The world does not become less "unknown" in proportion to the increase of our knowledge about it. . . . Our experience of the world involves us in a mystery which can be intelligible to us only as mystery. The more we experience things in depth, the more we participate in a mystery intelligible to us only as such. . . . Our true home is wilderness, even the world of every day.

—Henry Bugbee (1915–1999)

6. Six Henry Stories

1. Language has vertical limits. Not just any speaker can pack up his speech and tote it at will to a higher elevation. Where there is a will, there is as often a major embarrassment as there is a way. Like a gymnast on parallel bars, the speaker or writer who successfully conveys exaltation must possess sufficient mental muscle to hoist himself above the level of everyday verbiage without appearing to strain. Again like the gymnast, he must be able to lift all of himself, all *by* himself. It is not speech coaches and writers, height of pulpit, number of advanced degrees, thickness of thesaurus, histrionic techniques, or any such contrivance that truly lifts language: it is personal integrity. It's the ability to imbue one's words with the physical momentum, intellectual clarity, and psychic depth that only the actual deeds of a life can provide. If Martin Luther King Jr., in his Lincoln Memorial speech of 1963, had said "In my heart I know I'm right," and if Richard Nixon, in his resignation speech a decade later, had said "I have a dream," the world would have remembered King's heart and forgotten Nixon's dream. It is not just the words that make words memorable.

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This principle, I believe, is one reason why so many people, often decades after the fact, still remember certain statements the philosopher Henry Bugbee made to them. I, too, remember in unusual detail the first time I heard Henry speak. It happened like this:

In July 1993, a few weeks into my first summer in Montana, I listened to a program on the local NPR affiliate devoted to Norman Maclean's famed novel, *A River Runs Through It.* I normally take pains to avoid "literary educational opportunities," my entire working life being one relentless such opportunity. I tuned in this show not for literary reasons, but out of fly-fishermanly regard for my esteemed new neighbor, the Big Blackfoot River. I was pleasantly surprised, though. Two of the Maclean experts turned out to be astute. And, to keep things tense and interesting, the third was a crackpot. My apologies to this fellow for calling him a crackpot. Special apologies if he's reading this and turns out to be handy with his fists. All a crackpot is, by definition, is a vessel that won't hold water. I often don't. What brought the word to mind in this case was the fellow's claim that Maclean's novel was just a slick literary "cover-up attempt." He loved this term, "cover-up." He said that Norman was "covering up"—with useless love, useless hindsight, and treacherously beautiful prose—the fact that the Macleans were a dysfunctional mess of a family. He said that Norman and his father oppressed every woman they knew, denied every complex thing that happened to them, and failed to own up to the brother Paul's need for psychotherapy and an alcohol treatment center. As several call-in contributors pointed out, in Paul Maclean's day there *were* no therapies or treatments besides the whiskey bottles and gambling halls he so faithfully patronized. The cover-up expert never budged from his position. He was finally simply buried by articulate disagreement from callers who loved Norman's book.

The radio show changed gears: two local fishing guides and a retired fly-fishing philosophy professor came on the air, not to philosophize, but just to chat about the sudden national mystique of fly fishing. No sooner had the host and guides launched their discussion, though, than the old professor veered off topic to make some of the most insightful comments I've ever heard on *A River Runs Through It.* The show ended with the prof's comments, as it should have; they were authoritative and climactic. Then, a couple of weeks later, as happens in small towns, friends invited me to dinner—and there the old professor sat.

It was Henry, of course. And after we were introduced, I told him how much I'd enjoyed the show—especially his contribution to it. Henry thanked me, said that he, too, enjoyed the broadcast, but confessed to a very inexact recollection of what his contribution had been. I should point out that this was before Henry's stroke or his brain disease; the inability to remember his own animated words has been a lifelong attribute. Henry is one of these people who zeroes in on the direction of a conversation, then so loses himself in its flow that, though he's left with a profound sense of what we might call the "hydraulics" of the situation, he retains little memory of the specific and often wonderful things that he himself so often says.

This is a fine way of maintaining one's humility. But since I happen to be the sort who remembers *lots* of the clever things that *I* say, I decided, there at the dinner party, to try to mess with Henry's humility by showing him how bloody insightful he'd been about *A River Runs Through It,* and see whether I couldn't puff him up a bit.

