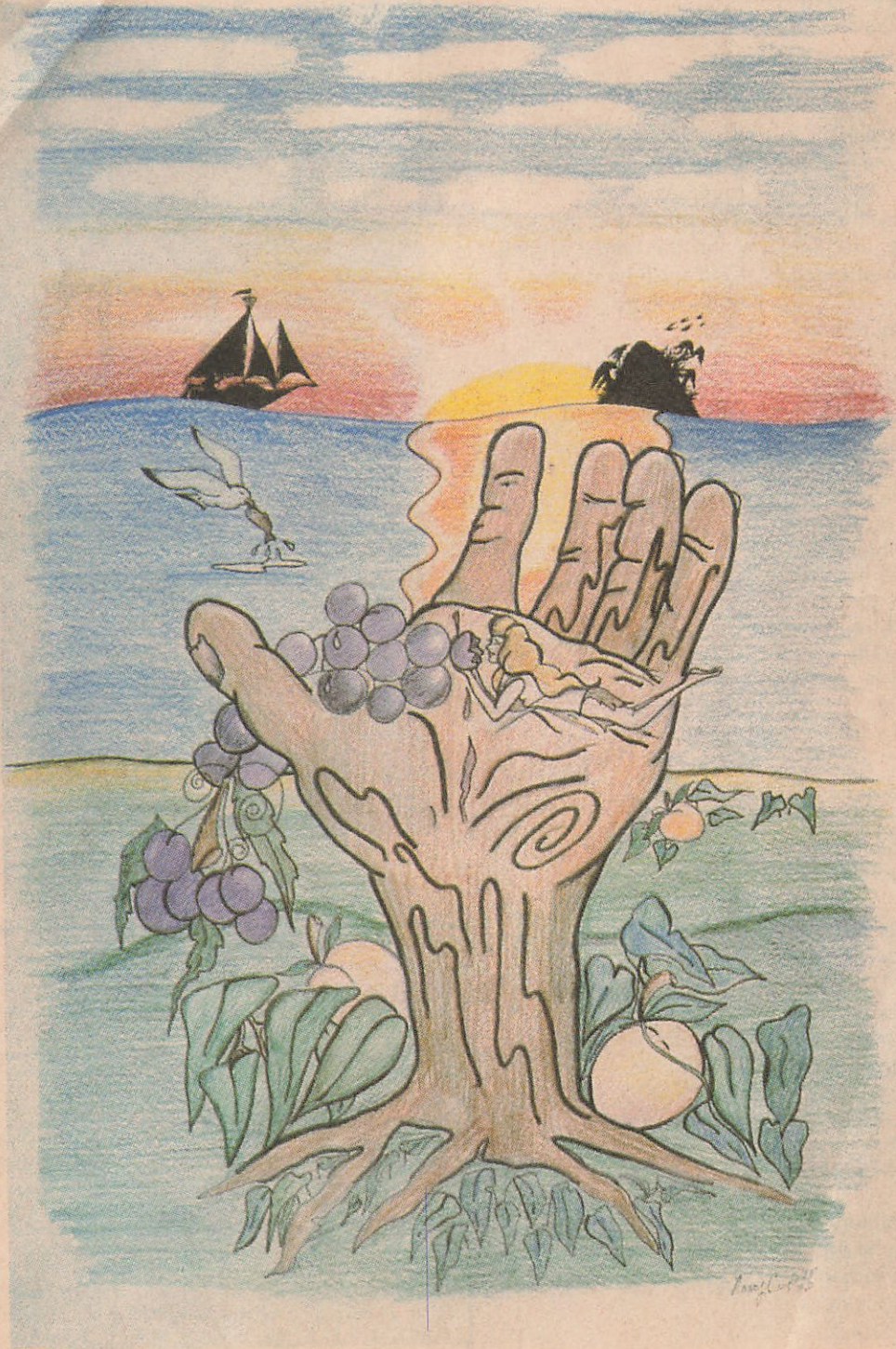


DENALI

A Literary Arts Publication



artwork by Nancy Crupi

Spring 1985

Poetry

The Conquistadores

I

Gold dust on skin.
stars in dark waters.

