



COMING BACK HOME

A series of newspaper columns
composed at the invitation of the publisher

Twin Falls Times-News

Twin Falls, Idaho

© Ann Kreilkamp

1976

Column

PREFACE to “COMING BACK HOME” SERIES

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

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Preface (2020)

In this compilation, I feature the eight, weekly “Coming Back Home” columns I managed to get in print before the Publisher of the Twin Falls Times-News took me to lunch and gently, but firmly, told me that he just couldn’t keep it up. That his phone was ringing off the hook, all day, every day, with old fogies shouting: “Get rid of her!” Furthermore, he said, the ideas and attitude in my startling columns were beginning to infect the entire newsroom.

Whoa. Let’s back up. How did this fiasco begin?

It began in 1974, when I came back home to marry my high school boyfriend, after 12 long years apart. Dick High was the Editor of the Newspaper. The Publisher of that newspaper had been the one to invite me to write the column. That was just after Dick and I divorced, an occasion as loving as our two-year whirlwind marriage had been.

The Publisher’s invitation had likely been extended because of a Letter to the Editor I had written while still married to Dick, wondering why newspapers featured bad news when they could just as easily pay attention to good news. A number of women had commented on that letter, praising me for having the guts to write it, especially as the Editor’s wife! Dick himself had set me straight, however. Bad news, he said, sells

newspapers. If the paper started focusing more on good news, its subscriber and advertiser base would shrink.

And it's true. Bad news does sell. Even now, in the internet age, when websites, stories and videos scream headlines trumpeting death and destruction.

Once in a while, however, I notice websites that actually feature good news, and I applaud them.

My lunch with Bill felt familiar. It was not the first time my fiery intensity had proved "too much" for my environment. As usual with me, what I had initiated provoked a strong wake, with a clear division between those who loved the columns and those who hated them. Fortunately, for me, I was used to the fact that my work arouses a divided response. Way back in graduate school my teacher had told me that this is how I would know I'm making a difference.

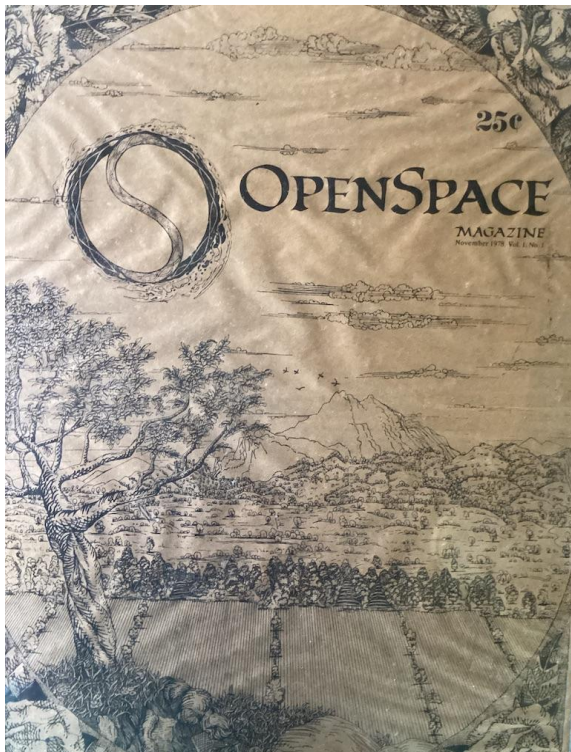
Back in childhood, and up into my early 20s, I was a good, saintly, "straight-A," dogmatic Catholic girl. Then, at 26, I took my first hit of LSD. The experience "blew my mind" wide open. Determined to understand what had happened to me, I started to investigate the intellectual assumptions of my social and educational programming, and found myself, as a result, dramatically transforming. The results, both personal and philosophical, were documented in my PhD dissertation, its energy matched by a provocative title: "This Is Not A Book About Wittgenstein." The committee which decided my fate did grant me the PhD, but not until I agreed to change the title. In the end, *they* picked the title; can't even remember it now, but it was designed to NOT stick out in the roster of those who had received doctorates from the Boston University Philosophy Department. And if the title didn't stick out, then likely no one would read the dissertation, which is what they intended all along, since it called into question the philosophical foundations of western civilization.

For this "Coming Back Home" compilation, I attach an Appendix, which consists of a letter stating my intent after Bill had extended the invitation, and sending along the first five columns for him to look over. To my surprise, he refused to publish them! I can now see why, and I'm very glad he refused! My writing was unnecessarily obscure; I had

quite a chip on my shoulder back in those days, while trying to remain, post-divorce, in our conservative home town. Before my return, I had spent the intervening years on both east and west coasts, and considered myself one of the founding members of the “hippie” generation.

If you decide to read the Appendix with its five unpublished columns, please do notice how the final one is moving towards the tone I finally discovered for the eight columns they did agree to publish. Also, for those familiar with my blog, exopermaculture.com, notice that my point of view in the unpublished columns prefigures what I now call “Alt-epistemology.”

After Bill discontinued my column, I decided to utilize the cultural space the columns had opened up by inviting other strangers in that historically traditional community to contribute their own creative work — stories, poems, photos, drawings, paintings — to a new community magazine. Thus was OpenSpace born.



This cover artwork arrived unexpectedly, just as we were getting ready to print the first issue and wondering what should go on the cover!

Needless to say, all sorts of weirdos began to stream into the editorial office I set up in my living room. The production office, with a long light table, we built in the basement.

We relished our newly focused camaraderie. Who knew what unusual jewels had been hiding out in our otherwise sleepy little town! OpenSpace published quarterly for three years, though I left town for further adventures after two years.

Column

HEARTLAND OF AMERICA “IGNORED”

Coming Back Home, #1

Twin Falls Times News

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Editor’s note: Ann Kreilkamp, 35, grew up in Twin Falls. She left the town, as many others of her generation did in the 1950s. She went to the East and lived for 15 years. In 1974, she came home. In the coming weeks Ann will write a weekly column talking about why she left, why she came back and what she has discovered about her hometown then and now.

Three years ago, I came back home. Broken and defeated, I stumbled back home from the city. Where the “real world” was. Where I had thought I belonged.

I was wrong. And it took me 15 years to find that out. I am a slow learner.

And yet, in my youth, I was identified as one of the smart ones. Being “smart,” I was supposed to leave home, leave my small town, supposed to go and make my mark on the world.

We smart ones all headed for college — either to the West Coast or “back East”— and stayed there.

And it’s strange: even now many in my generation who still live on either coast think America consists of only San Francisco (or Los Angeles) and Boston (or New York City).

They thus ignore the heartland of America, 3000 miles wide. When dissatisfied with either coast — and they often are — they can only think of moving to the other one. Some of my friends in Boston and San Francisco have moved back and forth from coast to coast four or five times in as many years. And many are still restless, still moving on.

I too was restless during my 20s. I, too, moved from Boston only to go to San Francisco. I, too, could see no other alternatives.

So, you can imagine the kind of desperation, the kind of failure I felt in humbling myself enough to come back to Twin Falls.

