

Time is but a Stream I go a-fishing in:
A Memoir of Brotherhood.

Adam Wright

The title of this piece is borrowed from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*.

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the
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Introduction

For my senior project as an English writing major, I have written a memoir. It is a collection of moments stretching back over the past six or seven years, pieced together in order to try to help me understand my relationship with my brother Abe. The writer ultimately writes for himself, and it seems that this story has become more about me than I initially intended it to be. In trying to write about my brother, I have listened to many voices: my brother's from the past and present, to the voice of my memory, and to the voice of those friends and fellow writers who have helped make this piece of work a reality.

I feel it is important to recognize those who have helped me along the way. First, I want to thank Abe, for being my brother and friend, for fishing by my side, and for teaching me truths about life that I have found nowhere but in his presence. I also want to thank the great writer and fisherman Loren Graham, whose friendship and writing guidance have been indispensable for this project. Thanks to Loren, this project is a lot further along in magnitude and quality than it would have been under my own volition. I also want to extend special thanks to Murphy Fox, who has been an inspiration to me in many ways, too numerous to list here. Thanks also to Kay Satre and Rod Thronson, my two thesis readers, who have helped me along in this writing process. One final thanks also goes out to all the professors of Carroll's English Dept., who have helped me with this and many other pieces of writing during my time at Carroll. To all my buddies - you're awesome and you know who you are, thanks for being there.

These are some of the voices that have become a part of a piece of writing that is mostly by Adam Wright. Add your own, and I hope will find this enjoyable to read. It is a mix of poetry, journal entries, and prose anecdotes combined in an attempt to use a diverse group of writing modes to best convey the history and meanings behind the dynamic relationship with my brother.

In preparation for this project, I have read a handful of memoirs at the suggestion of my thesis committee. These included memoirs written by former Carroll graduates, *This House of Sky* by Ivan Doig, *This Boy's Life* by Tobias Wolfe, *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt, *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck, and *A River Runs through it* by Norman Maclean.

What follows is a beginning, a summary of a greater story that's not finished. I've discovered that my memories are like a jigsaw puzzle which I try to put together to try and figure out something about my brother and me. In putting the puzzle pieces of memory together in different ways to try to tell our story, I've found that I need more pieces, that I'm not satisfied with the way the picture is turning out. I know in my mind what that picture is supposed to look like, and I get glimpses of it on rare occasions on a river, in a song, or in a pickup truck. What I have now is just a sketch, an unfinished painting, but I've come to think that's all right.

Prologue

Five years have passed since Abe and I cast our lines into the waters of Canyon Creek. I remember our trip to Canyon Creek as the first time Abe and I really went away to go fishing together, out from the teaching and guiding hand of our father. We were on the threshold of growing up, and it was a good place to be, just two brothers, heading out to the woods to catch fish and tame the wilderness. We were triumphant in our brotherly self-sufficiency, discovering this new place we'd never been with our father, setting up a camp beside the river, and cooking trout in warm autumn redfire-dark night. We met the challenges that the river presented, and walking along that river in search of fish, we took the first few steps toward manhood.

I learned to believe then, that together, independent of the world, my brother and I could do anything, conquer the world and live on our own terms. I have a hard time letting go of that belief, even when the reality of the rest of the world bears down and complicates my relationship with Abe. Perhaps that is why I feel so at peace when it's only Abe and me out on the river fishing, out of reach of the rest of the world. I often seek that refuge of the wild places, and when I go, I find thoughts of Abe there, and I try to reel in the wisdom of brotherhood from the rivers' flowing waters.

And all rivers flow to the sea. Abe and I have been carted there - the vast open sea filled with predators and the great emptiness of a world that doesn't understand the truths flowing in a trout stream. I am the salmon, driven upstream by a sense of home and family, trying to recapture that perfection Abe and I shared at Canyon Creek, when all we needed was each other, fishing gear, and a home on the river.

I think about that time and the feeling I have that it was in those days on the river that we knew each other best. I live with Abe now, and I've lived with him other times since those days on the river, though it seems that with each passing season I know him less and less.

Our lives expanded beyond the challenges we faced at Canyon Creek those five years ago. Yet I know that our roots still cling to the riverbank, drawing meaning and understanding from its flowing waters. Like rivers, lives change course. Abe and I grew up and away, and I don't know him like I did in those days when the late summer sun warmed us, wind blowing through our hair as we dove carefree from the cliffs of Canyon Creek. The challenges we've experienced since have changed us, and the paths we've walked led us away from the simplicity and refuge the river provided. But I still believe that our journeys and all our differences are not out of reach of the waters of Canyon Creek, whose imprint lies on the endless river valleys of Washington and the towering mountains of Montana. I return to these places, and I want my brother to be there beside me, because somehow I know that no matter how we've changed, the river still holds that fish worth chasing, and with it, the answers about Abe that I go there to seek.

Where it All Begins

Before dawn the pickup roars to life,
Three fisherman radiate in this old ritual.
One old and wise, two young and anxious
To reach the stream where it all begins.

Creedence sings while Abe and Adam argue
About who will catch the bigger fish
And who will catch Ol' Grandpa today.
Dad just laughs and sings along.

Where the road ends the river begins
we go bounding from the pickup truck
all eyes open to the mighty Quinait.
We're chasing the next riverbend, hoping
Searching for a fish story by day's end.

* * *

The Rest of Us August 1998

Abe and I are cruising on the open road. The city with all its suburbs and traffic is merely a bad memory now, as we roll down our windows to let the blast of fresh country air invigorate us. We are on our way to Canyon Creek, the last, best place within a two-hour drive of our home in Southwest Washington. Canyon Creek is a relatively undiscovered oasis of beauty, good fishing, and solitude. Abe and I are heading there for one last trip into the woods before I leave for college in a week. We had been to Canyon Creek once before, and we knew that trying to fish any other body of water in our area soon became an exercise in combat fishing. Abe and I lean our heads out the windows and yell out into that August morning, letting the wind blow through our hair as the road to Canyon Creek shifts from open highway to backcountry roads. Together we just rock and sway with my Fiat as I jockey through the gears on the road's sweeping curves.

When we get there, it is time to begin the fine art of selecting the perfect campsite. After

crossing a bridge that spanned the creek, I park the car on the side of the road, and we negotiate our way down the steep decline to the riverbank. It feels good to be walking in the woods again. The twigs that are snapping beneath my feet and the squirrels scurrying across the forest floor combine with the sound of the river to create an overture whose chorus echoes all around me.

