

Chapter 9 - Friendship and Solitude

"Little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendith. For a crowd is not company and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love." - Francis Bacon

"Friendship is the one thing in the world, concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed." - Cicero

Part 1. Consultation with Jonathan Swift's Specter

"In all distresses of our friends, We first consult our private ends; While nature, kindly bent to ease us, points out some circumstance to please us," rustles the ghostly Jonathan Swift.



"How now, worthy Jonathan?" complains the man. "Here I was, ready, primed, and loaded with a barrel of platitudes, conventional wisdom, cliches, bromides, stereotypes, truisms, lieu communis (F) and locus communis (L), lauding the meaning and value of friendship, and now you've done gone and mowed 'em down with that E-fluent from an ancient Gutenberg Press.

"And what happened to Ed? inquires the man. "I told that boy to keep a sharp lookout for your ghost, but maybe he can't, because I can only imagine one being at a time."

"Verily so, if that's what you believe," says Jon. "You must take the will for the deed,' and as I read your narrative, there are occasions where I exclaim, 'That was excellently observed...when I read a passage ...where [your] opinion agrees with mine. When we differ, then I pronounce [you] to be mistaken.'"

"Jonathan, now that you've put in your phantasmic appearance, and cast your eyes on my manuscript, do you reckon it's gonna fly?" asks the man.

"Books, like men, their authors, have no more than one way of coming into the world, but there are ten thousand (ways) to go out of it and return no more," replies Jonathan, "and as for the kind of literate peons you are likely to find in this Century, as Gulliver was told by the citizens of Brobdingnag, 'I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.'

"As to whether or not your narrative will 'fly' - what a strange way of expressing it to someone who has just recently discovered your airplanes," continues Jon. "MY flying island, 'Laputa,' was a solid structure of earth and rocks, quietly kept aloft and navigated by natural forces. My account was published along with descriptions of scientists on that island. There was a man who 'had been eight years upon a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers which were put in vials, hermetically sealed, and let out to warm the air in raw inclement summers.'

"Methinks you have that kind of 'vision,'" says Jon, "'the art of seeing things invisible,' and possibly a gift for 'satire...a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own,' a recognition that 'there is nothing in this world constant, but inconstancy,' and you 'love good credible acquaintances,' and at the same time you persist in being 'the worst of company.'"

Part 2. The Man Flies Rings Around Jonathan Swift

"THEODORE!" shouts the man. "You wimpy dawg, come out from under that computer desk, and ED! Why are you hiding in the computer monitor? Don't you guys know there's no sech thang as a ghost?"

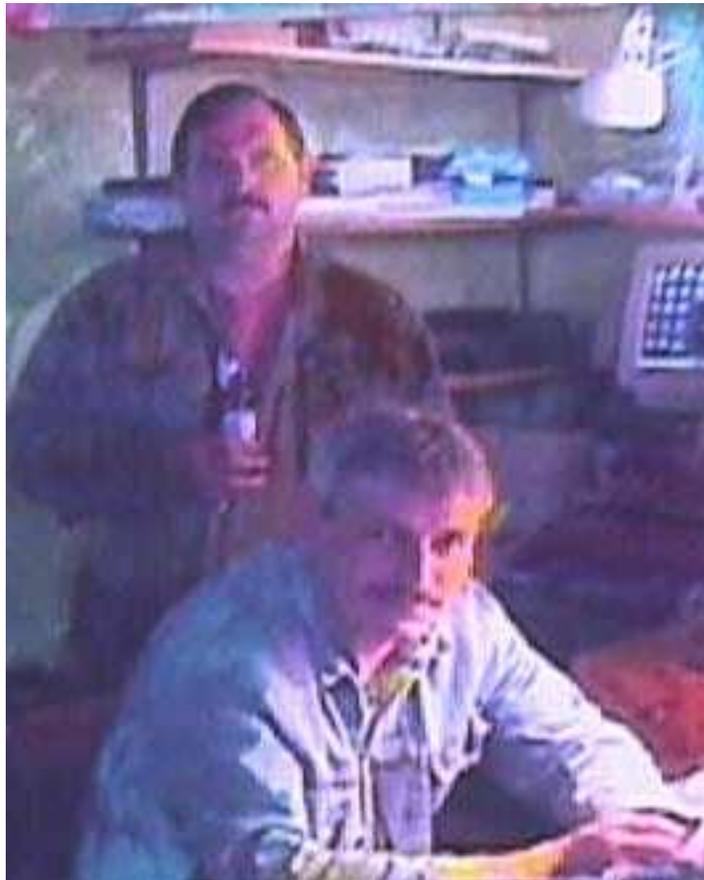
"Why can't we have a nice quiet evening 'round here, now that we've dragged our tails back to the States?" inquires the man. "We've finally reached our poor old abandoned laboratory that once looked out on old Mr. Ken Parker's farming activities, his plow

pulled by a mule. Towards fall, when the alternate rows of corn and peanuts were mature, he'd fence the field and turn the pigs loose to complete their finishing diet before finishing them off. . . a clean, odorless operation, accomplished without pesticides or additives. Lately, it's no longer cost-effective to grow any kind of food crop in these sterile fields, so it's just tobacco and cotton in a chemical environment that endangers many life forms, including human."