How embarrassing! After all, I was one of the “smart ones.” And we smart ones all left home, never to return . . . But if we were so smart, why did we all follow each other out so blindly, so without question, so like sheep?

I am reminded here, of how important it was to be “popular” during my high school days. And I see now that the ethic of popularity still held us during our 20s. The only difference being that we switched from personal popularity to identifying ourselves as living in popular (read “hip”) places.

I came home again; I did what Thomas Wolfe said I should never do, could never do. Why? Because if I went home I would become a child again, because I wasn't really an adult if I did? Why? Because I was afraid my old childhood reality would suck me up, destroy me? Was my identity that shaky, that easy to lose?

I came home, yes. For instead of making my mark on the world, I found myself marked, branded, numbered, no longer recognized as I walked down the street. I was one of those faces in those crowds, my eyes fixed forward, my face frozen, a mask, as I headed brusquely by all the others in my mad search for something (what?) that would lend me what I had lost so long ago: a smile, a touch, a warm hello.

I came home again, and to my surprise, I'm not alone.

Ken, for example, came home three years ago to help with the spring planting and stayed, much to his surprise. Peg, on the other hand, came home quite deliberately. At

30, she returned, bought a house, settled in, and said with her usual dramatic effect, that she had “come home to die.”

Twin Falls is no exception to this trend. Shari, for example, who went to Hollywood seven years ago to become a movie star. Three months ago she went back to visit her parents. (Trailing her ten matched suitcases behind her . . .) And now I hear that she has just opened a new shop with her mother in her home town of Farmer City, Illinois.

All over America, we in our 30s are giving up the dreams of our 20s and returning home. Home to the heartland of America, home to the values we thought we had left behind. Home to where a person’s character is created in the history he or she shares with others over the years.

Home to where not only the surface glitter counts. Home to where one cannot simply disappear in the crowd when the going gets rough. Home.

In our return we bring with us outside experiences, perspectives, values. These have shaped us, formed us, irrevocably; these have made us foreigners, “outside elements,” and thus difficult for our small towns to absorb.

Small towns are famous for their stubborn adherence to small town values. For their intolerance of the kinds of diversity a city allows. When I grew up here, there was only one black family living in Twin Falls. So it was quite a shock to walk through Chicago for the first time. Now that I’ve returned, I see a few more black faces, but not many: even now children stop and stare as a black person walks by.

These are the kinds of things I notice now, as I walk down the street, smiling, touching, saying hello. I see the present realities, and I automatically compare them to the past. I cannot help it. I am one of those who has returned, and I am busy sifting through time.

Busy wondering who I am, who you are. Wondering especially, who we are, all together, as a community.

Have our experiences outside merely created a barrier between us and those who have remained behind? Or will our outside values be welcomed for their freshness.

Why are we here. How do we see this town. How shall we act, what roles shall we begin to play as our generation begins now, to take over America, all the small towns of America. Who are we as we begin to shape the future of, yes, even this town. Our Town, Twin Falls, Idaho, U.S.A.

Column

WHAT WILL MY PARENTS THINK OF ME?

Coming Back Home #2

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls Idaho

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My first marriage was what I call now a '50s marriage — a marriage made because, simply, there was nothing left to do. I had gone to school through college. Now I was to become an adult. To become an adult is to get married. I knew that. We all knew that. We had been taught that all of our formative years.

Six years later, I finally pulled out of the seductive social game — for marriage was a game then, back in the '50s. A game, with set rules and a goal. The goal was death, as in “til death do us part.” The rules were the roles we took on, him as husband, me as wife — with duties divided neatly down the middle — or I should say across the board. For the line between my husband and me was drawn vertically. He was on top, and I on the bottom. Literally, figuratively, emotionally.

That was the nature of the '50s marriage game. It was rigid, stereotyped, “square.” It allowed for no movement within. My marriage, however, was born in the '60s, born late, born too late to really “take” as a '50s marriage. Sooner or later, one or both of us were bound to question the nature of the game, and to slowly, laboriously, and finally snap ourselves free of it. Usually, back then, it was the woman who broke free first. Our marriage was no exception.

Our marriage was typical; typical also, its aftermath: divorce. And divorce, I found, does not occur in a vacuum. To divorce my husband was to set in motion all kinds of consequences, not all of which I could foresee in advance.

I came back to visit my parents soon after my marriage broke up. In this I was also typical. One of the biggest hangups for anyone breaking up a marriage then was “what will my parents think of me?” I wanted my parents to understand me. I thought only if they understood me would they love me. I equated love with understanding. I was naïve.

My parents did not understand. Not at all. They understood neither my behavior nor my problems. For them, marriage was real, a lasting bond, a commitment. For me, however, marriage had been a real hell.

I wanted my parents to understand me, and instead they called me selfish. I called them old-fashioned, narrow, straight, bigoted — I always did have more words than they did to describe the enemy —.

The less my parents understood me, the more real my problems felt. The less they understood me, the more hysterical I became. They called me selfish, and so I shouted yes: personal freedom is the only goal worth pursuing, the individual counts above all.

But this was the “old Ann” talking. The Ann who had “broken free” and declared she would remain so forever. The other Ann, that old Ann, had her memories to contend with.

Divorce. Divorcee. Broken home. These words still sound alarms in my ears. They signify failure. They carry with them a certain social stigma. When I was growing up in Twin Falls, I knew of only one divorcee, and she we all felt sorry for. All of our parents were very much married, and none of them thought of it as a game.

And the “old Ann,” conditioned, trained to observe parental values, believed them.

Is it any wonder that I was hysterical? Two sides of myself were fighting, and both of them had the upper hand.

And if I was hysterical, my parents were depressed. If I felt guilty for getting divorced, then they felt guilty for being “bad parents.” Good parents rear their children to be exactly like them, i.e., good. Bad children have bad parents. Therefore I am a bad parent.

So my parents must have thought, as they watched, helpless, as I and others like me began to litter our emotional carnage all over America.

We were World War II babies, and we were coming of age in the ‘60s, by destroying all those outside structures that had bound us and generations before us, and thank God that’s over.

For the ‘60s “love generation” had violence at the heart of it. The generation that needed trust in human relationships above all else, had personal freedom as its clarion call. My generation, born of war, went to war against its own parents, and both sides lost.

But that was seven years ago. Meanwhile, the world wind has moved on.

And so have I. Now I no longer see all marriages as games. Now I even treasure those few marriages among my peers that survived the turbulent ‘60s. I honor them. I am amazed that they did what I could not do, amazed that they could learn to drop the games and still keep the marriage.

And I am amazed at my own parents and their changes. When I was young, my father went off to work, and my mother did the housework. Now, they go off to work together, and when they come home, they both do the housework.

I thought that to be a free individual I couldn’t be married; that freedom and the emotional security that marriage brings could not co-exist; that in opting for one I had to give up the other.

Now I am not so sure of myself, not so sure at all.

Nor are other people apparently. For marriage is not dead, despite the '60s. The divorce rate continues to climb, and yet people are still getting married — right and left, and over and over.

