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# Girl on the loose

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**GIRL ON THE LOOSE**

By

Rachel Wood

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

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Rachel Katherine Wood  
June 30, 2013

**Girl on the Loose**

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Rachel Wood  
June 2013

## **Abstract**

*Girl on the Loose* is a collection of personal essays focusing on the author's acts of searching. These searches are sometimes physical undertakings such as the recreational activity Geocaching. Other times they are metaphorical as with the author's search for answers to questions concerning family lineage. Set in the Pacific Northwest, the essays reflect the author's cultural background as seen in an on the history of cultural institution of craft brewing. The essays explore themes of searching for identity, as in the essay "Do They Still Call in Cyberspace?" in which the author works through the created online persona she developed as a young child. This theme of identity then connects to essays concerning the author's family, and especially how the women in her family develop identities and cope with living in a society that does not allow them to fully explore their own searching endeavors.

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## **This Photograph**

George Wood stands next to his older brother on the front steps of the family home. The brothers, their backs to the front door are posing for the camera, for their parents, for their country and the monarchy. George's older brother has come home on shore leave to escort young George to the docks and awaiting position: enlistment in the Royal Navy, crew-member on a British Man'o'War. George is twelve years old. Their parents are proud as they stand next to the camera man—or perhaps they are not proud. Perhaps they only feel that expectations have been met, the reputation of the family name secured. George looks over the shoulders of his parents out to the pastures beyond, the land the family has farmed through the generations. The land that will never belong to him as the youngest son. George thinks of how the wind moving through the tall grass is not so unlike the crashing of the sea on the shore. Even though he is expected now to take on this new responsibility, George can't wipe clean the roguish smile that will be passed on to every son in continued lineage.

I want to think this picture was captured. Even if only a few short months later the framed print above the hearth was removed from the wall by his father and George cropped from the scene. There would be no scar of evidence to show George had ever existed, his image carefully cut—not torn—away. A clean break. The frame simply resized, the youngest son erased from family history.

Through his older brother's rank and connections, George lands the sought after job of rowing high ranking officers to shore and back. The ship made its way to the Northwest Territory, to the banks of British Columbia and Vancouver Island. I can picture George, a

child still, 5'1" with light brown hair and blue eyes, suddenly expected to behave with decorum, reverence, pride. When he was small he had played in the woods, or on the banks of a small brook on the outskirts of the family's land. George grapples now with the confines of the vessel, of the dank wet smell of ocean water emanating from every pore of the wooden ship.. He does however like the feeling of pulling against the water, that for the first time he feels the way the muscles in his shoulders and arms flex then retract. At thirteen, he hates the officers, and their rules he feels burdened with. Sometimes George wonders if it's his brother's constant gaze, the pressure of measuring up to the stature of a commanding officer that makes things so difficult. Would anyone ever say that George Wood was going places? On a foggy afternoon, standing with the waiting lifeboat as a group of returning officers come into focus, George realizes he has been many places—the problem is the moment he has to leave them.

The story goes in my family that George Wood jumped ship and changed his name. Except he didn't. It is true that one afternoon when he rowed a group of officers to land, their heavy boots hitting the sand just off the point at Pysht, George and another young sailor hoisted the row boat onto their shoulders and sold it off to a farmer who would pay them twenty dollars for it if first they gave the wooden boat a fresh coat of paint. George Wood did jump ship, was a deserter and a traitor to his country. All before the age of 15. Who knows how many ports of call it had taken him to plan it.

George signed the charter to make Washington a state, gained his citizenship with a signature. I've never quite heard the story of how he managed to land a job running the Bellingham camp for Bloedel Donovan, where he spent his formative years in the woods



among the great cedars and pine—so different from that endless ocean. George married Agnes, a mild mannered Norwegian woman who cooked lefse so tender it melted on your tongue. He served on the school board in Alger, arguing for education and opportunity. George fathered a son who fathered a son who fathered my father. Had he known that he was chopping his own limb from the family tree, transplanting it across an ocean until it grew as wide as it was tall, roots spreading, taking hold of the soil? Did he ever picture that when his own grandson visited England, the family would slam the door in his face, severing history?

In the small town of Alger, Washington, there is a curving road that seems to lead nowhere in particular. Wood Road meanders from two lanes to gravel paved Wood Lane. It's named after my great-great-grandfather George, that same name that he was too arrogant or perhaps too young to change.

## Girl Seeking Pint

In July of 2010, I brewed my first batch of beer. My father lent me his old brewing equipment, gave me a book to read, and showed me how to assemble my brewing set-up. I found a recipe for a heavy-bodied amber on the internet, and tweaked it slightly to my specific tastes. On a Sunday afternoon, I wandered around my local homebrew store, going out of my way to smile at the young daughter of another patron—the way she eyed my shoes and earrings led me to believe I was the first female she had seen at the brew-store in all the weekends she had been carted along by her own father.

My father brewed beer in the early 1990s before the influx of Microbreweries took off. Homebrewing at that point was completely a grassroots movement—the best handbook of the time was entitled *The Joys of Homebrewing* which describes each step simplistically, concluding with, “Relax, have a homebrew!” Today’s homebrew books are more chemistry than cookbook, getting into the specifics of the process of fermentation, charts and molecular models of sucrose structures. My father’s brew book had pictures of an unfortunately dressed couple straight out of the ‘70s wearing sweaters only fit for ugly-sweater holiday parties, pouring dark mixtures into buckets on their kitchen floor while sipping a homebrew. In the past eight years, the Homebrew movement has changed from hippy to hipster-intellectual. Now, as is the case with many Do-it-yourself activities, there are even establishments that have taken the “home” out of homebrew. These “you-brew” business allow patrons to brew a batch of beer based on any of the in-house recipes, name the brew, and then leave the clean-up and bottling to the business's staff.

My parents have always had a bug for the Americana mentality; I can’t remember a

time in my childhood when we didn't have home-canned jam and apple sauce in the house. My mother grew up smoking pot during youth-group at the Unitarian Church and met my father when he was still the roadie for a garage-rock band. My father didn't brew beer because he was a hippie—he brewed beer because it was a hobby that produced a consumable product. Plus, he was unimpressed with most beers on the market at the time.

My father went with me to the brew store, marveled at the advancements made over an almost twenty year period. He confessed that he brewed his last batch of beer in 1991, just shortly after my younger sister was born—I would have been three and a half years old. The only brew store in the Seattle area at that time was The Cellar in Georgetown—he shook his head in wonderment that I'd found a store located across the street from a Costco, just ten minutes drive from my parents' house in Kirkland.

My father kept all of his old brewing equipment in an old steel gang-box out in a shed I had painted the summer after I graduated high school. Before getting to the gang-box, my father and I had to move box after box of old Jeep parts we had pulled from a CJ-7 we built to off-road in while I was in high school. After I left for college, it was difficult to plan a weekend to go drive muddy forest-service roads anymore. Once, the Jeep died mid-hill climb and my father narrowly avoided our backwards descent into a ravine. When the Jeep finally came to a stop, my father offered me a beer for the first time—I declined. Now, as the boxes piled in the lawn, it seemed we were moving the remains of one father-daughter bonding experience to get at another buried beneath.

The strangest part about all of this: I hated beer only months before. In fact, on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2010, I made a resolution to make myself like beer. It might seem like a

superficial resolution, but it was something I had to work at. It was always a hassle that I couldn't stand the taste long enough to choke down a beer—everyone I knew drank beer, and at times that was the only thing available. Beer doesn't require a mixer, is always consistent no matter what bar you order it from, comes in a diverse range of varieties, and of course offers the same drunken results of any alcohol.

I am well aware of my tendency to become obsessed with things I like. It's just part of my nature to want to know everything I can possibly learn. This leads me to do things like open my roommate's drawers to see how he folds his socks (the smallest gestures can say the biggest things about a person). Beer has always fascinated me as a subject—even before my resolution—I loved going on brewery tours, learning trivial history facts, and used to joke that I'd start brewing if someone else drank the product for me. Not even I could have foreseen though, that nearly a year after my resolution, I would be the kind of person that upon trying a new beer would remark things like: “You can really taste that high ABV, almost like a whiskey flavor—real oaky. What kind of grain do you think they use to make it?” I have become a beer snob; but I prefer the term connoisseur.

And like many great adventure in life, it was all for love. Though I rarely admit it, I started drinking beer to impress men. Specifically one man I'd been dating on and off for two years. It seemed logical: drinking beer would give me something else to talk to him about, would provide another activity for me to use as a guise to see him. Instead of calling him to say things like “I miss you, can I see you tonight?” I could say something like, “Hey, just picked up a six pack, I think you'd really like this beer. Want me to come over and we can drink it together?” Honestly, now it all seems pretty pathetic.

It should also be mentioned that this was the same man whose pitch for me to start drinking beer was that it would make my breasts grow. He'd apparently seen it on a "man-show" and instantly thought of me and my humble curves. When I watched the clip online, it became apparent that he hadn't listened to any other words besides "boobs" and "beer." Though hops do contain a phytoestrogen—an estrogen not produced by humans but instead by plants—the show computed that in order to consume the same level of hormones present in a breast enhancement pill (suspicious by their own right), a person would have to drink upwards of fifteen beers a day. Of course my breasts would grow—along with every other measurement from the influx of weight I would gain. Not even mentioning the catatonic inebriated state I would inhabit if I drank more than a half rack of Bud Light every day. Two months into my love affair with beer, I begrudgingly had to admit that along with the ten or so pounds I'd gained, I'd also gone up a cup size.

The link to breast growth may be dubious, but the use of hops is not only limited to beer. A 2006 study conducted in the UK found that the phytoestrogen in hops can help aid in the reduction of hot flashes in menopausal women. Hops are often used in homeopathic remedies for ailments such as tumors and fibromyalgia

Fortunately, the late-night interactions with the man who started it all grew fewer and fewer. But by that point, my passion for beer—this new found subject, this new wealth of history and trivia, this delicious beverage of pharaohs—was deeply rooted. The first pint of beer I can say I actually fully enjoyed was an African Amber from Mac and Jack's. I was out with a group of my male friends, eating pizza (beer's best friend of course) playing pool and drinking a couple pitchers.

Up to that point, I had only consumed beer from either extreme ends of hop bitterness: Frat beer(think beer pong ready Coors) or India Pale Ale. My introduction to drinking had been during a round of drinking games with my twenty-something year old cousins, downing red plastic keg cups of Pabst Blue Ribbon and Busch. These watered down Pilsners were easy to chug quickly—but I remember forcing myself to sip from the can, my mouth soured by the taste. My father preferred to drink the bitter hoppy Pale Ales, and when I began to try beer this was what was available to me. Pale Ales always left an acidic after taste in my mouth like pine tree pitch on the zest of a lemon.

Amber is the chameleon of the beer world. Ambers can often have pronounced hop taste, but this is usually mellowed out with the rich caramel malts and darker grains used during brewing. Mac and Jack's is a solid Amber: the bread-y-taste of the malts cut through the bitter bite of hops with a fresh citrus taste. At the time though, I didn't have the words to describe my pallet. All I knew as I took my first tentative sip, leaning back in a corner booth while watching the boys shoot pool, was that I really was enjoying that pint.

When it finally happened that I could proudly say I enjoyed drinking a beer, I began a quest to find the perfect brew. It became in many ways, simply a process of trial and error. I had little knowledge of what differentiated styles of beers from one another. My friends and family were of little help when it came to advising my choices. My father began drinking microbrews when there was a very small market for them. His suggestion of Pyramid Apricot Ale, and Sierra Nevada Pale Ale did not impress me. Most of my friends were college students and didn't have the cash to spend on higher end microbrews, so their

suggestions of beers to try were “Whatever’s the cheapest.”

This was a discouraging time for me as a beer drinker. My fridge started filling up with half-finished six packs—each new beer I tried just wasn’t quite what I wanted. This was largely based on the assumptions that since I’m a woman, I’d want to drink a lighter beer. “Try a Blue Moon with an orange slice!” was a suggestion I received often. Of course, at this point I had no idea that not all beers were brewed with the same types of grains. Barley and wheat both have distinctive tastes—a barley ale does not taste like a wheat beer. In each of the beers I tried, I was missing the rich taste I remembered from the Mac and Jack’s I’d had. The caramel hints just weren’t there in a wheat beer. When given a beer recommendation, it was always by brand name, never by beer style itself. I had no idea that Mac and Jack’s was an amber, or that Blue Moon was a wheat. I was starting to worry that my one wonderful experience with beer was a fluke.

It was finally one day when I was in a store with some friends that the concept of style came up. My father drank a pale ale from Deschutes Brewery in Oregon, and I pointed it out to in the beer aisle while we were stocking up for a Friday night.

“I really like their beer. I think my favorite is the Porter though,” a friend commented.

“What’s a Porter like?” I asked.

“It’s dark. Kind of sweet, sometimes even a little chocolaty. Give it a try.”