Armor stirs itself and
walks through the jungle
bright column of blood
and sweat,
along the brown river.

Screams in the night,
guns rip holes in green
that has no end.

In the slow heat of the morning
helmets rust on the path
altars fall by the side.
Last night two men were
lost to arrows and a
third believed he drowned
in the heavy rain.
He could not be swayed.

II

In the afternoon,
a raft sweeps by
current-caught,
no armor holding
it back.

A priest holds the rudder
calls to no one, touches no one.

The soldier, body-erect
stops his dreaming mind,
sees rotting flesh
in his sleeve.
things are too clear.
parrots speak in tongues,
Indians dance on water.

Priests and soldiers,
enthroned in the jungle:
a cross in the Indian soul,
the sword on his neck.

The day is a night of terror
They cannot hold themselves
together.

The priest and the soldier
enter the jungle singing.
God's will be done,
god's will be
done.

Don Hildenbrand



photo by John Jordan

Denali

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Poetry

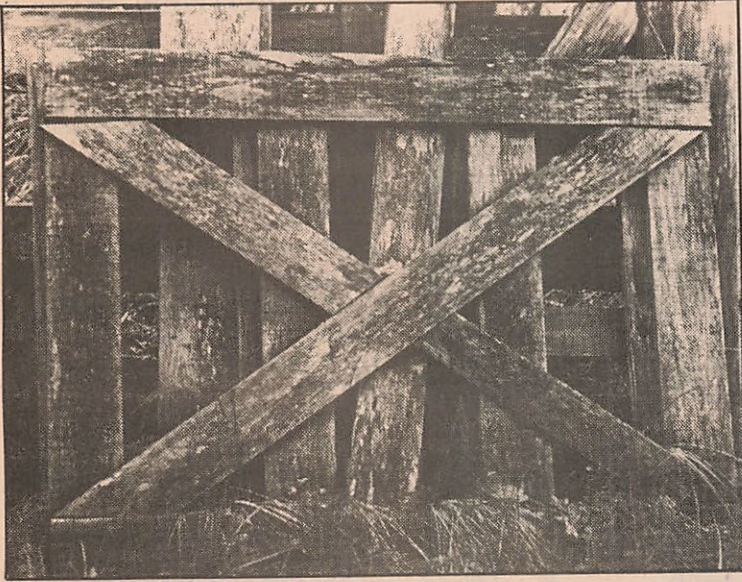


photo by Gary Breedlove

Letter to Eva in the Azores

It's spring on the coast, Eva.
The rhododendrons are pink and full,
and the Scotch broom waves yellow in the wind.

They hang banners at both ends of town
and count on sun for the Grand Parade.
Friday the queen is crowned
and given a key to the city.
Free Souls camp on the waterfront.
A city block is lined with motorcycles.
Chowder steams in pots on the street
while floats drift through town,
leaving traces of blossoms behind.

Folks will pack up their lawn chairs
and blankets and head for home,
but this year I'm staying for the season,
remembering a time we braided
our hair with blossoms.

Kim Simmoneau

Industrial Boy

He was born in the city
of false sunlight.
The buildings on his street
held the rhythms of many engines.
At night their throbs and rumbles
would comfort him in his bed,
as he thought of the faceless
gears and wheels
that seemed always
to be singing.
At school, his mind had wavered
from the frayed maps over the
blackboard,
gaze riveted to the somber
brick, the mysterious
steel, of the factories
outside.
When he became older
they swallowed him.
Hollow eye of the timeclock
greets him daily,
emotionless tin mouth
ready to accept his punchcard
soul.
Here, they had said,
this is your machine.
You will know it well.

Bruce Nealley

Ego Bards

In spring's full moon
They gather:
Christened coyotes
Howling heaven's verse.
Crouched on hindquarters,
Noses poised skyward,
They claw each other
For small scraps of attention.