Nor is the “marriage” between the generations dead. For if my parents still do not understand me, then somehow it does not seem to matter anymore. We love each other. We found that out, and that is enough. The heart has its reasons, yes, that the mind will never know.

Column

MARRIAGE: SECOND TIME AROUND

Coming Back Home #3

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

© Ann Kreilkamp 1976

I have been married twice now. Which is not unusual these days. My first marriage was stereotypical; my second one, however, felt more like a miracle.

We were high school sweethearts who had gone on to other lives. Three years ago, after 15 long years apart, we came back home to each other. We finally married each other: our dream came true.

Which just goes to show: it's when the dream comes true that the unexpected happens. We were married only two and a half years, divorcing early this year. A divorce as full of love as our wedding had been, and more. Both were full of tears, both full of joy.

This is unusual. I know. So unusual, that even now I have trouble making sense of it. Others often tell me that if we hadn't married we could have stayed together, that it was the role I took on as "wife," which, in the end, I could not live with; that my freedom was more important than the security of any role. And this is what I thought too, at first. This in fact, was what I told the judge.

Reality, however, is always more complex than any of my simple choices. And reality, in this case, began the very next day after we were married.

It is 5:00 p.m. I am at the kitchen sink. Outside, I notice the husbands are beginning to arrive home. Suddenly there is his car pulling into the driveway. He gets out, sees me through the window, and gives me that wide, slow, wonderful grin.

I smile tentatively, and then grimace, bracing myself against the sink, my head swirling with memory. Of all the other times I had stood at kitchen sinks, peeling carrots, or potatoes, waiting for my first husband to come home, dreading his arrival, yet expectant too. I was like many other wives that first time around. I was lonely. I was bored. I needed him to distract me from myself.

I stood there. I tried to talk myself out of my memories, tried to close that door. After all, I loved my new husband. I knew that. This time was not like the last time. I had loved him since I was thirteen years old. I would love him until I died.

Yet all my talk was for nothing.

As he turned the corner to the kitchen greeting hello — hello! — I rushed at him, enraged, in tears, beating my fists against his chest as his arms accepted me, enclosing me, calming me, giving me that comfort, that refuge, that solace that only he could give.

I was ambivalent. I hated him. I loved him. I hated him as “husband,” I loved him as a man.

For my memories were my nemesis.

I had been married before, and that marriage had been full of pain. Now, a part of me identified my new marriage with that old pain. Time had collapsed. I was right back where I started! I had locked myself in again. I was as good as dead.

But I wanted to be with this man, needed to. And I knew it, knew he was good for me, despite my memories, despite my new role as “wife.”

I knew it, and so I stayed. I stayed on, loving and being loved in turn. This man was my roots, and I had come back to them, come back home.

I had been lost for too long, lost and alone.

I was safe now, safe at last, as I had been safe with him so long ago. Safe enough now, to begin to melt down those painful memories. Safe enough to begin, later on, to open my eyes as now I was unlocking my heart.

Yes, within his arms I recovered my faith in humankind. This man was faithful, this man was true. Within his arms, I recovered myself.

But this was the nighttime; daytimes were another matter. Days, the phone would ring, and ask “Mrs. High?” Days, letters would arrive, addressed to “Mr. and Mrs. Richard G. High.”

Now I know that some women are proud to bear their husband’s last name. That they wouldn’t have it any other way. Besides, they have grown used to it, so why change now?

But I am one of those strange ones. I want my own name, and in fact, legally, had kept it even in marriage. For me, my name and my identity are linked . . . so far. Maybe someday they won’t be. Maybe someday I will be free enough not to need this symbol of my freedom.

And along with his name came neatly defined duties, so I thought that others thought. Make Campfire Girl cookies, organize a car pool, do errands, attend company and family functions.

The name, the neatly defined duties, all this spelled “role” to me, spelled despair; of living out all my days as “the wife,” of needing to keep up and or break down other people’s views of me and what I should be as a “wife;” of never knowing my own path apart from someone else’s.

So it was that during the second year of our marriage his loving gradually began to feel like smothering. I had had enough. It was time to come out of the cave. My eyes were opening, thanks to our union. And I had work to do, miles to go, a path to travel.

Our paths, we found in the end, diverged. This was, for me, an important lesson. I loved a man, and yet, EVEN SO, our paths do not run parallel. They converged for awhile, and that intersection of our life-lines changed my entire way of being. Yet now, our paths lie in different directions. So be it; this is not a tragic story.

I look upon those three years with him as part of a process, as one cycle within a longer one, a cycle, in the end, twenty-one years long. For us to go our separate ways in the spring of 1977 was for our relationship to come of age.

Ours was a union of two people for the purpose of dissolving the scars which had formed in other lives.

Ours was a union which, in its ending, freed us for union with others.

Ours was a union which freed us both to begin.

Yet, insofar as our union was also a “marriage” I was not happy. I was not able to distinguish myself from my role as “wife” — was not strong enough, wise enough. I learned something about myself. I learned my limitations.

I learned that there is a kind of freedom I have not yet earned: the ability to take on a role as merely a mask, as something to wear when appropriate, and to discard the rest of the time.

Yes, that’s an entirely other kind of freedom. As ours was an entirely other kind of marriage.

Column

HORSES AND CARS AND GIRLS AND BOYS

Coming Back Home #4

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

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In first grade I asked my teacher what a number was. Instead of answering, she stared at me. Long, so long my face burned. Finally, she smiled, reassuring, and said, “That is not a question, dear.”

From that time on, mathematics was to me a floating world, not quite real.

And because I did not understand the basis of mathematics, I grew to fear it. How many nights, dear mother, did we spend bending over multiplication tables, or long division, your first daughter frustrated, in tears?

Nor was the world of machines real. “My car,” for example, meant nothing to me.

When I was fifteen years old, my father gave me his old car when he bought a new one. Several months later, he took it away again, saying I had left the car door open wide in the driveway one too many times.

And I remember, during senior year physics, how I froze when the teacher demonstrated how pumps work, or carburetors, or light bulbs. (Even so, I still managed to get an A in that class too: the competitive drive to succeed, drummed into me from so early on, overcame even my fear of machines.)

For I was typical of many little girls. I preferred my horse to any car. Every day I could I rode her, ran her, ran her out of control. Bareback on her, our muscles pounding as one, together we were wild and swift and free.

Though I never knew what a number was, I knew what it was to feel one with something else, knew in that union, my own freedom, there upon that horse.

As I imagine any boy knew too, as he pressed upon the accelerator of his car, the vibrations of the motor passing upwards through the soles of his feet.

In some ways, girls on horses and boys in cars have much in common: the experience of power, of freedom. Yet even so, horses and cars put girls and boys in their respective places: a horse cannot go as far as a car can, nor as fast.

Both horses and cars signify power, and therefore, freedom. But their powers are of different kinds. Whereas the horse is an animal, the car is a machine. The horse is big, dumb, conscious, somehow able to respond with life to my touch. The car, on the other hand, is big, metallic, with no trace of consciousness, no emotion of its own.

Somehow, we little girls and little boys had different (unconscious) attitudes about what it meant to be free, about what real power was.