I told Henry that he had evoked the novel's famous oatmeal scene: little Paul Maclean, aged five or so, sitting at the table before a heaped bowl of oatmeal, silently refusing to even taste this food that, as Papa Maclean puts it, "we Scots have been happily consuming for thousands of years." Paul is not swayed. Nor will his father excuse him. A classic battle of wills. The rest of the family finishes eating and leaves the table. The boy remains, looking small and vulnerable. He doesn't complain, doesn't squirm, doesn't display emotion; he just sits before the ever-more-monolithic-looking oatmeal, refusing to touch it, till we realize, as does his father, that young Paul Maclean will sit there forever before he submits.

It was a scene, in the Robert Redford movie, that one could easily describe as "cute." But on the radio as Henry Bugbee conjured it, the scene felt darkly prophetic. There was tacit violence in the father-son impasse, a frightening intractability on both sides. And Henry, on the air, summarized this intractability thus: "For all the love and admirable qualities of the father, it was, one felt, his dogmatic stance that prevented grace from flowing in the son."

This sentence rang in me like a bell. It underscored everything I love about *A River Runs Through It*: why the story feels so tragically inevitable; why the book speaks to so many of the pious parents and renegade daughters and sons who've read it; why Paul's death is so shattering to his father especially, for in that death we see how the

father's greatest strength—his rock-solid faith—somehow became a mere rock, a dead weight, when he tried to will it to his son. Above all, Henry's statement helped me see why Paul's fly fishing is so central to this story, and so hauntingly beautiful: in this willful young man in whom the flow of grace is blocked, fly fishing is the one pursuit, the only pursuit, in which we literally do see "grace flowing in the son."

Well, back at the dinner party, I said more or less what I've just written. And Henry's reaction amazed me. His eyes filled; he seemed half-overcome. With a radiant smile and in a voice close to a gasp, he said, "You did that very well!"

I quickly pointed out that all I'd done was parrot him to himself, but Henry refused all credit. And the more I thought his refusal over, the more impressed I was with it. The trout we catch in these hard-fished Montana rivers have often been caught by some previous woman or man; the day we catch one ourselves, we are no less alone on the river, and the trout is no less beautiful for its previous capture. In Henry I'd met a man with no sense of proprietorship in the presence of true words. In one sense I was, as I'd said, a mere parrot, but in another sense I'd plucked Henry's insight off the radio and taken it to heart. Henry honored this second capture as the solo philosophical event it was. He was loving a neighbor's insight as one loves one's own. He was being a father whose nondogmatic stance let grace flow in an adoptive son.

2. I walked around Missoula with Henry a few times after his stroke and his brain disease struck. "Walk," in fact, is an exaggeration. A lifelong athlete and mountain climber, Henry now tottered along while I held his arm, struggling to find a gear that allowed my longish legs and restless nature to mesh with his knee brace and cane. Henry was a physically beautiful old man, his shock of white hair visible from a good distance, his piercing eyes and weathered face more appealing the closer he drew. He was a legend in Missoula. During our walks he attracted curious glances and warm greetings, like a magnet. Henry's part in the exchanges was always the same: he smiled beatifically at a known face, then extended a firm grip and a good word. He squeezed your hand hard, and shook it around as if you'd won a race. He had a way of clenching his teeth as he greeted a friend, as if he were biting, with pleasure, into the encounter.

The reactions to his greetings were more varied. News of a great man's disintegration travels fast in a university town. Some spoke to Henry as if he had transcended the physical and become some kind of holy man; others spoke with an exaggeratedly loud and simplified friendliness, as if he'd become a toddler, or a tragic but likable village idiot; a few others whom Henry clearly recognized as we approached pretended not to see him and ducked away before close proximity forced them to witness Henry's "tragic condition."

For my part, I never stopped cherishing Henry's company, regardless of his condition. My feeling was, what better end than the one we were seeing for a man who believed as Henry had believed? He hadn't lost anything we wouldn't all be losing. According to our mutual hero, Meister Eckhart, Henry hadn't lost anything that was ever truly his; he was just returning some things that, as he'd always insisted, were only his on loan in the first place. What struck me about Henry to the end was what wonderful tools he'd been loaned, and how lovingly he continued to marshal the few tools he hadn't been forced to return.

