

Mapping the Dream: A Poetics of Remembering

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**Abstract**

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*The Things Downriver* is comprised of sequenced lyric passages that focus on the interlude of childhood in which the writer, Denise Calvetti Michaels, spent summers on the farm in Salinas, California, owned by her paternal Italian American grandparents. During this period the writer and younger brother freely explore the boundaries of the farm as they also steep themselves within diverse cultural exchanges among neighbors, family and friends. *The Things Downriver* speaks to the resilience of memory, as though memory itself is pursuing the writer who will pay attention and map dreaming. The writer's poetics statement reveals two primary influences on her creative work that include poet Yves Bonnefoy, whose essay *Arriere-pays*, maps the aesthetics of travel; and thesis adviser Renee Gladman, who made dreaming permissible.

## Mapping the Dream: A Poetics of Remembering

**memory** [n1] *ability to hold in the mind*

anamnesis, awareness, camera-eye, cognizance, consciousness, dead-eye, flashback, memorization, mind, mindfulness, mind's eye, recall, recapture, recognition, recollection, reflection, remembrance, reminiscence, retention, retentiveness, retrospection, subconscious, thought **SEE CONCEPT 409**  
intelligence::; appreciation, awareness, capacity, dark, darkness, empathy, experience, feeling, illumination, imagination, innocence, originality, perception, precognition, sensibility,

**remember** [v] *keep in mind, summon into mind*

bear in mind, bethink, brook over, call to mind, call up, cite, commemorate, conjure up, dig into the past, dwell upon, educe, elicit, enshrine, extract, fix in the mind, flash on, get, go back, have memories, hold dear, keep forever, know by heart, learn, look back, memorialize, memorize, mind, nail down, recall, recognize, recollect, refresh memory, relive, remind, reminisce, retain, retrospect, revive, revoke, summon up, think back, treasure (1)

*Also, remembrance, hallucination, dream, map, roadmap, chart, vision, archive, haunt, reliquary,*

1.

I write the lyric of remembering when I was a girl visiting my grandparents' farm in Salinas, California, with my younger brother Dennis for the summer.

My paternal grandparents, Agostina and Ercole Bianco, immigrated to the United States, May 24, 1910, as a young married couple from Montaldo Scarampi, a small village near Asti in the Piedmont vineyard country of northern Italy.

My grandparents represented a fraction of the waves of Southern and Eastern European emigrants who arrived to the U. S. between 1892 and the mid 1920's, relying on their manual

labor skills that included mining, farming, factory work and construction; welcomed to America for their labor. (2)

Each time I've written a piece of this story earlier in my life through the poem, *Grandmother on the Paso Robles Ranch Year My Father Was Born* (3) and *Polenta*, a memoir-lyric essay (4) I've found myself returning to the roots of a source about which I will never be able to say enough.

I know from observing life around me as a child, that my forbearers worked long, difficult lives, aspiring to care for their farm well into their nineties. I remember my father's long distance phone call when I was a young adult to inform me that my grandfather had died. And the relief my father expressed, knowing that Ercole was found early in the morning, lying on the damp ground, within the vegetable beds of his garden. My father grateful that Ercole wouldn't have to go to the hospital to linger, unconscious of where he was, but rather engaged, spade in hand, to the end with work he loved. And my grandmother Agostina also expressed her gratitude that Ercole had demonstrated a purpose each day, and stayed true to his calling to care for land they tended for forty years.

When my family drove from Seattle to Salinas for the funeral my father asked if I'd be willing to move to the farm and live with my grandmother so that she could continue to stay in her home. I wasn't able to, recently relocated to the Seattle area and teaching preschool at a job I loved, both my daughters thriving in school. Eventually Agostina moved to a care facility near my parents in Redwood City. I visited a few times and found her at peace when I walked into her bedroom. She was sitting in a comfortable chair, gazing out the window to the garden. She wore her crocheted shawl over her shoulders and held the black rosary beads she'd kept since leaving her village. All too soon after her death the land was sold for apartments and the house purchased to move to a new location.

It's too simplistic to say I was thinking only of my family and my new job and not my father and grandmother, but it is true that I wasn't yet able to appreciate and discern the deeper meaning behind what I'd experienced when I spent time with my grandparents on their farm during my childhood. But my father's request lingers today as a path I didn't take and represents a crossroad in which I wasn't yet aware of the importance of a place that had meant something to me.

2.

I wrote *The Things Downriver* to map the dream, to pay homage to summers on the farm in Salinas, and to validate through writing what I was conjuring.

The dream encompassed the recollections of childhood sensory experiences embedded within the memories of infancy, childhood and early adolescence during visits to the farm for holidays,

family gatherings, and summertime, when my brother and I were left to the supervision of our grandparents. I know for sure I visited as an infant because I have the photos that show me held in the arms of my elders who cherish the wide-eyed baby girl dressed in bonnets, pinafores and hand-knit sweaters.

And as I write today, I realize I may have been carried there within my mother's womb where I would have heard the muffled murmurings of language and birdsong enlarging the repertoire of my mother's voice to include those sounds within the arc of the farm.

The important thing though is the dream of an interlude of childhood that never left me, a recurring dream over the years as I matured into adulthood with a powerful consciousness of place I vividly recall in details that include the region beyond the farm, networked by back roads and diverse people and those experiences that emanated forth.

What also impelled my writing was a mix of curiosity and awe for what I might discover if I devoted myself to a sustained writing project. What kept me engaged over twelve months was a sense of reverence and respect for my grandparents and the many other people of my childhood who upheld locations for my dreaming, then and now, with the work of their hands.

An essential characteristic of the project included the attempts to depict the emotional landscape of my childhood that seemed wordless, to me, and not yet materialized or embodied as part of the story, but important, nonetheless, to connect and link to the sensory aspects of the natural world those feelings I realized were another layer of the lyric telling.