Rob Ferguson

A Brief Detour

by Clint Black

The young couple sat in their car and waited for the realtor to arrive. They appeared to be in their mid-twenties, were well dressed and apparently affluent. They were parked at a house, waiting to look at it.

The house they were waiting to see sat at the end of a short tree-lined driveway. Even on this hot summer day, the air under the many shade trees was cool and refreshing. The small cottage was surrounded by a well-trimmed, neat lawn. A small creek ran just a few yards from the rear of the house, producing a melodious babble as it tumbled over the rocks that littered its course.

For a time, they waited in silence, the young man studying the house and the surrounding area; the woman at his side worked on a nail she had just broken. Turning to her husband, the woman broke the silence.

"Why did you call that real estate man, Ralph? There is no way we could ever live in a place like this."

"How can you say that? You haven't even seen the place yet, and it's so pretty here, maybe you'll like it."

"I don't need to see it, I already know I don't like it. I don't like it because of where it is. It could be the nicest house in the world, which it obviously isn't and I still wouldn't like it."

"The man is already on his way, Hon, he's giving up his Saturday to come show the place, so we've got to look at the place whether we want to or not."

"I just don't understand you, you see a for sale sign in the front of this house out here in the sticks, and there goes the day. We were

going for a nice drive to the coast today, and what do we end up doing? Sitting in front of a little house in a dumpy looking little town, or whatever you call a place like this, waiting for a man to show us a house there is no way we will ever buy. Is there?"

"No, I suppose not. Our apartment is nice, and it's close to my job, and it would be an awful long drive from here. But when I saw this sign, I just wanted to stop and look at this place. I thought you would enjoy it too."

"I just don't understand you sometimes, Ralph, some of the crazy things you do. Sometimes I think Daddy was right, I should have married someone more predictable. Someone from my social sphere."

"Maybe your daddy was right. Perhaps one of those drones from the country club would have suited you better than me. But, the fact is, you did marry me, and right now, like it or not, we are going to take a look at this house."

They sat in silence again, more strained now. Finally, calming down, regretting the harshness of his words, Ralph said quietly, "Looking through the house shouldn't take that long - then we'll go on to the coast. Just think of this as a brief detour." He looked at her hopefully, hesitantly.

"Well, maybe you can just look at the stupid little house yourself. When the man gets here, I'll just wait in the car. I don't care what the house looks like."

"Suit yourself," was his quiet reply.

The crunch of tires on the gravel announced the arrival of the realtor. Jumping from his car, he approached the couple's car.

Ralph got out and took the hand that was thrust in his direction.

"Afternoon folks, name's Smith, Bob Smith; just go ahead and call me Bob. Folks around here generally go on a first name basis. Boy, is this your lucky day. This here place is a real gem, just got the listing. There's a fireplace, three bedrooms, only one bath, but it's nice and big, and located in a real convenient spot. Right next to the master bedroom."

"Well Mr. Smith, we've just started looking, and don't really know just what we are looking for yet, probably something bigger. I just saw the sign, and couldn't resist taking a look at this place."

"Oh, once you two see this place, you won't be able to resist. It's just the kind of place a young couple like you should start out in."

"Maybe you're right, Mr. Smith, but..."

"Now, I told you, it's Bob. We like to keep things informal out here in the country."

"All right, Bob let's take a look."

"Is the little lady coming with us?"

"No, she doesn't feel up to looking at a house just now. I know pretty much what we want, if it looks promising to me, I'll come out and get her."

The real estate man bent over and looked in the car. The woman in the passenger's seat of the new BMW looked back at him.

"Are you sure you don't want to see the house with your husband, Missy; it's a real nice little place?"

"No thank you!", she replied curtly.

"My wife isn't feeling well, Bob. I'll just go ahead and look at the house to see if it's what we have in mind."

A Brief Detour

Ralph followed Bob down the short walk to the front steps. Climbing the short flight of stairs, they came to a large front porch and old porch swing sitting against the wall. The young man reached over and gave the old swing a push, and listened to the squeak it made, as it slowly rocked back and forth. Unlocking the door, Bob started pointing out the features of the house as he entered.