I don't wish to seem wiser or more detached than I am. In the five years of our friendship, I grew exceedingly fond of Henry's unexpected phone calls, his warm, high-pitched voice, his sometimes fumbling, sometimes gorgeously chosen words, his raunchily reverent fishing stories; I loved the way he looked at his wife, Sally, when she'd enter a room; I loved the solar smile he would turn on his friends at times—and on me—nonplussing us when he simply left it on us, full-beam, for such a long, long moment that we'd finally have no choice but to realize this was no social smile, no rote kind of friendliness: this was what it felt like to be completely seen and loved for a moment.

Henry had, as it turned out, to return every borrowed gift but his inert body and heartbeat before he left us completely, and his harsh losses made me, and all who knew him, intensely sad at times. Yet almost everything about him continues, even in his absence, to be an antidote to sadness. Henry lived the kind of life that made it impossible to mourn his losses without betraying the life. Because of this, you saw a beautiful struggle in his family and friends the last few years. Our awareness that Henry was leaving us, and our urge to grieve, was cut by a simultaneous wish to honor the fact that Henry had stood, lifelong, by traditions holding that the loss of a loved one is not so much an occasion to mourn as an occasion to be true to love. "To give thanks lyingly," said Jalal al-Din Rumi, "is to seek the love of God." In the eyes of those who greeted Henry as his mind and body failed, I was touched again and again by this "lying thanks," this seeking of love.

I saw panic in some eyes, too. When those who live the life of the mind see an anchor of a friend taking leave of the mind, there is bound

to be terror. But, while I still have a mind with which to be afraid, I embrace Rumi's "lying thanks," Eckhart's "emptiness," Zen's "no-mindedness," Christ's "poverty of spirit." This mind of mine was never mine to start with; in sleep and in dreams I lose it every night. Henry, in his final state of mind, reminded me of that Chinese, or maybe Japanese, roshi, his name now lost to me, who, when asked, "What is my real self, O master?" answered, "Mountains and rivers and the great earth." Henry reminded me of that Japanese, or maybe Chinese, poet who, when asked, "What is self?" answered, "Rambling in the mountains, enjoying the waters." He reminded me of Jim Harrison (finally a name I remember!), who, in "Cabin Poem," says, "I've decided to make up my mind / about nothing, to assume the water mask, / to finish my life disguised as a creek, / an eddy, joining at night the full / sweet flow, to absorb the sky, / to swallow the heat and cold, the moon / and the stars, to swallow myself / in ceaseless flow."

Henry's condition reminded me, finally, that though I once knew the names of the makers of all the above statements, what difference do names make if the statements are true? A man once given to speak sentences such as "There is a stream of limitless meaning flowing into the life of a man if he can but patiently entrust himself to it" drew slowly toward the end of a life of patient trust. The few people we approached on the street, the ones who ducked away, made me want to shout, "Come back! Don't be pathetic! There's nothing scary or sad here! A wonderful old man is falling slowly to pieces. Come say hi to him and his pieces while you've got the chance!"

One of the last times I saw Henry, a circuit crossed and he greeted me as "Mike." I say, close enough. I say Henry finished his life disguised ever more perfectly as a creek. I say, call me David, call me Mike, call me Ishmael, and give me, please God, the courage and grace to embrace the same disguise. The courage to become mountains and rivers and the great Earth. The courage (to steal it straight from Henry) to make wilderness my true home.

3. Some teachers never retire, despite their retirement. Henry, for instance. Almost every philosophical poker hand the old sharp plays in his legendary book of reflections, *The Inward Morning,* will still win the pot. The reason Henry couldn't and can't retire is this: When you align yourself with emptiness and no-mindedness, then spend your life teaching that alignment, what you've taught goes on teaching itself whether or not you're even alive, let alone whether or not you've retired.

I experienced the nonretirement of Henry one recent December when I was invited to spend three days, in my capacity as a novelist, with forty students at a small college in Oregon. This was a *Christian* institution, mind you, with a Christian plan for my visit. What the students wanted me to talk about, it turned out, was my "personal faith" and "personal experiences as a churchgoer."