This idea for the way remembering begins within sensorial landscapes that contain and evoke deeply rooted emotions, is developed by French poet, Yves Bonnefoy, in his essay, *The Place of Grasses*, one of three essays he wrote in 2004 as an afterword to the Italian language translation of *L'Arriere-Pays*, his larger work published in 1972. In *The Place of Grasses*, Bonnefoy develops a poetic framework to explain why poets begin with the memory of childhood experiences:

Poetry is the memory of those instants of presence, of plenitude experienced during the years of childhood, followed by the apprehension of non-being underlying those instants which becomes translated as doubt, and then by that hesitation that constitutes life; but it is also a reaffirmation, it is our *willing* that there should be meaning at the moment meaning falls away. (5)

Bonnefoy's explanation for what occurs to nurture the sensibilities of the poet in "those instants of presence" relates to my experience as a poet writing lyric fragments to reflect on the nature of the dream of my own childhood as I mapped those instants of "plenitude experienced" within the pages of my journal writing.

Throughout the essays of *L'Arriere-Pays*, Bonnefoy reflects on the inspiration for his understanding of what channeled his writing focus rooted in childhood that parallels other poets who also returned to drink from the reservoir of childhood such as William Wordsworth's poem, *Intimations of Immortality*. (6)

Whenever I've tried in the past to describe my perception of my own creative process I become cautious, not sure I understand the nature of creativity as it may apply to me but aware there are strictures that impact creativity that may stem from social-cultural inhibitions I learned as a child. (7) Contradictions I felt from my parents who on the one hand encouraged me to write while also diminishing the importance of college that was not possible for them, and may have posed a threat to their parenting.

In some ways it seemed it would have been easier if I could have avoided telling what occurred during the process of writing. In brief, the act of writing triggered remembering and the act of writing, even when I didn't know where it might lead, allowed me to reach the places I was mapping within the dreamscape. In essence, I found that the more I pursued remembering, the more I became obsessed by the generative act of writing that unfurled the act of remembering, an organic reciprocity.

I wish it could be enough to say that I was 'dreaming', the word I used for what I was doing as I attempted to draw upon the repository of detailed recollections. But there was more that my thesis advisor, Renee Gladman, called to my attention, telling me, "you are mapping", providing yet another channel to think about how and why I would write this sequence of fragments, for it was more than dreaming. (8)

It's also important to mention how mapping involved allowing myself time to re-imagine one experience after another, a form of consecutive dreaming, as I collected the memories of detailed experiences that haunted me and lead to more to remember. In some way I was re-experiencing the past, and in so doing I created the possibility for more elaborate constructions of new neural pathways for remembering.

For each memory appeared to bloom as successive dreaming in which I collected those fleeting detailed experiences that haunted my dreams and lead to more to remember. And reminded me of the opening stanza of the poem, *On the Threshold* by Eugenio Montale in which he wrote: *Be happy if the wind inside the orchard/ carries back....for, here where a dead web/of memories sinks under/was no garden/but a reliquary.* (9)

Though this may sound formulaic, it wasn't. My desire was to write what I remembered and distill those recollections so that each episode shimmered, relit, alive cinematically, marked by sunrise as the site of remembering.

In the poem, *The Anchor's Long Chain*, Bonnefoy encapsulates the notion of the debt those of us who are poets may owe to childhood,

I think I owe almost everything to the horizons of my early years.  
Horizons, far-off or near....open, under full-blown clouds....or  
withdrawn in the darkest waters of the river's bow. (10)

In my own writing I discovered the process included two components to pay attention to; 1) time for dreaming, and also, 2) reflection on divergent ways to think about how to map dreaming;

both crucial to support my return to pivotal childhood experiences I hoped to describe with language that I felt I found within the lyric space I was mapping.

But, I also wished it could be enough to mention the documents I possess that prove my grandparents existed. Yes, I wished it could be enough to note the roots Agostina planted in 1938 with the purchase of 4.15 acres of land in Salinas, my grandmother separated at the time from Ercole, burnt out by the demands of rural landscapes that belonged to someone else, leaving little to show, the ethic of hard work no one could argue my grandmother didn't possess. For I hold the 1938 survey map with her name printed on the Rancho El Sausal parcel (11) that Agostina Bianco purchased, and the evidence of a woman who continued to express self-determination after the ocean voyage to America.

An Italian immigrant who arrived in New York on the ship named the *Berlin*, (12) in the spring of 1911, Agostina (born in 1885), married Ercole, and journeyed west by rail to join him in San Francisco where they worked at Hotel City of Paris. In 1914 after my father was born, they sought the open space of ranches in central California's interior valleys. Here, they encountered temporary worksites on dairies and ranches tending flocks of sheep and herds of dairy cows. Agostina cooked the meals and did the laundry for the crew of ranch hands who lived onsite, in bunkhouses. Ercole managed the land and livestock while my grandmother drove the wagon to town for supplies. It is interesting to consider that had my grandparents waited to leave Italy, they may have been barred by the legislation enacted by Congress in 1917 (13) that required anyone over sixteen to demonstrate proficiency in English.

In 1938 at age fifty-three with savings from her share of working on the ranches located in Soledad, Gonzales and Paso Robles, Agostina bought four acres in the town of Salinas next to the Chinese Cemetery on Natividad and a mile from the rodeo grounds. My understanding is that my father lived with her until his enlistment in the Navy during World War II.

Perhaps the 1945 date of my grandparents' U.S. Naturalization papers addresses the difficulties of learning to write English within the transient lifestyle Agostina and Ercole encounter early in their migration to the U.S. that came to a halt with the purchase of the farm. And, also to consider, maybe my grandmother was impelled to overcome the challenges to citizenship based on anti-immigrant sentiment and overt racism faced by recent arrivals to the U.S. from Italy and Germany (14) and also faced by those who were U.S. citizens by birth with ethnic roots to Japan. (15)

3.

There will always be things I won't know, kept from me, murky, never discussed, that before his marriage in 1947 to my mother, there were two former wives and a daughter.

What I do know includes that after I was born my parents resettled in Redwood City, a working class town at the time, twenty miles south of San Francisco, bordering Palo Alto, Atherton and Stanford, this move so that we were near my maternal grandparents, Domenic and Gene Airaudi, and the good location for my father to open the grocery store, Dumbarton Oaks Market, on El Camino Real.

Soon my brother was born and Redwood City provided Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, the newly built Horace Hawes Elementary and a branch library on Roosevelt. Sprinklers ran all summer long in the backyards. Fathers with leisure time coached Little League. There were scores of children our age.

But what evokes the wilds of my childhood stems from the farm and what other road trip destinations came forth, the magical summer space I roamed with my brother as universes opened for us, above and below, inside and out, with layered riches I map with fragments and vignettes in *The Things Downriver*, inhabiting the poetics of remembering.