My brother's voice soon joins in, shouting, "I found it -- there's a great spot right here." Abe stands next to a semicircle of grandfather Douglas Firs. The trees surround a piece of flat ground relatively free of undergrowth - our own chosen campsite and a perfect place to spend a few nights in the woods.

"All right, let's do it," I say. Abe and I begin shuttling gear between the car and the campsite, and half an hour later, our work is done. The ground was clear, the tent was set up, and a firepit had been constructed. We now faced the afternoon's most difficult decision.

"Upstream or downstream?" Abe says with a twinkle in his eye.

"Gotta be upstream," I reply as I grab my pole and don my fishing vest.

"That looks like a good hole I say," and the fishing begins. Lures of brass and nickel are dropped into pockets of water with precision and grace as we cast lines in the clear, clean water of Canyon Creek. Abe is wearing a t-shirt that says, "Rich people have therapy. The rest of us just go fishing." It makes me chuckle while the strife and worry of the past few months drifts away with every cast. Abe and I continue to move upstream, driven by the desire to discover what lies around the next bend in the river and hoping that there are fish waiting to be caught. I've been wondering what lies around that next bend in the river for as long as I can remember. My first and some of my best memories are of fishing, most often with my brother and my father. The world seems to make the most sense when I'm knee deep in a stream holding a fishing pole. So I don't fight it; I just keep chasing the next riverbend. Abe is right there with me, and together

we explore the intricacies of Canyon Creek.

We continue to move and fish, but we aren't having much luck. The river then changes a bit, splitting into a couple channels. The channel on the right is obstructed by a logjam, but none of the fish are willing to bite. Evidently, the fish aren't as hungry as Abe and I. It's 2:00, and we haven't eaten since breakfast.

"Abe, we better head back and get some food," I say, trying to look as serious as possible. "It's just not safe to be out here starving ourselves like this."

"Yup. I suppose the right thing to do," Abe replies with a smile. "I bet I can beat you back to camp."

"We'll just see about that," I fire back as I take off down the creek, running over the river rocks, sending a spray water into the sky behind me. Abe is right on my heels, and together, we tear down the river, splashing our way back to camp. I'm just a bit ahead of him, so I turn around and kick a deluge of water in his direction. Abe reaches into the creek with both hands and gives me a good soaking in return.

"You got me," I said, dripping wet and winded from my run down the river. "Let's get some lunch."

"Sounds good," Abe says, and we leave our fishing poles on the riverbank and walk up to our camp. Abe grabs the cokes, crackers, and cheese in a can, while I wrestle a boulder into the campsite. I plop down to eat lunch upon my newfound easychair, and Abe makes himself comfortable on his log couch. While munching on aerosol cheese covered crackers, Abe and I reminisce about our one and only season together on the high school swimming team.

I raise my coke in a toast and say, "League champs, it was fun, huh?"

Abe raises his coke in agreement, and after pausing a moment, he says, "It won't be the

same without ya, bud.” I reassured him, telling him he’d be just fine. He’s a good kid, and I know he’ll be able to manage. I’ll sure miss him though. When Abe ran away at 15, I brought him back home and smoothed it over with our parents. When life got a little rough for me, Abe would take me aside and play me a song on his guitar. We took care of each other; we fished together. It’s what brothers do.

“So what do you think about trying our luck downstream,” I ask, even though I already know the answer.

Grinning, he replies, “Let me show ya how it’s done.” We’re back on the stream again, but this time when I drift my lure by a pocket, I feel my line go tense. My muscles clench, and I raise that rod tip to the sky.

“Fish on!” I yell at the top of my lungs. I splash my way downstream, following the rainbow trout who deftly tries to outmaneuver me by swimming with the current. The magnificent fish finally concedes, and I stand on the bank holding him, beaming like a kid at Christmas. I put the fish in the creel, and together, Abe and I continue downstream. The water becomes less accessible, so we climb up along the riverbank. As we round the bend, we see one of the small canyons that gives the creek its name. From where we’re standing, there is a 15 foot drop from the edge of the canyon to the water. Looking down we see the slow, clear water. I figure it’s at least 25 feet deep.

“Hey, check it out,” says Abe. “There’s fish swimming around down there.” The fish are way too deep to fish for with our tackle, but we try anyway.

“This would be an awesome spot for cliff jumping,” I say to Abe.

“Yeah, let’s come here tomorrow,” he replies. I teasingly remind him that he still has yet to catch a fish, and so he picks up his pole and guides us around the riverbend. Sure enough, Abe

finds a beautiful hole. The fish jump all around us, and one of them finally hits his lure. Abe skillfully plays the trout. Somehow, watching him catch a fish is even more satisfying than when I caught my own. Abe's trout now lies next to mine in the creel. Satisfied with the afternoon's results, we head back to camp.

Upon arrival, I begin collecting sticks for the fire while Abe cleans the fish.

"Abe, you know how to cook those things?" I ask.

"Yeah, I'll show ya how," he says. All I cook is macaroni and cheese on a good day, so it's nice to have Abe around to help out with these things. By the time I have a fire going, Abe has prepared the fish for cooking. He butters up the trout and wraps them in tinfoil. With expert precision, our meal is placed in the campfire. At the appropriate time, Abe pulls the fish out of the fire, and they're ready to be eaten. I marvel at nature's basic gifts of food and warmth. In the firelight, Abe and I talk about college, fishing, and how he'll be a famous guitarist someday. After that, we say a prayer of thanks for all of the day's blessings and head into the tent. We say our goodnights and I lay back to reflect. It's been an incredible day, and tomorrow promises to be equally exciting. I'll be in college soon. I actually think I'll make it just fine. If the going gets too tough, I'll just have a longer drive to Abe and Canyon Creek.

* * *

June 2002

I'm driving up to Glacier alone. The red-yellow sunset plains of wheatfields and Blackfoot range cattle stretch off forever in my rear view mirror. Ahead lie the snow-capped mountains of Glacier National Park, my summer home for the second season. It's up to Goat Haunt, where I'll wander in the mountains and clear trails with the vagabond gypsy outfit called Goat Haunt Trail Crew. The passenger seat holds an assortment of books and journals-my backcountry entertainment for the upcoming summer.

It's a spot you should be sitting in, talking with me about this beautiful landscape we're passing through, making plans to rendezvous with the trail crew boys as soon as we make it to St. Mary. I would be whipping through the gears as we glide through the curves, winding our way up the switchbacks on Highway 89, climbing our way up towards St. Mary. You would be playing music on the radio, both of us singing along, filled with the anxious expectation of a summer in the mountains. But the cab of the truck is silent, save for the hum of the motor, and you're not here.