"That's enough dismal chatter, old man," says Ed. "I know you're suffering from culture shock. It happens every time as we leave the maritime provinces, with clenched teeth, and fearfully cross the border. It's a real effort to readapt to the pace and gritty edge of things - heavy traffic, excessive speeds, pushy impolite drivers. Until you remember how to keep up, you're fair game for every breakneck-speed horn-blowing idiot."

"This has been a harrowing day for Theodore and I, with your 'non-existent' visitor lurking here and about," observes Ed. "What we need is a bowl of chicken soup to settle our jangled nerves."

"Traveling here wasn't as bad as you like to make out, Ed. After that 'blow-me-down' weather in Newfoundland, the overnight ferry crossing was a breeze," insists the man, "and you must admit that along the way we lived high up on the hawg with my delightful electrically cooked meals and luxurious sleeping arrangements, thanks to Todd and Colin."



"Are you SERIOUS?" shouts Ed. "I'll admit our good friends Todd and Colin delayed their Saturday carousing to make that van habitable, by elevating your bunk to where your nose barely stays clear of the roof, and thereby allows that electronic baggage and other trash you drag around, to be stowed. BUT, there sure wasn't much breathing room for that ninety-pound dog, and for me, even if I am imaginary, and for you to squeeze hither and yon to prepare and cook an identical supper each night - codfish, carrots, turnips, cabbage and potatoes - on a hot plate run by that 1000 watt HONDA generator you love so dearly.

"AND FURTHERMORE," says Ed, "You never fail to park between tractor trailers with sleeping drivers, their noisy engines idling all night."

"Well, at least I saved some frozen chicken stock that wasn't consumed on the road. I've been longing to try a leek and potato soup. Cindy described how to make it, via an E-mail sent to Cow Head," replies the man. "Let's fire up the kitchen stove and give it a try!"

"OK, Ed, the first thing for you to do is dust out that non-stick cookpot. It's been sitting unused for six months," says the man, "and that being done, I drop in, thinly sliced: half a large yellow onion, one whole leek, about half a pound of cabbage, six medium sized potatoes, then add several tablespoons of olive oil and stir fry for ten minutes. Now, cover the sauteed vegetables with water and as much chicken broth as you can muster, and then, boil gently for an hour.

"Yummy yum yummy!" boasts the man. "That's some kind of good, and besides, I'm advising everyone I meet to consume chicken broth regularly, since I believe it's a way to avoid or delay the onset of arthritis. . .but don't hold me to it."

"Well, now that we are surfeited and relaxed," says Ed, "I must remind you about your promise to tell us adventures far more exciting than those told by Jonathan Swift about Lapudians, who merely cruised on an island made of earth and stone."

"Hold it, Ed," replies the man. "I don't want to put the tale ahead of the broth. Lazy cooks cannot expect the same beneficial results from canned chicken broth products laced with MSG and other fakeries. You must make your own, and many cookbooks tell how. But if you go the whole way and start from scratch, be sure to remove all feathers, since they stick in your teeth.

"And now, Ed, I know you're trying to upset Jonathan, by comparing my stories with those in *Gulliver's Travels*," says the man, "but I did have advantages over Jonathan, even in my preteen years, of being so far ahead of my time in my superb understanding of the sciences, metallurgy, rocket fuels, care and feeding of dogs in space, and celestial navigation - so my dog Corny and I were relaxed and in excellent shape, with all systems 'GO," as we ran through the complicated slide rule calculations required for a soft landing on Mars, and were suddenly impacted by an uncharted asteroid."



"After a crash landing, Ted and Corny met two green snakes, Mr. And Mrs. Pelvis Eslie, who fed them a delicious meal of Mars Bars and Moon Pie. After Pelvis repaired the cracked ship, with red sand and snake spit, he asked the brave voyagers to go to the Planet Beetlejuice to bring back some much needed water. Then Pelvis kissed his wife "Goodbye," climbed aboard his snakemobile, and drove off to his office.