This plan presented two problems. One: the phrase "personal faith" is impossibly paradoxical. As soon as you talk publicly about personal life, personal finances, personal anything, it's no longer personal. Two: upon attaining religious autonomy more than thirty years ago, I began to worship at Henry's church: the church of "wilderness, our true home." As a result, I have since enjoyed a grand total of zero personal experiences as a churchgoer.

Bivouacked among the forty young Christians, then, with a single night to prepare remarks on "personal faith" and "personal churchgoing" in order to earn my personal honorarium, I felt disturbingly cognizant, for the first time in my life, of a slight vocational resemblance between me and Pat Robertson. Must I, too, feign piety to get paid? Or should I take things in a more Swaggartish direction and speak forthrightly about how sitting in church pews, shortly before I fled them, used to give me such uncontrollable sexual fantasies that I'd pretend to be reading the hymnal in order to cover my erections—and in gratitude for said coverage at last grew vaguely fond of hymns? The options looked dark. The hour grew late. There was no booze, on that accursedly clean-cut campus, to fuel even a madcap nightcapped musing. No hymnal either. What a relief, suddenly, to recall a deft card hand played by Henry in *The Inward Morning,* aimed at the word "wonder."

I didn't have Henry's book with me, but did recall him saying something like "The tenets of religious belief are not intended to be the termination of wonder: they're intended to be *occasions* for it." This felt like a desirable entry point into my thoughts on "personal faith," in that it would at least put an end to any resemblance between me and Pat Robertson. I then realized I could answer the "personal faith" question by simply ignoring its Christian connotation, speaking instead of something in which I *do* have faith—namely, this state so beloved by the never-retiring Henry, the state called "wonder."

I grabbed my pen and legal pad and set to work, finding it incredibly helpful not to have *The Inward Morning* with me, since this freed me to crib Henry's thought with shameless abandon. The next day I gave my forty Christian charges a talk that began like this:

My earliest conception of the meaning of the word *wonder* was a feeling that would come over me as a little kid, when I'd picture the shepherds on the night hills above Bethlehem. Even when those shepherds were made of illuminated plastic, standing around in Christmas dioramas on my neighbors' lawns, their slack-jawed expressions of wonder appealed to me. Years later, having become literate enough to read, I learned that those shepherds were also "sore afraid." But—a personal prejudice—I didn't believe in their afraidness. I believed the star in the east smote them with wonder, and that once wonder smites you, you're smitten by wonder alone. Fear can't penetrate till wonder subsides.

Wonder is my second favorite condition to be in, after love, and I sometimes wonder whether there's a difference; maybe love is just wonder aimed at a beloved.

Wonder is like grace, in that it's not a condition we grasp; it grasps us.

Wonder is not an obligatory element in the search for truth. We can seek truth without wonder's assistance. But seek is all we'll do; there will be no finding. Unless wonder descends, unlocks us, turns us as slack-jawed as plastic shepherds, truth is unable to enter. Wonder may be the aura of truth, the halo of it. Or something even closer. Wonder may be the caress of truth, touching our very skin.

Philosophically speaking, wonder is crucial to the discovery of knowledge, yet has everything to do with ignorance. By this I mean that only an admission of our ignorance can open us to fresh knowings. Wonder is the experience of that admission: wonder is unknowing, experienced as pleasure.

Punctuationally speaking, wonder is a period at the end of a statement we've long taken for granted, suddenly looking up and seeing the sinuous curve of a tall black hat on its head, and realizing it was a question mark all along.

As a facial expression, wonder is the letter *O* our eyes and mouths make when the state itself descends. *O*: God's middle initial. *O*: because wonder *O*pens us.

Wonder is anything taken for granted—the old neighborhood, old job, old life, old spouse—suddenly filling with mystery. Wonder is anything closed, suddenly opening: anything at all opening—which, alas, includes Pandora's Box, and brings me to the dark side of the thing. Grateful as I am for this condition, wonder has—like everything on Earth—a dark side. Heartbreak, grief, and suffering rend openings in us through which the dark kind of wonder pours. I have so far found it impossible to feel spontaneously grateful for these violent openings. But when, after struggle, I've been able to turn a corner and at least *accept* the opening, the dark form of wonder has invariably helped me endure the heartbreak, the suffering, the grief.

