

ISSUE NO. 3

Poetry

Fiction + Nonfiction

Visual Art

# High Desert Journal

Sandy Anderson Josh Beddingfield Suzanne Burns  
Pamela Burry-Trice Greg Darms Marion Davidson  
Tim Greyhavens Shaun T. Griffin Elizabeth Grossman  
Gaylen Hansen Roger Hedden M.E. Hope  
David Jordan Teresa Jordan Herman Krieger  
Darius Kuzmickas Desireé Manville  
Amy Irvine McHarg Judith H. Montgomery  
Paulann Petersen Kirk Robertson Stephan Torre  
Nance Van Winkle Rich Wandschneider  
Alexander E. Weiss Gary Whitehead Joe Wilkins  
Brooke Williams Carolyn Winch Kathleen Yale



Spring 2006

\$10

POETRY

- 3 Kirk Robertson. *Driving to Montana with V.*
- 8 Shaun T. Griffin. *Frida in Winnemucca*
- 8 Pamela Burry-Trice. *Dead Center in a Square State*
- 14 M.E. Hope. *Poem for a Daughter*
- 20 Greg Darms. *Smoke Creek to Sulphur*
- 23 Alexander E. Weiss. *Water Rise*
- 28 Gary Whitehead. *Lava Butte*
- 28 Gary Whitehead. *One Day in July*
- 34 Carolyn Winch. Haiku
- 20 Paulann Petersen. *What Remains*
- 37 Kathleen Yale. *Swift Fox*
- 37 Marion Davidson. *Will Naming Quench the Thirst?*
- 40 Judith H. Montgomery. *Driving after Dark*
- 40 Stephan Torre. *Basho's Tail*
- 41 Nance Van Winkle. *The Cantina Music Was Too Gay*
- 41 Nance Van Winkle. *Something of the Bear*
- 48 David Jordan. *Meteor Shower*

VISUAL ART

- 2 Desireé Manville. photographs
- 6 Teresa Jordan. monotype
- 15 Herman Krieger. photographs
- 16 Gaylen Hansen. paintings
- 25 Teresa Jordan. broadside, poem and image
- 27 Tim Greyhavens. photograph
- 38 Darius Kuzmickas. photographs
- 51 Sandy Anderson. sculpture

ISSUE NO. 3 SPRING 2006

# High Desert Journal

FICTION AND NONFICTION

- 9 Suzanne Burns. *An Acquired Taste*
- 17 Amy Irvine McHarg. *Origins*
- 21 Brooke Williams. *Our Role in the History of the Future*
- 24 Elizabeth Grossman. *Migration*
- 29 Joe Wilkins. *Far Enough: A Western in Fragments*
- 35 Josh Beddingfield. *Planting Trees for Crocodile Tom*
- 42 Roger Hedden. *Release*
- 46 Rich Wandschneider. *Alvin Josephy's Love Affair with the West*

This page:  
Black Rock Desert, Nevada  
by **Tim Greyhavens**  
On the cover:  
Desert II, Nevada, 2001  
by **Darius Kuzmickas**



by **Gaylen Hansen**



*Dog and Magpie*, 1989  
Oil on canvas. 60 in. x 72 in.  
Courtesy of Linda Hodges Gallery, Seattle



*Fish & Fisherman*, 1987  
oil on canvas. 60 in. x 72 in.

“Much in this world is upside down. When you turn things upside down  
you also know what is right side up.”

– GAYLEN HANSEN

by Amy Irvine McHarg

# ORIGINS

¶One would have heard them first – the desperate, rumbling thunder of hooves. Shards of light tumbled from the sky and shattered on the desert floor, made the sagebrush and relic sea shells glitter a silver-green. Across the western states, the Great Basin bled its ancient sea bed: Portions of Oregon, California, Nevada, southern Idaho and Utah.