You're back in Helena somewhere, and I'll spend my summer wondering what you're doing and why you're not here with me. I'll wonder why you're stuck at a gas station in the city while I'm in the mountains, even though I already know the answer. I was so excited when I showed up at your apartment that Saturday. I was all fired up to hear that you had gotten the job in Glacier, and I was ready to make plans for our brotherly exodus into the mountains. We had laid the groundwork together—filling out applications, making a few phone calls, and getting recommendations from my buddies working up there. Then you threw it all away. You didn't have a phone, so I got messages for you on my phone. I had called you at work, and told you to call this guy first thing in the morning. He had called you back, and I think he was going to hire you. But you never called that next day. The look in your eyes was distant and disconnected as you explained this to me. You had probably been smoking just before I arrived. "Sorry dude," was all you could manage to say as you rolled the glass pipe lazily through your fingers.

"You fucked up," I told you then. A job at Glacier slipped through your fingers. So little work and you could have been spending the summer in the mountains, making good money living near your brother, and partaking in the vagabond carefree lifestyle of the Glacier community. In a last ditch effort, you tried to call the park ranger on Monday, in order to see if he still had a job for you. You never got a hold of him, and then you just gave up.

It's sad really. You'll be spending your summer working at a gas station, sticky hot asphalt summer days. People all around you will be moving, and you'll just be stuck there, trapped in the city behind the counter of a convenience store. I'll be out here in the retreat of Glacier's mountains, plying a stream for trout or diving headlong into an alpine lake after a long day of hiking. I know it will be an incredible summer, and I'll have memories for a lifetime. I just wish you were here too, because somehow all those memories would be that much better if you were a part of them.

* * *

Running Away

Abe ran away when he was 15 years old. It had been coming for a while when it happened, but it caught us by surprise, all the same. There was a lot of crying. I remember that. I remember too Abe's face written with fear and hard resolve shooting through tear-stained eyes and I remember mom crying, yelling "don't go." Then he walked away.

It may have been a phone call that started things going that night. Mom picked up the receiver to hear what had become an all-too-common occurrence, the automated message saying that said Abe had skipped school that day. Abe had been skipping a lot of school that year. It was out of character for him, and Mom and Dad were struggling to figure out why he was doing it.

“It must be a mistake,” Abe said, seemingly hoping that a simple denial would suffice for an explanation. But Mom and Dad had grown tired of hearing too many explanations. The last few months had been an endless stream of hearing his excuses, talking with teachers, and discovering how he had been skipping class, smoking cigarettes, and running with a crowd of kids rough around the edges. Mom and Dad insisted that Abe begin toeing the line. They grounded him, kept in almost daily contact with his teachers, and tried to bring him back into the fold. It really hadn’t worked, but it wasn’t due to their lack of persistence. Every time they punished Abe, he just ignored it. Abe still had to get on the bus for school in the morning, and once he boarded it, he was out of their grasp. Abe went to school if he felt like it, and he came home when he wanted to.

The phone call, clothes that smelled like smoke, and the past few months of unsuccessful attempts to make Abe change all combined that night to give Mom and Dad a sense of clarity and a understanding that something had to be done.

“Abe, we won’t believe you anymore,” Mom said.

“There are rules in this house, Abraham, and you need to start following them. That means going to school, coming home immediately after, and doing what you’re told,” Dad said.

“I have been,” Abe said.

“No you haven’t Abe,” Dad replied. “You’re lying.” There was no easy answers left and Mom and Dad were pushing, because they were tired of Abe’s behavior and his the way he

ignored what they said.

“I don’t want to talk about this right now,” Abe said, and he began to walk away. That wasn’t going to work this time. I remember there was a tension in the air, like this was a battle and mom and dad were tired of losing -losing because regardless of what they said, Abe did what he wanted to. I can’t remember exactly what happened next or what words were exchanged between my brother and my parents. Mom and Dad were building up to a crescendo, and I remember watching Abe lose ground and then begin to grow desperate and angry. Mom and Dad had the upper hand now, and they were insisting that Abe promise to change his ways. Abe refused, and that’s when it happened.

“You can either promise to change, or you can leave,” Mom said. It was a challenge, and no amount of explanations could change what had been said or done. Abe was crying now, but they weren’t tears of repentance. They were trapped tears, trapped because Abe was in a corner, faced with all the failures of the past year. Mom had left him no way out. He had to change; he had to make a promise.

He called their bluff. They didn’t really want Abe to leave, but the words had been spoken and the die cast. Mom meant well, like she always does. But she was emotional and angry, and she told Abe that if he didn’t want to abide by the rules of the house he should leave. And so he did. It all happened in a couple of minutes. Abe began walking toward his room with a face that was a mix of sadness and determination. It took him a few seconds to grab a couple things and rustle through some papers he had on his desk, and then he began heading for the door.

Mom was crying now, “You don’t have to leave. We can talk about it.” Dad just stood there trying to process the fullness of Mom’s threat and accusing her of going too far.

Mom tried to stop him at the door, but Abe just said, "This is what you wanted," and he slipped out into the night.

Time stopped when Abe left. Mom was crying. My little sisters were crying. Dad was just quiet and he was trying to comfort mom. I just stood there frozen in time surrounded by confusion and sadness. Mom was worried about Abe.

"Go tell him to come back," she said. I went to the room and grabbed a sleeping bag. Then I ran out into the dark, my heart pounding and my lungs stinging from the cold night air. I tore down the dark streets looking for Abe until I found him, walking away a couple blocks from our house.

"Abe," I called out to him. He stopped and waited for me to catch up.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Mom and dad want you to come back," I said.

"I can't." It was quiet, and I didn't understand why it had to be like this, only that it was.

"Ok," I said. I looked at Abe and I was worried about him, but I was going to let him go.

"Are you going to be all right?" I asked.

"I think so."

"Will you come back?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he said.

"Here," I said, and I handed him the sleeping bag.

"Thanks Adam." I looked at Abe. He was sad, but he was tough, and I knew that he had to leave. I didn't know how long he was going to be gone. I took my baseball cap off my head, a wool pro-fit Green Bay Packers hat.

“Here, this will keep your head warm. That’s my favorite hat, don’t forget about me.” I set the hat on his head and looked at him. In that moment, he didn’t have to say anything. I looked in his eyes, and I knew. I took out my wallet and gave him all the money I had, \$20. Then I took off my sweater and handed it to him.

“Thanks Adam.” We hugged. I was choking back tears, but I was trying to be tough, so I held them in. I could have stopped him then, but I didn’t.