That’s when I met Porters. Maybe it was just engrained somewhere in my genetic makeup to be drawn to the dark-roasted malt of Porters—my family traces its ancestry to the British Royal Navy; the family were sailors right up until my great-great grandfather jumped

ship and found work for a logging company in the fledgling Washington state. I like to think if nothing else, I drink like my English forbears—dark ales smooth and rich in flavor. It was mid-March when I began drinking Porters, and the winter weather was beginning to make me feel listless. One afternoon—after a shopping trip of impulse buys—I found myself in my apartment with a maple bar in one hand and a Porter in the other. This would become a weird association for my taste buds—I began to wonder if I had a drinking problem when I seriously considered drinking a Porter with my morning doughnut before heading to class.

Beer has changed many of my interactions with the opposite sex. I would suffer the mild teasing when I ordered a Baybreeze at a bar, and I went on a few dates with men who refused to order my “fruity-girl” drink for me. When I started drinking beer, men started paying more attention to who I was, simply because of what I was drinking. It seems like an appropriate way to begin a conversation: ask me about beer. The grocery store, waiting at the bar—if I’m on my own, a man will almost always strike up the conversation.

At first it was exciting, as if proof that I had become a beer drinker with good taste! I’d discuss the seasonal ale I’d tried the week before with a construction worker picking up beer and tomorrow’s lunch, or talk about the golden angle for a perfect Guinness pour. When I finally noticed that these men weren’t approaching other men in the beer aisle to strike up the same conversations, I realized their end goal might not simply be to talk about Alaskan Brewery using spruce-tips in their Winter Ale.

“There’s something sexy about a woman who likes good beer,” my roommate Brandon confessed to me once when I brought it up. Should I feel flattered? It might be more correct to clarify that there’s something sexy about single women who like good beer.



After Brandon and I started living together, we frequented the beer aisle more often and for longer durations of time. More than once, we've spent over an hour in front of the refrigerated display cases, debating. Our fridge at home usually has a shelf reserved for beer—varying 22oz bottles, multiple six-packs of local brews, unlabeled bottles of homebrew. Men don't approach me while I'm buying beer with Brandon—I always appear to be taken.

We were Craigslist roommates—I posted an ad for the empty room in my apartment listing beer and good conversation as my interests. After we exchanged e-mails, he looked at the place, liked the location, and I gave him the key a few days later. By the time I had officially come home from my parents' house after summer vacation was over, his things were unpacked and our life together started. I will always credit beer as the reason Brandon and I were able to quickly pass through the days when we were just two strangers sleeping across the hall from one another.

It was awkward in the beginning, maneuvering our way through a platonic mixed-gender living arrangement. I have a tendency to over-share when I'm nervous; the words slipping at a rapid tumble when I see the person across from me disengage from the conversation. It was a relief to know that if I ever felt I had crossed a line, I could always fall back on beer. Too early to discuss my last break-up or most awkward sex story? Fine then, let's talk about our favorite bar to have a pint at. Music and beer were—and still are—the foundation of what has become a tender friendship.

We used beer as an excuse to encroach upon the other's space—Brandon would knock lightly on my door jam, grabbing my attention from the book I was reading in bed and ask if I wanted to drink a beer. We'd sit out at the pub-style kitchen table listening to

music and drinking, the alcohol making us giddy at the acquired knowledge of the other, the realization that while beer may have gotten us started, we shared more than just a fondness for Porters.

Sharing the rent transitioned into sharing a life together. Many of our friends had moved away from the college town we lived in, so in many ways we filled in those gaps for one another. Like some sort of wacky sitcom, Brandon became a surrogate family and for the first time I considered the apartment I lived in to be my home. Our lives overlapped the longer we lived together, each inviting the other to take on the next great adventure. For us, beer became a constant—the clear choice for celebrations, for bad days, and for quiet evenings at home together.

Culturally, beer is seen as a man's drink. According to the most recent studies, women make up only 25% of beer consumers; yet this number is on a steady increase. But women still don't make up the targeted demographic. Much of beer advertisement has either a sports theme, or in some way objectifies women. A YouTube video titled “Best Beer Commercial EVER!!! :)” depicts a bottle of Guinness resting on the bare back of a woman. Two different hands reach for the beer and the tag on screen reads, “Share one with a friend,” and when a third hand reaches up, “or two,” is added to the tagline. The obvious ambiguity is played up: share a beer, or share a girl?

In the world of craft beer, there is less of an outright stigma against women. Generally, it's because craft beers are produced by smaller breweries with limited advertising budgets. These breweries aren't producing Superbowl ads, and usually aren't objectifying

women in the advertising they do produce. Women only figure in even briefly as a consumer if the beer is “light”--we must always be watching our calorie intake after all.

Brandon and I have very similar taste when it comes to beer. The only small exceptions being that I can tolerate a higher hop profile than he can, and he loves a wheat beer in the summer which I could take or leave. I enjoy drinking beer with him, even more so when we both are trying the same beer for the first time. It's exciting to simultaneously experience a beer together, each of us taking a sip, making eye contact over our pint glasses, swallowing, and then comparing tasting notes. Plus, purchasing a pitcher of beer is cheaper than buying individual beers at times, so Brandon and I can drink communally and save money at the same time. I don't ever wonder whether or not Brandon and I should be drinking the same beer based on our sexes. But popular culture seems to be stating otherwise.

There's an online group of female craft beer drinkers and brewers called “Ladies of Craft Beer.” Their subtitle is “Women Teaching Women About Craft Beer,” creating an obvious distinction that women beer drinkers are not equal to men, and that we must come together to change that. Almost all historical beer scholarship has been written by men, and the widely regarded best resource for beer on the internet, BeerAdvocate is run by the Alström Brothers.

In an article they wrote on Ninkasi, the Sumerian Goddess of Brewing, the Alströms comment, “Early brewers were primarily women, mostly because it was deemed a woman's job. Mesopotamian men, of some 3,800 years ago, were obviously complete assclowns and had yet to realize the pleasure of brewing beer.” They don't outright say it, but the

underlying meaning seems to be “Thank goodness we men set things straight.”

July of 2010 was not abundant in summer weather and it rained the day I decided to brew. Like a true pacific northwesterner, I stood out in my rain-drenched driveway, over a brew-pot on a portable propane burner. The smell of malted grains is warm and dusty, sweet like dry straw in the sun and I remember breathing the scent deeply from the mouth of my grain bag as I waited for the brew water to come to a boil. When making beer with all grains, it becomes obvious why it’s called brewing—the same process of brewing a cup of loose-leaf tea applies. Brew too long, and you run the risk of tannins being released giving the beer a bitter aftertaste. Grains don’t brew like herbs though—they create a thick sugar-molasses substance called wort to which hops are added as preservative and flavor enhancer. The most time consuming part of brewing was cleaning up this sticky mess from the concrete floor of my parents’ garage and all of the stainless-steel equipment. I then ran the wort through a heat-exchange coil my father had fabricated out of copper plumbing materials, bringing the temperature down to a toasty 70 degrees Fahrenheit at which point I was able to pitch—a fancy way to say dump in—a strain of yeast. Then it became a waiting game. Waiting the 28 days before bottling, then the two weeks for carbonation before it was ready to drink.

My father drove up specifically so we could try my beer together—pouring equal parts of the 22 ounces into two pint glasses, clanking in a toast and taking a deep gulp. I’ve always felt close to my father—a quiet man, he would take me out for long silent drives when I was younger. It meant something that he chose to make the hour long drive up specifically to drink beer with me. If there was any moment I could have pinpointed as the

accomplishment of my resolution to become a beer drinker, it was when I realized that I had brewed a delicious beer. My father patted me on the back, pulled me in for a hug. We finished our pints in the silence of enjoyment.

In Ancient Egypt, women—like the Sumerians before them—were the primary brewers. There’s a rich history of women brewers even up to the Pilgrims in New England colonies. Female Egyptian brewers could sell or barter the beer they produced in order to procure food and household items. It was thought though, that brewing methods in Ancient Egypt were crude—creating beer from bread which was soaked in water and then strained and allowed to ferment. In 1996, a Cambridge University archaeological dig in the village of Amarna uncovered the remnants of royal breweries. Due to the extremely dry climate of the Egyptian desert, incredibly, there were trace amounts of beer and food components found in the site. At this point an archeobotanist and professional brewer teamed up to analyze the found residues and work out a possible brew recipe. The beer did not contain hops, but instead used coriander seeds and juniper berries as a preservative.

Brandon excitedly read this story to me from an article in a homebrew magazine he had picked up. The two of us were sitting together on his bed, drinking beer and reading on one of the first extremely cold days of November.

“There’s even a recipe! It’s a wheat beer, I’d love it...you’d hate it of course.”  
Perhaps the only place where our tastes in beer differed.

In our relationship, beer seemed to always be paired with music. Early on, our friendship grew out of a shared history of bands we loved when we were in junior high and high school. Brandon and I were both reformed emo-kids, graduating from screamo to neo-

soul. But in the throes of nostalgia we'd drink beer and listen to The Starting Line. Usually, we developed scenarios where we met each other in high school back when he played bass in a band and I went to all-ages shows. Or, what if we'd met on a blind date, or at a party. What if he had taken that other apartment and we had just met up for beers and live music like we had agreed.

“What if we started reviewing local music?” Brandon asked me. By the time we finished our beers, the idea of me writing live music reviews and Brandon photographing shows didn't seem completely out of the question. But it was Brandon who sent an e-mail to the editor of the local entertainment magazine expressing our interest. A week later I stood in the front row jotting down notes on the set list and performance as Brandon snapped pictures, at times resting his camera form balance on my shoulder. We drank a celebratory pint after reading our names among the contributors to the magazine's February 2011 issue, toasting when we opened to the review I wrote and the picture Brandon shot.

It was also Brandon who, in January of 2011, brought a pint glass of a new beer in for me to try while I was fixing my hair in the bathroom. It was before one of the first shows we reviewed together. I set down my curling iron as he shifted his weight against the door frame; we toasted, took a sip, and gave our opinions.

“It reminds me of a milk-stout—really creamy and low on hop flavor,” Brandon said, before drinking again.

“How high is the alcohol content? It has an overlay hint of whiskey to it. What kind of grain do you think they use to make it?”

One of my favorite things about beer—something I enjoyed even before I drank beer—is visiting breweries. I'm lucky, living in the Pacific Northwest, because the microbrew culture is incredibly strong. In Washington state alone, there are close to 150 active breweries. In the town of Bellingham alone, we have three routinely award winning breweries. Before I started drinking beer, I'd toured the Mac and Jack's brewery with a group of friends. Located in an office park just past Avondale in Redmond, Washington, the brewery looked more warehouse than drinking establishment. A microbrewery that doesn't bottle its beer for purchase in stores, Mac and Jack's gives tours on Sundays: you are handed a pint glass a quarter of the way full, listen to a brief talk by the brewer whom you can't hear from your place in the back, mill around with others, and then return to sample the subsequent beers also on tap. The Sunday I went was a stifling hot day in mid-August. After donating my quarter-pint of beer to a friend, I ran the cool glass on my forehead and neck, in the end positioning the chilled pint glass in the front of my tank top. It was perhaps the memory of that day, and the appreciation that I had for that cold glassware, which flavored the taste of the first pint of beer I ever enjoyed.

Mac and Jack's is just one of over 50 microbreweries in the greater Seattle area. Just a downhill coast from my childhood home, Red Hook Brewery is nestled on the edge of the Woodinville Valley across the road from the green lawns and peacock inhabited gardens of Chateau St. Michelle Winery. When anyone from my hometown mentions a brewery tour, it's safe to assume they are referring to Red Hook. For a dollar, a guest is given a four ounce Red Hook tasting glass and taken up to a windowed viewing room that overlooks the brewery at work. Between samples of beer, the tour guide—almost always a scruffy man in

his mid-twenties wearing a sloppily put together outfit and sipping on a travel cup of dark beer—gives the history of the Red Hook factory’s growth from a small microbrewery in Ballard to selling nation-wide in an alliance with Anheuser-Busch.

I’ve gone on the Red Hook tour a variety of times—both as a beer drinker and abstainer—and each time the tour guide has told a different story or trivia fact. One that always impressed me was about the often mythic birth of the India Pale Ale. India Pale Ale—according to our knee-socks-with-shorts wearing tour guide—was the only beer to have ever started a riot. This scruffy young man told of how British soldiers upon their homecoming to merry ol’ England were horrified to find that India Pale Ale wasn’t served in the taprooms of the local taverns. India Pale Ale was created after a greater quantity of hops had to be added to the beer in order to preserve it during its treacherous trip to India. Soldiers, now accustomed to the bitter hop flavor of their favored beer, were outraged to the point of rioting for the renewed production of this illustrious pale ale.

Unfortunately though, the story is a lie. The popular history of India Pale Ales’s birth as a noble beer strengthened by hops to make an epic journey is a stretch to say the least. It was a combination of location and luck that fueled India Pale Ale’s popularity.