Along the way, I've asked who would read this, and why, because in the beginning I felt there were no words, and if no words, maybe not worth writing.

At the time I was reading lyric essays by Fanny Howe and Renee recommended yet another collection. The following section from *The Winter Sun* fostered a sense of liberation in which to explore direction and defy expectations of others,

The prose notebook is something else entirely, without repetition or revision included. It is anti-memoir, a response to a day, and all the day produces by chance. It is in many ways the most radical form: a chronical without a rhythm or a beat. Pure reflection, transparency. No audience desired or expected. It is inherently anarchist. (16)

This statement described how I felt about my writing and meant I could write without yet having a clear plan, without knowing the outcome; I could write and worry later about the shape of the book, no audience or censoring public standing in my way.

Howe's statement conveys her ability to describe the essence of her thinking as she reflects on her own writing process. And reminded me of the book, *An Unknown Woman*, by philosopher Alice Koller, a midlife woman who dedicated time to reflect on her life as she posed questions to consider.

To do so, Koller established a daily practice for thoughtful, reflective writing, arranging to live alone for one year on Nantucket Island, accessible by ferry off the coast of Massachusetts. Relevant to my own writing was the affirmative stance Koller demonstrated, as does Howe, by their willingness to share what they've learned. In other words, women using writing as a tool to build a bridge for others to understand how they arrived. (17)

And, also important because of the betrayal of Salinas, my place of birth. Knowing that I misled my friends when asked where I was born. Claiming Monterey or Carmel, artist communities on the Pacific. Not inland like Salinas, known as the agricultural headwaters for lettuce, sugar beets, cowboys and vaqueros. Broken English and my foreign grandparents I couldn't pull with me to the suburban landscape where I also lived when I returned to school in September, asked to tuck in my shirt, polish my shoes, write on newsprint about how I'd spent summer vacation. Looking back, I realize that I misled my girlhood friends to protect myself from the ridicule I experienced when I invited a fifth grade classmate to come for an overnight to the farm in Salinas to meet my grandparents. I remember the disconnect of not understanding when I heard

the girl's critique of my family, my friend unaware that I overheard her comments of what she perceived as smelly food and old people who didn't speak English. I felt angry and at a loss for words. I see now that I was trying to protect my family from the shame endured by someone I thought was a trusted friend. And a reminder to myself that culture is the medium we swim in, immersed like fish in water, the water invisible when we swim within our own milieu, but visibly strange if different from our own.

To ask, *who is my audience*, is important, but first, I wrote for myself, unsure where I was headed as I mapped, concerned that the interpretations of others not impinge on the dream.

So I veered away from the audience of immediate family to imagine the reader as one unknown to me, but within the wider circle. Wellington Lee, for example, I contacted by email, based on a history of Salinas website and because of his first-hand knowledge of Chinese American history in San Francisco and Salinas, Salinas' Soledad Street where he lived with three generations of his family, and the Chinese cemetery on Natividad Road that bordered my grandparent's farm, and the same cemetery where his sister was buried as a child. (18)

Wellington answered my questions about when the cemetery was established, either 1900, 1901 or 1902, depending on the source. But perhaps more important to know that before the cemetery was formally deeded, it already served as a burial ground for those deceased Chinese workers, primarily single men, who immigrated to California to build railroads and drain marshes, barred from permanent residency based on the Chinese Exclusion Act enacted in 1882 that California had agitated for, blaming the Chinese, who were willing to work for less, for a decline in wages. So arrangements were made between workers and employers for the return of the remains to China after temporary interment on the land my brother and I looked to, not knowing the history of work by the people who made it possible for my grandparents to farm their land. Email conversations with Wellington lead me to question why I don't remember Soledad Street, if I was ever taken there, and if not, why? (19)

4.

There were several questions I considered: Is this real and true because I wrote it this way? Or did I fail in my remembering, throwing the reader off scent? And if I could go back to straddle a rail fence, immersed in the reverie of the landscape, what would I say and think that I couldn't as a girl? And how does remembering this now give me a tool to map the hinterland where I stood on the outside looking in, site of richness, observing.

There's pain in remembering; because this piece generates remembering, it's no different.

For now, the story is a shape-shifting container(s)—sometimes, the basket to gather eggs, the valise / suitcase my grandmother used to carry personal possessions to America, a wicker fishing basket heaped with breathless rainbow trout, the bedroom in afternoon light, the fig tree that dropped its blue-black orbs to the ground beyond the clothesline, evocative talismans for remembering. For now the story is between the lines of the lyric fragments I've compiled that provide yet another container. A poetic space where I wrangle with the fragile tendrils of the story, attempting to tie down the tufts, loose like seeds, carried away and gone when I blink.

The mapping of this terrain is mine and belongs to me for I know from talking to my brother, that if he wrote a book, it would be different, and that's the nature of memory.

Conversations with my brother take different turns in which he will recall an experience that made little or no impression on me, reminding me that the past is the source of a rich labyrinth in which each of us is lost, at times, separated from one another.

But I also mean by writing this collection of fragments something to do with the poetics of memory. For I tried once to write a chronology of events as though I could record my childhood on a timeline. So I believe what I've attempted to do in *The Things Downriver* is compose a lyric of remembering. And, a lamentation, each fragment providing a way to return to a site of emotional territory experienced long ago. A lament in service of the writing of remembrance and what poetry offers, "a book that is a tombstone and a hymnal, a collection of epitaphs and a lyric anthology of songs.... the poem (the lyric) is doing the work of keeping the story of the past, moving it into a permanent present...." (20)

And this is what I think I mean when I say, *to map the dream*, so that when the world vanishes, the map of the world will exist, the past I remembered.