Little boy power had something to do with knowing mathematics (and not asking forbidden questions) and knowing its applications: the logic inside a machine. They knew mathematics, and with that knowledge came also the ability to plan, to look ahead, to try to control the forces of change through time. For them, somehow, power and freedom had to do with control, with the ability to foresee all the contingencies by identifying all the variables, as in mechanics.

And it's true, if the world is mechanical, then power is control, and freedom is the ability to increase control by enlarging the domain of it. (But the domain of the world is finite. Thus the need for competition. There is not enough of the world to go around. There is room for only one at the top.)

It is easy to talk about the kind of power little boys have. The whole world runs on it. Just like in Newton's day, the world is still viewed, by and large, as a great big machine,

a clock, keeping perfect time with itself, all its parts oiled, running smoothly, in tick-tock precision.

But is the world mechanical, or is the mechanical world a dream. Can we really predict what is going to happen to us, or are we fools to even think so.

And what kind of power do little girls have. What is the animus in women, that big dumb conscious beast lying inside all of us, projected by some of us out onto the horse? What kind of power is it, that it has had to remain hidden from the world for so long.

This kind of power is not mechanical, but organic; not completely predictable, controllable, but somehow full of life. A kind of power where freedom does not have to do with increasing control, but rather with letting go of control — with allowing that power to overcome us, overtake us, to throw us into a kind of ecstasy, another world — as we run upon our horses, our legs wedged wide, our eyes blinded by the wind, into some unknown and uncharted future.

When I was a child, Blue Lakes Boulevard was a trail-lined avenue of arching trees. We rode our horses on it, into town. Now Blue Lakes has widened to become “San Jose Avenue,” its side-shows bright, metallic, with no trace of consciousness.

Little boy power is on the ascendant in Twin Falls, Idaho, as more and more cars drive down wider and wider streets. Little girls still ride horses like they used to, but they rarely come into town anymore like we did. They stay on back country roads. From there, they can look across and see the town, already so full of cars that the fumes create a haze. The little girls look across and see the town, and it is hazy, floating, not quite real, a dream.

Little girls stay on the back country roads. They leave the town, and the center of things, alone. They leave it to the boys.

Column

OUR CARS, OUR STEEL SKINS

Coming Back Home #5

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

© Ann Kreilkamp

Three years ago I came home. Home to hear coyotes howl. Home to smell the sage in rain. Home to the dust the wind the subtle earth tones. Home to the sky blue technicolor drama of small mortals rolling along highway 93 our voices rebounding off insides of car walls.

The windows are closed.

It is too hot out, or too cold.

We prefer the security of a controlled environment to the open air outside.

And the day ahead is dawning as the mountains loom larger and larger soon to dominate even this alien desert landscape heading everywhere, anywhere; heading nowhere.

Gertrude Stein once said that those who grow up being able to see the distant natural horizons — those for whom the sky is a bowl — are formed differently than those who grow up in hills and valleys and city streets. That their thinking is more abstract somehow, more universal. That they do not lose themselves so easily in petty affairs.

I was one of those so formed. And I wanted out.

How I longed to escape this place as a child! How I longed to travel to where the world undulates, squirms with life. Here there was only that desert lying flat and wide, putting the lid on even my own contours as we traveled north and then again south on highway 93.

Straight north and straight south.

Now we can travel straight east and west too. Twin Falls is now the intersection of a standard set of coordinates. Twin Falls is on the map.

Back then, we drove east and west on curving roads, roads which followed the subtle contours of the land.

Now we travel on a road which ignores the land, one which uses it merely as a springboard for the flat wide straight blacktop of I-80, running smoothly, hypnotically, from here to there.

And we sit in our cars and no longer watch for the Stinker signs as much as we do the directions, the rules of the road: how to recognize where you are, how to avoid collisions, how to get from here to there the fastest, safest way.

It's all very scientific, very efficient, very predictable. It's all very much like all the rest of America. Interstate highways connect us to one another: they also homogenize us, make us much the same.

All over America, we sit in our cars, and eat and drink, or smoke and talk, or listen to radios and tapes and CB radios, or, like me, dream of a world that is passing by. (Seen from the outside, however, our cars are passing through a landscape which is stationary. It is only from inside our cars that the whole world seems to move.)

And our windows are closed. The heat is on. We feel safe and secure. We are with our family our friends our lovers ourselves. We are safe, secure, separate from all those others also in cars, windows rolled up, mere faces, behind windows, pass by.

We are each of us passing the others, we are in passage throughout America, we are going here and there and everywhere, we have a hard time just staying home.

I am describing weekends here. Weekdays, we are also in cars. Husbands drive cars to work and back; wives “do errands” — they go to the supermarket, they shop for clothes, they drop off and pick up kids — and always in cars.

All of us in America are in cars some of the time. And some of us are in cars most of the time.

Our lives are spent going straight down straight roads, obeying signs, directions, all of them more and more standard.

Our lives are spent passing one another or crisscrossing, encased in metal, suspended on springs which are suspended on tires which roll along smoothly from here to there.

We never even have to get off if we don't want to. We can eat and sleep on the road. Hippies do it; so do Winnebagos and Airstreams.

Yet Twin Falls is not Los Angeles. Most of us are not in cars much of the time.

But Blue Lakes Boulevard is Los Angeles. There are no sidewalks along that street, only entrances and exits for cars. And Blue Lakes is advance warning to this town. As you approach Twin Falls from the north, notice what you are getting into.

Two forces seem to be at work here. There is the force of nature, still noticeable in Idaho; there is the force of science and technology now rising even here to meet the challenge that nature presents.

Two forces which work inside us too: there are our natural selves, alive, unpredictable, open to the air: there is the homogenization, the standardization of ourselves, as mass men and women.

Which one will win out? (Or better: how do we learn to blend the two?) Will Idaho go the same way America is going, or can we learn from America's mistakes.

Gertrude Stein was right, I feel, about those of us born to see the entire sky. We grow up here more aware of our own smallness in the face of nature; more certain, therefore, of our own mortality. The pleasures of the world are not as distracting in this

place. The beauty (and the terror) of God are more in evidence. This makes us, many of us, naturally “religious” in our temperaments, whether or not we go to church. We know we’re going to die someday, so we wonder why are we here at all, why we are even alive.

And indeed, why are we alive. Are we alive simply to learn how to deaden ourselves as we travel, passing each other, never meeting — not touching, not saying hello — each of us in our safe enclosed metallic spaces, going hypnotically from here to there? Or is there some other reason, some other reasons.

Column

THE BELLS ARE RINGING, RINGING

Coming Back Home #6

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

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It is 1:00 PM. Lunch hour is over. Time for reading and arithmetic. I steal a glance at the big round clock. I steel myself; my mind clicks into its required place: I begin to learn facts, to memorize or recite them, or sometimes, catch myself dreaming out the window, my spirit sky high.

Next day, same story, and eight more months to go. 7:30 am, rise, crowd into bathroom with sisters, set the table, eat breakfast, and then all of us off to school, dad to work.