“You can call me, you know. Just tell them that you want to talk to me,” I said.

“Okay.”

I stood out in the middle of the street, under the cold, dim light of streetlamps. It was a calm night with no wind and the street shone black from an earlier rain. I stood motionless listening to your footsteps, watching you walk away into the night until I couldn’t see you anymore. I was going to have to tell mom you weren’t coming home. I shivered. Then I walked back toward the house.

* * *

July 2002 - Glacier National Park

But oh jack kerouac wandering those sad streets of civilized desolation pouring your sorrow down with companionship and the city’s many pleasures of the flesh. in the sky you’re as pure as rain, but as you drag weary through these city streets unknowing, you are like muddy drainwater tarnished, rushing aimlessly across the cigarette-butt littered road and down into sewer drains

And here’s me ‘ol me listening to strange music of a past girlfriend with many visions hopes and dreams yet just plumb tired out in the woods after a hot day of good trail crew work, “and when will I learn to drink the waters of purity and truth that I might never thirst again,” - find sustenance in my hopes, dreams, and writing. Perhaps it’s truly happening I wonder as my thoughts wander to Abe then a girl then Abe and

Oh Abe, when will I write your story, our story -of brotherhood and all those things I don't yet know. You wrote another line to one of my old poems in an notebook. Just discovered it in my notebook the other day. Did you see my struggles and scrawlings trying to convey emotion, and on revised second attempt you penciled a single line to try to help your brother out, about "marveling at how it all vanishes into nothingness." I marvel at you my friend all you are and all you could be, like your poetry that you carelessly discarded and I saved -wrought with mystery and meaning -like you and your life. Are you stuck like 'ol jack, lost in the city among friends who muddy the purity of you and your streamside and pickup truck stated intentions, "I just wish I could fish forever." Abe, that's a great moment for me, just us -two brothers balling an old Chevy pickup truck across wide open Montana plains talking about fishing and life, humming along with the din of a 350 echoing the chorus of our lives. I want to exist with you in the perfection of those moments, and then we could send pictures of those great fishing trophy moments home to Dad and he'd put 'em on his desk and know glad in his heart that he'd done well -two boys of his out in Montana chasing the wind and wild rainbow trout bounding through Montana's mountains and hills in a pickup truck...

* * *

October 2002

A lonely train whistle blows and I can remember a long ago night when I stood next to some tracks and felt the wind and the power as the boxcars rushed endlessly by

with the echo of that whistle sound and distant rhythm of all that energy clickety-clacking its way across the landscape and *marveling how it fades into nothingness*

and there you are Abe - I stole your line. I wonder where you are tonight. What are you doing out there buddy, mired in the easy consistency of mediocrity? You have a lot to give from in there, a heart and soul filled with poetry which you throw away and instead flirt with 17-year-old girls. "Abe - the water of life" one of my buddies called you, meandering your way through life along the path of least resistance. There is a greater life and I know you possess the gifts to partake in it. I've glimpsed those times when you've risen above to create something great from within yourself- music and poetry of honesty and beauty that blows away those who've listened. it's why those of us who know you hang on, hoping you'll aspire to something greater, hoping you'll see the greatness we see in you and run with it to the pinnacle of the world. But right now Abe, you're just running away and all those lame little friends you keep around just tell you that everything's okay. But they don't know you like I do Abe; they don't know that you could pick up a guitar and change the world.

* * *

Running Away (part 2)

It was a hard night when Abe left. Mom didn't sleep much. She spent the night on the couch in the living room, waiting for him to come home. The porch light was turned on, struggling to push a few beams of brightness into a dark night. That light didn't reach Abe, though. He was both close and faraway, but nowhere near ready to return that night.

Abe called the next morning around 7:00 am, before mom and dad went to work and all of the kids went off to school. Mom picked up the phone after one ring.

"How are you, honey?" Mom asked. I could tell that she was relieved to hear his voice, but she was being careful not to overwhelm him with emotion.

"I'm fine," Abe said. "I want to talk to Adam."

"Tell him he can come home," Mom said as she handed me the phone.

"Hey bud, are you doing alright?"

"Yeah." It seemed to me that I was talking to someone in prison, faraway, and that this was his five minute phone call. I felt like I needed to make the most of the time I had, because I might lose him any second.

"Do you want me to come pick you up?"

"No," Abe said. "I'm not ready to come home yet."

"Are you going to school today?" I asked.

"Probably not," he replied. I should have expected this, but I didn't. I knew then that Abe had truly walked away, and I feared that he may never return.

"So where are you calling from?" I asked.

"I'm at Denny's. I used some of the money you gave me."

“That’s okay. You sure you don’t want me to come and get you?”

“Yeah” I was losing him. I knew he needed to go away, but this was too much. If he didn’t come home, all the things that could happen to him out there were bad, but it wasn’t my decision. Abe was still out there, somewhere, trying to figure things out.

“Call again this afternoon, Abe. You can call collect if you want.”

“Okay. Tell everybody that I love them.”

“I will. Take care of yourself, bud.”

“I will. Thanks, Adam.”

“Anything else, Abe?” He was slipping, and I wasn’t ready to let go of him yet, but I had to.

“Nope.”

“Alright then. Call me.”

“Okay. Bye.”

“Bye.” He was gone.

I hung up the phone. Everybody around me, especially mom, was looking at me.

“Is he coming home, Adam?” she asked.

“No. He’s says he’s not ready yet, mom. But I think he will be soon. He’s going to call me after school.” Mom was worried sick. She didn’t want to go to work, but I told her that it was going to be okay. Somehow, Dad knew that this was going to work out, and I think it was good for my mom to see that both Dad and myself were calm. Mom decided to go to work, but it was difficult for her. Losing Abe, even for a day, must have been like losing a part of herself. When Abe and I were growing up, she was always there; she was a mother first, and everything else in her life second. I remember one summer when all the kids went to Wisconsin to live with our

grandparents for a month so Mom could finish some college classes. Mom called almost everyday, just to make sure we were doing okay.

I was getting ready for school, but mostly, I was just going through the motions. It was a familiar routine, so I just did it. Really though, I sort of felt lost. I wanted to talk to Abe and find out what was going on, but I couldn't. I was walking around in the living room, because I needed to do something, and it wasn't time to leave for school yet.

Mom said, "Do you know where he is, Adam?"