"The inhabitants of this planet live in a desert-like center with a freshwater ocean completely around the outside. Below the city they hold a sea slug captive, feed it rations from their feed mill to make its tail wag and thereby provide the power required to pump water into the city. They generously supplied the much needed water, then helped blast Ted's and Corny's ship back into space, and on to the trade routes to Mars."

Part 3. Ships that Passed in the Night

"My goodness," exclaims the man. "Pat and Allen are having their fiftieth anniversary! Sylvia and I were newlyweds when they were. They lived upstairs from us, in an old grungy house, located in a Morehead City neighborhood called 'the Promised Land.' Our neighbors were said to be displaced pirates from the Outer Banks. When kerosene was stolen from our front porch, the police chief commented: 'Well, if you want to live in a place like that, what can you expect?' Too bad he couldn't see it through our eyes - a beautiful, ever changing view of the water, and a nearby boatyard with wooden boats in various stages of disrepair, the smell of wood shavings, caulking, paints, sisal and Manila lines, and tarred nets.

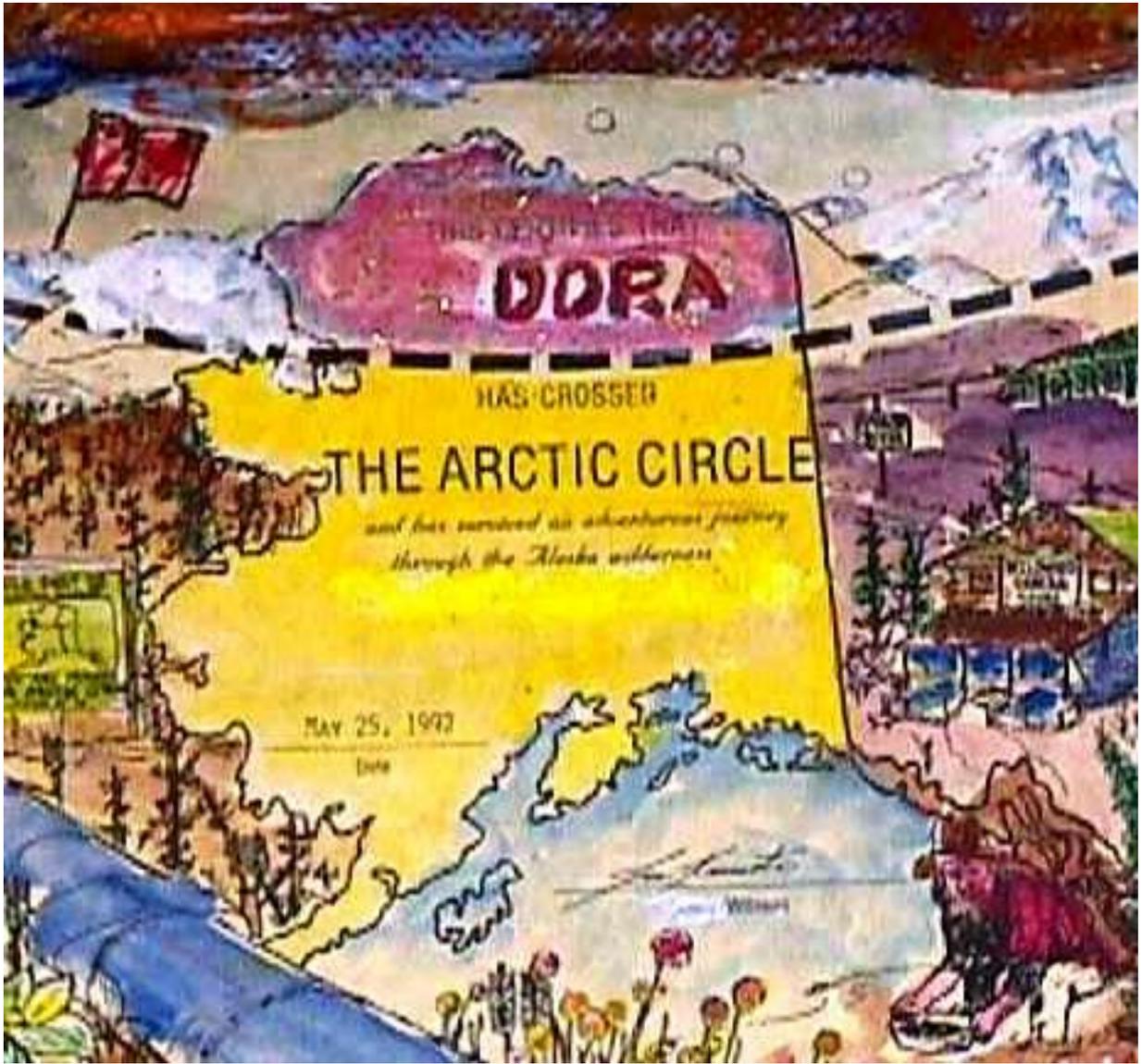
"The landlady's house next door appeared a quiet refined place, except for cars and taxicabs that dropped by, or parked, far into the night," continues the man. "We suspected 'bordello,' but were too engrossed in our affairs to be interested. Then, near Christmas, I came home with an end-of-fishing-season check for six hundred dollars (a small fortune!) and a bottle of wine. We abruptly informed our landlady that we planned to move, bought