"Now, here is the fireplace, you don't see these much any more. Everyone stuffs an insert in them for the efficiency. Right back here is the kitchen, nice and modern, dishwasher and all."

"Maybe it would be better if I just kind of looked around on my own. I know more or less what I'm looking for, and this place doesn't look big enough to get lost in. Would it be all right with you if I just looked around by myself for a few minutes?"

"Oh, you bet. I'll just sit out on the porch and wait for you. You take all the time you want to look the place over real good."

"Thanks, Bob, I won't be too long."

Ralph watched as Bob walked out the front door and crossed the porch to sit on the step. He turned and looked at the room in which he stood. Crossing to the fireplace, he gently caressed the wood of the mantle, tracing the initials carved near the back with his fingers.

Then, walking to the back of the house, he looked out the window of the kitchen at the creek that flowed just a few feet away. He could see the little swirls as it passed between rocks. A leaf, drifting in the gentle current caught on a twig sticking out of the water. He leaned against the window, mesmerized by the progress of the leaf. He could see it all so clearly.

The two young boys stood on the bank of the small creek. The smaller of the two watched his older brother from a few feet away.

"Ralph, that is the biggest crawdad I ever saw. I bet he could pinch your finger off if he got ahold of it."

"Be quiet, Tommy! You'll scare him away, and if you do, I'm going to push you right in there with him, then it will be your big toe that gets pinched off."

"You wouldn't dare, cause you know you will get the lickin' of your life if you do."

"I don't care, if you scare this one away, I'm going to push you in."

Gently, Ralph lowered the hook that was baited with a piece of bacon rind. He placed it right in front of the giant crawdad. When

swing. As the swing began to rock, the once familiar creak took Ralph back to the summer of his fourteenth year.

He sat in the porch swing, thankful for shade on the hot summer day. He was trying to think of something to do, but it was so hot that energy was hard to come by. He had some chores to do, but it was too hot for work. He was toying with the idea of going fishing, but when he caught sight of the girl walking down the driveway, all thoughts of fishing left his mind.

Sally was spending a few weeks with her aunt, who lived at the end of the driveway leading to Ralph's house. She had been there only a couple of days. All Ralph knew about her was that she was fourteen, lived in Eugene, and was the most beautiful girl he

The sound of footsteps on the porch erased the memory from Ralph's mind. He heard the realtor cross the porch to the old swing. As the swing began to rock, the once familiar creak took Ralph back to the summer of his fourteenth year.

the six-inch long crustacean had a firm grasp on the bait with its large pinchers, the boy slowly raised the pole, lifting the creature from the water. He sat it almost on top of Tommy's bare foot. The younger boy squealed and jumped back.

"Ralph, you did that on purpose! I'm going to tell Mom on you."

The younger boy climbed the bank of the creek and headed for the house sitting just a few yards away. Ralph dropped his pole and followed.

"Come on, Tommy, I didn't do it on purpose, and besides it never got your stupid toe."

The sound of footsteps on the porch erased the memory from Ralph's mind. He heard the realtor cross the porch to the old

had ever seen.

Ralph quickly picked up a magazine from the table by the swing. He wanted to act surprised when the girl arrived. He pretended to read as he secretly watched the girl over the top of the open magazine. He didn't look up till she spoke from the bottom of the steps.

"Hi, Ralphie, what ya doing?"

"Look, I told you already, my name's Ralph, not Ralphie, and what does it look like I'm doing? I'm reading this magazine."

"Is it interesting?"

"Course it is, or I wouldn't be reading it."

"How come you're holding it upside down?"

Ralph looked at the book in his hands, and mumbling something

A Brief Detour

about hearing the phone, ran into the house leaving Sally standing at the bottom of the steps. He spent quite a while sulking in his bedroom, too embarrassed to face the girl. He didn't know how long she'd waited around the steps, but knew he wasn't going back out until she was gone.