¶It was across this desiccated ocean they ran, the ocean that spanned much of the former Kingdom of Deseret. And to the men who followed the herd, it was still Deseret – part of a sprawling topography claimed by Brigham Young and his first wagon train of faithful in 1847. To those first Latter-Day Saints, it was irrelevant that Mexico still owned the land, that the vast lake at its edge was more salt laden, more lifeless, than the Dead Sea. For the persecutions they had suffered at the hands of eastern Gentiles, God had awarded them two vast physiographic provinces: This gray desert and a red one – the Colorado Plateau. Together they comprised the promised land – the place to tide the Saints over until they could reach their ultimate destination, the Celestial Kingdom. ¶Dust from the herd's hooves gathered and moved across the hard pan, swirled into a vortex of sweat and breath. To the men on their heels, it didn't matter that, after the U.S. had annexed this portion of the basin from Mexico, the government had not let them be. Instead its shadow loomed over their settlements and tried to police their practices – especially the one that involved marrying up and impregnating fourteen-year-old girls. It didn't even matter that a seriously truncated portion of their Zion had been renamed Utah – a tribute to some of the region's natives. In their minds, no map, no law or proclamation or army – unless directly issued from God – could ever alter Deseret. ¶From the cloud the band of wild horses broke, >

**I tell him I'm no outsider. I tell him  
And I tell him that if they are handing out points for most original,  
for which wagon came across Zion's  
but that I love nothing more for dinner**

running for their lives. Three cowboys were on the band's left flank, with two on the right and one off the back. Their heels dug hard into their mounts as they bore down on the herd, the tame forced to terrorize their wild cousins. Hollering harsh single syllables, the cowboys drove the band toward an outcrop of limestone cliffs. There the animals were bottlenecked into a dry wash, carved out of a flat, grassy bluff that loomed above them. Two by two the horses stumbled over stones as they ascended.

They broke out on top of the bluff. The cowboys circled them once, folding the herd into itself. There was a quick turn of hand from the man at the back then they pushed the confused cluster of animals across the meadow. The herd became a galactic nebula, indistinguishable except for the whines of panic, a blur of muscled bodies and thrashing tails.

At the edge of the bluff, the cowboys reined in their mounts at the last moment. The herd's momentum launched them into the silver-green light. There was a gorgeous, brief moment when the horses looked winged, as if carried on wind. And then the thud of bodies, the clack of hooves and bone striking rock below.

The cowboys grinned at each other, held their gloved thumbs up in the air. They'd given it to the federal government, and to the congressional act just passed to protect wild horses on federally owned lands. The buzzard-pecked carcasses would be found the next week by a Bureau of Land Management employee, who had received an anonymous tip. By the end of the week, the news would be broadcast across the nation, the feds furious at the Sagebrush Rebels who had demonstrated that no one tells them what to do with their deserts, or with any critter who competed with their cows for food.

The incident occurred in 1971 – over a century after the first wagon train of Mormon pioneers arrived. That same year, a federal study allocated forage for animals on western public lands. Of those lands, tens of millions of acres lay within the original boundaries of Deseret.

Seven percent of the forage was designated to indigenous wildlife: Deer, elk, antelope, big horn sheep. Thirteen percent went to wild horses and burros – not even native to the land.

Eighty percent was dedicated to domestic livestock.<sup>1</sup>

WE SCATTERED MY FATHER'S ASHES around his favorite duck blind, on the southeast end of the Great Salt Lake. They had hardly settled in the cattails before my truck was packed and headed to the opposite end of the state. There, I had rented a crooked blue house in the San Juan County seat of Monticello. From my father's desert – which sprawls gray and westward beyond the lake and encompasses the entire western half of my homestate – I wanted distance. And color. And so I went to redrock country – the desert of the Colorado Plateau. I love its capricious topography – its plunging canyons of bare pink stone, glistening with seeps and springs. Its roiling rivers, eating away at the sandy mauve banks beneath ragged, bloody spines of steeply rising anticlines. And its expletives – sandstone minarets that erupted from the desert floor like a bold stroke of red ink.

I moved to a county the size of three small New England States. Named for the river that crosses its southern end, San Juan County spans a total of 7,884 square miles. Only eight percent of that land is owned privately. The rest is Indian land and public land – the latter managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Forest Service. There are less than two people per

square mile. Not one shopping mall or condominium. A single stop light and liquor store.

But there are eleven Mormon Churches.