Life was well-ordered, under control. By the time I finished first grade, I knew how to behave. We all did, we all squeezed our small squirming bodies into all those straight-backed desk chairs, row upon row of us, each of us the intersection of a standard set of coordinates, folding our hands in front of us politely, at attention, steeling ourselves to begin that long slow painful process called education.

By the time I hit thirteen however, sex had risen its ugly head, disturbing order, forever altering the course of my trajectory.

I moved from St. Edwards to O'Leary and grew pimply. I gave up my horse to fall in love with a boy. A tall, dark, handsome boy, D.H. D.H. + A.K. — scribbled on desks, notebooks, inside locker doors.

Passing him in hallways, my hair on end, my spine running with current, my eyes fixed forward, pretending not to notice.

Time stood still during those moments, those long wonderful moments; forbidden moments, stolen, ripped out of the schedule we were all learning to keep, bells five minutes 'til, then on the hour. Five minutes to switch classes. Five minutes to alter my history.

And each five minutes, stolen from the clocks, became the last five minutes, as those five minutes began to repeat themselves, began that other kind of education.

They say we go to school to learn how to read and write and follow directions. But school, by the time we hit thirteen, becomes the stage for an entirely different kind of learning.

The first kind we do by the clock, 55 minutes per class, six classes per day. All of them filled with facts.

And yet, between classes, for those five minutes of every hour, we blush as we brush by each other, traveling through forbidden lands, throwing time out of order, releasing us from the clock.

So we have two kinds of learning in schools, intellectual and emotional. These were not combined in my education — ever. They were opposites, pulling me in two directions: there was clock-time, and its contents, the well-ordered placement of facts; and there was no-time, the time of the moment magical.

The first kind of learning is the official purpose of American schools; the second acts underground, it is not officially recognized.

The first kind taught me to behave on the surface; the second kind plunged me below the surface. The first kind was clear, clear-cut, well-ordered; the second kind muddy, turbulent, confusing.

The first gave me answers to questions I, for one, had not even asked — so I seldom remembered them. The second created questions in me, questions which didn't have any answers, and which could not then, significantly, even be asked in schools.

Yet these questions were remembered, or rather, they formed in me again and again. They rise in me still; they haunt me in the night. Questions about sexuality and its “magic,” questions about life and my own death.

Questions which have answers soon turn into “the facts.” Facts are definite, they are items, bits of information — what we fill computers with. Schools turn our minds into computers, “real-time” machines. They create time-frames for us, and then fill those frames with the facts.

Facts help us cut time into those fragments — the minutes hours days years — which we then try to piece together in our search for answers to those other haunting questions. (But the search is futile: for these are questions about the whole. And the whole is greater than the sum of any parts. But no matter.)

For soon these questions disappear — they become buried, submerged — as we cut time up into more and more complicated displays of fragmentation, making plans and more plans, nesting time within time. For we must hurry. For the bells are ringing.

7:30 am rise, time to go to work. Forty hours per week, eight to five, an hour off for lunch. Ten minute coffee breaks. Before bed, a few hours of “free time” (as opposed to what, “bound time”?) which we then proceed to either “waste” or “fill” productively.

Whereas, as kids in schools, we filled our time-frames with facts, and then were released to play, as adults we learn to fill even our “free time” with facts, or projects, products —.

Schools create time-frames for us, and from then on we are always needing to fill them. This gives us our “drive,” our “motivation”; this leaves us somehow dissatisfied.

For those time-frames are sieves: whatever we pour into them leaves us as empty as before. But we don't know it, all we know is we feel split, divided, cut in two: there is me, myself; there are all those facts and/or things I "own" or "want."

When I was a child released from school, I could return to my natural world, a world undivided, a world where my actions and my time were one. Now I can't anymore. The time-frame is inside me now, only I don't know it. So I wander among my facts and things, seeking reflections, as they begin to swell, littering my driveways and bookshelves, my coffee tables and garbage cans.

I wander among them. I touch them, hold them, and yet I can no longer feel them. I don't feel anything anymore.

I am big now, an adult, and I prove it with facts and things. Yet I feel numb, depressed, unreal: I am nothing, nobody, no one. Who am I?

That is not a question, dear. Forget your questions, dear. The bells are ringing, dear. Hurry up dear, for the bells are ringing, dear, they are ringing, ringing —.

Column

MY GLASSES REMIND ME

Coming Back Home #7

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls, Idaho

© Ann Kreilkamp 1976

We say that children are lucky, that their lives are one and not divided, that their worlds are in full bloom.

For me, however, that was not the case, ever.

As a child I lived in two worlds already. There was the world of God and the devil, there was that other world outside. God and the devil were inside me, they took sides in me, one side black and the other one white.

And the other world, the “real world,” was their battleground. Something to be escaped eventually. Not quite real. Real were God and the devil. Real were my sins. Together they informed my world, gave it laws, a structure. This is good, so go ahead and do it; this is bad, so don't you dare.

I was seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, like any other young animal. Being human, however, I was also conscious, and so cursed, my conscience casting its shadow over everything, coloring it all in shades of grey.

But the world was not really grey. It was black and white. So I thought. So I was taught. This is good, this is bad, so I learned to show and tell, and to do this I had to

focus, to concentrate, to look closely — for the black and white within the grey, and so to frown, to begin to etch that long narrow vertical line between my brows which remains there still.

And the more I worried, the more I frowned — the more I tried to know precisely what was good and bad, black and white — the more hazy, the more cloudy my vision became.

By the time I was ten I was wearing glasses, to “correct” my vision. And my glasses, I found, made things clear, all too clear.

As clear as they are for all of us, clearly at odds with what I had been taught: that there was one world, one truth, and I had it. I felt sorry for my friends who weren't Catholic, sorry that they didn't know the truth, like I did, the black and white of it.

Even so, they were my friends. I liked them. And the more I liked them, the more I got to know them, got to know their worlds.

At some point I realized that they too thought their worlds the only ones, that their religions were, for each of them, the one and only truth.

And so I would pause, and frown, and realize: something is wrong. How come so many of my friends think they know the truth, when there is only one truth, mine?

I had the truth. I knew that. I had to have it; without it, and my structure collapsed; take it away, and my world came tumbling down. So they must be wrong.

They are wrong, because I am right. I am right, and I am white, or at least I try to be.

7:30 p.m. Saturday evening, each and every Saturday evening.

Dear Father for I have sinned. I fought with my sisters ten times. I talked back to my mother twice. I lied to my father once.

Now this is easy, this is clear. This is a ten year old's black and white world. At thirteen, however, I began to grow curves and hair and emotional power, a power which

required a set of rules to combat it. Rules so definite, so clear, so absolute, that I could make sure I never broke them.

But these rules weren't clear. They were cloudy, as cloudy as my world was becoming.

Were we dancing too closely? If so, then for how long? Did I really mean to kiss him that way in the car later, or did I catch myself in time? Did I mean to do it, any of it? Maybe it's his fault, not mine. Should I break up with him? Yes, of course. Oh no, please, no!

I was in the classic teenage dilemma: fatally attracted to the black, and yet fatally wounded by any contact with it. So I thought. So I was taught.