In the introduction to a collection of essays in response to Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the editor, Joanne M. Braxton, integrates varied approaches to the concept of memory and its function in fiction and nonfiction in the following passage:

Critics of fiction and nonfiction alike agree that memory is a plastic medium through which the past can be seen and reconstructed. "[M]emory is almost sacred," wrote French historian Pierre Nora. And Melvin Dixon saw memory as a tool that could be used both to dismantle and reclaim. In his words, "Memory becomes a tool to regain and reconstruct not just the past but history itself." Putting it another way, critic and writer Karen Fields wrote, "[M]emory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events, such as an individual's wishes, a moment's connotations, an environment's clues, an emotion's demands, a self's evolution, a mind's manufacture of order, and yes, even a researcher's demands." Toi Derricotte expressed it simply and more elegantly, perhaps, when she wrote, "Memory is in the service of the greatest psychic need." (21)

The layout of the piece begins with Part One written primarily during spring of 2016, and generated by Renee Gladman's writing assignment to map a place. (22) It seems important to this poetic statement to note that at first I didn't want to write about this episode of my childhood because I felt I'd already exhausted the material through other creative writing projects as I mention earlier. But when the sensory aspects of remembering inundated my dreaming I decided to again return to Salinas and the farm on Natividad Road to find what was embedded there, though I continued to question whether there was anything more to say. And, as I gave myself the chance to commit to a year-long creative writing project, I discovered that what I wrote in the spring was a beginning.

The book I eventually wrote could be considered as one long dream comprised of spare fragments in Part One, and longer, more developed vignettes in Part Two. A handful of photos are provided as evidence that I lived this dream. But the entire book depicts the dream of mapping a place, and allowed me to provide details about the farm as it re-emerged from the hinterlands of memory and also to describe the diverse spheres of human relationships offered to me and my brother, at that time of our life.

For the farm stood as crossroad for everyone who'd ever lived in Salinas—Chinese Americans who honored their ancestors at the Chinese cemetery next door, migrant workers from Mexico, Filipino American families who lived across the road, cowboys from the rodeo (pronounced as the Spaniards did with the accent on the long A sound), Swiss immigrant families living on dairies and naming their new cheese Monterey Jack, my grandparent's Italian Pisani from Italy, Japanese Americans who also tilled gardens and were held in makeshift quarters on the rodeo grounds in Salinas during WWII. This account will never include everyone such as the first people to move into the river valley named by John Lathom after the Salinas River and African Americans who worked at the rodeo and struggling white families from Oklahoma who lost their land during the dust bowl. (23)

The farm a backdrop for our physical, psychological and spiritual growth. The farm a stage, a platform, a framework. The farm's refrain nuanced with the coloratura of psychological offshoots I revisited to develop the longer episodes of section two, giving consideration to concentric layering to questions and hunches, revealing through the lyrics what I remembered of the dream over the course of writing, relying on recollections as I continued to excavate.

The sensory sustenance of the dream made everything more vivid and animated, open to riffing, as emotions melded with recollections. For example, chipped white paint on stucco wall and skunk scent, neighbor Woody's scowl in the morning when he blamed us for the mother rabbit killing her offspring, the smell of our grubby hands on the cage, he insisted, and I don't remember whether I touched, only the temptation to do so, but grandfather said, *No, coyote scared her; no your fault*, but for some reason Woody's viewpoint prevailed, and children bore the guilt.

As I reflect, I see I was given permission to dream, to re-enter this interlude of childhood through the privilege of time to write. And once, maybe to help me to stay in the dream, Renee said, *if it's the farm that is calling, then it will be the farm*. (24)

Writing offered me an alternative to explore the way memory is traditionally constructed as an ordered sequencing of experience and not what happened for me. Over the years I would attempt to construct the story only to fall, tripping again, as a child. I thought to write about the memory and that this meant to build a chronology of events in the way of the historian. But, when I was able to devote to what I call "summer space", I activated the dream I returned to daily, to delve more deeply, an archeologist, whisking away at the fine layers of dust.

Bonnefoy's reflective *L'Arriere-Pays* provided me a model for ways to address the emotional content I was discovering, and helped clarify what I might do with the tensions I felt over form,

whether to write poems, prose, or something else I couldn't define, hybrid perhaps, experimental, based on the subject matter that *belongs to that special category—a poet's imaginative prose*. (25)

In other words, *L'Arriere-Pays* helped me to envision a pathway for writing a poetics of remembering that moves away from individual titled poems toward a sweep of uninterrupted remembering, perhaps stream of consciousness in nature, yet different. For my desire included to express in my writing ways to engage / understand the thing that can't be reached, because this thing, this memory, is of the past, decades gone, downriver and retreating into the domain of lost histories and memories. It was important to me that I not use writing to flit from one image to another, in an effort to be concrete, but to struggle with the interior sense of the experience that offered a way of wandering to tap something I hadn't already known. Though this may sound strange, as I write this now I realize I'm not so much a storyteller as a poet who records the fragments of dreams.

It was helpful that Renee recommended I read *L'Arriere-Pays*. (26) I appreciate her discerning suggestions for what I might need to read to tap movement in my own work to map dreaming, *L'Arriere-Pays* a collection of essays in which the poet dwells on a sequence of pivotal experiences as he wanders through Europe encountering the art of Baroque and Renaissance painters. But the essays also explore his childhood, after his father's death, when he spent summers on a farm in Toirac, a village in the Lot River valley of rural France with his maternal grandparents.

What I recall from reading *L'Arriere-pays* during summer 2016 is Bonnefoy's desire to mark the beguilement of childhood, and to honor it with reverence by recording memories through the lens of the sensibility of a particular writer, because the enchantment was remembered, made good, perhaps, because of the natural setting, unknown and imagined histories the writer couldn't yet fully glimpse, but offering the child a quality of benign neglect perhaps similar to that of the young of wild animals.

In "*The Place of Grasses*," Bonnefoy distinguishes the experience of the young child from those of the adult noting that by age seven, already the world is understood and perceived and begins to shift away from the child's magical thinking in which the tree the child encounters is more than tree because it is the first encounter and so it is with each moment of encountering. (27)

Reading *L'Arriere-pays* also provided an opportunity to enter the dream of the father as a person who is meditative and reverential of the waystations he recalls as Bonnefoy explored circuitous routes, inspired to walk to the next horizon, touring museums and churches, allowed time to look, reflect and dream about the artists whose works he found along the way.