AND THERE IS AT LEAST ONE LAUNDROMAT. It is where I go on a temperamental spring afternoon, when Abajo Peak gathers clouds like the skirts of a Spanish dancer. Layers of steel blue tulle and ribbons of spectral silver swirl around the mountain. It's a good day to stay out of canyons, and off the computer. It is a good day to do laundry.

The place is empty – save the two Mormon missionaries who knocked on my door earlier that summer. I walk past them, to a row of vacant machines. Our eyes meet fleetingly; the young men quickly return to their folding. Two perfect and identical piles: White shirts, white socks, white briefs.

There is no doubt they remember our exchange. The taller one had tried to tell me that I had a lot to learn about the Church.

The Church. In Utah, we pronounce it with a capital C.

Little did he know that both sides my family were of Mormon origin, that for seven generations they have inhabited various portions of former Deseret. My mother's side are ranchers in southern Idaho. And my father's great-great grandfather was Major Howard Egan, a leader in the Mormon militia and a bodyguard to Joseph Smith – until the founding prophet was martyred in Carthage, Illinois. Egan was among those handpicked by Brother Brigham for that first wagon train of Mormons that came looking for Deseret, was one of the first to look upon the Salt Lake Valley and hear their new leader declare "This is the place." He homesteaded in the Great Basin's Deep Creek Mountains, and made the fastest time on record crossing its expanse by mule.

Eventually I had closed the door on the missionaries' pink, earnest faces. Now we stand in the laundromat in awkward silence. Outside, rain has begun to throttle the roof when suddenly, the front door bursts open. In strides a man who is larger than life, who looks and acts as if he were walking onto the saloon set of a spaghetti western. He sports creased Lee jeans and an unsoiled white Stetson.

With an air of familiarity, he slaps the missionaries' backs, bel-lows, "Good afternoon, Elders." The boys look up, their faces suddenly animated. The cowboy banter with them as he moves down the row of washers, where he sets down his laundry basket on the table nearest me. He tips his hat my way.

"Are the Elders giving you any grief, ma'am?" His eyes sparkle in jest. "Not today," I reply.

"You let me know if they do and I'll set 'em straight," he says, winking at the boys. I smile, and apologize for taking up so many machines. The cowboy waves me off, says he only needs one machine, as he is doing what he calls "bachelor laundry."

"So, where you from?" he asks, dropping quarters into the machine slots.

The cowboy is immaculately groomed, and looks to be about my age. He shares with me the classic Utah stock features of fair skin, blue eyes and blonde hair – most of us descended from converts who were Scandinavian or English.

"I live here," I reply.

He turns abruptly toward me, his eyebrows raised to demonstrate his profound sense of shock.

"Now why haven't I see you around? I know everyone in this town."

<sup>1</sup>Bernard Shanks, *This Land is Your Land: The Struggle to Save America's Public Lands* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1984), p. 185.

# Our role in the **HISTORY** of the **FUTURE**



by **Brooke Williams**

I'M STANDING ON A SMALL KNOLL somewhere between Rock Springs, and Lander, Wyoming, facing west. The wind dies and the huge quiet replacing it blends silence with balance, deep breath and heat. A cairn of black stones is the tallest form.

Of the free moments in my life, I've spent most of them in the wild. Wild places rugged, steep and barren. Places carved by big weather and time. Places where beauty goes beyond sight. Places where natural systems are the antidote for the spreading rash of civilization. Places in which civilization has yet to find something useful. I usually go to these places to rediscover a simpler, more serene part of myself and of the world. I am here now in the high desert of southwestern Wyoming for a different reason: to look for my great, great, great grandfather's grave.

WILLIAM WILLIAMS, my great, great, great grandfather, was born in Shrewsbury, England in 1808 and died in 1863, of mountain fever, within 10 miles of here, near one of the nine places where the Mormon Trail crosses the Sweetwater River in this high desert of southwestern Wyoming. At the time of his death, he was traveling with his wife, Mary, and youngest son, John George. They were part of the Mormon migration that took place between 1846 and 1896, during which 85,000 people made their way in large groups from Europe to Salt Lake City, Utah. The Williams family, like most of their traveling companions were poor and perhaps could not read or write. No journal or record of their journey exists.

