

pace of Heart Earth:

50 pp.--ch. 1

30 pp.--ch. 2

35 pp.--ch. 3

25 pp.--ch. 4

60 pp.--ch. 5

200 pp = 40,000 wds

These are letters of introduction (of my mother to me), my meeting of Berneta in the haze of half-memory of childhood.

It's not that unusual.

Heart, 2nd of

My uncle's life was ceremonially over now, but not his (existence)
done with.

They refuse conclusion, some chapters here when I was born.

... but a person never knows whether a family ch is done c.

Ceremonially W's ch of life was over, but by now I know
better than to think it was done c.

I still never know
echo into earth here

Such moments, eyes here after.

• earth does its echoing into • eye.

****all chapters earth holds**

• earth keeps adding chapters

I never know how chapters here when I was born will turn out.

...as if we had been pushed adrift by a long pole.

use w/ "Arizona predicament"?

...that we had traded a blind canyon in Montana for a blind canyon in Arizona.

subtitle the book A Memoir (or some variation) to avoid the confusion of falling-between-categories that Stegner got into with Wolf Willow. The book and form can be as complex as I want, but keep the title/subtitle straightforward.

Heart Earth

--use G'ma's penciled postscript in letter already written to Wally as the news of Berneta's death in the book, presented the same way, postmark and all, as her letter excerpts have been?

Heart Earth

possible final phrase to work toward: ...at attention.

--my life, Dad's, Grandma's, the country's, all frozen in anticipation at the point of my mother's death. Possibly show this person by person, description of the three of us--plus Wally--our lives--that--were abruptly halted, forced into new postures to see what will happen, at attention.

--cd include that Dad did not try Arizona again, that he chose Montana as battleground with Grandma. (Returning to Arizona, or even going somewhere else in Montana, would have taken me farther from possibility of G'ma winning me from him.)

--possible flow: Wally is being freed from the war, moving into, toward, his life; bringing with him the letters in which the others of us are caught at attention. (Does this take the point away from Berneta too much?)

North 138

the one wound everyone shared--my mother's death--

of North

--use near ending, of all of us (Wally, ^Dad, G'ma, me)
"attattention"?

The ranger and his wife and son wash their car--Ford coupe?--in creek before going to a funeral; see Theresa Buckingham's letter to me about my folks doing so.

- of rider killed in rodeo?

→ lead for ch. 3: Jick, riding home the day after 4th rodeo, sees his parents washing the pickup in the creek--the custom for going to a funeral. (Les Withrow has died in Conrad hospital of his saddlebronze fall.)

"dialogue" filecards in Keeping the Days filebox can be sorted for any use in Heart Earth as well.

Aug. 19, '89: strategies suggested by C for selling the idea of the next 2 books:

--Heart Earth, as essays or a single long essay, should not be called that; instead, call it the sequel to Sky.

--Fort Peck novel, Bucking the Sun, cd be called monumental novel--the Ft. Peck project itself a kind of monument, building of an American pyramid.

1/2/91: subtitle Heart Earth "a memoir" to make sure it doesn't have the confusion of what-genre-is-this that Stegner hit with Wolf Willow.

lead, as of 4/4/91. Tucson:

She knew to use pointblank ink. Nothing is ever crossed out, never a p.s., the heartquick lines of her fountain pen refusing the fade of time. Among the little I have had of her is that pen. Incised into the demure barrel of it-- my father must have birthdayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture--rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. Readily enough, then, I can make out the hand at the page, the instinctive skritch of her letters going down onto paper for ^{someone} Wally alone to know. But all else of her, this woman there finishing off a warstriped air mail envelope's return address with Mrs. Chas. Doig, until now has been only farthest childscapes, moments thinned by so many years since. I had given up ever trying to imagine what my mother must have been like. Now her pages begin her: I have to spill over to someone. Upward from her held pen, at last she is back again.

(if "refusing the fade of time" is saved for end of the book, 2nd line here could be "as distinct as the day of the postmark.")

lead, as of 3/1/91, Tucson:

The first few envelopes in the packet duffeled home from the Pacific are blurry from seawater, but the pointblank ink of her letters has refused the fade of time. Nothing is ever crossed out, never a p.s., the heartquick lines of her fountain pen as distinct as the day of the postmark. Among the little I have had of her is that pen. Incised into the demure barrel of it--my father must have birthdayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture--rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. Readily enough, then, I can make out the hand at the page, the instinctive skritch of her letters going down onto paper for Wally alone to know. But all else of her, this woman there finishing off a warstriped air mail envelope's return address with Mrs. Chas. Doig, until now has been only farthest childscapes, moments thinned by [the] so many years since. I had given up ever trying to imagine what my mother must have been like. Now her pages begin her: I have to spill over to someone. Upward from her held pen, atlast she is back again.