Beer and other alcohols were staples on sailing ships because they were a means of staying hydrated. Clean water was simply hard to come by and alcohol could be trusted as the safer option. If you’ve ever taken a sip from a glass of water that had been left on your bedside table for the past week, you recognize the stale taste of tepid water. Water going brackish was a problem that sailing ships contended with, but beer and rum could overcome the long journeys and stay potable. Grog, a favorite of English sailors, was a combination of



rum, simple syrup and fruit juices that not only quenched thirsts, but fought against scurvy.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the East India Company was at its height of trade, the most popular style of beer in England was a Porter. Porters are a malty beer, with mid to high alcohol by volume coming in shades from deep ruby to almost black. But the qualities that made Porters popular in England didn't translate well in the warm climate of India. Soldiers wanted a more refreshing beer, with citrus rather than chocolate-malts. The East India Company purchased their beer from a brewer by the name of George Hodgson who worked for Bow Brewery—a quite unremarkable brewery. What it had going for it though, was location. The brewery was just up the Lea River from where The East India Company's docks were located. It was convenience and reduction of cost that made sure that Hodgson's brews were the primary beer consumed by sailors and soldiers alike.

The Bow Brewery produced the English-favored Porter, but also began shipping out a pale ale called an October beer. This beer was heavily hopped, and then left to ferment for a year before bottling, then an additional year of aging before consumed. It was a favorite of English nobility, from which the East India Company's staff was predominately hired. The beer was matured quicker by temperature change and sea conditions while making the journey from England to India, and was fit for drinking upon arrival in India. It wasn't a “new” style of beer by any means, but over time, India was placed in front of the name as an advertisement strategy. A similar strategy is being employed now by microbreweries in the Pacific Northwest, tagging their stronger pale ales as North-West Pale Ales to add distinction—if by name only.

The great saga of the IPA is a story I like to bring up while drinking in taphouses.

When Brandon and I take road trips together, we plan our routes based on which breweries we can hit along the way. Our longest trip together was ten days in the car, camping and sleeping in cheap hotels from Bellingham to San Francisco and back. On the way down we hit up seaside breweries in Oregon and California like Pelican Pub, Rogue, and Lost Coast. On the way back up, we drank brews at Ninkasi, and Deschutes. We'll drink a beer, take a brewery tour if its offered, and chat with other beer enthusiasts. As with any drinking establishment, there are aspects that almost all breweries share: cardboard coasters, wooden booths and tables, and most importantly—a large glass window separating the taphouse from the brewery floor. The sterile gleam of stainless steel mash tons, instantly recognizable; once I was lucky enough to see a brewer, dressed in rubber hip-waders, disappear into one of the large metal vats with a hose in his hand to spray clean spent grain and yeast from the sides. Brandon and I visit new breweries most often for the novelty of a new location. Pelican Pub is nestled on the shore of Cape Kiwanda in Pacific City, Oregon and the taproom floor is always covered in fine silt layer of sand from the surfers coming in for a break between swells. Brandon was a drinking a Doryman's Dark and I sipped on a smooth Kiwanda Cream Ale while I told him about the summer I was 18 and had stayed in Pacific City—about the Doryman bringing their boats into shore just as the sun was rising, and how I had almost drowned trying to teach myself how to surf alone. It was a foggy early afternoon in September and the haystack rock the cape is famous for was barely a shadow, a section of fog a smudge darker on the horizon.

We make resolutions to change aspects of our lives, to come a shade closer to our

ideal image. I kept my resolution—and not many can say that. So I became a beer snob; what’s wrong with that? I don’t think of myself as being more sophisticated because I prefer to drink a microbrew over a Bud. Instead, I have come to realize that I’m simply dissecting something I have come to love. Brewing helped me to understand that in a good pint of beer, each ingredient is crucial and layers itself upon the others. It’s like coming to know a person: you need to take more than one sip to understand how they’re brewed. A resolution is better kept if it becomes communal—there’s a reason bars sell beer in pitchers. Since I started drinking beer, many of my most treasured moments have happened while I was sharing a pint with someone I cared about. Checking in on the fermentation of my beer with my father gave me a reason to call in the first few weeks while I was back at university. And most likely, were it not for beer, I wouldn’t have found a compatible roommate and even better friend in Brandon.

I remember coming home to our apartment once to find Brandon perched on the edge of our bathtub. He was removing old labels and cleaning out the insides of bottles in preparation to bottle a batch of beer he had brewed. The dark amber glasses bobbed through the white foam of soap bubbles, smooth necks wet and glinting.

“I thought about getting in with them so that when you came home it’d be to your three favorite things: Beer, bubble baths, and me,” Brandon joked as he peeled away a soggy label.

I rolled up my sleeves and knelt next to him.

“This is close enough,” I said, putting my hands into the suds, fingers closing around a slick neck.

## The Wine Cellar

There's a picture of my father with his older brothers—I've only seen it once, but it's one of my favorites. The three brothers are like a set of matryoshka dolls. Descending height with matching crew cuts, belted blue jeans, white t-shirts tucked crisply into their waistbands. My father, the youngest, is missing one of his front teeth, a gap in his smile. The picture is from 1964, and my father is helping his brothers make drinks.

My father is barely tall enough to see over the kitchen counter, looking back over his shoulder at the camera. His oldest brother Bill is about to pour a shot of gin into each of the glasses lined up on the counter. My uncle Bob, the middle son with something to prove, has the dangerous job of cutting the limes. When my grandmother made french toast for breakfast, Bob would cut the crust off. “Mom made *me* pancakes,” he'd tell my father, just to get a rise. The sons are making drinks for their parents, and most likely for family friends. The picture is charming now, but I don't remember my parents even asking me to grab them a beer from the fridge when I was a child. I'm sure I was aware of alcohol, but I wasn't ever directly involved in my parents' intake of it.

In the early 1960s, my grandparents were raising three sons in Renton, Washington. Friday nights meant The Melrose Tavern for drinks. The Melrose was owned by their neighbors, Jim and Laretta Natucci. My father and his brothers would sit in the back seat of the family station wagon, listening to the radio. The three boys would eat peanuts and drink Orange Crush soda. Bar patrons would see my grandparents come in, and head out to see the boys in the car. The soda and peanuts were a tradition started by a pitcher for the Seattle

Rainiers. I can imagine my father, bouncing up and down on the car seat, telling the local baseball hero his newest joke. When my father told me this story when I was around nine, I was slightly horrified—his parents went to a bar and left him alone in the car? My own mother barely left me in the car long enough to run into 7-11 to buy cigarettes when I was in elementary school.

“It was fun!” my father replied, “Even now, eating peanuts with Orange Crush takes me back; how exciting it was as a young kid to have all these people come out and talk to me.”

Jim Natucci convinced my grandfather to start making wine. They'd buy the grapes from a farmer who drove over Interstate 90 from Yakima, before Yakima became the wine capital it is today. After the first few batches, my grandfather decided he wanted to get serious about wine making. Laretta's family came from Tuscany, and the Natucci's often visited their extended family in Italy. Most likely Jim gave my grandfather the idea for the wine cellar.

Picture this: my grandfather is building a bunker-like structure out of cinder block and concrete in the height of the Cold War, within years of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The rest of the neighborhood thought it was bomb shelter; a rumor my father and his brother perpetuated with tall tales at school. Really though, the concrete kept the wine cool while it bottle aged. I can imagine it—my father is out in the backyard, grass-stained knees on rolled up jeans helping his father. My grandfather shows him how to dig the blade of the shovel in, how to apply your weight to the handle and use leverage to carve away at the soil. My father, three-quarters the height of the shovel's handle, can barely scrape a shaving of dirt

and rocks from the side of the foundation walls. He staggers, trying to balance the too-large garden tool, depositing a trickle of dirt into a waiting wheelbarrow. My grandfather chuckles, calls my father over and takes hold of the end of the shovel's handle.

“Now son,” my grandfather instructs, “you need to get farther away from the edge...”

At first, my grandfather aged his wine in the garage. He kept the bottles in cardboard boxes, a blanket over the top to keep them insulated. He was over eager in the beginning and made multiple batches all at once, so the wine bottles were starting to pile up. I'm sure my grandmother was starting to complain, wanted him to go out and organize things better. It was summer, and the garage was humid. My father wiped a hand across his forehead, clearing away mock sweat. He pulled the collar of his shirt out wide, as if spreading the white of his t-shirt like a sail, catching a breeze; he stuck out his tongue and pretended to pant like a dog. My grandfather chuckled, patted my father's shoulder and went into the garage. They started moving the boxes out, my father unable to pick a box up on his own, had to drag the boxes onto the asphalt driveway, pulling them by a dog-eared cardboard flap.

Wine, like any alcohol, produces carbonation as part of the fermentation process. And carbonation is just Carbon-dioxide gas. Molecules expand when heat is added, they move farther away from one another to fill the volume of space they are allocated. My grandfather paused when he told me the story of his wine making days to give me this brief chemistry lesson. My grandfather tells the story like this:

“We get one of those goddamn boxes out, and we hear a kind of whistling sound. Well, I mean, now how was I supposed to know what to do about that?”

He laughs to himself here, pausing a moment in memory.

“Your dad though, he knew something was wrong. He goes running behind me, grabbing my pant leg, so he can peak around. Well, hell, I get that bottle that was whistlin' out and suddenly,” my grandfather makes a plopping sound with his mouth, “It was purple everywhere.”

After my grandmother spent the rest of the afternoon yelling at my grandfather about the mess of broken glass and wine all over the driveway, my grandfather decided to build a wine cellar. I'm not sure what happened to the wine cellar at my father's childhood home. His parents divorced before he was a teenager, and my grandmother moved the three boys into a house a few streets over. Friday nights in the Melrose parking lot ended, along with playing bartender for family friends. Perhaps the new owners of the house stocked the wine cellar with canned food and emergency supplies, misinterpreting its purpose.

Now, my grandfather drinks his wine over ice, diluting and chilling it so he can sip on it from early afternoon onwards. He likes to get boxed wines, easy to transport when he drives down to Texas and over to Palm Desert where he keeps a double-wide trailer. He likes generic sounding wines like “Burgundy” or even simply “Red Blend.” In his mid-eighties now, he spends his afternoons looking out the window at the lake, using his scope to search for eagles' nest. He drinks his diluted wine and when I come for dinner, he tells me stories about the past. But never about my grandmother.

As my grandfather tells it, the happiest moments of his marriage to my grandmother happened between her first and second drink. Alcoholism runs through the family, but is

often explained away—for the men at least. Grandpa Len grew up in a logging camp or Wood men can hold their liquor. A boyfriend of mine was slightly astonished to watch my mother and father have not one but three Bloody Marys with brunch on Sundays. My father rarely has more than a few drinks at family gatherings, always mindful of his status as the designated driver.

After the divorce, my grandmother took to keeping a bottle of gin in the toilet tank. It kept cool, and she could drink in semi-private away from her sons. It could be a secret. A woman who drank too much was viewed as a woman with a problem. It most likely didn't help that my grandmother drank out of unhappiness—perhaps because she married before completing her degree, perhaps from feeling an obligation to have children she didn't want. I can't really say, because I don't remember much about any time I spent with her. She was a shadow in my childhood, the grandmother who sent gifts that reeked of cigarettes. Outfits I would never wear, but were obviously expensive—a white gauzy dress I could never expect to keep clean as the messy child I was. We saw my grandmother at the most twice a year, Christmas and Easter, a visit that was tense as she yelled at the grand-kids to behave and complained to her sons that she never saw them.

It was at a family gathering just after she passed away that I found the picture of my father and his brothers playing bartender. Tucked away in a box of unsorted photos, it was one of the few candid photos which remained of my father and his brothers at that age. Of course there were the annual Santa Claus portraits from Frederick & Nelson, or the cousin pictures taken with the Eastern Washington half of the family. But the picture of my father and his brothers in their barkeep uniform stuck out to me.



I drank my first beer the night the family spent spreading photographs on the pool table in my Uncle Bill's front room. The photograph of my father and uncles playing barkeep was thrown into the hodgepodge of my grandmother's belongings. The boxes would be later stored in someone's attic, tucked away again, just like all the conversations about my grandmother have been since her death.

I was twenty, and my father told my older cousins it was about time they taught me how to drink. That night, my father showed me how to make a gin and tonic so smooth it goes down like water. Squeeze the lime over the ice cubes, add the gin, top with tonic, and give the drink a quick stir. The lime and juniper were bitter on my tongue, and I thought of my grandmother sitting on the edge of the bathtub, taking pulls from a Beefeater fifth, while outside the closed bathroom door my father burst into tears when his brother Bob taunted,

“It's because Mom likes me better.”