For example, the portrait of a woman with dark, expressive eyes that the reader finds on page 46 within the body of the text and described in the appendix as, *Foyom Mummy* (c. 100 BC). (28)

This painting of a woman's face Bonnefoy tells us *looks pale and tries to catch his eyes*, a woman who is relied on to save the one who is hiding, a refugee perhaps, someone trying to survive by hiding from the enemy, a woman aware of how to map the interior passageways of

the dream, who understands that the purpose of remembering is to save, the young woman the muse who guides. (29)

And similarly, I remember as a girl, my father's road trips for the purpose to immerse in an aesthetic that he named *sunrise over the horizon*, theorizing that no two moments in nature were the same, no two trees or mountains the same, each with its characteristics the artist must find. And I feel this is something I attribute to my father, even my mother, telling myself that she told me something in a lyrical way because she couldn't find the logic to explain her father's accidental death. Did I make this up or did she really tell me that sometimes things run amuck, teaching me to photograph the sun-damaged ropes strewn about the dock, the frayed mainsails elegant, worth of observation?

Bonnefoy describes in *L'Arriere-pays* a small church in Lithuania with stucco exterior, hills in the distance, the very hills that draw the reverie forward and impel the traveler to seek the next vista, like my father and his daughter, too, leaving together on early morning road trips. (30) And significant, also, in that Bonnefoy, who is old enough to be a father figure to many of us living today, died last summer, July 2016, as I was reading *L'Arriere-pays*, falling under the enchantment of his lyricism.

In the poem, *A Stone*, from *Second Simplicity*, Bonnefoy references the gift of innocence inherent to the interlude when the younger Bonnefoy and his wife drove through the countryside, open to the whimsy of the landscape, enjoying the scenery around Valsaintes. There they found what they realized were remnants of an old monastery, a building that had served multiple purposes, a stable left to the weather of wild things, birds in the rafters, and the place where Bonnefoy and his wife will live for many years, transforming the ruins to a farmhouse. In the following stanza Bonnefoy returns to the question of memory, illusory in nature.

*We granted each other the gift of innocence:  
only our two bodies fed its flames.  
bare through trackless grass.  
known as memory. (31)*

*For years,  
Our steps wandered  
We were the illusion*

As I wrote, I too merged with the landscape and attempted to listen for the voices of those who came before, deepening my consciousness of the past as a palpable influence and presence. For it was my magical landscape to conjure, the cedar waxwing who broke its wing, which I helped to mend, a bird blown off course as my mother drove the car to the cemetery to visit the grave of her father.

And I considered the purpose of a road trip as a pilgrimage toward an aesthetic, and an immersion in looking, being lost. The trip to Italy when I was a girl, not a field trip, but an opportunity to align with the history of reverence and gratitude expressed by those seeking the interiors of churches, scattered hill town ruins, and the emotional aspects of travelling.

A conflict I dealt with encompassed the tension between writing a narrative that was historically sound versus a personal story steeped with nostalgia. I wondered if I was fulfilling an

unconscious need to remember in such a way that meant my audience would say, she has no right to remember through the haze of memory. I imagined readers reproaching me as one who is unschooled in how to accurately record a historical moment. I questioned if I had distilled remembering into my own image, and now I realize that this is what I did, though I didn't initially want to do so.

What I mean by this, and a poetics of why I wrote how I wrote, requires that I appreciate writing as a tool to embody experience. For me the beginning point is remembering childhood through writing within the context of emotion and social-cultural layers so that whoever reads this book has been given a map of the territory of a girl leaving traces of her *self* on paper.

Thesis consultation with Renee Gladman included periodic long distance phone calls to check in. I know that I overwrite and this is how I also wrote during this project so, during our calls, Renee helped me to gain a sense of the direction I might successfully pursue in that there could have been a number of pathways. Letting go of words on the page especially when devoted daily to a year-long project is challenging for me because I wanted to find ways to include everything. But, as I've become more familiar with other writers I understand, as Renee also told me, I'll write other books. Also during our sessions Renee would provide commentary that I attempted to jot down in shorthand....and I'm sure when I returned to my scrawls, found less than what she intended. But, somehow, Renee always offered the connecting line to keep me encouraged and ready to return to delve further in the project that was unlike any I'd undertaken. One thing was how to handle the sheer volume of pages / passages and how to know where to find the fragments I was composing. So I created an index and Renee suggested to number the pages or number the sections, even though arbitrary. Renee emphasized during this phase, midway during the process, ways to get a handle on the content so that I wasn't inundated by too much material to handle and I can see that a skill of the writer is to manage the material, a way of focusing. Renee also supported me by telling me that I was *writing in poetic space*, a way, I feel, of saying the lyric. (32)

I'm grateful that Renee provided the descriptive language for what I was making on the page. For example, Renee suggested that each lyric fragment was a *part to contain, a meditation of memory*. I appreciated also the image she provided of *concentric circles of remembering*, that made sense to me as the writer in process. (33)

5.

When I began to write *The Things Downriver* I shared with the other thirteen members of our MFA cohort that I felt I would be writing what was conjured. Corbin nodded agreement. (34) This essence encapsulates the language of why and how I wrote this interlude.

I know I could have written a history of place or a chronological account of memory but the aesthetic took me somewhere else.

I conjured things that wanted to be written. I took time to recognize in the dream, that conjured thing. I then had the content to decide on. What form to shape the dream, the conjured thing, a

wild thing that couldn't be broken in the way that my grandmother broke English, the way the young horse is broke, the way bread is broken.

I see now that I returned to sunrise and the beautiful image, *la bella figura*, dawn's fractured light cresting the ridges of the granite cliffs, Yosemite, Pinnacles Monument, and the silhouette of the cougar I remember on the road to Arroyo Seco, imagined still as my father imagines his daughter who will map the dream.

And there was a sense of danger because the danger was there. Yes, because as the older of the two children with a reputation for good behavior, one who can be relied on, I inherited the chore to oversee my brother, set a standard, be a role model, can't remember the other terms—your brother might be watching, remember your brother needs you, looks up to you, until maybe he resented it, this expectation I couldn't or wouldn't relinquish until much later.

But, yes, danger of guns and how to supervise children, especially one like my brother with no inhibitions, who did fire a loaded rifle in my direction. We were standing in the back of a pickup truck. My parents were out of the country, our grandparents responsible for us.

I've made lists throughout the process, "nest as metaphor for writing," did I say this or Renee? (35)

Each section a meditation, successive dreaming and the question of how much order and how much disorder should the book have?

What do I do with all these pages of looking?

The book is a dream of mapping; an attempt to recall.

Each installation does what it does, the lyric is there; whatever way, I can break the pieces—read until I hear something that tells me.