Wonder is not curiosity. Wonder is to curiosity what ecstasy is to mere pleasure. Wonder is not astonishment, either. Astonishment is too brief. The only limit to the duration of wonder is the limit of our ability to remain open.

I believe some people live in a state of constant wonder. I believe they're the best people on Earth. I believe it is wonder, even more than fidelity, that keeps marriages alive. I believe it's wonder, even more than courage, that conquers fear of death. I believe it is wonder, not D.A.R.E. bumper stickers, that keeps kids off drugs. I believe, speaking of bumper stickers, that it's wonder, even more than me, who I want to "HUG MY KIDS YET TODAY," because wonder can keep on hugging them, long after I'm gone.

4. One warm May evening a couple of years before he died, Henry and I sat in lawn chairs on a rocky point, overlooking the runoff-swollen trout stream that runs through my backyard. This evening marked the first time I'd seen Henry since he'd suffered his stroke. The hundred-yard walk from my house to the rocky point was a slow, serious undertaking. The stroke had clearly returned a few pieces of my friend back to the "mountains, rivers, and great earth" from whence they'd come.

As we sat above the fast green water, I told Henry of spectacular seasonal changes I'd witnessed on the creek over the past year, of encounters with local wildlife, of fish I'd hooked in the flow right before our eyes. Henry listened calmly, but seemed more interested in the unaccompanied sound of the stream.

I stopped my babbling and let the creek's take over. The evening was beautiful, the sun warm, and I was relieved at once by the cessation of my own voice. I was sinking into things, giving myself to the day, and to the curious tension that rises and falls when we sit long, without speaking, with a friend—when I suddenly noticed something odd going on with Henry.

He was seated directly to my right. And he'd begun to slump way over on the right side of his chair. The ground beneath our chairs was rough and rocky. He kept slumping farther. Fearing he'd fall—fearing some strange symptom of his stroke had set in—I surreptitiously placed my foot on the base of his chair and held it firmly down.

Henry lowered his right arm clear to the ground. I looked away, feeling embarrassed somehow, but could hear his fingers fumbling in the rocks, feel his chair writhing as I steadied it with my foot. I was just beginning to think he was having another full-on stroke when he suddenly straightened, and the chair came back into balance.

Henry did not look at me. Instead he leaned slightly forward, briefly studying the surface of the swollen creek.

Then his right arm flashed. A large flat stone I hadn't even known he was holding sailed down over the green eddy, hit the water, bounced up in a sunlit crown of spray, hit the water, bounced again, hit the water, bounced again. A triple skip! From a bad angle, out of a lawn chair, over rough water (a rough *eddy,* no less), by an eighty-one-year-old who'd just had a major stroke. On the authority of a life spent skipping skippers, I tell you: this throw was an *ecstasis.*

I turned. Henry was still studying the creek, but his "innocence" was a sham now. The slow turn of his head, toward me, then away again, was eagle-regal. He was painstakingly careful to wear no trace of a smile. But the look in his eyes as they met mine, then turned back to the creek! I tell you . . . I tell you . . . It was even better than the lines "The readiness to receive is all. Without that, what can be given?" Better than "This above all, then: be ready at all times for the gifts of God, and always for new ones." Maybe even better than "To love is to understand what is perceived as eternal."

5. The last time I saw Henry, I don't know how to describe his presence except to say that he seemed no longer home in any sense but the anatomical. Though his body was being well cared for, his consciousness had returned to the mysterious place consciousness goes after, as Tom Waits puts it, "the wheels come off." Henry's wheels came off in this order: he lost the ability to take care of himself, then the ability to walk, then the ability to recognize his friends, children, and finally even Sally. Meanwhile he lost the ability to convey a thought. Then the ability to speak. And finally the ability to recognize food or water in his own mouth. With this loss came the loss of the ability to eat and drink. So loss of life followed. But not nearly so soon as one would think or hope or pray. Henry's long, slow loss of everything was a mystery intelligible to me only as mystery. It was a dark, dark wonder. It was wilderness.

Sally had to take me to the Home for Those Whose Wheels Have Come Off, get me inside, show me to Henry's room. In the room next door was a frail old woman who, Sally had learned, was the poet Dylan Thomas's last extramarital lover. To give me time alone with Henry, Sally went in to read Thomas poems to this woman. I watched the reading begin. The woman's eyes, when we first saw her, were staring straight ahead at a white curtain. When Sally greeted her, then introduced me, her face never changed expression and her gaze never swerved. The Dylan Thomas poems commenced. The gaze didn't change. So much for poetry in the face of mysteries intelligible only as mystery.