I discovered William Williams and his birthplace, Shrewsbury, England, as part of a process to determine where I came from. Knowing this information, I felt, was the first step necessary to more fully explore my biological connection to 'place' – something I hoped might provide the foundation for understanding the importance of preserving wild places. Without records and with little detail from my personal genealogical information, I was easily distracted from my main goal of connecting to my lineage. I'd barely begun to explore where it was I came from when I discovered that Charles Darwin, my hero since high school when I first read of his voyage on the Beagle, was not only born in Shrewsbury, but within a year of William Williams. This discovery was the seed for an obsession that has lasted nearly a decade. Did William Williams and Charles Darwin know each other? Could they have been friends? What meaning, if any, exists from joining a personal and public history?

William Williams was born in a one-roomed house in the Frankwell neighborhood, not far from the center of Shrewsbury, England. I can still see the word, "Frankwell" in the blue glow of William Williams' birth record through the lens of the microfiche reader in Shrewsbury's Family history library. When I asked the attendant what that meant, she referred me to a town map showing the Frankwell neighborhood separated from the Shrewsbury town center by the Severn River.

My great, great, great grandfather was born there, I told her.

When?, she asked. I told her.

Poor lad, she said.

At the top of the main road transecting the neighborhood, the word "Mount" was printed. Dr. Robert Darwin built the Mount estate in 1797, where his son, Charles was born in 1809. I discovered that William Williams and Charles Darwin were born in houses within a five minute walk of each other.

According to the two page biography my grandfather wrote of

his grandfather, Thomas Valentine Williams, William Williams's oldest son, the family was too poor to send its children to school. Thomas was trained as a button maker, and his father supported his family as a 'joiner', who, as near as I can tell, is the person skilled in joining pieces of wood during the furniture manufacturing process. In a small pamphlet written to educate tourists about the Darwin family, I found the sentence, "Dr. Darwin was a generous man who would treat the poor people of the Frankwell neighborhood for free." In the book, *Shrewsbury, A Pictorial History*, the author, Tony Carr describes the neighborhood.

Frankwell, the western suburb, has many fine 16th century buildings in its streets. The name has not been explained. Though originally grand, most of the homes had become over crowded tenements by the 19th century and the alleys behind them were dirty and unhealthy as they lacked sanitation.

Frankwell, it seems, was the slums. My ancestors were poor people living in slums.

CHARLES DARWIN'S five-year, around-the-world journey formed the basis for his theory of natural selection – survival of the fittest – as the prime force in the evolution of life on earth over the past three billion years – a slow process of trial and error involving random mutations.

William Williams and Charles Darwin represent two different historical dimensions. I'm sure if I looked hard enough I could find a 'family tree', showing William Williams as the trunk, his children as the major branches. Somewhere at the far edge of the crown, I would find my own name hanging on some minor twig. Darwinism suggests that my family tree is not a separate entity, but actually one tiny branch of a different tree, the one including all life going back billions of years to those single-celled animals moving freely in that first primal soup.

IN 1855, THE MORMON Missionaries came knocking on the Williams' door. I imagine William and, his wife, Mary, pulling the few chairs they owned around the table – the table that was used for everything from sewing and washing clothes to eating. William chose the broken chair because he knew how to sit in it without falling. Since all the houses were built in back-to-back rows divided by a common wall, I can hear a neighbor baby crying, along with hungry dogs and the buzz and drone of the neighbor's struggles. I can smell the combined smoke from a dozen street-side fires cooking – the same smoke I've experienced in LaPaz, Bolivia, San Juan, Costa Rica and Lima, Peru.

MORMON MISSIONARIES in the nineteenth century in Europe were responsible for converting individuals and families to the faith and then arranging their emigration to Utah. It is plausible that, especially in cases involving poor families with little or no opportunity to change their situation, the promise of a new beginning was used as incentive to convert. For 30% of the Saints who emigrated to America between 1852 and 1887, this included loans from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund which Brigham Young set up in 1849. The Ten Pound Plan transported a person from England to Salt Lake City for what today would be \$1,000.