Blurs from seawater

lead, as of 2/25/91, Tucson:

envelope
A few of the letters in the packet duffed ~~home~~ from the Pacific are blurry from ^{sea} water stains, but the pointblank ink has refused ^{any} the fade of time itself. Nothing is ever crossed out, never a p.s., the heartquick lines of her fountain pen as distinct as the day of the postmark. Among the little I have had of her is that pen. Incised into the demure barrel of it--my father must have birthdayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture--rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. Readily enough ^{then,} I can make out the hand at the page, the instinctive skritch of her letters going down onto paper for Wally alone to know. But all else of her, this woman there finishing off a warstriped air mail envelope's return address with Mrs. Chas. Doig, until now has been only farthest childscapes, moments thinned by the forty-eight years since. I had given up ever trying to imagine what my mother must have been like. Now her pages begin her: I have to spill over to someone. Upward from her held pen, at last she is back again.

lead, as of 2/25/91, Tucson:

Her pointblank ink ^{have refused} [even yet] refuses the fade of time. Letter after letter, [nothing is ever crossed out, never a p.s.,] the report of her fountain pen heartquick but lasting. Among the little I have had of her is that pen. Incised into the demure barrel of it--my father must have birthdayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture--rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. So, ^{more} ₁ I can make out the hand at the page, the instinctive skritch of her letters going down onto paper for Wally alone to know. But all else of her, this woman there finishing off a warstriped air mail envelope's return address with Mrs. Chas. Doig, until now has been only farthest childscapes, ~~moments~~ moments thinned by the forty-eight years since. I had given up ever trying to imagine what my mother must have been like. Now her pages begin her: I have to spill over to someone. Upward from her held pen, at last she is back again.

lead, as of 2/14/91:

Heart-to-Heart
 She writes in pointblank ink. Nothing is ever crossed out, never a p.s., the direct fountain-pen refusing the fade of time. Among the little I have had of her is that pen. Incised into the demure barrel of it—my father must have birth-dayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture—rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. So, ^(more) I can make out the hand at the page, the instinctive skritch of her letters going down onto paper for Wally to know. But all else of her, this woman there finishing off a warstriped air mail envelope's return address with Mrs. Chas. Doig, until now has been only ~~childscapes~~ farthest childscapes, moments thinned by the forty-eight years since. I had given up even trying to imagine what my mother—she—must have been like. [?] I have to spill over to someone. Upward from her held pen, at last she is back again.

*But how her pages begin
 her: into writing*

would surrealism help this book? (example of Bohin Manor)

--above all, it must be a story: Berneta's story

possible conclusion to opening graf of Heart Earth:

A distance had been growing between us--(strangely), our ~~idea~~ item of disagreement
split ~~our shares of the expense for~~
had been the shared expenses of his mother's funeral--

(Wally's jobs.)

But before that, before the ^{gnarl} ~~kink~~ in our family history that brought me back and
back to that wintry cemetery, he was a sailor on the Ault.

(lead into 1st of my mother's letters, or the 1st one to mention Dad and me.)
(with Wally's navel address)

in utmost tears, and his second wife sent bereaved regrets from New Mexico. Any way I try there at graveside, then, to epitaph this quicksilver uncle, the life I knew him in comes across to me as forty years of more zests than zeals.

V-Mail

The War at Home

The afternoon of Feb. 0, 1986, yellow blurts of flame appeared against Mt. Baldy from the rifles of the 4-man VFW firing squad, and the casket containing Ringer, Walter G., ex-Navy went into the ground. I shook hands with the other pallbearers and then walked rapidly to my borrowed car (at edge of cemetery) for the 75-mile drive around Mt. Baldy and the rest of the Big Belts to Helena and my plane home to Seattle. Time ~~up~~ upon time throughout my 46 years I had been in that WSS graveyard--all my American forebears are buried there--and it seemed the funeral days were always raw, bone-chilling. I had been dreading this one and was relieved it was over.

Wally was my uncle, ~~my~~ the youngest of my mother's three brothers. Across most of the 40 years (we really knew each other) he was ~~next of~~ my favorite uncle.