## **Do We Still Call it Cyberspace?**

My family bought its first desktop computer in 1993. I remember going to the computer store with my father, a small building in a strip mall smelling of new carpet and warm plastic. On one wall was a sparse shelf of computer games—cardboard boxes with cartoon characters on the front (remember the talking paperclip from Word?) reassuring consumers that they too could use this mystical machine, the personal computer would blend into the space of the home just as the dishwasher and microwave had before it.

I was in kindergarten, and my best friend's mother worked for Microsoft. When I played over at her house, we spent hours on the computer together, both squished into one computer chair taking turns sharing the control of the mouse. My father picked me up once after a playdate—how many times did he call my name before I heard him and turned away from the screen? That night he told my mother about his plan to start setting aside savings towards a computer.

In the middle of the store, display models were set up on high platform desks—most likely to hide the size of those bulky off-white processor towers. My father had been reading PC magazines during his lunch break and at night before bed, learning about RAM and memory, about operating systems. He came in to this purchase with a list of questions. As an object, computers bored me. I wanted to know what I could do with them, what I could discover. Did the salesman notice I was fidgeting? He suggested my father test out a machine, cuing up a computer game I might enjoy. My father and I navigated through a digital nursery rhyme world—what was the name of that game anyway?--dishes were eloping with spoons and if you clicked on it, the cow would jump over the moon.

We were entranced, and it wasn't until we noticed the lights dim that my father realized what time it was. The store was closing, but the employees couldn't bear asking the father and daughter to stop playing, to pull them out of an imagined world. Going about their closing duties around us, we walked out with the employees, watching them lock the door, and pull down the security gate across the store front windows. Our family had a computer by the next weekend.

For a year, that first computer sat out in the living room of our three bedroom rambler, only becoming an annoyance during Christmas time since it occupied the space reserved for the tree. My father spent Saturday mornings playing *Myst*, getting up early to drink coffee in his bathrobe while filling out codes and working through puzzles in a spiral bound notebook he kept on a lower shelf of the computer desk. My mother played *Magic School Bus Explores the Solar System*, read encyclopedia articles on *Encarta 95*, and recreated to amazing accuracy the Donner Party's trek west while playing *Oregon Trail*. For Christmas 1996, my father bought the family a new computer—and this one came with a dial-up modem. We were now a family connected to the world wide web.

After I would go to bed at night, my mother would spend hours in chatrooms, talking with men in Australia, New Brunswick, Germany. That summer, we received a package from an Australian man my mother befriended. He filled it with candy, vegamite, seed pods from a tree that grew in his backyard, and a mixtape of his favorite songs on the radio, “Tubthumping” track one. Later that November, the song would take off here, and you could hardly turn the radio on without hearing it. My mother sent a package in return: a figurine made from Mount Saint Helen's ash, Applets and Cotlettes, a small package of smoked

salmon. I was nine years old. When my father protested my mother revealing our address to a man she'd only ever contacted via chatroom, she said,

“Really Jack, you think he's going to catch a plane over here to kill us all?”

The Australian was an early contact, before my mother learned about ICQ messenger, about the level of disconnect when chatting with someone only through text. She began to re-imagine her life. In chatrooms, she was single, living with her brother and a dog. My mother would stay up until two or three in the morning, in chatrooms talking mostly with men. At one point, she asked my father to buy her a microphone, so she could literally talk to these men online. My mother once met a 17 year old girl in a chatroom who even in 1997 was still depressed over the death of Kurt Cobain. She learned from a random screen-name that Princess Diana had been killed. And in the morning, she would get up, make my lunch, walk me to school, and volunteer at my elementary school with PTA.

None of it was a secret. I remember my mother talking over dinner about the conversation she'd had with Ray the fire-fighter from New Brunswick the night before—Ray had spotted a moose in his yard, had to shoot his gun into the darkness to scare the beast off because he was worried about his dogs. My father said once, “How is it that you know these people's lives are real? You're lying to them; why wouldn't they be doing the same thing?”

My mother replied,

“I can just tell.”

I'm not sure how my father felt about being written out of my mother's life. If he felt my mother was cheating on him. I'm not even sure if my mother's conversations digressed into a sexual territory, or if that even matters.

My early wanderings on the web revolved around two things: Sailor Moon and cats. In fact, they intersected some since I desperately wanted a talking cat, like Luna, who could give me magical powers and a super-hero identity. Sailor Moon, unlike the token Disney princesses fought her own battles. Superheros were for boys until Sailor Moon came on the scene—unfortunately it was just a few short years before the Spice Girls trade marked gurl-power. Sailor Moon was a fringe show, and one I was made fun of for liking. Which made my love for it even stronger, even at eight years old trying to distance myself from the mainstream crowd of my peers. The internet was a place for the lonely even then.

I remember cyberpages with background graphics so busy, I had to highlight the text on the page in order to read it. At this time, websites had graphic-rich versus text-only options, a single page sometimes taking ten minutes to load—an email containing an attachment often taking hours to download into the inbox. This was a time when search engines didn't have an image tab. Page owners spent time compiling images, filling page after page—Image Gallery Page 2!--with thumbnails and haphazard rectangles of all size forming the *idea* of columns and rows. My favorite Sailor Moon pages were those which organized images by character—that way I never had to waste time waiting for images of Sailor Mars to load since I didn't like how mean she was to Sailor Moon.

I don't remember my internet browsing being policed by my parents. Even without parental controls and safe-search filters, the internet then was accessible and safe to me as a child—perhaps the worst I ever encountered was a swear word; like I'd never heard the word “dammit” before. The only time my mother facilitated my internet time was when I entered

chatrooms. I had to ask for permission, and wait for my mother to take a break from cooking dinner so she could sit next to me. Mostly I joined chatrooms on Sailor Moon websites, or chatrooms for cat lovers. We were both perplexed at first by *a/s/l* and *brb*. I was a terrible speller, and had little typing experience, so my mother often worked as my proxy, typing my questions into the dialogue box. Often, if she felt the conversation in the chat room was taking an inappropriate turn—19/m/Ohio suggests activity to 16/f/Long Beach that I don't understand, but my mother does—she would sign us off the chatroom. None of my friends at school liked Sailor Moon, and I wanted desperately to connect with other who did. These times in chatrooms allowed me the chance to communicate with people in the fansub world—communities who made and distributed copies of personally subtitled episodes—people who had seen all 200 episodes of the anime, and were in the middle of translating the kanji in the manga they had imported from Japan. I was a nine year old girl, asking anyone I could about the continuing adventures of crybaby Sailor Moon and her talking cat.

Just before the family dog was put down, my father brought home kittens with hope a new pet would soften the blow for my sister and me. It wasn't the first pet death in the family, but I think now that my father bought the kittens as much for himself as for us children. Rescued from a garbage dump by a little old lady, then raised by veterinary interns, Cassy and Kelly were so small when my father brought them home that I could carry each one in the side pocket of my overalls. I was madly in love with Cassy—her white paws, giant ears, and long slinking tail. She drooled when she purred and stole sponges from the kitchen sink, hiding them under my sheets at the foot of my bed.

I don't quite remember what internet search I conducted—this of course being the days of Lycos and Altavista—that in the end led me to CLAW. An online club, CLAW—Cats Lording AlWays—was a cyberspace for “Cats who rule.” Did I mention that members interacted with one another while impersonating their cats? In many ways, the club functioned like any other club—there were guilds, club sponsored social events, by-laws, and classes. Only, each message from the club president began with the greeting: Rawr rawr MERAW CLAW Members.

At ten years old, I spent part of my life pretending to be a cat. This involved signing e-mails “Cassy,” and bragging about my abnormally long tail and perfect white paws in cyber-purrsonals, while looking for an attractive tom-cat to marry in a wed-wink ceremony. I attended plays where all the actors were cats. These plays were drawn out affairs of clicking through each scene of cats costumed with computer drawing software, layered on digitally fabricated backdrops. My best friend moved away that summer, and because I chose to wear calf length print socks instead of white ankle-length, I spent most of my recesses alone, or drawing in the library. I drew comics about cats traveling through space in flying pirate ships.

I marvel now at the world created by the members of this online community—the hours it must have taken to learn HTML, to code pages, and maintain the information of over 500 members. At 10, I think I understood that there were people behind the cats, that it was all make-believe; but I easily forgot this navigating the world as it appeared. The disconnect was perhaps something I struggled with at that age, wishing it wasn't a fabrication. Which made the world even more enticing. I wanted to believe that a group of

cats had come together to form a club. I wanted to imagine cats designing the stage decorations, sewing costumes, and putting on their own theatrical productions. And yes, it made sense to me that cats wouldn't spell things correctly—that they would call their owners their “meowmies” and sign their e-mails, “Many Purrs.” They were cats! It was amazing they could type with their paws at all!

Acting as Cassy, my CLAW interactions were limited in comparison to the club officers. I never wrote articles for the CLAW zine, or taught classes at CLAW University. In fact, my cat Cassy didn't even complete enough college credits to earn her AA degree. But “Cassy” was a member of the Riddles Guild, and worked as a costume designer for CLAW's production of Cinderella. I spent hours drawing ballgowns on images of cats using MS Paint. I wanted each of the five dresses to be different, distinct—a red one in taffeta, a light blue one with lace. I begged my parents for a scanner, for the ability to put my cat's likeness onto the web—to carve out a physical presence for this part of my life. We wouldn't get a scanner until years later when the five-in-one printer became the standard choice, and then if I uploaded pictures of Cassy, it was to MySpace or Facebook.

In 1997, dial-up internet was the norm, and my father would not spring for a second phone-line. Landlines were sacred back then, and my mother kept a strict “one-hour” policy. There wasn't much I could do in an hour—especially when it took two to three minutes for a single webpage to load—but I would make the best of it, signing into CLAW and reading the day's updates. I would check the newest riddle for the week, look in the purrsonals section for a charming penpal for my alter-cat-ego and participate in whatever seasonal event might



be going on. In April, it was an Easter egg hunt, at Halloween a costume contest. But it always seemed the hour didn't last long enough. My mother, however, had the long late-night hours to inhabit her created life.

I couldn't sleep one night, but could hear my mother down the hall in the living room talking in the even tone she used when the microphone was turned on. I was angry, because at that moment I was convinced that my mother didn't care I was still awake, maybe even didn't care that I was her daughter. I was angry that the only member of our family she kept in her fantasy life was our dog.

I crept down the hall into the kitchen, pulling a glass out of the cupboard, and taking the milk from the fridge. I walked over to the kitchen table, set the plastic gallon jug on the tabletop, and then slammed the glass down next to it, making sure the noise was as loud as I was frustrated.

My mother leaned over into the kitchen doorway, and snapped her fingers at me the way she did when my sister and I started fighting in a nice restaurant. She was furious, and she couldn't yell at me because in acknowledging my presence, the life she had created online would dissolve instantly.

When I think of it now, I know what I wanted. I wanted her to get so mad that she broke character to yell at me. I wanted her to realize that *I* was the one who needed to invent a new life. I would have rather been a cat on the internet, than the 10 year old wandering the playground alone, hoping that the popular girls wouldn't notice my rainbow striped socks since the hem on my overalls was just an inch too short. I wanted my mother to realize that even though she was PTA president, no amount of carnival nights and bingo nights could be

organized to change the fact that the only time someone talked to me in class was to make fun of the comics I drew—hard black outlines of Cassy in cartoon form and Sailor Earth, designed as closely as I could to look like me.

But I didn't think then that maybe I wasn't the only one who was lonely. I think my mother never felt that she could have the life she wanted. She once told me that for her, college was never an option. Her fascination with canning, soap making, and even *Oregon Trail* were her attempts to give meaning to her life as a housewife—imagining a time when these activities weren't just hobbies but necessary for survival. My mother wanted to imagine a life for herself where being a mother wasn't the only option for her future.

In the summer of 2012, Cassy passed away in bed next to my mother as she stroked the ailing cat's fur. My mother woke me up with a tear-sputtering phone call, “She died, Cassy's gone,” on a Saturday morning in August. I drove to my parents' house, and told my mother to look away when I put the first shovel of dirt over Cassy's face. She sobbed openly at the sound of soil coming to rest on the gray-striped fur.

My father was working in Idaho for the summer, the first time my parents were away from each other for more than a few nights in 30 years of marriage. My mother was taking it hard, living on her own for the first time in her life, and I would log-on to Facebook some nights to find she had posted pictures of cats with drunk-speak descriptions, “The grey one, yes. Little splotch toes; I think. Stay kitten forever?” This is to say, my mother was not really herself.

When she stopped smoking, my mother replaced her vice with two more: alcohol and

Facebook. My mother drank frequently as I was growing up—but never in a way that as a child I considered excessive. But without being able to reward herself with a cigarette after shampooing the carpet, instead she sat down on Facebook, a light beer in hand. With my father gone, the beers increased in number, and the only living thing she had to confide in were the cats, and the internet at large.