"No, not anymore," I said. "He was at Denny's before, but he's probably gone now. Maybe I can go find him. I might miss some classes today," I said, and I didn't wait for approval. I just said, "I love you Mom. It's going to be alright," and I walked out the door. I wanted to find Abe. I had to talk to him. I wanted to tell him those things I couldn't say on the phone. I was missing my brother. He sounded sad and distant on the phone. I fired up my car and sped toward Denny's. When I got there, I looked around and asked if anyone had been there that matched Abe's description. The waitress I was talking to was kind. She said that Abe had been there for quite a while, just drinking coffee, but he had left some time ago.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Yeah. It's okay," I said. "He's my brother. I'm looking for him. Did he say where he was going?"

"No," she said. "I hope you find him." She was sincere, as if some quality about my brother had shone through, even for a waitress in a late-night café.

I left Denny's, and I stood in the doorway of the restaurant. I didn't know what to do now, and I wondered if I had said the right things to Abe that morning on the phone. I wanted more than anything to find him, just so I could talk to him, and maybe, together, we could sort this

thing out. Somehow, I knew to go toward the bus station. There's almost 100,000 people in the Vancouver area, with a number of places Abe could have been, but something made me get in my car and drive toward the bus station. I never got there. As I was driving, I saw a lone person, bundled down with the load he was carrying, walking down the road with his head hung down. It was Abe. He looked tired, but it was Abe, and I had found him. I drove all the way across the parking lot and over to him. He didn't realize it was me; he just kept walking. I watched him for a second before I called out to him.

"Abe," I yelled, as I swung open my car door. He looked at me from under a Green Bay Packers baseball cap with eyes that told me it was okay that I was here.

"What's up," he said, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened in the last 24 hours.

"I came to get you. I wanted to talk with you. Come on. Climb in," I said.

"Okay." Abe got in the car without any hesitation.

"You hungry?" I asked.

"Not too much really," he said.

"Well, let's go home. You can take a shower and stuff. Mom and Dad aren't around."

"Yeah alright."

"It's really good to see you Abe," I said.

"You too man."

The car stopped at the traffic light. I looked over at Abe, and I was so happy. I had a brother and I got him back. There was no way in hell I was going to school today.

"Let's go fishing today, Abe," I said.

"You're not going to school," he asked.

"Not today, Abe. Today we're going fishing," I said.

Big Belt Mountain Poem

Fire up your trucks
gather up your belongings
fishing poles, grub, and a stray brother
because something out there
is calling your name

Hit the trail in swirling snow
Forge on ahead and feel the rhythm
of footsteps pounding down the trail
Conquer a mountain and wind your way
to your campsite there in the valley
Do this, and then you'll know.

Do for the sake of doing
Be for the sake of being a man
See there the sawtooth ridge
the skittish grouse
and the boulder-strewn path
leading the way to our mountain refuge

Find the hidden lake and
Ply its deep green waters
Fish for mountain cutthroats
as they ripple the water with countless jumps
Begin to understand
trout aren't the only things you're fishing for

Shout in triumph
Raise your calloused hands high in celebration
Of granite boulders hefted in unison
the strain of muscles and the satisfaction
Knowing the beauty of freshly-broken firewood
licking flames into the midnight air

Warm yourself by that fire
Sit back and tell fish stories
eat what the land has provided
and drink that Olympia brew
brought here over many a mountain mile

Look to the sky
strewn across with a hundred thousand stars
reflecting there on Hidden Lake's waters
Nod your head and raise your pipe in acknowledgment
of the One who made this place
and brought us here, together under a valley of stars

Listen. Be silent and hear
the poetry of the land
in the voice of your brother
in the whispering wind
and the crackling campfire
Out here among men and mountains
you've found what you were looking for
you've done it, and now you know.

* * *

August 2002 -Glacier National Park

And I think of you sitting quietly on our front porch of the house we shared my junior year in college, me 20 and you 18. You're on the front porch smoking, lost in thought as you look out into the horizon and that's how I think of you now, looking out into the horizon as if you're searching for something. And I'm searching too my friend for all for all those great life questions still unanswered and searching for you, hoping that your search will lead you to rest and happiness. I think of the windy trouble-filled road you've taken with nothing more to look forward to in life's immediate future but more hard lessons, and sometimes, oftentimes, I wish we were traveling the road together - a road filled with mountains and trout streams flowing into an endless sunset and then I know that everything would be alright. Just me and you Abe - it's all those other people in the world that fuck everything up. And I think about my far off future plan to spend a winter in a cabin alone and now I think that if I were to take anyone with me, it would be you. All those friends or girls who may want to come along would not be considered, but you, if you wanted, could most assuredly come along.

I miss you out here man, and I wonder about you, and I know that I have no greater story to tell than ours. And knowing how you are in your greatest moments, most especially when you know I need you in your calmness and serenity, playing a guitar-song for your world-weary brother, I know you'd say to me, "it's okay, Adam, you can tell our story. You'll do fine."

and so I embark.

First Visit

Your house-
a dirty garage where cats roamed freely
clothes strewn haphazardly on beat-up couches and cement floor

The Stench-
of sweat and mildew and things rotting away
cobwebs lining the rafters of your new home
sunlight peeking through cracks in a roof too long neglected

Your hair-
sticking up in weird directions
matted and dirty from sleeping on an old couch
smelling of dirt and sweat and stale cigarette smoke

These clothes-
hanging on your frame like a loose tent
but I know they're yours and they fit when
I saw you wearing them two weeks ago

Your Eyes-
distant. shut-off. not receptive to shock or question:
Abe, what the hell is happening to you?

* * *

late September 2000

Abe oh Abe bearing the weight of the world on your shoulders- sad, tired, living on the verge of homelessness, empty of hope, surviving, but without reason. You've been existing on the kindness of others these past few months, sleeping on the couch of some fellow musicians, but they're moving away, and you need a place to go.

Bridges to your past have been burned. Mom and Dad love you, but you used up their capacity for forgiveness, and now you're on your own. Justin too is gone. He left behind broken promises when he fled to California, wandering down the road to use someone else. But you're not angry at Mom or Dad or even yourself. You're just tired. Lost.

You called me today and unraveled all these things. Maybe you called because I'd been there for you before, and there is some sort of bond we have that's been forged in times of crisis. I remember one time when Dad found a Playboy in our room. He confronted us, his eyes burning with the anger and disappointment of a betrayed trust. The Playboy was mine, but I didn't have the strength to say it. Dad tried to get us to incriminate the other, but you wouldn't turn me in. You just stood beside me silently, and we bore the blame together. I didn't know what to say to

you when Dad left. I felt like I'd not only failed as a son, but as worse an older brother. But you broke the silence. "I should have said it was mine, Adam. I'm sorry." I never would have wanted or expected you to do that Abe, but it showed me something about you and about us that I've remembered ever since.