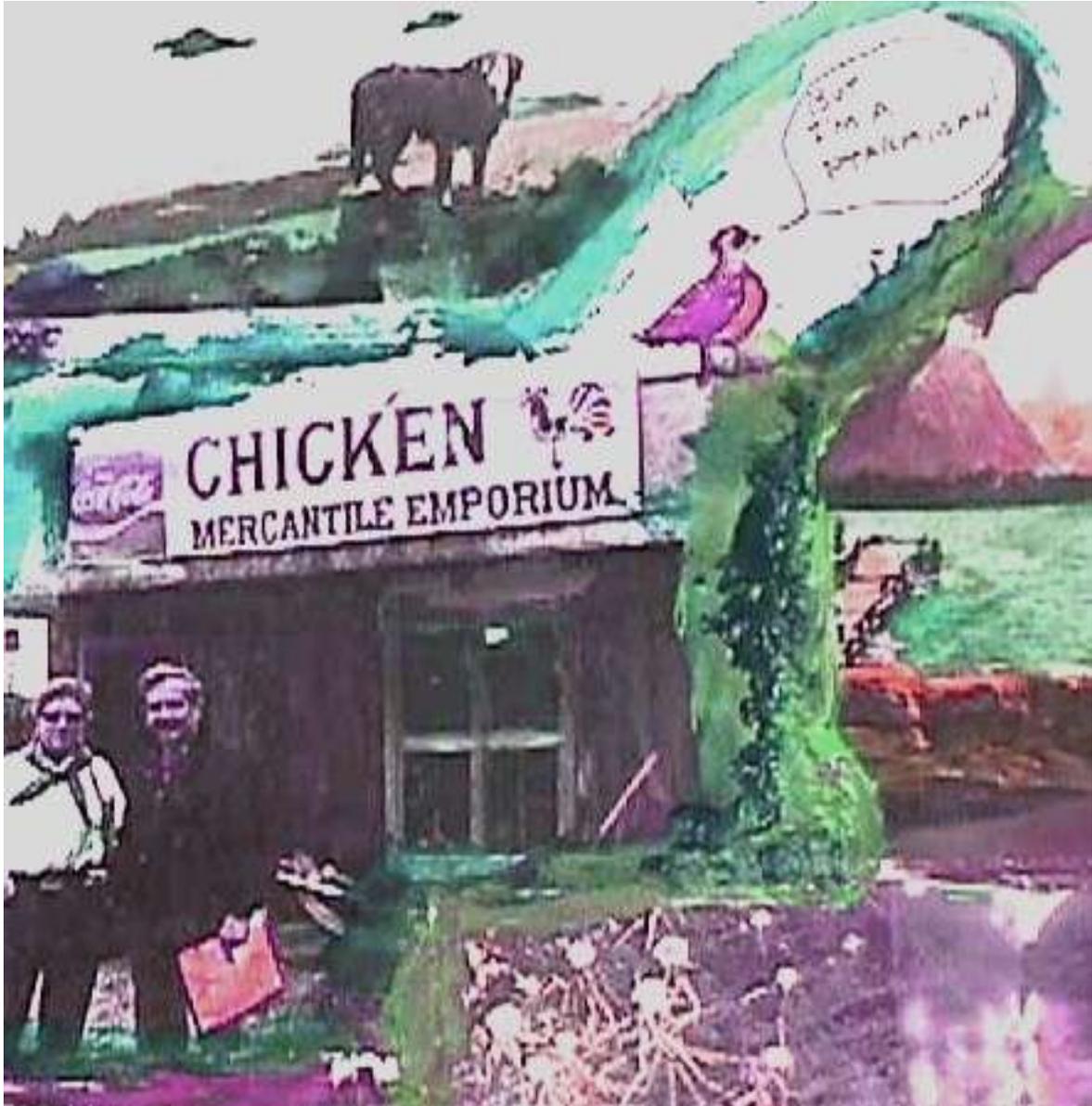
a secondhand Jeep, and then Sylvia found our permanent location in the country and on Bogue Sound, where I still reside."