After my mother and I lined the top of Cassy's small grave with stones, we turned back for the house. My mother broke down again, mouth drawn and eyes squinting with tears,

“I don't want her in the ground, I want her back on the couch. She belongs on the couch—can't we go get her?”

And I looked at my mother, realizing perhaps for the first time that even though I don't remember witnessing passionate kisses between them, or finding the two dancing together in the kitchen after a bottle of wine growing up as a child, my parents were not still together out of complacency. This wasn't my mother reacting to loneliness alone, this was my mother missing my father specifically. I put my arm around her and said, perhaps a bit hastily,

“She's fine.” Because it was really the only think I could think to say.

Cassy was a strange cat, tending toward neurotic with her habits. She spent most of her life living under my parents' bed, sometimes darting skittish down the hall to hide behind the towels in the bathroom closet. I would clip her toenails each time I visited, sometimes finding them grown inward in sharp arcs splitting the pads of her black and pink toes. Cassy wasn't active enough, and the vet determined that her delirium and strange behavior was

most likely due to severe dehydration. She was nothing like the persona I created for her on CLAW—the persona I created for us both.

CLAW closed its virtual cat door early on in 2000 just after the threat of Y2K. The club reopened as a service club, asking members to sponsor animal shelters through donations and providing information about feral cat colonies and working as foster families for abandoned cats and dogs. Now, the URL leads to a white page reading in black text: 403 Forbidden. I searched web archives, hoping that an article had been written, or blog posts, or anything about the human owners of these web navigating felines. I found instead “The Back Fence Cat Club,” a former sister club to CLAW that expanded its web presence after CLAW shut down. A time capsule of internet that was, the cyberpage for the BFCC maintained the typical scroll down index, the same photoshopped images of random cats with computer drawn hats and costumes sitting on a virtual-lawn in front of the oft-aspired to white picket virtual-fence.

What a find! Some how this gem had escaped the server overhauls, and domain destruction which had claimed the Geocities and Angelfire websites of the 1990s. After closer inspection though, I was almost horrified to find that this website was active—this was a current version, updated only the night before. A small corner of the internet had escaped the clean lines of social networks and flash technology, choosing instead to hold fast to basic uses of HTML and busy page backgrounds. This page made MySpace look innovative. The language was all still in place, with references to purrs, meowmies and all of the syntactical practices I recognized as CLAW vernacular. I scrolled down only to find the heading “Sad News,” instantly recognizable as a memorial space. Just like my cat, the cats

behind the big name personas of CLAW were reaching the age of feline mortality. I clicked through page after page of memorial messages, until I found something just slightly different. Written by the moderator of the BFCC, the message chronicled life with her cat Jessie. In the same paragraph, she chronicled Jessie's presence in CLAW and as zine author, contrasted to Jessie's inclination to eat only moist food straight out of the can, no plate involved. Here it was over ten years later, and this woman—an adult—was grieving publicly for her cat; grieving for a loss of persona.

I was able to find an archived version of CLAW. The Wayback Machine is an organization working to recover deleted and lost domains of the early internet. But this version isn't perfect—broken links and un-recoverable images leave large holes in the space. The production of Cinderella has only been archived to a few short pages, the ball scene missing, and the production credits leading to a broken link. I wasn't able to find links to any of the guilds I was a member of as a child, unable to find my contributions to this space. Except one. In the CLAW garden there is a wishing well, and each of the wishes made by members was archived and collected.

*A Wish From Cassy Wood:*

*PLOP-PLOP!!!*

*That all kities had wonderful homes and never had to be hungry!!!*

## Girl On the Loose

My parents have a hallway lined with photographs—mostly old family snapshots. My parents' wedding and honeymoon, a family portrait of my grandfather age twelve and his parents, my mother's twin great-uncles in matching 1920s suits and tipped fedoras. I've never been photogenic, so all portraits of me were taken before the age of six except for my senior photos. Those are records of embarrassment—I had braces, felt awkward in front of the camera, and the photographer passed up the more traditionally feminine field of flowers backdrop having me pose instead with a log cabin.

Just below the photo of my grandfather is a picture of my Grandmother, about 14 at the time, with her parents. My father's mother, Grandma Jackie became an obligation, rather than a loved one. For my father growing up, she was an angry alcoholic, pathological liar, and professional guilt-tripper. My childhood memories of Grandma Jackie are birthday cards smelling like stale cigarette smoke, cold-cut platters at Christmas, and my mother rewinding the full answering machine tape after only a single message from her mother-in-law. These tapes were a run-on of anecdotes about how difficult it was to live so far from her sons. Her catchphrase was, “Well, that's all my news,” before she recited once more each story she'd already recounted.

My grandmother was incredibly sentimental, and on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday sent a dozen long-stem red rose with a card saying that every young woman deserved fresh flowers. Grandma Jackie wrote long letters on my birthdays, detailing each year the story of the day I was born, of my father cutting the umbilical cord and giving me my first bath. Before she died, my grandmother left me a hinged cedar box. It was a mini hope chest, that each female

graduate from her high school received on graduation day. With the box, came a letter tabulating its uses over the years from jewelry box in her sorority days, to junk drawer of nails and plastic army toys after she became a mother. I keep the letter tucked away in the box, along with the dried rose petals.

It was only after her death that I learned my grandmother had studied English at the University of Washington. She only ever mentioned college when lamenting I hadn't joined her sorority. Stories of my grandmother's childhood and heritage came predominately from memories my father had of his own grandmother.

In the picture, my grandmother's hair is fashionable, pin-curl waves pulled smoothed behind her ears with tortoiseshell combs. She's wearing red lipstick—a dark gray in the black and white photo—making her appear much older, a slightly younger copy of her equally fashionable mother. My Great-Grandma Ree has a wide smile, infectiously happy leaning back against her equally as happy husband.

Grandma Ree died shortly after I was born. My parents have grainy photos of her holding me—she couldn't bother to look at the camera, too excited to hold the first born of her youngest grandson. When my parents first started dating, one of the first members of his family my father introduced my mother to was his Grandma Ree. They visited often, cooking and listening to stories in her Enumclaw trailer. My parents joke that Grandma Ree loved nothing more than the sound of her own voice. But she had stories to tell, about growing up in Washington just after the turn of the century.

Seattle was growing quickly due to the Yukon gold rush, but industry was still primarily mining and logging. Seattle's Smith Tower was constructed in 1914, just five years

after Ree was born. The Smith Tower was the tallest building west of the Mississippi River until 1962 when the Space Needle was constructed. In 1909, Seattle celebrated the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific-Exposition, and George and Hattie McMillan celebrated the birth of their second daughter. I don't know many stories about my Great-great-grandparents McMillan, but to the best of my knowledge the family was well-to-do.

My Grandma Ree told my father a story about her mother Hattie, and her involvement in the suffrage movement. Ree's older sister Bertha, was embarrassed that her mother marched in parades, holding up signs, yelling out slogans. Bertha was entering her teens, an age when anything your parents do that garners the attention of others is mortifying. But Ree was only 9 or 10 at the time—she was beyond proud of her mother. I can picture Hattie McMillan, her tailored suit skirt showing off her ankles—progressive, and able to breathe easier in a corset more relaxed than the one she needed to be cinched into each morning during her courting years. Washington state granted women the right to vote in 1910, but Ree watched her mother march on those streets, hoping that the other Washington across the nation might catch-up to the frontier states. Mrs. Hattie McMillan wore her purple, gold, and white suffrage sash, marching to make sure that her daughters enjoyed more freedoms than she had grown up with.

I wonder if Ree thought of that afternoon from her childhood when she stood on the sidewalk and watched her mother with pride, even just for a moment as she opened the door to her parents' house. That day, she brought home her new husband, Al Barday, and told her parents she was pregnant at 17. The year was 1926, and Ree wore her hair in a smart-bob which she tucked behind her ears when she giggled. Alfred Barday is the reason my father



has dark olive skin despite the Scandinavian and English heritage of the Wood family. I've heard varying stories: Al Barday was French, he was a sailor, he was poor. None of these explanations are ever expanded upon.

“So what happened to him? Why did he leave,” I asked my father.

“The family ran him off. He wasn't good enough. Grandma Ree's parents made her get a divorce. She married Grandpa Ben, and he legally adopted my mother.”

Grandpa Ben was well loved—to this day my Grandfather doesn't have many nice things about his former wife, but I've never heard him speak with anything but admiration for his father-in-law. Ben Banning, from the stories I've heard, was a good man, a good husband, a good father, and a damn good cribbage player. In the family portrait hanging in the hallway of my parents' house, there isn't a forced smile—they look like a happy family, my great-grandparents and their daughter.

But still, how did Ree feel, when her mother said sternly of Al Barday, “You're leaving him.”

How did a mother, who felt her daughters should have just as many rights as her son, feel when she told her 17 year old pregnant daughter that this choice wasn't hers to make?

## Waypoints

### **TFTH- Thanks for the hide**

As the screen went blank, we had to give up. Our hiking GPSr's batteries had died and the hint “On top of stump” wasn't specific enough on a trail winding through the forest at the base of Lookout Mountain. The forest floor was a thick carpet of decomposing leaves, moss, mud, and fallen nurse logs. There were enough stumps to keep us busy for hours. Lookout Mountain, also known as Galbraith, is crisscrossed with mountain-bike and hiking trails—as well as gravel logging roads. The area had been heavily logged in the past, and many preservationists and mountain bikers were currently fighting to keep the area from being logged once more. My roommate and I were there to hopefully hike to the north peak—the highest point in the greater Bellingham area—and to do a little bit of Geocaching. At first, we'd guesstimated the approximate location based on the last GPS readout before the screen went blank and the the unit refused to turn back on. A quarter mile, east by north-east. We checked the first ten stumps we encountered as we continued down the trail, rummaging through leaf refuse and bark—but it was getting dark and at this point we were blindly guessing.

We gave up, logged a mental “Did Not Find” and continued down the trail, our car parked on a gravel turnout a mile and a half away. We planned dinner, talked about whose turn it was to empty the dishwasher. We were tired, our legs aching from the daylong hike, and the cold wind blowing through the birch and fir trees around us was a reminder that a warm September Indian summer was finally ending. I was cold, hungry, and starting to get a little bit whiny. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a pile of kindling stacked on top of a

stump. The telltale feeling kicked in and I scrambled down the side of the trail to the stump's base, lifting away the scraps of log to reveal a green plastic tupperware-- no bigger than my closed fist.

“I found it!” I yelled, laughing and shaking my head.

Our Geocaching adventures began one afternoon while hiking on Sugarloaf Mountain in Anacortes, Washington. My roommate Brandon and I had eaten lunch on the overlook—a 360 degree view of Fidalgo Bay on the right, Skagit Valley farmlands on our left, and the San Juan Islands dotting the horizon in front of us. As we were about to leave, I noticed a treasure chest tucked into a hollow log just off the trail. There is a moment, a feeling of instant excitement at the prospect of stumbling upon treasure. The child-like joy of discovery. It didn't matter what might be inside—there was just something about finding that chest. That I had been more perceptive than the average person, had seen this object that many other had most likely walked past, unnoticed.

After calling Brandon over, the two of us opened the chest and pawed eagerly through the contents within—mostly trinkets and knick-knacks that looked like they were from gumball machines. There was a small notebook, lines filled with dates and what appeared to be coded messages—jumbled phrases of random letters. Brandon's immediate reaction was to write our names in the book, to dig through my purse and find something we could place in the chest for others to find. We left behind the directions Brandon had drawn out, labeled at the top “Crude Map.” The directions were to not only Sugar Loaf Mountain, but also to the brewery downtown where we planned to have a pint after our hike. Over that pint, and on the drive back home, Brandon and I babbled about finding more caches,

wondering how many were hidden near by, wondering where they were and how we had never found one before. But all of that was answered easily enough—inside each geocache was a list of rules, and a link to geocaching.com, an online network where players can log their finds and look up caches. Membership is free, and opens up access to over 2 billion geocaches world wide.

By the end of the night, we were registered Geocachers—one find logged.

### **Groundspeak**

I knew I wanted a Jeep more than anything after I saw the commercial. The narrative was ridiculous: a scruffy adventurer catches the eye of a beautiful girl at a rest stop. As she leaves, she drops a slip of paper on his table. Cut to the adventurer driving his Jeep through mudholes, navigating service roads and blazing his own trail. He comes at last to a waterfall—there waiting for him is the beauty from before. She smiles. The camera cuts to a close-up of the slip of paper. The name Jenny, but instead of the expected phone number, she has written GPS coordinates. At fifteen—that seemed like the perfect love story to me.

My father and I started off-roading while I was in high school. It was around this time that I first learned about Geocaching. In 2003, Groundspeak, the parent company of Geocaching, was trying to get word out and make some money off of the geocaching hobby. The company partnered with Jeep, as well as multiple off-roading publications. My father and I were avid readers of these magazines, and he loved the idea of finding hidden treasures out in the woods. Unfortunately, my mother didn't approve. She thought it sounded like another hobby for my father to foolishly spend money on. Though we continued to off-road up through my time as an undergraduate, my father and I never managed to take up

Geocaching.

