pace of Heart Earth:

50 pp.--ch. 1
30 pp.--ch. 2
35 pp.--ch. 3
25 pp.--ch. 4
60 pp.--ch. 5

\[200 \text{ pp} = 40,000 \text{ wds}\]
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.
My uncle's life was certainly over now, but not his existence.

They refuse conclusion, their chapters have not yet been born.

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

Ceremonially with his life was over, but by now I knew better than to think it was done c.
Heart

and #: earth's echoes, we hear by eye.

- Not all echoes go into earth, eyes.

* Echoes go only from ear, never eyes.

Such moments, eyes hear after.

earth does its echoing into eyes.

**all chapters, earth holds

earth keeps adding chapters

I never knew here, chapters here who I us born well years out.
...as if we had been pushed adrift by a long pole.
...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?
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?)
the one wound everyone shared—my mother’s death—

—use near ending, of all of us (Wally, Dad, G’ma, me) "at attention"?
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.

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 saddlebronchial.)
"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. Pešk 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.
Heart Barth

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 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.")
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 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.
lead, as of 2/25/91, Tucson:

A few of the letters in the packet duffled home from the Pacific are blurry from water stains, but the pointblank ink has refused 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 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 childdscapes, 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 [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, 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.
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 birthdayed her a couple of weeks' worth of his cowhand wages in this gesture—rests her maiden name: Berneta Ringer. So, 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 farthest childscapes, moments thinned by the forty-eight years since. I had given up ever 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.
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 item of disagreement had been the shared expenses of his mother's funeral—

(Wally's jobs.)

But before that, before the 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 naval 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.
The afternoon of Feb. 0, 1986, yellow blurs 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 upon time throughout my 40 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 most 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

My two daughters married at the middle of the afternoon

[Handwritten notes and corrections]
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 ability, and at that time of Sputnik I'd have gone on to become engineer or minor scientist, eventually switched to 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?

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 devide: just use Instead: and then quote directly from her letter showing the return to Montana)
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 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 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 Welty's One Writer's Beginnings or Jeanette Haen'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)
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, 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?)