"Now, don't go hoity-toity on us," gibes Ed. "I'd say there's not much 'residing.' It's more like hanging out, berthing, dossing down, bunking, and at times crashing. Let me remind you, kindly imaginative Sir, the game-plan calls for tales about chance-encounters while trekking, sailing, flying, or however else you got around during the last decade of this here millennium."

"To trigger my extensive memory-banks on that one, I must resort to place-names, or geographic localities, that have intrigued me since time knows when, and proved irresistible magnets when the opportunity arose," replies the man. "So to accommodate your request, I'll mention some human or animal encounters in *Alaska; Big Bend, Texas; Canadian Rockies; Gulf of California, Mexico; Montana-Glacier Park; Newfoundland-Labrador; Canada's Northwest Territories, and the Yukon-Klondike.*

"In Alaska my nearly blind, boon companion, Dora, received a brave dog certificate (pictured below) for her first crossing of the ice-jammed Yukon River, and her travel northward to where the petroleum pipeline intersects the Arctic Circle. A few weeks later, at Chicken, Alaska (so named because they couldn't spell 'ptarmigan') we met a husband-wife team (see below) who were 'under water gold mining in a river at forty mile.' They warned the man to be ready to meet wild animals and be well armed, because 'around here, bears especially can be dangerous and people sometimes get eaten.'





"As a child," continues the man, "I thought the map of Texas resembled a face looking downward. I longed to visit the place where its nose was being washed by the Rio Grande. When Dora and I crossed the west Texas border, at El Paso, I decided we must find out what it actually looked like, even if it required hundreds of miles of extra driving.

"Upon arrival, we were greeted by austere, rugged, jagged, mineral-painted mountains - terrain reminiscent of border skirmishes where General Pershing had long ago been provided with much of his early fighting experience, and Tom Mix with settings for the 'Westerns' that kept us entranced as children; and then we came upon 'Cat,' a mentally scarred veteran of 'Nam.'

"He had named himself 'Cat' because while serving as a helicopter pilot he had survived numerous shoot-downs. He loved the wild terrain and was eager to show me around.

Soon we were crossing the Rio Grande in an aluminum boat, paddled frantically by a Mexican boatman (see below), and then we hiked to a Mexican village, without benefit of Customs. The place was so reminiscent of Tom Mix movies that Cat and I, after serious mood adjustment in the local saloon, enacted a shootout in the middle of the dusty street. The gun play was a draw and we both bit the dust at the same time, observed only by bored burros. Then we met a man who sold stones (as pictured below; Cat is on the right).





"I really tried to keep in touch with Cat, but his only reply was a book about the Mexican border, and an inscription: 'Feb. 2, 1992 - Ted, This is to help you remember the short period of our tour, "Life on the Line!" Your friend, Cat Williams.'

"In the Canadian Rockies a herd of mountain goats led by a pushy large ram disputed our passage. Later, I saw a few in rapid sure-footed motion.



"We camped near the northeast shore of Gulf of California, Mexico, and observed the abject poverty that reduced the attractiveness of Puerto Penasco. We saw the big homes on the Gulf of California, owned by rich Americans with ninety-year leases on the land, the fat-cat tourists from the States in big motor homes, most of whom I resented and avoided. At least they helped provide a meager way to make a living.



"While on furlough during World War II, I traveled the now defunct Great Northern Railroad from Spokane to Chicago. The train stopped briefly at a station, 'Closed for the Duration,' for those who in peace time visited Glacier Park, Montana. How I longed to go there, and forty-eight years later, returned to the same spot, and recognized the abandoned train station. Dora and I camped in a field near the Park entrance. A prairie dog, busily digging a burrow, was completely confusing to Dora (see picture, below).



"I estimate we have made the five-to-seven-hour ferry crossing, to and from Newfoundland, at least twenty-two times, and have spent a total of four years on the Island and in Labrador. The picture of Theodore and the Goose (see illustration, below) was first produced by camera on Shallow Bay Beach, and is intended for the cover jacket of my book, when published," says the man.

"My cabin near the Cow Head fishing harbour is indeed my second home, and Todd, (pictured below) takes pride in having built it. Harold is the one who first showed me the land on which the cabin stands (he is shown in the picture below that of Todd, on the far right, while my daughter Deede and her husband Michael, are on the left side).