I went to try my luck with Henry. How did it feel, being with such a man after his wheels had come off? I'm still pondering that. I'll ponder it till my own wheels go. I took the chair by his bed, said hello, and when Henry turned slowly to me I took his hand, held it, and vowed not to let him have it back unless he absolutely seemed to want it. He didn't. He stared at me a long while, said nothing, but struggled, I felt, to figure out just who the hell I was. We still had that in common.

There was no creek to turn to, and Henry had been silent for days. I had a monopoly, now, on the babbling. I took advantage of it. I first told Henry, despite some embarrassment about how kiss-ass it sounded, a couple of recent anecdotes about how much he'd meant to a variety of wonderful people. Henry stared at me the same way Dylan Thomas's last lover was staring at the sound of Dylan Thomas's poems.

I told Henry stories about the changing of the year—how the Indian summer of '99 was the most adamant I'd ever seen, the slowest to pass into autumn. He stared at space in response, he breathed, he lived on, while the resemblance between his state and the summer of '99 reverberated in the air.

I played my sorry trump card. I told Henry I'd been having the best trout fishing of my life, thanks to this summer that refused to die. I then launched a fish story. Henry still just stared. But so do trout and water. I was in my element now. Telling fish stories felt almost like an exchange between us, since when you start telling fish stories it makes sense that people just stare.

I told Henry of a spring-fed pond I'd discovered in a huge grassy field in the middle of nowhere: a pond that looked and felt like something in a dream. I told him, truthfully, of lying behind a log on a sandbank, four feet from this pond, while twenty-inch rainbows ate live grasshoppers I tossed to them with my hands. I told Henry, truthfully, of a twenty-seven-inch brown trout I'd caught in this dreamlike pond, how it flashed at but refused an artificial grasshopper, flashed at but refused even real grasshoppers kicking along on the surface with no

hook attached. It then rose to an artificial blue damselfly, though no such insects had been in the air for weeks—rose, perhaps, out of yearning for this blue harbinger of high summer. I told how the brown threw my fly on its first hysterical leap, but was spinning so violently that the leader lassoed its snout and the thrown hook drove itself, a second time, into the trout's nostril. I told how the pain of a hooked inner nose made the big fish leap more relentlessly than any brown I'd ever seen, leap itself to early exhaustion, leap itself, weakly, right into my waiting hands. I told how I sat for the longest time, cross-legged in twelve inches of clear-as-air springwater, with this twenty-seven-inch, yellow-and-gold-bodied, crimson-spotted animal resting in the shade of me, allowing me to admire it, allowing me the pleasure of watching it fin and breathe.

Henry just stared. And it had, I felt, been a pretty good story. So I let one of my own wheels come off: my truth wheel. I told Henry of the forty-two-inch brown trout I hooked, on the very next cast, in the same dreamlike pond, then watched for his reaction. He just stared. So I rared back and told him of the ninety-inch brown. The largest ever seen, anywhere. Forget Loch Leven browns, Henry, this was a Loch Ness fish. Lived on geese, ducks, and spring calves that fell in the pond. He didn't object. His stare was not eagle-regal. But now it at least felt like a statement—felt like the response my nonsense deserved. This made me a bit happier.

I called off the last two browns with a "not really." Henry stared. I said, "Not only do your friends and family and Sally miss you. I bet *you* miss you, too." He said nothing. The man before me had once written, "As we take things, so we have them; if we take them in faith, we have them in earnest; if wishfully—then fantastically; if willfully, then stubbornly; if merely objectively, with the trimmings of subjectivity—then emptily; and if in faith, though it be in suffering, yet we have them in earnest, and it is really them that we have."

And now he and I had this.

I looked at my friend carefully, knowing suddenly that it was for the last time. It seemed helpful, as I looked—at least in terms of controlling emotion—that our visit had felt so one-sided. Henry seemed beyond visiting. He was no longer Henry exactly; his body had become a temple, closed seven days a week, with the Henry I loved locked inside. But when that old temple suddenly, competently, cleared its throat, and I heard in the clearing the tone of Henry's beautiful, vanished voice—Henry the unexpected, Henry our *anam ċara*—all kinds of things rose in my chest and throat and eyes, and I had no more words for either of us that weren't silent and weren't prayer.