My mind told me one thing. My body showed me another.

This could not go on . . .

I had to pretend it wasn't going on . . .

But I couldn't pretend forever . . .

So at 20 I got married. And with this act, the world began to turn grey again, grey as before, only now I knew the black and white of it all. I was an adult, civilized. Going about my life in the right way. Following my right hand, God's hand in mine, cutting off the left one, the one the devil had held.

I followed the light now, only now what (they said) was white seemed drab, grey, hollow.

I was moving through a hollow tunnel, aiming for the light at the end of it, always receding. The light of civilization, lighting my way out of the darkness of my own animal instincts for pain and pleasure. Turning pain into pleasure, and pleasure into pain. Turning the natural world inside out and upside down. All color was draining from the sky.

The sun was blinking out.

My world was growing grey, grey and cold. My world was a living hell, fire underneath, yet iced over, smooth, slick, like ice, as the surfaces of things began to reflect my face, frowning even more now, that line between my brows digging deeper year by year.

Something was wrong. The world had lost its meaning. There was no more point to it all. My structure had collapsed. I gave up.

I gave up, and my body took over. I took sick, and nearly died.

But that was seven years ago. Meanwhile the world wind has moved on.

Black and white are gone now. That grey shroud of conscience has lifted to reveal another world, a world I never knew as a child, a child's world, and full of color. A world shining with the sun. A world where even that sun is only another star.

A world where "truth" is a matter of perspective, and perspectives change.

A world where whatever structure I choose to give meaning to my world, it is always provisional, never final . . .

A world where whatever happens, it is happening now, now, and so is forever new, new . . .

And it just goes on and on. And it just keeps on blooming. Smile lines grow to rival the frown line, though they never will remove it.

For I still wear glasses, permanent reminders of closely watched worlds.

My glasses remind me. My sins had their consequences. They rise in me still, they always will.

Column

CAN PEACE DREAMS AVERT DOOMSDAY?

Coming Back Home #8

Twin Falls Times News, Twin Falls Idaho

© Ann Kreilkamp

I was born December 19, 1942, war time, to parents of German descent. Love me or leave me.

My daddy left me. My daddy left me and went off to war. My daddy left me and my mommy behind, sobbing.

I was a World War II baby, and we are now coming of age in America.

In all the small towns of America.

In Twin Falls, Idaho, U.S.A.

Yes, we were World War II babies, born to miss our daddies, born to a cosmic disorder.

For us, daddy's absence was a presence, looming large, looming larger than our own small personal lives, looming, blooming to cover the entire earth with that grey mushroom cloud.

That cloud of unknowing. Of never knowing whether or not the world was going to end. Of wondering, as I jumped rope, or played marbles, whether or not it would blink out that very day.

As a six-year-old, running outside to pick up the newspaper the moment I heard it land on the porch. Then kneeling down on the floor, unfolding the paper slowly, deliberately, frowning, scanning the headlines for news.

No news was good news. No news meant the world was safe that day, meant the world would last that day, and even — I crossed my fingers and prayed — even last all through the night.

Then at night, tucked into my bunk bed, my three sisters sleeping beside and below me, I would begin the ritual: my silent prayers to God.

And always it was Dear God. Please don't ever take away my daddy again.

And always it was Dear God. Please don't let there ever be war again.

These were my requests. (I tried to ask them politely, but they always sounded like screams); and I would line them with prayers, each a certain number of times and in a certain order, turning slowly round in a circle, prayer by prayer, from stomach to side to back to side to stomach —

Meanwhile my sisters slept on peacefully. Or did they? Or did my prayers themselves fire a mushroom cloud — and one big enough, grey enough, to infect my sisters too.

Was I the only one who feared as I did? Was I all alone? Why didn't the others understand? How could they run and skip and play as if nothing was happening, nothing had changed. For who knows, maybe something had changed. Who knows, maybe today the world will end.

So I would think, frowning, standing off to the side, watching my sisters and classmates do what children do.

I was not a child, I was an old woman. I had seen it all.

I had seen it all in my dreams at night when finally, exhausted with prayer, I would dip, fitfully, into that never-never-land of fear and prophesy. Which is which. I shall never know.

I'll never know which of my nightmares are mine alone, which are ours together. I'll never know which of my dreams are real, which are merely dreaming. Never know which might alter the course of history — my history? Your history? Our history? — and thus turn the tide, prove themselves wrong, and thank God, I'll never know.

Now they say we all dream, whether or not we know it. Those of us who know it usually, however, don't care. Our dreams are not real, we think. Real life is when I get up in the morning afterwards. Real life is the life of my plans, my projects. Real life is not my daydreams, either.

But sometimes our dreams at night last all day long. Sometimes even the sun does not dispel them. Some dreams cast shadows, like the sun does. They infect us; we feel vaguely ill at ease.

Those dreams which do cast shadows have a power, a light, and in exact proportion to the length and breadth of the particular shadow cast.

Nevertheless, the sun at noon casts no shadow.

The sun at noon is at its zenith in the sky.

The sun is at its zenith for one full moment only.

Every day, each and every day of our lives, we have a chance to register this one moment, this light which casts no shadow, this dream of a world which is one, and not two, not divided, not split down the middle — in us, as we go about our daily lives, judging good/bad, black/white; in nations as they go about their headline diplomacy, their secret deals —.

Every day each of us has the opportunity to experience the power of those dreams of ours, especially us World War II babies — and before us, those World War I babies, and soon those Korean War babies, those Vietnam War babies — we were all born into a

world at war. We cannot help but see beyond our noses, beyond our own small personal lives, at least some of the time.

We can't help but dream, at night — and then, at least by morning, begin to cast that mushroom cloud of unknowing, that grey cancer cloud, that fear of our daddy's absence, of that cosmic disorder.

Yes, we can't help but dream too, of that 12 o'clock high, that moment of full sun warmth, that heat that will melt down our differences, and melt them down far enough so that they can be seen for what they are: the living colors of the natural world at noon.

High noon. That one moment of pure light, pure consciousness. High noon, that one, long, magical moment, that moment when our awareness is, or can be, so all-encompassing, so round and all-forgiving, that never again shall we go to war, never again.

For one of these dreams is going to win out. That's for sure. That's how things begin, as seeds, in our dreams.

Some seeds are cast upon hard ground, and so shrivel and die. Others are cast upon the waters, and so drift and drown. Still other seeds, however, fall upon soil deep enough and rich enough to nurture them as they grow, spreading their roots in contact with other seeds' roots, and so, all together to become that mighty oak tree that is or could be the human family.

Is the soil of our Idaho deep enough, rich enough? Or do the winds of change blow too hard here. Do they simply blow over our land, taking the top soil along. Do the winds blow too hard and fast here. Do they bend us too far over with their force. Are we so used to war that we prefer it to any familiar dream of peace?

Do the winds blow in one ear and out the other, like our dreams seem to?

Appendix

Coming Back Home: Earlier, Unpublished Columns

Composed for *Twin Falls Times News*, Twin Falls Idaho

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Letter to Publisher

March 31, 1976

Dear Bill,

I send you the first five columns I would submit were I to be a columnist. They are numbered in the order I would submit them.