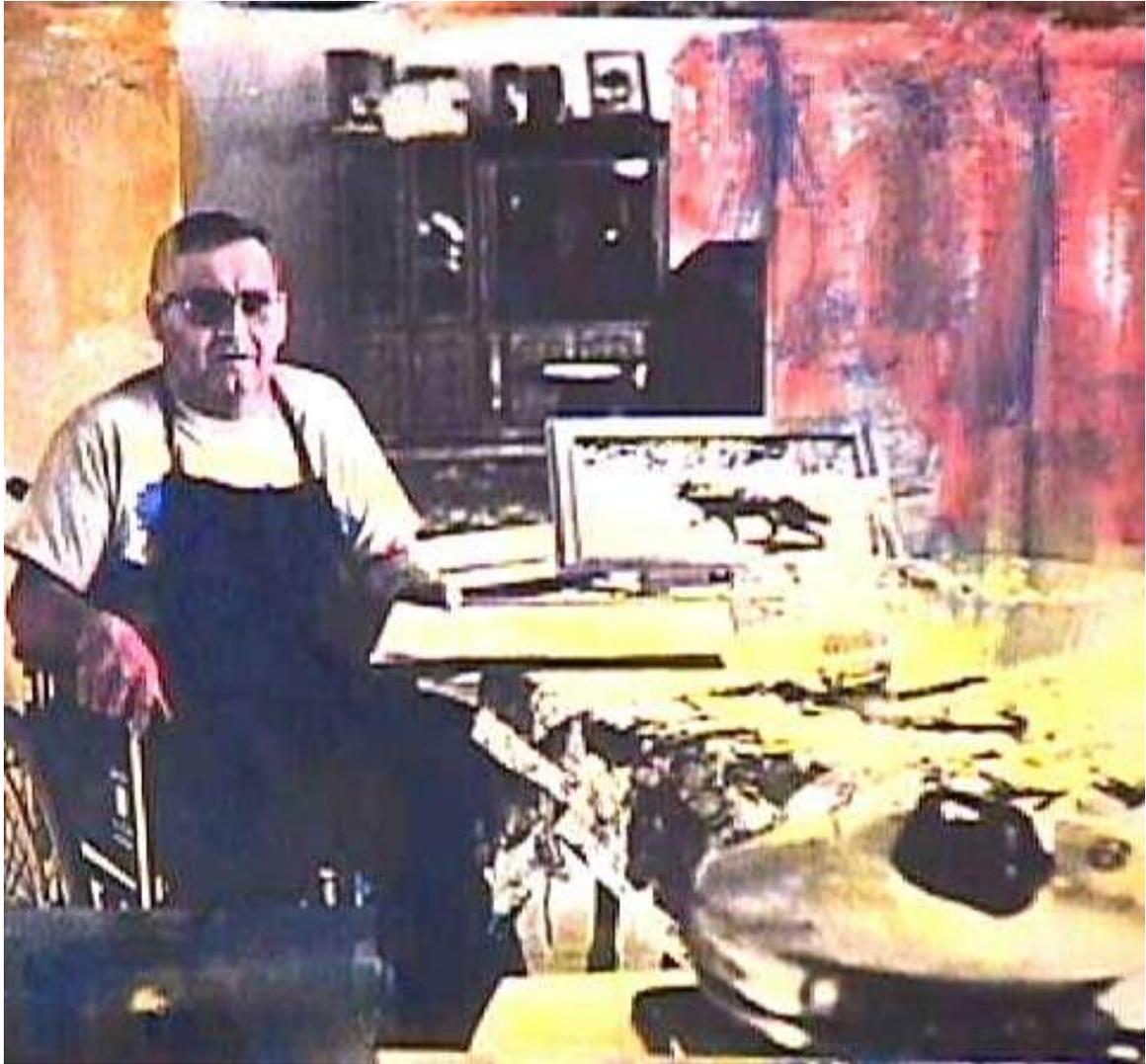


"When I travel north on the Viking Highway," says the man, "and reach the old gravel road that was once the main highway to Port Saunders, I let Theo jump out and use it for a rest stop, then go about a mile further to visit Stella and Gus (see Stella, pictured below), and to buy their fresh-laid, large brown eggs, the product of three hundred big Rhode Island Reds. They have never failed to invite me to dinner, or at least to have tea , and I accept the latter. Their home is beautiful inside and out, always looking freshly painted or varnished, and housecleaned. Stella has at times threatened to phone her relatives, Marion and Ken, in Norris Point to find out how I am doing, if I don't appear at frequent intervals. 'You remind me of my father, and I want to call you Dad,' she says, and I accept that as a sincere, touching, heartfelt compliment.