I imagine that while the Missionaries told the Mormon story (about Joseph Smith's vision of Christ in America after his resurrec-

tion), William looked around at the worn coats and clothes – mended dozens of times – hanging from hooks on the walls, over at the one large kettle and two small pans which, along with his aging tools, accounted for what he owned in the world. Then I imagine something happening to him when missionaries mentioned America, the City of the Saints – a place called Salt Lake City, in Utah – out west where anything was possible, anything.

Was it a small spark lighting up in his brain? Or did a charge go off leaving a fully technicolored, multidimensional film playing in his mind? Or was it simply a blood red drop of dense liquid falling into the murky grey water his life had become, slowly dissipating, giving everything around him a fresh, new color?

I imagine William Williams becoming obsessed with the possibility that his family might move to the City of Saints and start over. The seed planted by the Missionaries for a new life grew and grew until it fruited eight years later, when Williams, his wife and youngest son walked up the plank of the Cynosure on July 14, 1863, with 850 other 'saints.' Three months later, they were part of a wagon train on its way across America when Williams caught mountain fever near Laramie and died where the Mormon Trail crosses the Sweetwater River south of Lander, Wyoming two weeks short of Salt Lake City.

I WALKED THROUGH the Frankwell neighborhood in 2002. It is no longer the slums. Today there are shops on the ground level, apartments above. "Flats to let." "Rolls to take away." A real estate office, a wildlife trust, a tattoo parlor. Lighting, tool and antique stores. A mandarin chinese food restaurant and a bakery. There are small, dark alleys leading back behind the tidy store fronts. Ivy-topped walls. Apartments make up the second level. I discovered one vacant with the door open. Inside, I found cheerful rooms of white walls with white trim.

How many layers of paint, of dirt, of light, of breath since my ancestors lived near here?

DURING THE MONTH I spent in Shrewsbury, I walked back and forth through that neighborhood a dozen times trying to connect with my ancestors, trying to discover the friendship between William Williams and young Charles Darwin. Waiting for an impression, a liquid insight, a thought on which to hang something concrete.

Then it came to me. Those early Mormon Missionaries must have walked up one side of the Frankwell neighborhood streets and down the other until they had talked to every family who lived there. It may have taken a week or a month, but while everyone heard the same story – Joseph Smith; Christ in America; and oh, by the way, come to Utah for a brand new start – I doubt that everyone said "yes".

Granted, those that did say 'yes' could have done so having been spiritually converted by the Mormon story. The fact that William Williams had not been baptized into the faith in 1855 when his wife and a number of his children were, suggests that as the head of his house, the provider, he craved America for its economic opportunity.

I don't believe he was alone.

Early Euro-Americans saw wilderness as nothing more than an obstacle to riches, a sentiment that still exists today. Native cultures, unlucky enough to have lived in places with abundant natural resources were seen as obstacles to world economic wealth and were reduced, confined or eliminated completely, along with thousands of

generations of survival wisdom. Today we are constantly reminded of the fact that our current, pro-corporate administration is fueling a fight to undermine environmental legislation, consume what may be the last non-renewable natural resources and even sacrifice the health of its own citizens (not to mention the entire world population) in an effort to further build the riches of a few people. Overcoming all the 'obstacles' has led to material wealth unlike the older world could have imagined. Today in America, we are led to believe that we can have everything. But what did we lose by breaking loose from our roots?

From Psychologist Carl J. Jung:

For it is the body, the feeling, the instincts, which connect us with the soil. If you give up the past, you naturally detach from the past; you lose your roots in the soil, your connection with totem ancestors that dwell in your soil. You turn outward and drift away, and try to conquer other lands because you are exiled from your own soil. That is inevitable. The feet will walk away and the head cannot retain them because it also is looking out for something. That is the Will, always wandering over the surface of the earth, always seeking something. It is exactly what Mountain Lake, the Pueblo Chief, said to me: "The Americans are quite crazy. They are always seeking. We don't know what they are looking for. There is too much head and too much will. Too much walking about and nothing rooted."