Dick [the Editor of the newspaper, and my just-divorced husband] thinks them unpublishable. People will not understand, he says, and so they will call me a radical-communist-atheist-pig, or some such anyway. They will, in turn, link me up to Dick, he says, and all the good things the newspaper has been trying to accomplish will thereby go down the drain with him.

Myself, I doubt all this could happen as the result of anybody's columns. But, since I am linked to him, he says, it will.

Because my writing is so "strange" — it speaks on many levels, it continually jumps levels, confuses levels, it contradicts itself over and over, it uses the same word to mean many different

things, etc. — it serves somewhat, as its own internal screen — to fend off those who would try to find anything consistently “radical” or “revolutionary” in it. Which, of course, is why my writing is revolutionary, and why I am indeed a dangerous person for this or any other place.

My weapon is language: what holds us together, what keeps us apart. Language is usually thought to be divisible into two parts — form and content. And it usually is: what can be said can usually be said in many ways. However, what can be said in many ways has no doubt been said before. And what has been said before is not my business. New thoughts demand new forms. New thought-forms are, naturally, not understood by any but those who are also “there.” So much for the great masses of Times-News readers. On the other hand, new thought-forms can work their way (insidiously) even into those great masses on unconscious levels. Which is, to my mind, where the only real revolutionary activity takes place anyway. Ideologies, on the other hand — even so called “revolutionary” ideologies — come and go, they play on the surfaces of our brains. They make no dents.

So here they are. If you agree with Dick, then so be it, no harm done. If you don't, if you would consider publishing them, then let's all three of us talk about it first. It all depends on where this community really is — and I imagine you and I and Dick all have varying views of that.

At the very least, the act of considering writing like mine for publication in the T-N would be a learning experience. As Neitzsche put it once, it is by thinking about the extremes that we understand more about what is normal.

Sincerely,

Ann

Unpublished

Column 1

I came back home in the summer of '74. In the summer of '74 I opened myself up to my ghosts. After 15 years of freedom. After 15 years of immersion in other lands, other customs. After 15 years of knowing I had left all that behind me, as should be. After 15 years of finding all that inside me, even so.

So I came home to it. Despite Thomas Wolfe's warning not to. Despite my knowledge I never would. Despite my years of feeling "Thank God! I'm free." Despite my ghosts I returned to them, to face them, face to face.

As a child I would greet the dawn, riding bareback through the fields.

I loved the morning, the early morning; that hour at the edge of the sun.

My horse, a big chestnut mare, was named Golden Sunlight. Other people called her Goldie; as they called me Annie, Annie Bananie, Annie Capanie.

People used to tickle me in other ways, too.

I never got over it.

One night my horse and I were riding through the fields again. She wanted to go home again. Reluctantly, I let her go. Upon coming to the edge of the field, we met the wolf, the guardian of the gate.

His eyes were bright and yellow.

His bright yellow eyes were staring at me, they were staring at me, pale and yellow, ice and ice cold; frozen: The Evil One.

In order to run from the Wolf I must take my eyes off him. In order to take my eyes off him, he must release me. He does. I run. He runs too. I see him run. He stops. I take my eyes off him to run. He runs too. I see him. He stops. I see him. I see him, and so I see: To Behold the Wolf Is to Become Him.

Yes, to behold the wolf is to become him, as I face him, face to face, that ghost.

That face, that face is mine! That ghost. That past. That past we all share somewhere, in all our home towns. That past, those childish things we were supposed to put away (where? in the closet?) as we grow into men and women, into grown-ups.

Grown-up now, I came back home. Even so, for the first six months here, I kept the drapes closed. Even so. Time warps. Identity goes. I huddle inside. Where am I. Why am I here. Who am I here.

Who am I when the desert stretches vast as an ocean, when the sky becomes a bowl, when the mountains glint in a distance so far and so close that the eye blurs to find the measure, any measure of distance, of perspective. Who am I when my eye clouds over in its efforts to find some center point besides itself to make all the rest fall into its usual place.

Yes, who am I. And who are these many others now who, likewise, have come home again, despite all those warnings not to.

Who are we. Who are we for ourselves, who are we for you. For Twin Falls. For those of you who have not come home again — for those who stayed home, for those who have just arrived. Who are we for whom the alternatives mean nothing now, for we have tried them all. We have tried them all. They mean nothing now. No thing. There is no thing that can keep me from this place, this land, from this honesty.

Unpublished

Column 2

Twin Falls is a small town. Small towns have small-town gossip. Therefore, Twin Falls has small-town gossip.

This is a well-known sociological fact. Nevertheless, this fact is seldom explored: what is gossip, just what is gossip.

There is gossip, and there is gossip about gossip. The one is the texture of small-town life, it is the warp and woof of *things*, its atmosphere.

The other is divided into patterns.

First there is the pattern which talks about gossip on the sly, that is to say, it is merely gossip.

Second, there is the pattern which gambles in opportunity — it is organized, planned, it is there for effect, it understands the world in terms of its cash-value. (Gossip as rumor.)

And finally, there is the pattern which overrides opportunity, which breaks up that atmosphere, that warp and woof. This is the gossip that feeds on gossip, that nurtures it, any rumor and its opposite; this is the gossip which breaks the back of gossip, under its own heavy weight. Where is the truth in all this. Which truth.

All gossip has the same quality — it is secret, shared knowledge. Gossip is that which knows that knowledge is power.

When knowledge is both secret and shared, there is the possibility of disclosure. Always. Even in print. Though gossip is not supposed to turn into print, it does. Often.

And what separates gossip from the records. And who decides.

To understand what gossip is, is to share in the secret of the universe. To share in the secret of the universe is to kiss and lament. To kiss and lament is to be held responsible

For one's actions

For one's words

For one's deeds

All together

As a whole

Thing, that

Hole thing

That thing which has no bottom it is only

A circumference

An edge, turned

Back on itself

As it rolls forward

Into no thing

Forever.

Gossip begins early, begins anyway at the junior high school. They group together, two or three at a time, in hurried, whispered conversation. Conspiratorial conversation, conversation which must *not* be heard by those outside. We are inside, they are outside, so goes our daily lives. Later, as grown-ups, these children will have homes of their own to whisper in, so they will no longer need to whisper, being closed in by private walls.

Which is why, perhaps, women have always had the monopoly on gossip. Their lives are carried out inside, in private, as distinct from their men, their public outside men.

Yes, the women in this town have this one thing in common: gossip. The men share in it too, to some extent. A few thrive on it, vicarious. (As gossip is in itself a vicarious pleasure, so too gossip can be doubly so. To engage in gossip or to disengage from gossip it is all the same, is to live in a world where gossip is the norm.)

To gossip is to have power over others. Is to speak of them behind their backs. Where they cannot see. Is to surround them with eyes. Is to double their vision. And to double that. Is to see only the appearances of things — my clothes, my hair, my manner. Is to not see me at all.