And now you're down and we need each other once again. You told me that maybe you were going to find Justin and go live with him in California, and it makes me realize that you're not just calling because you need advice on where to go. You've lost a part of your spirit. Time and trials have worn your memories thin, erased the memory of how Justin stole money from our parents, made you forget how he never thought of anyone but himself.

You've made some mistakes in life, Abe, but that doesn't mean I'd abandon you. I need you right now as much as you need me. California is too far away, and I could never bear to see you reunite with Justin. That's why I told you to come live with me in Montana. You were surprised at my invitation, but your response was full of gratitude and then excitement. The passion returned to your voice, and soon we were laying down the plans to bring you here to Montana. We're going to be together soon Abe, in land of big fish and bigger mountains. Today, I will revel in this feeling of brotherhood, and in a few tomorrows, I will see you again. I breathe deep, mixing my memories with the lingering smell of the river as I lay aside the extra fishing tackle in preparation for your arrival.

* * *

Cutting Firewood Fall 2000

Abe and I are rolling down that road we've taken many times now NE out of Helena past Shopko and the Cenex station down the winding highway of the York Road in my 1974 Chevy pickup, the bed empty except for a toolbox, a gas can, and a recently pawn-shop purchased Homelite chainsaw. It was late autumn, and we are heading out toward the mountains to cut firewood, just a hop, skip, and a jump from the Missouri River. It is a good day to light out of Helena after morning classes, just Abe and me heading off in the woods to cut firewood. We blow out of the city and are soon into the open plains where cattle and old farmhouses are dotting the landscape, and it is good to be out of the city again as it always is. So we roll down the road not talking about much, just some speculating on where we'll find the best firewood on the winding dirt spur roads that broke off the York-Nelson road. We listen to the radio and

the hum of the motor as we barrel down the highway.

After about 45 minutes, we come to a fork in the road at the York Bar where the highway ended and the two dirt roads meandered off into the mountains. We take the one on the left, the York-Nelson road, toward the Missouri River and various spur roads we hoped had good firewood. Later we would take the other road in search of a camping spot, climb a mountain, and sit on the top looking down on the Helena Valley, but today it was gasoline that was coursing in our veins, and so we tear down that dirt road kicking up rocks and a cloud of dust as Creedence echoes on the radio and around the cab of the pickup truck.

“You watch for good spots off the road okay Abe.”

“Yeah, sure man.”

We stop a couple times along the way but just a few skimpy trees barely worth cutting so we cruise down the road, eyes scanning the forest around us. The trees are mostly lodgepole here and the good firewood trees had all been carted away long before. So Abe and I continue on until we decide to go up the Hogback Mountain road. The first few miles of road are reasonably flat with some good trees, but there's a cabin every mile or so and we just keep going in order to avoid inadvertently cutting firewood on private land. And sometimes it's just good to drive in the woods anyway. The road starts to incline and the trees thin out and soon we find ourselves winding our way around the side of a mountain. There's no good firewood in sight, but that's okay because it's me and Abe driving through the mountains chasing the next unknown bend in the road like we chase the next bend in a river, just to find out what's there. We talk about what it would be like to live in a cabin like the ones we passed by earlier on the road. We could hunt from our front porch for the many deer and elk that call these hills and mountains home or head down the road to the Missouri to catch a stringer full of fish that we could smoke and store up for

the winter. I could write and Abe could play his guitar, composing the music of the seasons and the mountains.

The road starts to flatten out and we are following the curves of the road and an iced over creek that winds us along into good firewood country. I pull over the truck over into a clearing on the side of the road and Abe and I jump out to do some scouting. We negotiate our way across the creek and into the nearby trees. It's more mature forest here, and after a few minutes of looking around we've deemed it a good spot to cut. We find a spot on the creek that's frozen over just enough that we can walk across it. So we grab the saw and some gloves from the truck, step gingerly on the ice-covered creek, and head a hundred yards or so into the woods.

I spot a nice tree lying on the ground and call over to Abe, "Whatcha think?"

"Yeah I mean, looks dry."

"Sounds good," I say as I raise my eyebrows and flash a wry smile. It takes a few tugs but I get the saw ripping after a while and then we're off. The chainsaw bar is boring into a dry larch log and spewing out a stream of sawdust. I'm zipping off rounds and Abe's hauling them back toward the pickup.

The cut logs are starting to accumulate so I say to Abe, "Heh, I'll cut 'em longer and then we can haul 'em back to the truck together. We'll get more wood that way."

"Yeah sure," Abe says in that unassuming take-the-world-as-it-comes kind of attitude. So I cut the logs long and Abe and I haul the lengths back toward the truck. They're heavy, six foot long, and we have to haul them through slick brush and over the frozen creek. We just throw them down next to the truck and loosen up our muscles as we walk back across the creek to make another run. We're breathin' hard in the crisp autumn air and racing the sun to get as much firewood as we can. We find another dead larch and then Abe takes a turn on the saw and he's

handling her pretty good.

I give him a few pointers at first: "Watch the tip. Cut towards the back of the bar. That's where the power is." And then he's off and going.

He cuts for a little while and then says, "Aww Adam, you're faster. You should take over." So I take off my leather gloves and let that chainsaw rip while the sun dips below the ridgeline.

I cut a few more six-footers and then say to Abe, "Well that ought to do it, let's get these back to the truck."

"Yup. Okay," says Abe and we start toward the truck. These lengths are bit heavier and the distance to the truck seems to be getting longer. Abe is getting tired, I can tell, but we just keep on going as the air turns cold and the autumn clouds turn red with the setting sun.

"Just a few more, bud" I say to encourage him. The light is almost gone as we finally drag the last one to the truck. I put the tailgate down and grab a couple cokes out of the cab.

"Nice work," I say, and it's just me and Abe sitting on the tailgate drinking cokes as the night falls and the sky turns dark. With one last push of energy, Abe and I throw and stack all the logs into the pickup and put the chainsaw and gas in last.

"All done," I say. "Let's go." Abe and I jump in the cab and I turn the key to fire up the 'ol Chevy. Nothing happens. A couple more tries with no luck.

"Shoot Abe, this isn't good. I hope we don't have to spend the night out here."

"Are you serious?" he replies.

"Well, let me check on something," I say. So I pop the hood and jiggle the positive battery cable. The cab light comes on. I sigh and smile and then I slam the hood, hop back in the cab and bring that old 350 to life.

“Here we go.”