Brandon in comparison, stumbled onto Geocaching initially much like the two of us found that first cache on Sugarloaf. He was out rock climbing one day with a friend when the pair found an ammo container hidden away in some rocks. Brandon claims that he thought it was really cool at the time, but somehow the two never managed to do anything else to find out more.

Groundspeak is the reason that Geocaching has taken off and become a global activity. The easy to navigate website made geocaching accessible and appealing to both of its target audiences: technology geeks, and outdoor enthusiasts. Each physical cache is required to include a list of the Geocaching game rules, as well as a link back to Geocaching.com. Groundspeak has put together video tutorials, like “Geocaching 101- Everything you need to know in under five minutes.”

Even though both Brandon and I were aware of Geocaching before we found that first cache together, the ease of exploring Geocaching.com was what made the activity so instantly addicting. Geocaching.com even has a button labeled “Find My Location” which instantly gives a map of all the surrounding caches, based on the signal put out by your internet connection. On vacations, Brandon and I instantly have activities, just as long as we can get a wireless internet connection.

Geocaching.com is so easy in fact, that my mom even thought she might like to sign up. I was visiting my parents for the weekend and over dinner explained to them what Brandon and I had been up to. I told them about how before we purchased our GPS receiver, we'd relied on hints and Google Earth shots of cache locations. My mother owns a smart-

phone, which she uses primarily to look up the names of songs she hears on the radio. She asked if I could download a GPS app for her, if maybe we might all be able to look for a cache the next day as a family.

Phone in hand, I led my parents through a wooded area in a local park, bequeathed to the city for use by Girl Scouts. The cache we found was huge—a large storage box, camouflaged with pine branches and leaves. I opened the lid and my mother squealed.

“Look at all the stuff inside!”

To me, it just looked like the typical cache contents—some small children's toys, a few molded coloring books. But to my mother—who works at an elementary school and when I was a child spent more time playing with my Barbies than I did—this was truly a treasure chest.

“Can I take something?” she asked, as if I was suddenly the parent.

“Yes, but you have to leave something to trade.”

My mother pawed through her purse, finding a small rubber pencil topper shaped like a fish she'd gotten out of a gumball machine at the local Mexican restaurant. She deposited the fish in the box and gleefully began to paw through the contents.

**TNLN/SL- Took nothing, left nothing, Signed log**

Most of the time, we aren't interested in the contents of the caches. Usually, when I tell people about Geocaching, they ask me what the best thing I've ever found was. The honest truth is, I have yet to find something of distinct value. A button from the Australian Zoo that says “Crocs Rock!”, an Oscar Meyer Wiener Whistle, a monkey stamp—not necessarily treasure, or for that matter very useful. But these are the only things I have taken

from caches. I replaced them with a necklace, with a small racecar, a travel bottle of scented hand sanitizer. Nothing of substantial value. Which makes it hard to explain why, yes, Geocaching is a treasure hunt, but it really isn't about the treasure.

Geocaching is kid friendly, has evolved from its roots as a hobby known only to the early lovers of GPS technology into a family oriented reason to be outside and explore—and the contents of the caches adhere to this. For the most part at least. Cachers will scratch out inappropriate messages in the log books, remove smashed beer cans and condoms. I hope it isn't other geocachers that leave these taboo items, but I also cringe to feel so incredibly *adult* when I think, *damn teenagers* as I pull out a cigarette butt. The treasure hunt is written into the mythology of childhood. The classics of the genre—*Holes*, *The Goonies*, *Treasure Island* resonate because they present an adventure with a distinct purpose, a tangible goal. And that goal is treasure. There's a danger in each of these stories though; would the treasure at the end still be as valuable if the road to it had been an easy one?

I was a beach comber as a child, foregoing sandcastle building to sift through rock piles looking for clouded agates and poppy-jasper. Every August until I was about fifteen years old, my family took a camping trip out to the Olympic Peninsula, pitching our tents in a primitive campground on a bluff overlooking Kalaloch beach. Winter storms pushed driftlogs up against the base of the rocky bluff, creating a dangerous mess of splintering trees gnarled by sea water. Signs warned that beach logs kill. And the Pacific Ocean isn't warm either. Hovering around 45 degrees, hypothermia is a distinct danger. The riptides along Kalaloch beach are treacherous, waves crashing while simultaneously sucking back the sea water and anything left on the sand. As a child, I wasn't allowed to be down on the

beach without an adult, and even then I wasn't allowed to go any deeper than my knees into the ocean. So I would stand on the shore, letting the waves envelope my ankles, and feel the sand shift beneath my toes, the motion of the waves making me feel as if I was running backwards though I hadn't moved. I would let the waves bury my feet with the fine silt of grey sand.

After my feet went numb from the icy pacific tides, I would set about walking the tideline in search of shells. I wanted an unbroken sand dollar, or cavernous pastel swirl of a moon snail shell. Instead, I found the bottoms of sand-dollars, their crowns smashed by the beaks of birds. The closest I came to finding a moon snail shell was the slime trail left behind, like a clear jello ring. When I tired of my search, I'd join my father beyond the high tide line of kelp tangle and driftwood. We would carefully pick our way through drift logs, searching for glass fishing floats. Before being replaced with foam and plastic, glass floats were used to keep fishing nets and draglines from sinking below the waves.

We came every summer to Kalaloch because it was where my mother had camped as a child with a group of people from the Unitarian Church. When my parents were first dating, my mother brought my father along. My father loved camping—the beach fires that grew so large and so hot, falling asleep in a tent, the white noise of ocean waves. One of the first summers my parents went to Kalaloch together, my father found a glass float tucked safely in the sand beneath a sun-bleached log. The pale blue-green glass, unblemished, had survived the riptides, floated up past the the tide line on a rough winter storm, taking refuge in the crook of a beach log. Over the next few years, my parents would find two more floats, another glass-blue and a dark brown amber that reflected golden under direct light. As a



child, these floats were a wonder to me—the same ocean that was able to violently pile broken logs, could gently hide a fragile glass orb. I grew up wanting for my own, one of the glass floats displayed on the mantel piece—next to a whole conch shell, at the base of a Cutty Sark replica.

Though we never found one together, I remember spending hours searching. The excitement at stumbling upon a black tangle of netting, my small numb fingers pulling away the seaweed and brushing away sand, and then the letdown when the net came up empty. But one Christmas years later, my father gave me a blown-glass float filled with sand and shells collected from the coast of Washington. After lifting it from the tissue paper wrapping, I gave the globe a gentle shake. The sand shifted to reveal a perfect white sand dollar, only the size of a nickle.

I don't often take from the small collections of trinkets in caches. I took the Australia Zoo pin for my mother, who still keeps a picture of Steve Irwin on the fridge, a speech bubble above him exclaiming “Crikey!” The temporary tattoos, the marbles, these I leave for children who need the promise of a treasure to get them this far. A treasure might be enough to sustain them on the drive out to the mountains, on the mile and a half hike in the mud and cold to find the cache. For us, finding the cache is enough. Brandon and I discover the containers, sift through the contents, and sign the log book before closing up the cache and replacing it in its hiding place. When we get home, we fill out a digital log, typing in the acronym to say we took nothing from the cache. Sometimes though, there is something we really want.

**Picked up TB**

It was on a Wednesday in August that we got up early and drove across the border, through downtown Vancouver and parked at the base of Grouse Mountain. Brandon and I had conquered most of the more challenging hikes in the Bellingham area—Oyster Dome, Table Mountain on Baker, the Heliotrope Ridge hike to the Coleman glacier. It was time for a challenge, and that challenge became the Grouse Grind. Winding its way up to the top of Grouse Mountain in North Vancouver, just past the Capilano Gorge, the Grouse Grind is a trail of 2,830 stairs, gaining 2,800 feet in just 1.8 miles. It's not a pleasant hike. The stairs are crude, carved out of the bedrock or made by uneven wooden crossbeams. The rise at times so steep it might as well have been a ladder. The trail switchbacks on itself, and on the day we hiked, there was a fine mist in the air giving the trail above the appearance of steps disappearing into infinity. At first, the hike was easy, Brandon and I passed slower groups of hikers, raised eyebrows to one another over the muscled runners tackling the Grind, or older couples swinging hiking poles like they were on their Nordic-track at home. As we passed two women, one turned to the other and said, “Look at those two—not even sweating! Oh youth!” An attractive woman in tight fitting yoga pants passed us and I said to Brandon, “Look, I got you a present,” as we watched her calves strain with each stair she climbed.

The quarter way mark is a popular place to turn around. Hiking down the Grouse Grind is not permitted, the grade too steep to be regarded as safe. Really, after the quarter way point, there is no turning back. It was a fact Brandon had to keep reminding me of frequently after we passed the half-way point and I began to feel like my hips were grinding in their sockets. For Brandon and me, the quarter way point was a Geocaching break. While catching our breath, we wandered just slightly off the Grind trail, down a small embankment

to the base of a large tree where the cache was located. Inside, we found Mr. Nosey, our first trackable Travel Bug. I squealed with delight—we had anxiously been opening caches for weeks now, hoping to find a travel bug inside.

Travel bugs are items that travel from one Geocache to another, moving by way of the Geocachers that find them and drop them off in a new location. Travel bugs can be anything—a Beanie Baby, toy car, a plastic animal. Mr. Nosey happened to be a Flonase pencil sharpener in the shape of a nose. What makes them trackable, turns them from curio into travel bug, is the metal dog tag an owner attaches to the object. Trackable tags can be purchased online or even at REI for around five dollars. Each tag has a unique code printed on it. By entering this code on the Geocaching website, members can log the actions they make with the trackables—they can discover them, pick them up, or drop them off. Each trackable also has its own listing on the Geocaching website, giving the original owner of the travel bug and the “travel goals” each bug has. Mr. Nosey's goal was to travel to places where he could breathe in plenty of fresh air—whatever that meant. These listings also show the history of each bug—where they've come from, how many miles they've traveled. After discovering Mr. Nosey, Brandon stowed the TB away in his backpack—which smelled heavily of eucalyptus oil to ward off insects—and we took him home with us to log and track. Mr. Nosey originated in New York and traveled over 2,000 miles from cache to cache before we discovered him. We placed him in a highly trafficked cache near our apartment. Since being picked up and relocated, Mr. Nosey hasn't been logged in over three months. His whereabouts are unknown.

Travel bugs might be Brandon's favorite part of Geocaching. He loves traveling, and

I think he understands the vicarious wishes of each travel bug owner. The ability to look up your item, one you left in a cache right outside your front door and know that it has managed to travel from one hand to another for over 2,000 miles is a thrilling possibility. Geocachers often post pictures of Travel Bugs at historic or interesting places, like vacation pictures.

There's a risk with Travel Bugs though—tracking them depends fully on the participation of other cachers, and there is no guarantee that once you send your travel bug out into the world, that you will ever see it again. I once received a message from a German geocacher wondering if I'd seen her son's green duck travel bug in a cache I had recently logged; they had lost track of the duck and her seven year-old son was worried. Though the duck was listed as being in the cache on the website, physically there was no duck to be found. I received another email from a cacher in New Hampshire thanking me profusely for logging his eagle trackable after over a year of non-activity. He wrote me saying that it was great to see cachers still playing the game fairly—that the geocacher who had the eagle TB before me had been hoarding the bug. As per the suggested guidelines, I moved “Eegie”—as I began calling the plastic eagle trackable—along to a cache disguised as a birdhouse two weeks after I retrieved it from a cache near my parents' house in Kirkland. The birdhouse cache overlooked the Columbia River in a small town called Pateros, located in the eastern half of Washington. The night before, Eegie was tucked away in my purse as Brandon and I sat on an embankment above the stands to watch a high school football game. We cheered on the Pateros Billygoats louder than either of us had ever cheered for our own Alma-maters—and only because it was the solitary excitement to be found in the whole town on a Friday night.

The payout for hiking the Grouse Grind is the view of Downtown Vancouver as seen from the ski lodge at the top. In fact the top of Grouse Mountain is a popular tourist attraction. There are nature trails along the shores of an alpine lake, daily raptor shows and log rolling competitions in the summer months. The top of the mountain can also be reached by Gondolas, which run up and down the mountain every fifteen minutes. By the time we hauled ourselves up the last few stairs, the fine mist from the morning had turned to a heavy downpour. The only view was a hazy mist with shadows of evergreen trees breaking through, and the other mountaintop activities were closed due to the weather. We were satisfied though, because we'd taken a payout that no other hiker that day could claim: Mr. Nosey, our first travel bug. We didn't declare him at customs either—especially not after the border guard snorted when we told him how long it had taken us to hike the Grind.