In his recent book, *American Manic*, Peter Whybrow attempts to understand the stress of modern Americans living over-programmed, highly consumptive lives. He refers to the fact that modern Americans have descended from a small group of ancestors with a greater frequency for the "exploratory and novelty seeking D4-7 allele" in the dopamine receptor system of the brain. Modern research suggests that only 2 percent of all humans who have ever lived traveled more than 50 miles beyond the place they were born. Those 2 percent may have the D4-7 allele in common. If so, this allele could be part of the force motivating those Europeans who got on ships bound for America in search of unlimited and untapped resources, trading their connection to homeland for unknown rewards and concentrating this trait in a place with more-than-abundant resources. In fact, testing shows that the D4-7 allele appears at a greater frequency in modern Americans who have descended from European emigrants.

Millions of non-native Americans share my basic story and history – somewhere in all of our not-too-distant pasts, someone consciously chose an unknown opportunity in America over connection to their homeland, their 'place'.

Where does that leave us?

CIVILIZATION IS A VENEER, wrote Paul Shepard, philosopher and the father of human ecology, in his book *Nature and Madness*. I realize standing in the small track marking the Mormon and the Oregon Trails, how thin the veneer is among the black brush, sage and Wyoming wind. I also realize the past I'm reconnecting with through William Williams is only part of the story.

William Williams and I are not so different: he wanted a new life and so did I. A new life for me came when I went from one career selling construction supplies where making money was my only goal, to another focused on wildlands preservation and sustainability. William's goal was to tap into the opportunity he'd heard existed in America. My goal has always been to make my living by breaking through the veneer and working inside the core of life. Maybe both of



## 'TARGETS'

by **Craig Lesley**

**I SPENT TWO YEARS IN THE LATE 1950S** making America safe for democracy by keeping a vigilant eye out for enemy planes – North Korean and Russian piloted MiGs that might be threatening Oregon's interior near Madras. Watching for enemy planes was first and foremost on my mind. Tuesday and Thursdays after school, my friend Tub Hobson and I stood on the flat roof of the Madras Fire Department, scanning the horizon for hostiles. ¶ With the naked eye, and a single pair of cloudy binoculars traded back and forth, we repeatedly swept all four quadrants, taking no chances enemy planes would sneak by us to attack Culver, Gateway, or, God help us, open fire on Madras itself. Our Boy Scout leader had warned that even seemingly harmless

What did fly across the Madras skies during our watch? A yellow biplane crop duster, numerous magpies, a confused pheasant that wandered into town and dodged sparse traffic.

places like Metolius were prime targets, given the fact that they grew and stored potatoes there. He told of starvation during the Irish potato famines and how Stalin had starved the Ukrainians by taking away their potatoes. Now our enemies threatened central Oregon's spuds. I was convinced by the leader's speech, but Hobson was more skeptical.

"Hairballs," he whispered.

In spite of our best intentions, strict discipline faltered in about an hour. By that time, my eyes stung from staring over Mount Jefferson, Mount Bachelor, Three-Fingered Jack, and the Three Sisters, roughly the directions of North Korea and Russia, if you drew a line toward infinity.

Tub slugged me hard in the shoulder. "Don't rub it," he challenged.

His fists were bigger than mine and he had already grown the beginnings of a mustache.

"I think I felt a mosquito," I said but didn't rub it, even though it hurt like hell.

"I can throw farther than you can," Tub said.

"Not unless the bears come out of the woods."

"Betcha I can."

Dozens of rocks, some large as apples, mysteriously appeared on the flat composition roof before we manned each shift. We figured other high schoolers, probably the "hoods," threw them off – aiming for the city fire department's pumper truck parked in a gravel back lot a block away.

My shoulder remained sore after Tub's slug, but I limbered up and selected a baseball-sized rock. To gain momentum, I ran toward the roof's edge, then flung the rock hard and high. It clanged off the truck's water tank.

Imitating the voice of a baseball announcer, I spoke. "Tub Hobson rounds third and Lesley makes the throw from deep center field. It's going to be awfully close, folks, but he's called out at the plate. What a major-league throw!"

"Pure blind luck, you throwing that far." Tub spit on his right palm, wound up and threw with a mighty oomph.

The rock fell short.