In my work, letters, diaries, etc. figure large. In my novels people often hear pertinent information by way of a newspaper or a letter. They live, in short, the print-filled life I do.

my two generations of mothers

volleys cracked - middle of - afternoon
across - middle of - afternoon ... flame

had' expected it for many yrs
to come. #Marion Lucas
(But had' it been Edith Bracke
that way - then all) write a coll. Paul

Joyce
Hayel Winter

Afterword for new Sky edition?

Heart Earth

Because of what was to come (rootlessness, as in my not feeling deeply rooted in either WSS or Dupuyer country; also, conceal in the narrative that it's my mother who is to die--as the story begins, it'd Dad who's ailing.)

Heart Earth

--early in the piece, after one of my mother's letters from Wickenburg during Dad's recuperation, cd do an alternative life for us, straightfaced account of how we'd been if we'd stayed in Arizona, details such as:

--what job Dad wd have found after the war

--where I'd have gone to school (suburban Phoenix?); ranking in high school, 15th in class of hundreds; schl might have caught and kept alive my flickering ~~math~~ math ability, and at that time of Sputnik I'd have gone on to become engineer or minor scientist, eventually switched to ~~teaching~~ teaching? Married an Arizonan, or at least a southwesterner, had a couple of kids? Divorced, remarried?

--my mother's longer life, though change in air in Phoenix-Tucson (as non-native plants brought pollen count, air quality declined etc.) eventually affected her asthma even there.

--longer life for Dad, too; 80 or so, ending up in retirement home.

--look at how Arizona would have affected: our political views, finances...

--are there still Montana picnics in Arizona?

- *wd I have a beard? (probably not)*

Then began next graf something like, "None of this life happened for any of the three of us." (instead, we went back to Montana, as shown in my mother's next letter by direct quote. Possible device: just use Instead: and then quote directly from her letter showing the return to Montana)

HEART EARTH

Wally's 1st marriage split up; when I sought to console him (about having to start dating again), "Oh, it's not so bad."

--His funeral was attended by his first and third wives. His second wife sent her regret that she couldn't come ~~in person~~ from Alb'que.

--A writer's fingers ought not to repeat themselves any more than they tend to do anyway in dancing the 26 steps of the alphabet, the only several thousand ^{word-words} words of a book. In This House of Sky I have told (Dad and G'ma getting together). Here, just the basics:

Heart Earth

Possibly make it just one essay, the length of Eudora Welby's One Writer's Beginnings or Jeanette Haien's short swift novel, The All of It: 40-50,000 words?

--base it on my mother's letters, Wally in the S. Pacific, etc.

(Dad's and Grandma's) battle toward love.

(possible conclusion to Heart Earth novella-length essay on my mother's letters)

Heart

undertaker Kenny Twichell, who (or his family, i.e. his father) had buried all my family, not recognizing me in my grayish beard when I came up to him in the cemetery while he was digging Wally's grave.

VFW rifles' fingers of flame like ship's guns going off. (connect with the Ault?)

roads were slick

old as the hills

imagining ourselves (or trying to...)

--me, as mentioned in the letters: digging foxhole, prospecting for gold, my own memory beginning w/ FDR's death; also, my questions to my mother about Wally's destroyer.

--my mother; speculate on how she saw herself

--Bad: how his imagination powered his moods--his feeling G'ma had wronged him, for ex.

conclusion of Jane Smiley's novella, GOOD WILL: the fragments-are-enough theme--

"Let us have fragments, I say. Let the racial hatred that has been expressed through us lie next to the longing I feel for Lydia Harris; let's Tom's innocence lie next to his envious fury; let Liz's grief for the farm lie next to her blossoming in town; let my urge to govern and supply every element of my son's being lie next to our tenuous custody; let the poverty the welfare department sees lie next to the wealth I know was mine. If these things are allowed, if no wholes are made, then it seems to me that I can live in town well enough..."

21 Dec. '90: called Lee Goerner to say Merry Xmas etc., and to suggest we talk soon in the New Year about any ideas he has toward Heart Earth, flavors from House of Sky that should or shouldn't be in this one, for instance. Lee said what struck him from recently re-reading Sky was how hard that life was. I should keep that in mind for Heart Earth too, the main point perhaps that my folks could put up with hard work and hard finances, but not those and lack of community in Arizona as well.

--Out of Lee's comment, ~~xxxx~~ too, I should keep some focus on the day-by-day details, the work and chores that made up my folks' life.

--The larger historical theme behind this turning point in their lives was that America's turn to suburbia and automation was beginning to happen. In a sense, the return to Montana was a choice to stay marginal. ("margin" a key word to use, in connection with her letters?)