#### **TFTC- Thanks for the Cache**

The most surprising thing to me about the Geocaching community was how extensive it was. Groundspeak, the company that runs Geocaching.com is based in Seattle. I thought that Geocaching was perhaps a Pacific Northwest hobby, or that at least caches were spread far and few between and the hobby relatively obscure. I was pleasantly surprised to find how wrong I was. Within my neighborhood alone, there were upwards of fifteen different geocaches. Globally, there are geocaches on every continent and I have yet to find a country—with the exception of North Korea—that does not have somewhere within its boundaries a geocache. The total number of active caches is about 1,940,000 and there are over 5 million geocachers. There is even a travel agency that helps customers plan an entire vacation based around the geocaches available in certain regions.

If a geocache is placed successfully, the find is twofold. Not only does the geocacher discover the cache, but hopefully they discover a place they may not have otherwise sought out themselves. A well placed cache should make a person yell out “I found it!” for more than one reason.

We had started getting bored with Bellingham the summer we started Geocaching. Brandon and I could only take so many aimless walks downtown, and we were noticing the number of trails we hadn't hiked was dwindling. Brandon gets stir crazy if kept inside too long, and I have a tendency to brood when confined to a single place. These personality traits don't work well together. Brandon will burst into my room, jump onto my bed and tell me how bored he is, but since I'm brooding and low on energy, all he accomplishes is annoying me. We're close friends, and find that the best way to maintain our roommate relationship is to stay busy. The first apartment we shared was a short walk from downtown Bellingham and so it was easy enough to fill hours with walks to the bay or down for drinks at a happy hour on Sunday afternoons. We moved to the other side of the university's campus though, that summer, and found that walking through the neighborhood was even more aimless than walking downtown. We needed a change, a fresh perspective on our city. Geocaching gave it to us. Within the first few weeks of our regular caching adventures, we discovered two new parks we had never known existed, and even better, we now had something to do when we went out for a walk around our neighborhood.

Perhaps my favorite discovery was a cache located just off the Mount Baker Highway at mile marker 40. An unmarked trail leads into a grove overgrown by massive cedar trees. Perhaps it's because of my last name, but I've always had a fondness for trees.

As a small child I pretended to be a tree doctor, applying compresses of mud and crushed herbs from my mother's garden to the scars of my backyard trees' trunks where a limb had been ripped off in a windstorm. I would reapply the dressing, checking to see if the sap was still oozing like an open wound, if the bark was beginning to grow back like a scab.

While Brandon searched for the cache, I instead walked around the trunks of these massive trees, put my arms around them to see if I could guess at their circumference. Because the tree cover was so dense, our GPS lost satellite signal, and the hint, “At the base of largest tree,” didn't lead us directly to the cache. Brandon stood back and watched for a time as I ran from one tree to the next. These were trees were so massive I imagined hollowing out the base to build a house. The limbs seemed to be breathing out the cedar perfume I smelled thick in the air. I would have been happy enough to climb onto the trunk of a fallen tree and walk along its length from root to crown, but I knew Brandon wanted to find the geocache and achieve what it was we had stopped here for.

Like anything though, geocaching is not without its controversy. In November of 2005, a bomb squad was called in after two individuals were spotted with a suspicious container outside of a police station in Provo, Utah. The station and surrounding area were put under lock down, and the bomb squad detonated the suspicious container, only to find it was a police themed cache. After incidents like this one, rules and regulations for the placement of caches had to be amended. Caches must now be submitted for approval before they are posted and available for other geocachers to discover. Caches are not to be placed near government buildings, school, police and fire stations, or in National Parks. As an alternative, Earthcaches were developed—a type of virtual cache. Instead of taking a

geocacher to the location of a physical cache, Earthcaches are intended to aid in the learning of something about the natural world. Maintained by the Geological Society of America, in order to receive credit for the find a geocacher must answer a simple question about historical or scientific significance of the area in which the Earthcache is located.

Other groups are not opposed to Geocaching, but feel that the activity should be completely free of paid content. Though a basic Geocaching.com account is free, a premium membership can be purchased as well. This membership allows geocachers to receive notifications of newly posted caches in their area and opens access to a percentage of caches that are only available to premium cache members. Groundspeak also promotes GPS technology, and has released a line of Geocaching merchandise. Sites like Opencaching.com are completely free, yet they do not have the number of caches or members as what Geocaching.com operates with. Between the years 2010 and 2012, Groundspeak has been rated as one of the top Seattle companies to work for by *Puget Sound Business Journal*, *Seattle Met*, *Outside's*, *Seattle Business* and NWJobs.com. The company's office is called “Headquarters” by the geocaching community and cachers can arrange to visit the building in order to tour the facilities and of course, log the cache hidden there.

Groundspeak also sponsors Geocaching events—sometimes hundreds of geocachers will meet up together and either hide new caches, or search the area for as many caches as they can find. I read a log once from a cacher who said he'd logged 90 caches in one day during an event. Brandon and I consider logging 7 caches in one day a big deal. These events are perhaps the only time when Geocachers meet up with one another in the real world. Though Geocaching.com is a community space, I'm not sure I would go so far as



consider it a form of social media. As with Brandon and me, it appears that any members who are friends on Geocaching were friends before they started caching—not because of it.

### **Muggled**

Perhaps one of the most telling signs of Geocaching's historical moment is the borrowed Harry Potter term “muggle.” In Geocaching though, a muggle is a non-geocacher, and a bystander to be avoided during a search. Caches will have attributes listed such as “In high muggle-trafficked area,” or “make sure to camouflage well to reduced the chances of this cache getting muggled.” An imbedded goal of Geocaching seems now to be: Find it, but don't let anyone else find you. With good reason though—how odd it might be to come across a person bushwhacking through ferns just off a trail, digging through leaves in a hollow tree stump. In fact, not only have caches been considered “suspicious” by law enforcement, but geocachers themselves are often stopped by police who observe them wandering around during a search. Though we've never been stopped, Brandon and I once endured the scrutinizing glare of an on-duty life guard as we searched in the brush for a cache just outside of the glass windows of the university recreation center's pool. Some geocachers will even wait until after dark to find a cache, reducing the likelihood they will be spotted.

I, on the other hand, don't care. I don't wait for people to walk past before I begin lifting up pieces of bark. I yell at the top of my lungs when I find the cache, alerting everyone in the area including Brandon. I don't understand the point in keeping the activity a secret, the community a collection of people exclusive from others. My thought is, how wonderful it would be to have someone walking past ask me what I was doing, and then join

in on the search. Though I'm sure not everyone would be as captivated by Geocaching as I am, I still think that there's something intrinsic in the drive to find things, the continued search.

### **BYOP- Bring Your own Pencil**

Geocaches come in different sizes, from micro sized caches that are only big enough to hold a rolled up paper log, to large plastic tubs. Small sized geocaches are usually the size of a tupperware container—big enough to hold a pen, log book, with leftover space for swag and Travel Bugs. One of the most common geocache containers is the metal ammo-can. Generally, the green metal boxes blend in well with the surrounding landscape, and stay watertight. Making sure a geocache stays dry inside is a major responsibility for cache owners. Members can write notes to cache owners when they think a cache needs maintenance which could be anything from a log book that has filled up, to cache containers that have been wrecked or damaged. Brandon and I hate opening a cache to find everything inside wet, the strong smell of mildew and mold inside the cache. It makes me regret giving away the travel hand sanitizer as I sometimes want nothing more than access to soap and water as the same musty smell clings to my fingers.

When we find a travel bug in a wet cache, Brandon and I usually write something in the log about, “rescuing” the bug from a soggy cache, as if we were letting a stray cat into the house for the night during a rainstorm. There was one travel bug though, that was so damaged from being in a wet cache, that we didn't even consider taking it with us. The cache itself was full of water, the log a soggy wad of decomposed paper. After dumping out the contents of the container, I counted no less than 12 slugs that had been inside. Brandon and I

had gingerly scooped everything back in, skeeved out when we accidentally touched one of the bloated slugs stuck to a piece of swag.

Some caches are so small that they cannot hold a pencil or pen to sign the log with. Most of the time, these caches are micros. Micros are a favorite of the caching community because of their size. Sometimes no bigger than a pill bottle, these caches are often very difficult to find. Geocachers love a difficult find.

Brandon hates Micros. He doesn't see the point of them since they are too small to contain travel bugs and swag. For the most part, I agree. If I'm searching for a cache, I want there to be a bigger pay out than signing a strip of paper. Because of the age of my GPSr, the accuracy isn't as high as a new GPS unit, making micros harder to find. If you're searching in a ten-foot radius for a regular sized geocache, then it's much easier to find. But if the object you're searching for in that same ten-foot radius is the size of a roll of pennies, then the search becomes tedious.

Micros are usually placed in urban settings. It makes sense though, since a geocache located in a populated area would need to be hidden in a way that a passerby wouldn't mistake it for trash. Urban geocaching is not very rewarding—rarely are these caches located in intriguing places, instead located in the back alley of car dealerships or magnetically stuck to the base of a street light. I can see that geocachers would enjoy the chance at practicing their stealth with these finds—searching at night, or waiting for pedestrians to walk past before making a quick snatch. But since stealth isn't something Brandon and I care much for, micros and urban caching appeal very little to us.

**DNF- Did Not Find**

Not only can a member log a find on Geocaching.com, they can also log a “Did not find.” This log designation is in place to help the cache owner in the maintenance of their cache. If there's a string of three or four DNFs in a row, then most likely the cache has been moved or mugged. Even if there are a large number of DNFs sprinkled in with a few logs of member that did find the cache, then the cache owner might want to update the coordinates of the cache, or even give a better description or hint.

I'm sure most people would agree when I say: I hate failing. And that's how it feels when I spend twenty minutes searching for a cache, and never finding it. I become frustrated, give up, and usually attribute the cache to a foolish cache owner that didn't give a proper description. But actually, I take this small failure much easier than Brandon does. If I can't find the cache after about fifteen minutes, and I feel as if I have looked in all the places I think it could possibly be, I'm ready to give up and move on. Brandon though, Brandon hates to give up. He'll look under the same group of ferns three or four times, will snatch the GPSr from me, walk in a circle to see if he can get a better reading. If he notices that I've given up, he'll shout something at me like “Did you look over there? You should look again, look harder.”

Neither of us have logged a DNF, though there have been many caches we have looked for without finding. If I honestly think that the cache has been removed, or if I think the hint needs updating, I find other ways to alert the cache owner. Though I try to convince myself otherwise, DNFs seem warranted for beginners, for people who are looking for an extra hint.

**CITO- Cache-in, Trash-out**

Nature conservation groups have attacked Geocaching in the past for its promotion of damage to wildlife. Some site the pollution hazards of placing plastic and non-natural containers into natural eco-systems. Geocaching has also come under attack because members are said to damage the natural environment as they bushwhack through the forest in search of caches. Some caches have been placed in areas with out the land owner's permission, though the cache approval process usually catches these issues before the cache is publicly listed.

In an effort to clear Geocaching's name, and also to promote the spirit of exploration, Groundspeak developed the Cache-in Trash-out motto. This is simply a suggested practice of geocachers picking up any garbage they may find along the path they take to find the geocache they are searching for. Regional events are scheduled by geocachers at parks and along beaches focused on clean-up efforts. The idea of land stewardship is something I had always inherently associated with Geocaching—if there were not natural spaces to seek out and discover, then where would caches be located? The preservation of these spaces is the preservation of the hobby.

I was raised by a family that valued land stewardship. My parents taught me about local plants and animals, taught me how to gently touch the sea-anemone I might find in a tide pool. When camping, as a family we would go on Park Ranger guided beach clean-ups. This practice continued when I was a teenager and my father would take me out in the woods to go off-roading. Instead of throwing soda cans into the bushes like other drivers, my father and I collected the garbage and broken cars parts left on the side of the trail.

Brandon and I sometimes find it difficult to practice CITO, most often because we

simply forget to bring along a trash bag to collect the garbage in. Another problem we encounter is that most often we go geocaching while hiking. Sometimes it's just not feasible for us to carry a bag of trash in our backpacks for a six mile hike up and down a mountain side. But I wish that weren't the case. I wish I remembered to put the trash bags in my backpack, remembered the feeling I had as a child that I was changing the world with every piece of trash I picked up.

**\*\*\*\*\*- Strenuous Terrain**

Ken Jennings Geocaches. Ken Jennings, who won 74 *Jeopardy!* games before he lost during his 75<sup>th</sup> consecutive appearance on the trivia game-show. Ken Jennings is my hero—currently residing in the Seattle area, Jennings is a trivia god. Back when I competed with friends in local bar trivia nights, we'd watch *Jeopardy!* for practice, shouting out answers at each other. A friend found a station that showed syndicated rebroadcasts of older shows. When repeats of Jennings's appearances came up in rotation, we recorded them over a few weeks time and spent an entire Saturday yelling at the television and congratulating one another for knowing obscure facts on geography and show-tune history. We toasted Jennings's wins—his scrawl of an answer during final *Jeopardy!*—beers clinking all around.