Organize the flow of vignettes and ask, what is the architecture of the book?

What is this book now that I've written it?

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Hello, the Roses*, "And memory doesn't end where my skin ends, but diffuses leaving fragments of itself. (36)

Break it down into distinct sections maybe called dreams or memories

Emphasis on interior space, one that might move between something like diary and something like poetry—Renee (37)

Renee: It doesn't matter what we don't want to do....the book writes itself....if the farm is calling, that's the book you'll write.

6.

Photos are important to the book as I speculate looking through albums of old photos taken during my childhood. My mother used a Brownie black and white camera she'd had since her teens. I remember the lever released the back of the camera to remove and install another roll. After the film was developed my mother affixed each photo to the album page with little black paper triangles she slipped on the corners of each photo.

In this photo, a tree in a one-gallon tin can from the nursery, maybe from a neighbor's farm to transplant, I will never know, or to celebrate a birthday, each grandparent with one of us in their arms.

And here's Uncle Frank Vargas on the sidewalk along El Camino in front of the store when he and my father were partners, holding one of us on each knee. And this photo, taken with four elders.

And most precious, my sister I never met, five or six years old, the one photo I have.

Survey map of the property in Salinas. Dennis made a copy when he heard I was writing about the farm, and U.S. passport and naturalization papers, Dad's Navy photos, my parent's wedding. Citations:

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# The Things Downriver

Denise Calvetti Michaels

*But does it matter to which category her piece belongs,  
falling as it did inside her journal?*

*How much came from the daily bread of dream,  
imagination, reading, and life itself all combined?*

—Fanny Howe, *Wedding Dress*

*Home is that youthful region where a child is the only real  
living inhabitant. Parents, siblings, and neighbors, are  
mysterious apparitions, who come, go, and do strange  
unfathomable things in and around the child, the regions'  
only enfranchised citizen.*

—Maya Angelou, *Letter to my Daughter*

*The prose notebook is something else entirely, without  
repetition or revision included. It is anti-memoir, a response to  
a day, and all the day produces by chance. It is in many ways  
the most radical form: a chronical without a rhythm or a beat.  
Pure reflection, transparency. No audience desired or expected.  
It is inherently anarchist.*

—Fanny Howe, *Winter Sun*

*The human unit of time is the space between a  
grandfather's memory of his own childhood and a  
grandson's knowledge of those memories as he heard about  
them.*

—Ralph Blum, from *Blackberry Winter*, Margaret Mead

## Part One

I remember the syncopation of leaves, bruised apples,  
enchantments of language burning bittersweet charms on  
my tongue, the farm in the distance, mapping the dream.

We were children absorbing the world.

We were children crawling under trees, observing ant hills and the wasp nest high in the willow, the mound of dirt with its mammal that peered out at dusk.

We crisscrossed existence on four-acres, invisible histories that will dwell later in the dream of the farm.

Ancestors we did not realize were the bamboo's rustlings roamed among us.

Confounded by the sun's disappearance the field of vision transformed the sky salmon pink bleeding orange colors.

In the beginning, glint of sunrise low on the horizon.

Cirrus clouds infuse the palette of arid places, sienna-bronze-copper-dun.

I know this because my father stopped the car on the shoulder of the road.

Teaching us to observe how dawn broke in stages, a sequence of moments, some blinding, others subtle and the terrain gradually emerged with shape and sound.

We were all together, new oil change, tank full of gasoline, the Coleman stove and a good map, heading on the highway to daybreak.

We were driving toward morning, over the ridge worn thin within the folds of road maps to Yosemite, Arroyo Seco and Paso Robles.

I must have been carried to the car and fallen back asleep, waking later to find myself in the backseat, my brother beside me, asking, what did I dream?

Once he slid across the seat when the car veered too sharply and we landed together giggling on the floor. Duck feathers from a pillow fight the night before sticking to our tongues and sweaty faces. Then we'd force ourselves to regain composure and gaze out the window watching our reflections side by side in the glass, two siblings born a year apart in November, Dennis the Scorpio, Denise a Sagittarian.

We didn't know it then but we were paying attention, eyes peeled, as we listened to our father speak English to his friend Ray from childhood, then switch to the Piedmontese dialect of his ancestors to address my grandfather, Ercole Angelo Bianco, who arranged to take the day off knowing someone would water and feed the animals.

Road trips began early because our father was accustomed to work on the dairy.

To map this place is to conjure cougar, bobcat and coyote, my father a boy who raised an abandoned fawn, then let her go.

I am the memory of those summers.

On my desk near my computer screen a photo of my brother. On the back: *This is me! On top of Half Dome! Three thousand feet straight down!*

The family myth, I always protect him, give him what he wants.

I would describe the dream this way: sensation of swerving to avoid owls breach the moon.

When I was born my parents rented a house on Bernal Drive, a doll house compared to the farm on Natividad that turned onto Bernal a handful of miles on the outskirts.

I was born in Salinas. It's important to say I lied about my place of birth before I understood why. And maybe this composition pays homage, to redeem the place, though I don't fault the girl.

There are things people listen to you say and don't want to hear because their own memories are triggered.

Grandfather's friend for example, Pisano from the Old Country, both men from the same region in Northern Italy, who tells me at the fishing camp, no, thank you, he wouldn't like a piece of my grandmother's chicken because he's eaten so much chicken it no longer tastes good to him.

Something I can't imagine, living so long that the taste for a favorite food is gone; but what is spoken with his eyes is that his wife is dead, he lives alone and the past is a dry river of stones.

My father transfixed by Yosemite.

He returned with us to camp along the Merced River and to hike the Tuolumne Meadows, compelled to take relatives who visit from Italy, WWII buddies from the Navy who drove out with wives and children to California.

It's difficult to separate myself from his story, to know if wilderness belongs to me because of him and those family road trips.

I remember the nightly fire-fall embers pushed off Glacier Point, though the tradition was discontinued long ago.

I remember the legend of lost boy Elmer whose name, called out by campers, echoed at dusk from the valley floor.

What I map is the *textures* of an ephemeral landscape, planks beside the river burning, acorn and twig, feather molting.

I write in minor key, over there, running, outside the back door,  
down three steps, toward the weeping willow.

Wandering culverts, we dragged our toes through gravel, hiding  
out, far away from the house with the Spanish tile roof and adobe  
walls.