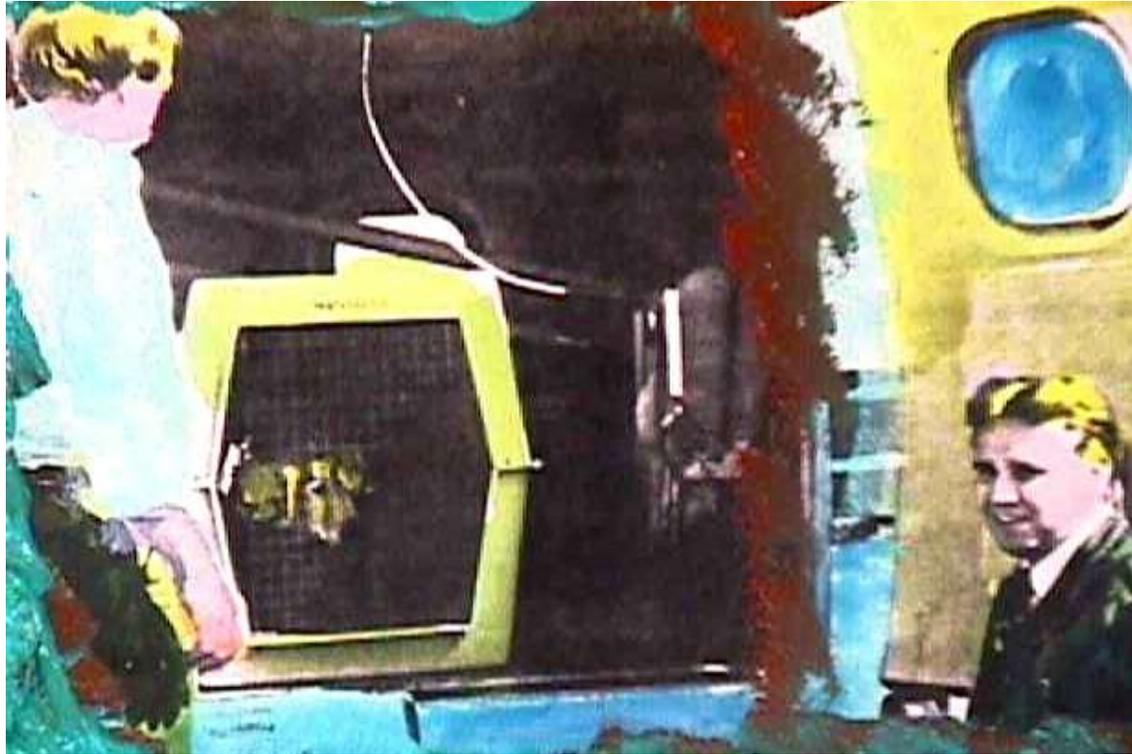


"Regardless of weather, the day is brighter when I leave the egg farm to seek out Everett at Port au Choix, a half hour drive away," says the man. "I phone ahead to find out if Everett is available. He may be off driving somewhere, working in his well organized workshop (behind his house), hunting moose, talking to friends. The first time I met Everett, I entered the door to his house and he suddenly appeared in his wheel chair, conveyed upstairs from his basement on an elevator of his own design, powered by storage battery and truck winch.

"Everett became a paraplegic in his teen years, a victim of an automobile accident. It is obvious that his mental powers remained intact," continues the man. "He is so capable and well organized that one forgets he is 'disabled.' We get together in this informal way, cook a meal and talk. It's fun because he's interesting, and we both love to cook. (Pictured below, Everett displays a special frame he made for a picture of Theodore.)