In his book *Maphead*, Jennings dedicated a whole chapter to geocaching. I know this, because Brandon read his book, cover to cover and then sat next to me on the couch while I read the part about caching, just to make sure I laughed at the appropriate moments. The title was what sold Brandon on the book: he loves maps. When I go out of town, the only thing Brandon asks me to bring back as a souvenir is one of those cheesy free maps they give away at hotel front desks, the snapshots of tourist attractions around the outside

edges. His bedroom walls are covered with maps he has collected over the years from school surpluses and clearance deals on Amazon.com. When we go Geocaching, one of Brandon's favorite parts is to draw a crude map of the area we're heading to, marking the approximate distance between caches and their location along trails and streams.

Finding out Ken Jennings geocaches was equivalent to a celebrity endorsement for us. Brandon kept asking me trivia facts,

“Hey, do you know about the OCB?”

“You mean the Original Can of Beans that Dave Ulmer put in the first Geocache? The most logged trackable in all of Geocaching. What about it?”

“Nevermind,” Brandon finished, defeated, “of course you know that; you know *everything*.”

Brandon isn't as charmed by trivia. It is perhaps the only part of our friendship that doesn't meet our expectations. I sometimes wish that he wanted to join my trivia team, or even just watch Jeopardy with me before dinner. And he sometimes gets annoyed with my penchant for spouting off random facts. I will admit, perhaps I do manage to steal his thunder sometimes. Brandon is reserved, but he becomes almost gleeful if he has a interesting tidbit to share with me. Perhaps it's because of all those nights playing *Jeopardy!* and yelling out the answer before anyone else, that I always manage to step all over Brandon's stories.

Jennings's chapter perhaps was not as revelatory to me as it was for Brandon since I, following my trivia inklings, had already done extensive research on Geocaching a few days after we started pursuing the hobby. It didn't matter though—I fell further into hero worship

of Ken Jennings. His humor was biting, and inspired instantaneous kinship for our fellow cacher. Jennings was disgusted by what he called *micro-spew*—the over abundance of caches too small to hide any sort of swag or travel bug. It's obvious what we did next: we Geostalked Ken Jennings.

Cache owners have the ability to rate the difficulty of their Geocache—based both on the terrain the cache is located in, as well as the difficulty of actually finding the cache. A five star rating is the hardest rating a cache owner can give. “A Hard Scrabble” is rated as a five star terrain cache. It's only been successfully found 29 times according to the Geocaching weblog. And Ken Jennings devoted five pages of his chapter to the detailed search he undertook to find the cache. Brandon read through each of the logs, and through process of elimination was able to positively identify Ken Jennings's Geocaching handle. It was like we'd solved a crime, or uncovered a geological find.

It's slightly embarrassing how excited we were about it. We tore apart his profile, reading through all of his logs, drawing up our own statistics and conclusions about Ken Jennings: the man, the Geocacher. He's never logged a cache in Canada! He's only logged 8 trackables! He's logged almost 1000 caches! He's visited both Groundspeak Headquarters *and* the Original Cache Location! Brandon and I were in awe.

What to do with that information though? Do we send him a message, confessing we'd uncovered his secret identity? Or should we quietly stalk his Geocaching handle, plotting the relative location of his house so we could *accidentally* bump into him while were caching in the greater-Seattle area. Collectively, once we realized how crazy we were starting to sound, Brandon and I chose instead to honor Ken Jennings's Geocaching legacy



in a more appropriate way: we decided to go caching.

Brandon and I had done a five star terrain cache before, climbing up the side of a hillside in Pateros, Washington which overlooked the mouth of the Methow River as it met the Columbia. It was difficult to climb through the rocks, and find footing on the steep incline. But the search took under a half hour, and the cache was easy to locate. Now, 7 months after we found it, Brandon and I are still the last to have logged a find in the weblog. But really, since there wasn't a standard set of guidelines for how to rate terrain, this rating varies drastically. The Grouse Grind cache was only rated as a 3.5 difficulty for terrain.

So really—how difficult was “A Hard Scrabble”? If Ken Jennings (who to the best of our knowledge hasn't hiked the Grouse Grind) could do it, so could Brandon and I. The description on the website describes a series of guide ropes used to scale 430 feet up the side of a cliff to the top of a waterfall. Could we handle that?

Brandon was about to hit his 100<sup>th</sup> found cache. Finding a five star terrain cache which Ken Jennings devoted a narrative to in his New York Time's Bestseller seemed like a perfect way to celebrate this milestone. He was hesitant though.

“I'm not sure,” Brandon said, “isn't it far away? And really, you have to use ropes to climb up the side of the cliff?”

I wasn't willing to give in though. I found directions, packed a snack, and handed Brandon his hiking boots.

The trail head was only half an hour away, the trail unmarked just like mentioned in the description. There wasn't really a trail for us to follow, just the stream which we followed to the base of the waterfall a half-mile from where we had parked. It was early spring, and

the weather was finally starting to show it—the temperature was still cool, but the sky was surprisingly cloudless.

Hard Scrabble Falls gets a 42.5% rating according to the Northwest Waterfall Survey—but I think I might have to argue against that. Multi-tiered, the falls have carved caves and channels out of the cliff-side. It's the type of off-the-beaten-path location I love about Geocaching—a hike we wouldn't have found otherwise. And, just as the cache description said, we found the first of seven ropes, draped down the muddy hillside just to the left the waterfall's base. Brandon gave the rope a hard pull, looked back over his shoulder at me and said,

“Are we sure about this?”

“You go first,” I replied.

After the first two ropes, we found ourselves looking down on the lower tier of the falls. The climb turned out to be easier than expected, the ropes a guide while we found our footing on roots and outcroppings of rocks. Brandon had taken to video taping our caching adventures, so after hoisting his leg at the end of each rope, he turned back to focus his camera on me awkwardly scrambling up the muddy hillside.

“We've got to capture each stage!”

From the top of the waterfall, there is an unobstructed view of farmlands in the Van Zandt Valley down below, framed by the foothills of Mount Baker beyond. Brandon and I sat out on the bank of the stream, throwing peanut shells into the small rapids created as the water flowed closer to the cliff's edge. We were racing, trying to see who could get their peanut shell to travel furthest, who could follow its course the longest. After a break, and a

quick snack, it was time to start hunting.

Forty minutes later, we were getting frustrated. From the logs left on the cache's page, it was apparent that cachers debated the actual location of the geocache. Some claimed that markers had been moved, and one cacher had even commented that she had moved the cache ten feet away to a “better” location. Brandon and I were convinced that as long as we found the general area, we could poke our way through the expected hiding places.

“Seriously though—are you really worried about hiding it well when it takes a person seven different rope systems to climb up here?!” Brandon was getting frustrated. He has more patience for searching than I do, but then becomes almost enraged when he can't find a cache. I just shrug it off—we can always try again some other time to find this one.

But not finding a cache—especially one with the prestige of “A Hard Scrabble”—does manage to change the tone of an outing. Upon reaching the waterfall's peak, we were elated, thankful that the weather was holding out and that the scenery was breathtaking. All of that seemed to melt away though, the instant we started to guide ourselves back down the rope, empty handed. Going back down the ropes was almost like falling with a guide—slower going, but with less effort put into the whole process. When we reached the bottom, Brandon was still in a foul mood.

“Listen,” I told him, throwing an arm around his shoulder, elbow resting on his backpack, “we can't let a DNF change how we see this hike. The hike was successful, and really isn't that why we started this?”

This wasn't a literal treasure hunt—really all that was at stake was a plastic box with some paper inside. But there is something off-putting about defeat, a feeling that compels

many of us to achieve further, to seek out more, even so far as to pretend what we're doing mean something more. Brandon did find his 100<sup>th</sup> cache that day, just off the trail on the way back to the car. The log was wet, we couldn't even sign it. That night, Brandon logged a DNF on the cache: "I've got 99 caches, but this ain't one." He showed me the log before he submitted it,

"I've never physically logged a DNF before, but this seemed like a good time to start."

### **GPSr- Global Positioning Satellite receiver**

At midnight on May 1, 2000, President Bill Clinton turned off the switch for Selective Availability, allowing civilians unrestricted access to GPS technology. Up until that time, civilian access to GPS transmission had been limited, the signal purposefully weak. The pure signal could only be used by the military. The government maintained that this was for security reasons. Still, there was a group of people who were intrigued by GPS technology—however limited—and multiple internet forums existed, discussing the uses and limitations of the technology. Dave Ulmer was an member of such a forum. On May 3, 2000 he hid what he referred to as the first "stash" and challenged others to hunt it out. Now considered the original Geocache, there is a tribute plaque on the spot where Ulmer buried a five gallon bucket, and the digital log for the plaque boasts over 6,000 finds. Geocachers call this Mecca, joke about making a geocaching pilgrimage. Some call Dave Ulmer the grandfather of Geocaching, though in multiple interviews Ulmer has admitted that he rarely logs his caches—his profile lists a modest number of 17 finds—and says that he uses caches as markers from one exciting location to another. He now travels around the United States in

an RV, using GPS coordinates to plan his route.

At times, it seems odd how much I love hiking out into an area I've never been. As a child, it felt dangerous to even unlatch the back gate and step beyond the fence-line. I would get a queasy feeling in my stomach as I reached up to flip the black powder-coat latch. Thinking back now, I'm not sure why it seemed so dangerous to exit through the gates and out into the side yard shaded by the neighbor's overgrown cherry tree. The fallen cherries, the ones that hadn't been picked over by birds, would squish between my bare toes, staining them a sticky red. Had my parents told me some danger of being hit by car out near the road, or of strangers that might walk past? I don't remember why, but the few times I did leave the confines of my familiar backyard did not excite me as much as terrified me queasy.

Why then should I risk venturing into the unknown without reason? I was always fearful of getting lost as a child—would panic if my parents were out of sight in a public place. If I found myself separated from my parents, I would try to imagine the directions I would need to walk home from the grocery store if I wasn't able to find my mother again. I would mentally retrace the route, try to remember where the crosswalks were. How long it would take me to walk home—would I ever even make it? At one point in history, I'm sure losing touch with home was a routine fear. But with that fear comes the slightest edge of pleasure. Is that what my Grandfather George felt when he stepped onto an unfamiliar beach—but can you really be lost without a home to return to?

But a treasure hunt, now there was a reason to venture. Treasure hunts involved maps, the ability to retrace your steps, and beyond that was the chance at riches, at something life changing held under lock and key in a simple chest. It wasn't until I moved

away from my home town that I realized I could trust my own sense of direction and ability to navigate. I even felt comfortable with putting myself into a position that I might end up lost. The turning point was probably the day I was forced into learning to drive a manual car. I was driving from my parents' house to the train station in Edmonds. I was competent with a manual car—as long as I didn't stop on any hills. On the way home from the station though, I took a wrong turn and found myself in an unfamiliar area. I was so mixed up directionally, that instead of turning around and heading back the way I had come, I inadvertently started moving further in the opposite direction. At some point, I ended up in the Green Lake area of Seattle—across Lake Washington from my parents' house in Kirkland. Not only was I lost in Seattle, but I was also in a vehicle I could barely drive. With its maze of one-way streets and steep hills, I avoided driving in Seattle even in a car I was comfortable with. I killed the engine midway through intersections, sobbed as I jammed in the clutch and shifted gears, the engine sputtering back to life as I limped through traffic. There were moments when I honestly wondered if I should find a police officer—would a policeman help a stranded twenty year old? Or would he give me a ticket for inability to operate my vehicle? I didn't have a cell phone at that time, I was alone.

There's something about being totally defeated that clarifies things. Somehow, I was able to logically place myself on the map of Seattle I pictured in my mind. I took a deep breath and identified which direction was North, telling myself that if I drove north, in the worst case scenario, I knew how to get myself home from Everett, a city forty minutes north of both Seattle and my hometown of Kirkland. It was the first moment in my life where I realized I didn't need to rely on my parents for direction, that I could trust myself. From that

point, I was able to very easily drive myself almost directly home. I only killed the engine three more times, luckily.

I'm not afraid of wandering away from my home now, about ending up in a place I've never been to. Now there are times when I crave it. My GPS unit is one of the first developed after the removal of Selected Availability. It's clunky, with limited features and all of seven buttons. Manufactured in 2000, the GPSr that Brandon and I use for caching is over twelve years old and can't get an accurate reading under tree cover, or even on particularly cloudy days. When the GPSr isn't able to get a clear signal, a screen pops up with an ironically existential caption stating, "Signal weak, need view of clear sky." But my GPSr is a comfort while exploring unfamiliar territory. Attached to the unit on a lanyard is a compass and—in case of emergencies—a black plastic bear whistle. Brandon and I haven't needed the whistle, but have used the compass many times to navigate paths through the thickening forest of Northwest Washington. We construct our map home, an amalgamation of digital signal and familiar locations. But we always look forward to getting lost again.