The Chevy bounces down the dirt road and I would turn on the radio but I’d rather talk to Abe. For some reason, out here, in the mountains and in a pickup truck seems like a pretty good place to talk with my brother.

“Thanks, Abe, for coming out and helping me cut wood,” I say.

“You bet man,” Abe replies.

“Next time we’ll head out early,” I say, “and hit the Missouri River for fishing afterwards. There’s big rainbows in there man, bigger than the ones we caught in Washington.”

“Really,” he says. “We gotta go out there soon.”

“Yeah, you bet Abe. We will for sure.”

“I think it’s snowing Adam,” Abe says. And sure enough, it was -big wet flakes that fell thicker and thicker from the sky, blazing a white path in front of us. It was a peaceful snow without any wind and it pressed us on, warm now in the heat of the pickup.

“I’m glad I’m out here,” Abe said.

“Me too, man. It’s a pretty cool place.”

“I needed to get away from Washington. I love mom and dad, but I had to get away.”

“Yeah, me too,” I said. “Remember how mom wanted me to go to Clark College in town?”

“Yeah.” Abe laughed.

“We’re going to have a good time out here,” I said. Abe didn’t say anything then and it was quiet for a while as drove through the snow.

“It’s a new start,” he said. “It’s good to be away from Justin, from people who use you, and that place where everything is the same.”

“So you’re glad. You came here instead of California,” I said.

“Yeah. Thanks for helping me out man,” Abe said.

“I’m your brother. It’s good to have you here.” And then we don’t

really say anything more. Abe turns on the radio and puts in a Tom Petty tape and we freefall our way home under the big Montana sky. Abe and I sing songs into the night as I wind my way back through the mountains and onto the highway.

Pretty soon I can see the lights of Helena twinkling in the cold night distance and here under the wide open starlit skies of Montana, we’re heading home together, companions on this journey as we fly down the road tired and satisfied. I look over at you Abe, and you’re sleeping against the window of the pickup truck and I look back into the night where we’ve been and at a pickup load full of firewood -the work of our hands. Nothing’s missing anymore, Abe. We’re together again. Together again, like it should be. Yeah.

* * *

Fishing with Abe

I remember watching you fish for cutthroats
casting your line into the Lewis River
a narrow ribbon of fast water and riffles
cutting through forests in the Gifford Pinchot

Time after time you made short casts
placing your lure in pockets and pools I couldn’t see
catching feisty river trout, born of the fast-moving water
splashing as they’re hooked, darting away as they’re released

I want to see the river like you can
reading every curve and bend like a book
knowing the logic of the river and where the trout are hiding
sharing in the story of the rocks and the surging water

You are quiet when you fish, and you listen
Hearing the story of the river
Discovering the things I've failed to find
as my lure slaps the water and tangles in the rocks

I remember finding old letters
from countless old girls you'd known
papers folded with intricate care
bearing stories of their fears and broken hearts

I spent two hours on a Saturday that you were gone
reading those letters, discovering who you were
the one person who so many girls
entrusted with all their sadness, hopes, and dreams

They loved you Abe, every single one of them
you saw something in them that no one else saw
allayed their fears merely with your presence
carried hope and beauty with you like a gift
only you could give away

I want to see like that, Abe
I want to know people the way that you do
understand what lies beneath the surface in a trout stream
learn to be quiet, and see the world through your eyes

I want to find the answers to our story floating on the wind
I want to learn who you are
Fish with you in tandem on life's trout stream
discovering all the secret fishing holes along the way.

October 2002

There's a tape I have somewhere, but I think it's lost. I used to listen to it when I missed you in college or stumble across it when I needed you most. It was a snapshot, a moment in time that was captured- me and you and my old buddy Brian sitting around his livingroom talking about Led Zeppelin Eric Clapton and how music was going to change the world. Brian and you are going back and forth, pickin' out rhythms and me fresh into college spouting off idealistic analyses and exhortations-all of us believing in the power of music and that we are a part of something important that is about to happen. And Brian says he won't play stairway because he'll shame it, and you proceed to make the guitar sing, just the way that Page and Plant intended it.

And then I ask you to play a song, one of your songs, so I can show you off to my friend and say, "See this genius mystical Stairway to Heaven playin' guitar master. That's my brother." And you resist a bit, Abe, but Brian and I finally get you to play and you lean your head low, close your eyes and the music emanates out of you and through that guitar. slowly, powerfully, and methodically you play and like always in these moments of beauty, power, and self-revelation, we fall silent and just listen to you sing.

Feelin'
Like I'm gonna drown
Cast your cares aside
Dust is creeping in

I'm searchin' for my misery
and finding it in you
Just pour the bottle down
Take yourself and run away
To safety

Wasted
Waste away with me...

Those are all the words I have and now that tape is lost and I wonder if more has been lost too. You haven't sung that song in a long time. And all that's left is fragments-- fragments and the memories I have attached to that song and that time in our life.

I remember driving across open Montana highways alone in my pickup truck and you kept me company on the journey as I looked out at that endless landscape and listened to the past unroll on wheels of a cassette tape and wheels of a Chevy truck. and I remembered.

* * *

Fishing for Brook Trout

It was the end of the summer at Glacier, a season come and gone too quickly, with the aspens and cottonwoods lining the road on fire with fall colors. I was heading out for my last fishing trip of the summer because I wasn't ready to leave yet. I needed to light out into the woods just one more time before I left. I only had the afternoon, so I couldn't hike too far for fishing, and I ended up rather reluctantly heading to Red Rock Lake. It was a beautiful spot with waterfalls cascading down the iron-red rusted rock that formed the lake basin and contrasted with the forested mountains that flanked the valley. I was hiking up the trail humming an old Hank

Williams tune and watching squirrels dash into the refuge of the forest. I was happy and carefree, even moreso for having spent the last few months working the trails that carved through these mountains.

As I rounded a bend in the trail, I saw Fishercap Lake through the trees. It was a shallow lake and there weren't supposed to be any fish, but something was tugging me to follow that inclination to explore and make my own trail. I wandered down to the shore, picking up game trails here and there and sort of laughing at all those people hiking in big groups along the thoroughfare of the main trail, bloodshot eyes peering into the woods, ears perked to sense the most minute unfamiliar sound, while their hands rested shakily on the bear spray at their hip. I just laughed with the creek as it warbled its way across the ground and flowed into Fishercap Lake.