Cupping my hand behind my ear, I asked, "Did you hear a clunk, Tub? Maybe I'm getting deaf."

Disgusted, he thrust his hands in his pockets and shrugged. "Hey, no kidding. How come you always out throw me, Lesley? You got smaller arms and skinnier shoulders." He seemed genuinely puzzled.

"Physics," I said.

"Physics?"

"Remember, you got a C in Mr. Johnson's physics class and I got an A. Momentum and thrust, Tub. Angle of trajectory. Keep that in mind."

"Weenie Arm!"

In that five minutes or so while we goofed off, I suppose a plane or two could have snuck by unnoticed, but fortunately, they didn't.

What did fly across the Madras skies during our watch? A yellow biplane crop duster, numerous magpies, a confused pheasant that wandered into town and dodged sparse traffic. Closer to the earth, we also spotted a few wobbly drunks escorted by the police from the Shangrila Bar to the city lockup, where they idled until their red-faced wives reclaimed them.

Thank heavens no enemy planes threatened Madras on our watch. In those days, the city police car had no radio (tight budget),

so if an emergency occurred, Madge Frudgett, the dispatcher, lit a red beacon on top of the firehouse. The light was visible from anywhere in Madras – except the dark, smoky bars. When he saw the light, Herb Vibbert, the officer on duty, would stop at a house, ask to borrow their phone and call in to see what was happening. All of this took time.

While Tub and I were freezing in the winter, baking in the summer, the light flashed only a few emergencies, but most were routine: stolen bicycles, cows breaking through fences, pregnant women going into early labor. Whoever spotted the flashing light first got to punch the other volunteer squarely in the shoulder and say, "Don't rub it," then add, "Do you see any enemy planes, Horse Face?"

Most shifts were uneventful outside of the throwing and punching. For the last hour of the shift, I gazed toward the snow-capped beauty of the Cascades – the jagged crest of Three-Fingered Jack, the rugged beauty of Broken Top – and I'd dream of catching brook trout later in the summer and hiking alpine meadows filled with wildflowers.

Shifting my eyes, I'd watch the sunlight glinting off the tin potato-shed roofs at Metolius and realize they did make ideal targets. Strengthened by my resolve to complete my duty, I'd stare hard at the sky another twenty minutes until black dots danced before my eyes. But even so, my mind wandered to my uncle Oscar's sporting-goods store and all the equipment I planned to buy with the summer earnings.

Finally, Madge would crunch out onto the gravel parking lot to announce our shift was over and invite us in for cookies and Kool-Aid in the dispatch room. We descended the shaky ladder while two more eager Civil Air Patrol volunteers headed for the roof.

After scarfing the drinks and sticking extra Sinckerdoodles into our pockets, Tub and I made our way toward separate homes, confident we had kept Madras safe for another three hours. We parted at the county jail, where sad-eyed men gestured out the bars, begging smokes.

"See you tomorrow, Bacteria Breath," Tub said.

"Same to you but more of it," I answered. I sauntered home, secretly pleased with his friendship and confident that any major league scouts visiting Madras would covet my throwing arm. Once again, Tub and I had guaranteed that central Oregon was safe from invaders.

Many years later, when the Metolius potato sheds finally did collapse, no one could discern a reason. Old age, gravity, saboteurs. No potatoes had inhabited the sheds for years, but a few transients had been reported taking up residency.

Earl Cordes, Jefferson County Fire Chief, drove out the five miles in response to a call from the sheriff's office. According to the story featured in the *Madras Pioneer*, Cordes yelled into the collapsed building (a dangerous mess) but got no response. "So far I've received no reply," he told the paper. "So they're either unconscious, dead, or not there."

I wonder what became of the so-called transients. Perhaps they were saboteurs, following sinister orders from a foreign power. Were they agents from Cuba, North Korea, the former USSR?

Maybe Cordes is right. "Unconscious," "dead" or "not there" implies no one is threatening central Oregon, but I'm not so easily convinced. Growing up with full knowledge of the Red menace, I know how sneaky those Commies can be. Even now, they could be hiding in seed carrots, the bluegrass fields or lurking in the mint, just waiting for us to lower our guard.