Not till December did Sally call to say that Henry's heart had stopped.

At the sound of her breaking voice after so many months of "patient trust," "the readiness to receive," and "taking in faith," I felt waters rise behind my face, felt a fresh crack in my heart, felt mind, mouth, and heart fall open, and knew—via raw ignorance and dark wonder—that these are the waters of life; that grasses, trees, and flowers grow from such cracks.

Henry's slow departure, hard as it was, is "the world of every day."

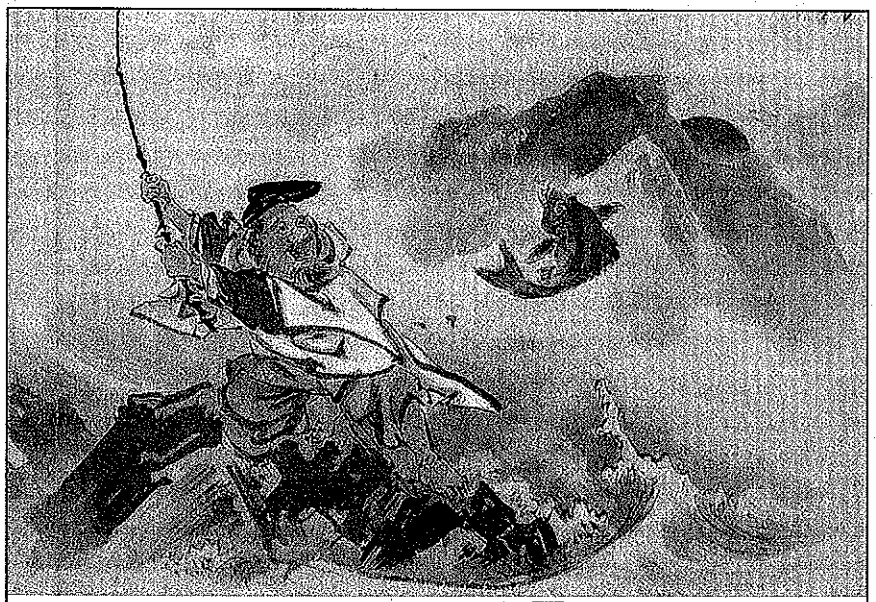
"Our true home is wilderness."

6. Indian Summer '99:

The sky a blue so outright it falls like snow to the ground. The air a beam-prone gold that pierces the blue, and me, each time I breathe it. The days, dawn to dusk, lit by a low, long-shadow-making sun that brings little warmth but finds the integrity in everything: pine bark, alluvial stones, tansy stalks, the spent garden, nine cords of fresh-split firewood, the browned backs of my wood-battered hands.

No wind. No breeze. Stasis. A lone fox barks somewhere, just once. After forty-seven years I realize it's gravity, more than anything, that tilts me, come evening, to the nearest river. Today the flow slides by in silence, a quavering, less convincing world splayed upside-down across its surface. Cricket songs slow in the gathering chill. The grasshoppers' hops grow shorter. I watch sudden silver rises on the thick, refractive water. Watch turned aspens shoot false fire through each rise. The cliff swallow colony's been vacant for weeks. Three days ago the ospreys set out for Mexico. A dull red water-birch leaf taps its blind way down through branches, softly daps the river, finds sunlight, turns crimson, slides blazingly away. Fifty winter crows and a single trailing magpie pass, without comment, into the mountain's growing shadow.

More silent rises. More false fire. More breath,
more blue, more gold. "The sky is vast
straight into the heavens. A bird flies
just like a bird." Even in
Montana, how I long
for Montana.



75.29.8 *Ebisu Catching a Carp* (detail) by Kawahabe Gyosai
(1831-1889). Japan, Edo period, Ukiyo-e school. Album leaf; ink
and color on paper; 15.5 x 22.8 cm (6⅛ x 9 i
FREER GALLERY OF ART
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560

Here we go, David!

Henry

Ebisu Catching a Carp, KAWAHABE GYOSAI