We never used the front door.

And if the doorbell rings, it's a stranger, sometimes a kind  
Jehovah's Witness who doesn't know us, and never will.

I write about what craves the lyric.

Silver strands brushed back with her hands tattered with chicken feathers she's plucking in a vat of hot water also used to wash clothes.

And, the gunny sack on the floor to dry bleating newborn lambs by the stove.

Gashed thigh she sutured herself ashamed of going to the emergency room and later my father's anger because she did not go to the hospital.

Heartbreak, when she came to spray the bedroom for mosquitoes and turn down the covers because I don't remember my grandmother smiling, wearing lipstick or rouge, earrings or hairpins though there is the photo glued to her Certificate of Naturalization when she became a U.S. citizen that proves otherwise.

And the valise Agostina used spring of 1911 to carry her belongings aboard the ship named the *Berlin*, Genoa to Ellis Island, is real as the gladiola she cultivated in the garden near the window.

There are no journals or diaries handwritten by women like my grandmother living on the edge of town.

Some things my mother told me, that I was born by caesarian with an owl outside the window while she was in labor.

I write about things that long for what we do not have, hold us together on the map, the girl, the territory of her family, evidence of their tracks.

Summer when I was a girl living on the farm located on Natividad Road my grandparents owned for the last four decades of their lives in the outskirts of Salinas.

The sensory impels my story because when I awoke from this reverie I had been digging with bare hands for traces of our existence in the fertile black dirt that Salinas Valley is famous for.

Maybe I exaggerate the habitat of my childhood, the sustenance of those early years, using language as a decoy to protect it, the sentence a lure. I do remember a rural landscape that lives and breathes.

Memories enlarge interiors, bottle nicked open, grappa dregs in goatskin, riffs that never resolve.

Synapses fire. Neurons communicate across the gap.

The bridge each neural message must cross to carry bits and pieces. But the bridge is never hardwired as the dendrites do not actually touch. To transmit memory involves taking a leap. Trillions of synaptic gaps convey what is fluid and malleable; memory turning into consciousness as dreams and fragments.

Emotions arise I don't want to call depression rather the bittersweet melancholy associated with the matrix of memory to remind the place has meaning.

Walking the park today I remember vivid colors and sepia tones, recollections channeled through the Brownie black and white's my mother affixed to pages inside the album monogrammed with my initials, same as my brother.

Sometimes each photo is a fresh start; Redwood City house when I'm two, El Camino above the grocery store when my family first left Salinas, yet so few of me on the farm. Especially during the summer when our mother helps with the store, mourns the death of her father, travels with her mother to reconnect with the side of the family that never left Italy.

When emotional terrain takes over I veer off road to a set of givens: fence post and barb wire, bamboo thicket and irrigation ditch—hiding places, I realize now, where I marked the map of my childhood so that this four-acre farm is held in consciousness long enough to pin down.

But here, on the two-dimensional plane of white paper, I'm doomed, my sentence failing the dream I imagine as densely rich etymological layering within a sequence of interludes of which I know only my share, given a particular bent to excavate this landscape.

So, if I did have a box of photos, perhaps the elderly neighbors I observed remove sunshine-scented cotton sheets off the line.

And the barefoot Filipina girl who held a bundle of rhubarb wrapped in newsprint and walked over from across the road with her mother in the afternoons to trade for eggs.

Circle of wooden crates for the men spitting tobacco, told to go inside, not to look, rooster forced head-first into a gunny sack.

Scent of fish oil, chili peppers, rice, left to the weather in the cemetery.

The day Dennis takes aim with the rifle, not realizing it's loaded.

Alone at the park, when older boys try to push me off the slide and I would have broken an arm rather than let them succeed.

Poker, accordion songs, bocce ball; up late, listening.

There are things people listen to you say and walk away.

It triggers memory, and this is painful; tools and routines of a farm are a way to anchor.

I wrote this piece because I wanted to write about the things downriver.

## Part Two

Farm is the language of gesture within the space of my mother's absence, a benign neglect because of the sensory richness.

Black earth matted to the soles of our shoes and bare feet.

Mud that clings to the roots when we pull up carrots, dig for potatoes, beets we rinse in the sink stopped with brown water.

Backdoor stoop, basking with honeysuckle we will fight over trying to make perfume for our mother who is in Italy.

Action word *farming* that lured me and my brother outside.

Chain link bamboo property line my brother and I peer through to find bowls of cooked rice left behind by relatives of the deceased on smooth river stones in the Chinese cemetery next door, the only familiar landmark for me that remains, the land for the cemetery purchased with a \$100 gold piece around 1901.

The word *fig*, how it becomes incident, episode and commotion leading to story of wasps circling pulpy seed, indigo skins broken in the dusty dirt.

Mid-afternoons, Grandmother in the herb garden, hemmed in with boxwood, gathering flowers to change the vase she arranges with carnation, dahlia and zinnia for the statue of the Madonna in the alcove, rosary beads dangling from her hands.

Grandfather's patience tested, late August, walking toward us, Toscano cigar stub between his teeth, brown paper bag to gesture we pick up the ripe figs off the ground, my brother's squishing with his bare feet.

My grandmother walks us, hand-in-hand, to the dusty rodeo grounds one mile from the farm on Natividad. We played here every summer of our childhood, staying with our paternal grandparents who lived near Salinas Memorial Hospital where I was born and where she did not go when she fell on the porch steps and cut her leg against the boot scraper. We are too young to understand why she hesitates before entering the grocery store, doubting her broken English, the clerk who rings up the order, bags her groceries, ice cream, peanut butter we should have done without; she and my grandfather known for organic gardening before it has a name. But this is about what we discover wandering the property; fig trees, apple orchard, strawberries and wild blackberries, garlic celery onions, tomatoes, escarole, romaine, kale collard greens and string beans we plant and water ourselves; the double-yoke brown eggs we collect, the rabbits in hutches, the rosemary and thyme, basil and carnations, the home grown larder I conjure to remember colors and shapes juxtaposed within the garden, borders and rows and rows of scents and tastes, vertical lattices, their braided honeysuckle patterns tantalizing. And perhaps a statement of abundance against the past of my grandparents' poverty of place. Montaldo Scarampi, the village where in the summer small boys stand naked to the wall and pee the dust to life.