Throw me your eyes

Throw me your

Ears, and your mouth —

Let me kiss them

Kiss and lament —

Let me throw them

Over the edge

Of that hole

It is yawning there

Forever

In darkness

That round hole

That deep —

Disclosure.

For gossip goes on and on. There is no end to it. That hole is a tube. That tube is, itself, an edge. That edge goes round, round, round.

So the only question is the one of relative size, i.e., how large is my circle. That is the one dimension that counts.

Even so, there must be an outside observer, an all-seeing eye, the source —

Of all those secrets we tell each other each hoping to get the best

Of the other, his life's

Blood, his back

Bone. We pick bones when we gossip, bones,

That structural heart

Of things —

As they are.

Unpublished

Column 3

I want to state the obvious: the views of this columnist are not necessarily the views of the sponsoring organization. This, however, is true of any columnist: columns are not editorials.

A columnist is one who gives his or her own personal views on things as they are.

A columnist is one whose views do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsoring organization. Indeed, the sponsor and the columnist necessarily differ in their points of view.

The sponsor has no single point of view, no center from which it sees the world. The sponsor is a part of the world which it views. The sponsor is, then, a mirror of its community.

Mirrors are flat planes. Distortion in a mirror image is the result of light (slight) deflections from the norm. These deflections occur at various intervals and at various angles. (And for various reasons. And even, some say, with various motives. Motives have to do with self-interest. It is in the self-interest of the community to want to ascribe motives rather than reasons. And motives, of course, are spread, not by the sponsor, but by gossips.)

The angle of deflection is measured by the (emotional) response of the community to distortions in its own (mirror) image of itself. Emotions are not reasons. Therefore, community response to any particular angle of deflection is not reasonable, not rational. Therefore, neither can be the sponsor's predictions as to what the community would say were so and so to say such and such is the case.

So, paradoxically, neither the community nor the sponsor is rational — and this, despite the facts!

To be rational is to be objective. To be objective is to report the facts. To report the facts is to say so and so said such and such is the case.

So we see the union of public and private affairs: sponsors are also gossips.

There are no differences between what is printed (printable) and what is not. Everything is news. Everything new changes as the result of looking at its own mirror-image, complete with distortions. What kinds of change are affected depend on what kind of image the community pretends (succeeds) in having for itself. In this community divergent views are not allowed. This community wants to have a single eye, a single view of the world.

This, of course, is impossible. Which is why we all feel so afraid. We fear our many selves, we fear the many selves in us.

There are many of us who are many selves. There are a few of us who know this. This knowledge is power. This power is currently in use. Nevertheless, the price of any utility is bound to go up in the coming years.

All this describes the sponsor, and its relations with the community.

The columnist, on the other hand, is not a mirror of the community. The views of the columnist are his or her own, one member of the community seeking all of the others — knowing they will never be found. A columnist writes what he or she thinks, or thinks he/she does. Sometimes the columnist contradicts him or herself. That is no small problem for small minds.

Small minds have small appetites. They can only take in so much before they feel full.

Small minds do not like to be called small minds. Bigger is better. The bigger the better.

Large minds, however, are rare. Rare, and to be valued — each a single one, each one with many colors, many hues, many selves, many voices, many contradictions: many deflections from the norm.

The norm is there to be tested, is to be shot through with holes.

Unpublished

Column 4

Newspapers sometimes say they report only the facts. So and so says such and such is the case. (Some may argue with this definition: what about the records? Nevertheless, whatever is recorded is, originally, at one time, so and so saying so — even to him or herself as he or she writes it. So too with committees — they are also so and sos, as each committee speaks, by definition, as a single one.)

Yet often, such and such is the case for only so and so. There are divergent views of the facts.

Newspapers, therefore, do not print the facts, they print only gossip. (Newspapers will argue with this: their standards of accuracy, they say, are much narrower than those for gossip. But accuracy according to what standard? Whose standard? Who is the so and so at the top? Well, they say, the community, of course. But which community? Twin Falls? Idaho? America? The World? God? And if God's law is indeed the final one, then what to make of my son Colin's remark, at age three, and laughing — this doesn't scare him a bit — that "there's another god beyond that one and another god beyond that one . . . there's lottsas gods!" So communities — like committees — no matter what the size — are all so and sos. There is no standard at the top, for there is always another (larger) world — with its standards — beyond that one. (This reminds me of the category "top secret" — and of Daniel Ellsberg's contention that there are at least thirty categories above that one — some of which even the president doesn't know.)

Gossip, unfortunately, has a purely pejorative connotation. It is not respectable in official quarters. This shows how pretentious officials are.

Give up the pejorative connotation of gossip, and you give up pretension — that pretension to objectivity.

For there are no facts. There are only miracles. And we are one.

There is a common ground within this community, only it is not the facts.

Facts are floating things. Facts emanate from my eyes and yours. Facts never repeat themselves if left on their own. They are bubbles, and they burst. With each new fact I pop all the others lying in (relatively) close proximity.

Yet we try to build on the facts, those floating things. No wonder our houses are made of cards.

Pretension is the glue that keeps the cards from falling down. But the edges of the cards are thin, thin and hard to join up with any other card, not to mention more than one.

So too with our selves. Our edges are thin, they are easily loosened from the edges of others. It's no wonder there is no single eye in this community.

Question: should there be? Or is this too much to ask for. Or is this not what we need anyhow. Eyes aren't solid foundations either, not our common ground. That is to be found somewhere underneath all that, in the darkness, in the thick brown soil of this land, this desert land, this common common ground.

Unpublished

Column 5

Let me take the opportunity to invite you to my party, to be held somewhere between the hours of 10 pm and 6 am, any night. Come one come all. Come together in our dreams.

I have heard it said that a community's dreams are as much a part of its common life as are its waking decisions. Which makes the whole thing unpredictable, irrational. Inject one aberration into the system and you change the results of that system. And some aberrations go unnoticed, like dreams, dreams dreamed in common.

It is said that sometimes dreams can be shared by more than one. If this is so, this is a miracle, not to be explained away, not to be injected (reduced) into the system, not to be forgotten by all those who (think) they are knowing the system, as they (think) the system involves only what counts, that is, is additive, cumulative, outside the insides of our heads which are teeming with dreams. Our heads teem with dreams without our even knowing it!

And perhaps some of these dreams are actually shared — that is, one dream, not additive, not cumulative, not to be counted as when we count points to make up our lines of pretension.

Between any two points there is always a third one possible. Therefore there is no such thing as a complete description — and thus, no objectivity either.

Nor can we hope for an even partial description. Parts can be viewed only in terms of the wholes they form parts of. These wholes then, are our assumptions, they fill in the spaces between our points (the facts).

So it's best to state our assumptions — those we know of. In this way we have, at least, a (relatively) complete description — of ourselves.

What emerges from my facts is not the "truth," it is (my image of) myself.

And this is a self I cannot possibly know (i.e. completely describe) unless I refuse to go to sleep, refuse to dream.

So what are we left with? What are we left with besides ourselves, unknown and unknowable. What are we left with but those (shared) dreams we experience night after night as we fly swiftly, silently, commingling — over this ground, this ground, this, our common hallow ground.