Elk and deer hoof prints showed in the mud on the lakeshore by the inlet stream, evidence of the travelers who had come here before me. Motivated by curiosity, I wandered up the creek that fed Fishercap Lake. It wound through the tall grass carving a channel in the landscape. There was a small bush leaning over the creek on a corner where little fingerling brook trout faced upstream waiting for food. I crept past their spot and grabbed a handful of caddis fly larvae from the stream. I carefully picked off their protective coating of pebbles and pine needles until I had a handful of caddis treats for the brookies. I sat down near the bush where I had a good vantage point for watching the fish, yet wouldn't scare them away by casting my shadow into their pool. I took the caddis larvae, and one by one, tossed them into the pool. The eight or nine fingerlings darted around trying to snag the caddis in the pool's slow current. The biggest fish in the hole, a three incher, exerted his dominance and was claiming the majority of my offerings. Some of the other fish retreated dejectedly from the prime spots to the edge of the pool. I tossed them a few

caddis larvae, which they eagerly wrestled into their tiny mouths. I was having a pretty good time and didn't really care that I wasn't catching any fish. I accepted the fact that I would probably just spend the day exploring, and that was fine with me.

I kept wading my way upstream, and I saw a fair number of little brookies like the ones I'd stopped to feed at the first hole. There were even a couple bigger ones, maybe four or five inches. The river was getting wider with more bushes on the bank and the holes were getting bigger as well. I came upon a nice-sized beaver dam, and when I walked out on top of it, I saw a nice 6-inch brookie dart below the cover of the sticks which made up the dam. I continued up the river, only more quietly now, hoping I might have a shot at catching a fish. The bushes along the bank were being gradually replaced by trees, and the formerly flat terrain began to incline. I rounded a bend in the river and came to a spot where the river flowed into a nice pool. I put together my fishing rod, tied a little silver lure to the end of the line, tipped the hook with a worm, and cast the lure right where the riffle came into the pool. I felt a trout slam my lure. The fish was jumped and splashed through the water as I brought him downriver to the spot I'd cast from. It was a pretty seven-inch brookie, vibrantly colored with a deep green back and a red and white belly. I unhooked him, released him back into the water, and headed upstream. The water was fast and riffle-filled for a few hundred feet until I came to another pool, fed by a one-foot-high waterfall. As soon as my first cast hit the surface, the water came alive with fish swimming over each other trying to be the first to bite my lure. I pulled three fish out of that hole, all of 'em healthy 8 inch brookies. This was turning out to be a promising day of fishing after all, and I just kept right on going, heading upstream to see what was waiting for me. I walked along the rocks on the riverbank, constantly hopping from one side of the creek to the next. Finding lots of great holes and losing count of how many fish I'd caught, I had even fallen in the creek a few times by

this point and my logging boots had slipped on the slick river rocks. But I didn't care. I was laughing as I squish-squashed up the creek in wet boots and trousers; it was sunny, the fish were biting, and I just kept right on going.

The fish grew bigger at every hole, and I was having a good time catching them. I got to thinking about what a great spot I'd found and how fun it would be to bring Abe and Dad up here and show them this spot. This was our kind of fishing-catching a bunch of hard-fightin' brook trout and hiking our way up a secret stream that we had all to ourselves. In order to do it right and follow tradition, I'd have to keep a couple of the bigger brookies and cook 'em up for dinner, but so far, I'd released all the ones I'd caught. It was going to be dark in a couple hours and I was a few miles back in the woods, so I decided to catch a couple for dinner and head for home. I rounded the riverbend and found myself at the base of a 20-foot waterfall. I cast a few times into the pool and caught a couple 9-inchers, but they weren't quite good enough. I wanted to know what the river was like above the waterfall. I took apart my fishing pole and put it in my backpack. The waterfall was flanked by steep rock that formed a small canyon. The left side looked like the easiest to ascend, so I grabbed on to whatever rock or root handholds I could and clambered my way up to the top of the waterfall. What I saw when I reached the top was a creek fisherman's dream-a series of large stair-stepping waterfalls careening over ledges of red rock and forming a successive zig-zagging series of deep giant pools. I was tucked in a little canyon, this little piece of fishing paradise all to myself. If only Abe and Dad could be here with me, then we'd really have a fish fry with stories to tell.

Well, I didn't sit around and think too long, because I was stuck right in the middle of fishing that was too good to pass up, and I only had a bit of time if I was going to make it back before sundown. I had to apply some different tactics here, so I cast my lure right where the

waterfall came down, and then let it sink deep into the pool. If I didn't get a hit right away, I would jig the lure up and down a bit, slowly, and before long I'd feel a brook trout tapping at it before he committed all the way. I caught a few more, including some nice ones, but I let them all go. I struggled my way up to last big pool in the series and precariously balanced myself on the edge. The pool was extremely deep, and I couldn't see the bottom, despite the water's incredible clarity. I cast near the waterfall, and began to jig up and down, but I didn't get anything. I kept at it though. This was a good pool, and there was bound to be something in here. I reeled in and gave it another cast, just a short pop cast right into the waterfall. The force of the surging water plunged by lure deep into the pool. I waited 1, 2, 3 seconds, and then got the hit I was waiting for.

"Wambo!" I exclaimed, echoing my father's fisherman success call. That brookie hit hard and didn't waste any time starting to fight. The bite had caught me off balance, so I was trying to keep steady on the steep rock edge of the pool while I kept the line tense against my competition. I started to gain on him, when he shot fully out of the water in a tail-whipping jump. I got him to the edge of the pool and hoped my four-pound test line wouldn't snap when I brought him up. Gently, I lifted the fish out of the water. It was a fat 14-inch brookie and the king of this stretch of the creek. "A good eatin' fish," I thought to myself. I slipped him back into the water and watched him dart away into the depth of that deep pool. I smiled, put my fishing pole into my backpack, and began to head for home under the sinking autumn sun.

I left the 14-inch brookie and all his brothers there, hidden in the pools and pocket water of the secret creek. In my days on the river, I have learned that once a fish is caught and placed in the creeki, the fish story ends. I did wish not keep any fish that day. For me, there still too many chapters waiting to be written.

Somewhere, in the unknown future of the next riverbend, there's a place where the sun-kissed mountain water flows downstream and lingers, providing refuge for the trout that rest there. On the riverbank, the tall yellow grass comes and goes with the seasons, watching fish rise to sip caddis flies from the surface and waiting for fishermen to come learn their secrets. There's room for two on the riverbank, and it waits there, calling those who are willing to seek, beckoning them to travel far into the wild to find what they're looking for. I'm still searching for all these things, trying to find the mystery of brotherhood where the land carries the water home. So I'll return to that creek again and ply its deep blue waters for the rest of my story. My answers are still swirling there, waiting for me in the deep pool below the waterfall.