Ralph's mind returned to the present, and the old house. He continued to look at the once familiar rooms. He walked down the hall and pushed open the door to one of the bedrooms. The room was still the same, his mind jumped back to that night so many years ago.

The seventeen-year-old was startled by the sound of the front door opening. His folks and Tommy had gone to the drive-in and weren't supposed to be home until at least one, and it wasn't even eleven yet. The lights and the TV were still on, so they knew he was still awake. His father's voice rang through the house.

"Ralph, we're home. What are you doing home so early, I thought you had a date tonight?"

Ralph's mind raced. What was he going to do, how would he explain?

The girl in the bed with him jumped up, and quickly began to hunt for clothes that had been discarded in the dark. Ralph reached over and turned on the lamp, and after taking just a moment to admire the naked girl, he too began to look for some jeans to put on.

Too late, his folks had heard the commotion in his room. Without waiting for an answer to the knock, his mother pushed the door open. Ralph looked up, one leg in his jeans, the other still out. There standing in the doorway was his entire family, all wearing a different expression: his mother, a look of embarrassed rage; his dad, a look of amused pity; and his

brother, a look of open admiration.

Ralph wandered slowly back through the house to the living room. Returning to the old fireplace, he crossed his arms on the mantle, and laying his head on his arms, he allowed the most painful memory of his life to come.

The funeral was over - Ralph was back home. His grandparents were with him.

Ralph stood in front of the fireplace, trying to draw some comfort from the flames that burned within. He wished everyone would just go and leave him alone.

The call, three days before, had come while he was studying in his room at the dorm. His grandfather's strained voice on the phone, the mind-numbing news that his family had been in an accident - they had all been killed. Ralph had hurried home to the old house.

Ralph turned as his grandfather came and put his hand on his shoulder.

"What are you going to do now, son?"

"I don't know, Gramps, I just don't know."

"I know it's a hard time to think about it, son but if I was you I would sure try to go ahead with your schooling. That was the one thing your folks wanted more than anything else."

"I can't afford to go to school now, Gramps. Dad was helping with the money and all - I just don't know."

"Listen, son, you don't have to worry about the money. This old house is paid for, and you can sell it for more than enough to finish school. There's nothing left here for you now but memories. You're going to be an engineer in a couple more years, and you

won't need anything this little old logging town has to offer. I really think your folks would want you to go back to school and make something of yourself.

Ralph's mind was snapped back to the present by the sound of the car horn blaring in the driveway. He walked across the room and out to where the realtor sat.

"Well, sir, what did you think of the house? Nice little place, isn't it? Do you think your wife will be interested? If not, I have several listings I could show you."

"No, I'm sorry to have bothered you, Bob. I don't think she would be interested in anything this small. Her taste runs a little richer than this."

"No problem, I've got some listings just a short piece from here that I'm sure she would like."

"No, I'm sorry, but this is just too far from my work. Sorry to have taken your time, but I think we had better be going now."

Ralph walked out to his car, and with one more glance around, he opened the door and got in. He could see that his wife was still mad. She wouldn't look at him.

"Well, did you get your curiosity satisfied? I still don't know why you had to look at a house like this - tiny little old house way out here in the country. It would be horrible to live in a place like this. In fact, I can't even imagine it."

"I know."

Ralph guided the car down the driveway to the road and turned toward the freeway. A short way up the road, a small store and gas station sat. The sign on top of the small store read "Comstock General Store."

His wife read the sign as they passed the store. She turned to Ralph.

"Comstock, didn't you say you used to live near a place called Comstock?"



Pilgrimage

In other than this body
I have travelled to that
far place.
It claims no name
that men might give it.
Shadows and muted figures
I have glimpsed there.
Scrawls and jagged glyphs
left by other sleep voyagers
swirl in the pigment
of the vision.

Time must be nothing,
for the journeys between
feel like centuries,
yet the rocks have moved little,
sky brined metallic in it's
perpetual day.
I desire no food or
drink here, no warmth
of other beings.
I am alone and not alone.
With no mouth to speak,
No hand to touch.

Bruce Nealley