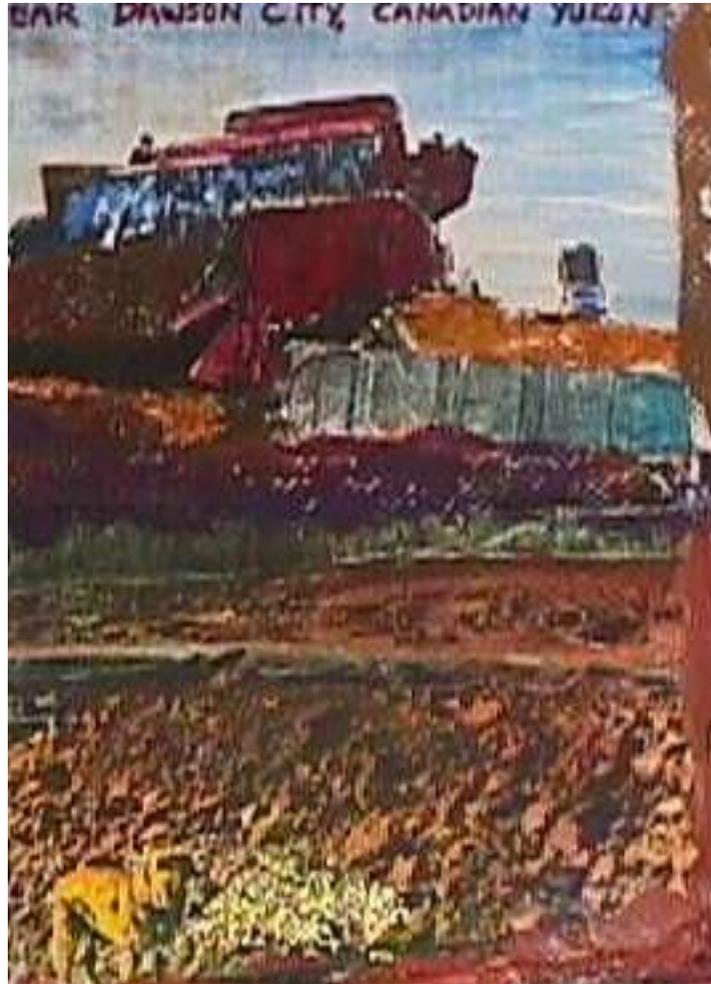
"Friendships in Newfoundland and Labrador are very much a product of a chain reaction, activated by where you've been on land or sea. Dora's visit to renew her acquaintance with Reggie and Frances began when she was loaded aboard a Twin Otter for her flight to Mary's Harbour, Labrador (pictured below)," explains the man. "The previous year, Dora and I had spent two weeks aboard the M/V Taverner in the midst of floating ice, icebergs, and ice packs that kept her pinned down in Labrador harbours every night, and prevented her from reaching several northern ports," explains the man. "Reggie and Frances were aboard from Mary's Harbour to Goose Bay. Reggie, who had been drafted as a bright student in high school and made a teacher, held that position until he retired. He provided a wealth of information about the coastline and its colorful history, and the following year Dora and I were invited to visit their home.



"To prepare for Dora's flight, and mine to follow, we camped in our trailer for almost a week at St. Anthony Airport," recalls the man. "By then we knew every security guard, and where they hailed from - Cook's Harbour; Raleigh (pronounced *ray-ley*); and St. Anthony. It was there that I met Howard Decker, the man who later told me how to prepare a Jiggs Dinner, as described in Chapter 7. Frequently, I was called to the control tower to see moose and other wild animals near the runways.

"The security guards and men in the control tower were good listeners, and I had exciting memories to describe as well," says the man. "I told them about that wild urge to follow the Dempster Highway north through the Yukon, to camp above the Arctic Circle (as illustrated below) and to continue to the Northwest Territories (pictured below), and to directly observe gold mining in the Klondike (in the picture below, Dora digs for gold), near Dawson City where I visited Jack London's reconstructed cabin."





Part 4. - Oneness versus Loneliness

"In this world, people are all around us, but we go through life alone." - S. B. M.

"Oneness," said Sir William Goschen, "is splendid isolation."

"Amen to that," agrees the man, "and Emerson described it as 'the oneness of private integrity.' These fine words belong to persons who are in command of their own fate."

"Sadly, oh so sadly, S. B. M., whose words are quoted above, showed me the extent and depth of the isolation he endured for most of his life. In his youth he had every reason to expect a bright future, in spite of the hard times of the early '30s. He earned a law degree with honors, passed the Maryland bar examination the first time around, then suddenly faced the cold realities of unemployment. A suicide attempt left him mentally deranged for the rest of his life, with only brief intervals of normal behavior," recalls the man.

"Sydney, my big brother! How I looked to you for friendship and guidance when we were young, and what you gave me when we were older was an appalling demonstration of what it means to falter. Years of such tutoring, and my backbone stiffened with every twist and turn of your sad life," thinks the man.

"Ten years ago, when family responsibilities and everyday affairs had settled into a comfortable routine, I was finally put to the test. 'Now, you seventy-six year old fossil,' I said to myself, 'are you vertebrated or invertebrated? We'll soon find out, me boy.'

"Well," says the man, "It's a foregone conclusion that normal people strive for continued existence rather than for oblivion, even if it means accepting loneliness. But turning loneliness into a priceless asset requires imagination and effort. Loneliness can be the motivation for a whole new life, so 'guys and goils,' put your backs into it, and GO GET IT!"

November, 1999