We were sent outside to get along so we fought where sun pooled and honeysuckle tangled and we plucked the blossoms one by one and tasted then squeezed the nectar into tiny glass medicine vials we'd been given by the elderly neighbor in a wheelchair who stayed in the house to tend cats. It ended badly. Another fight over who did what to gather the stamens to make perfume for our mother who was in Italy.

A story came out of it from the old country, Agostina's village, *Blame is an ugly animal, no one wants him*, and the word I never heard her use again, *cattivo*, meaning, caught by the devil, someone bad, wicked, naughty, in reference to my brother, little guy I adored and defended.

In the afternoon we slither along the creek bottom using our hands to anchor our bodies to the smooth boulders covered with slick algae. We net crayfish. Dislodge minnows. Cool boulders sooth our sunburned skin, children who sat in the backseat of our grandparent's '51 Chevy upholstered with horsehair that scratched the backs of our thighs, calamine in the first aid kit in the glove box.

Once we leave for home early with no time to enjoy the picnic my grandmother prepared the night before standing at the stove to fry chicken and rainbow trout, marinate finger-length anchovies in olive oil and garlic she minced with the curved blade of the *mezzaluna*.

I only remember the confusion of mason jars and cotton tablecloth hurriedly thrown together in the backseat after my father hit his head on a rock when he dove in the river, forgetting its depth in late August, and suddenly the road is heavy Sunday afternoon traffic.

We are the memory of those summers.

There are things I will never know.

My grandparents were born in a small Italian village before coming here, not enough ground corn *polenta* to go around, so they marry and move to America.

Maybe it isn't necessary to go to school to learn the orbits of planets or the names of constellations; just that the Milky Way is home, a way of ordering.

In the afternoon hues of honey over the landscape milk from the sun's rays blanching the four-acre patch with color schemes I've since known only in memories.

Farm more than farm.

There are things downriver I've never properly grieved.

That boulder, for example, on the bottom of the river I want to take a jackhammer to fracture into fragments that will glitter the horizon, cat with green eyes on the outcropping staring at me, and I'll tell you I saw it first, the right to dream it, a way of writing.

By dawn, so much is forgiven.

I make mistakes of not concentrating yet I learn what I need to do as I remember and it is clear I mean many things to you so don't force me not to love you; this is how becoming a daughter works.

Two interludes bookend the experience of my father in my life, and hold things together, appear linear, but are not and will never be.

Mapping memory, one sentence at a time that leads back to dredge. For now, a map of a road trip with a beginning and an end. I'm standing before you, impatient to run off to school. Maybe you have a flashback to barefoot girls in pinafores thin as whispers in the one-room school house of your childhood, and you ask yourself how you became the father to this girl wearing shoes and new dresses? On the other side of the river the wind rustles the cottonwood leaves.

Housing developments eventually gouge the landscape; each parcel renamed for the wildness I experienced first-hand living the velocity of a girl who doesn't know at the time what she'll remember is not for sale; no one can divvy.

Haunted by the face of each ancestor, I lose hours dwelling on a single gesture, trying to make eye contact with an elder crossing the ocean. I shuffle through old photos and commemorative prayer cards of the deceased. I listen to my mother's written and oral histories she takes the time to share, though unlike me, she didn't stay on a farm in Salinas with her grandparents, June through September, many summers of her childhood. I try to make meaning from original documents, late at night, when I'm alone, working at the table with the box I've opened that contains the remnants of the most fragile, the crazed, the delicately faded, trying to offer a liniment, the salve of understanding to quell the losses, soothing and saving the memories.

Again, I'm in the clutch of remembering.

And what triggers is merely the crunch of tires, braking to stop, on gray-flecked gravel.

Scrappy sound of a spin out on the private road entrance to the farm as my father steers the car a bit too sharply off Natividad and slowly past the first of two neighbors' houses, then sudden lurch to the left onto the driveway.

This is how the skid of loose rock becomes the origin sound as synapses fire in the queue, unfurl tendrils vines that will detour, surprise and shock, tentacle in directions I may not foresee.

Here, I had a choice of direction in order to locate my grandmother.

Yes, here, when I'm age eight, I would already know she made countless daily forays from the back porch door, as she momentarily left behind the smoky wood stove kitchen to walk out to the dark cool cave of the cold storage room across the way from the house lit by a single overhead bulb.

Within the sanctuary of the cave's four adobe walls my grandmother stored mason jars on long open wood shelves anchored above the freezer's larder of butcher-wrapped beef and lamb, duck and chicken, rabbit, pork and the venison of elk and deer.

I knew of her skill at provisioning because in one compartment of the freezer it became my job to help to store the ravioli she taught me to roll out with the three-foot long rolling pin I keep to explain our legacy to the most recent grandchild who reaches the milestone to understand how food is made within the fold of generations.

Though she's been gone over three decades there is her signature gesture like the marble-sculptured pose of a complex woman.

I see her in this dream in the context of Carrara marble, the *Pieta*.

She wipes her forehead with her apron, carries a basket, a tray, a box, a sack, back and forth, between here and there, two locations she inhabited that belonged to her.

Whatever she carries, she balances; glass jars against the fleeting nature of childhood, juggling the physicality of abundance with the generativity of the magical landscape.

When I imagine her, it is an attempt to understand this aesthetic, palpable, real, beyond words, the hand in motion. But I should simply describe her hands, sketched before I write, in the way Michelangelo sketched drawings before sculpting.

I remember the feel of the cold metal handle of the ravioli wheel she placed in my grasp; how the silver wheel spun, spinning through dough. My brother impatient to play, misapply its function: mince an earthworm, chop tomato limbs. But, *spetta / wait! Uno momento / one moment! Senti / hear this!*

The wheel sings after we daub ravioli filling on the sheets of rolled dough with the mixture of chopped parsley, ricotta and parmesan cheese, ground chicken and fresh- from-the-garden sage, thyme, rosemary.

Theatrics of space transformed; the kitchen, dining room and spare bedroom used to dry the ravioli on table tops and beds draped with clean cotton towels and dusted with flour to prevent sticking.

When we woke in the morning, having slept on the divan, we found dozens of ravioli bagged in bread wrappers tied with double knot to prevent freezer burn. Sometimes, we ate them raw, before falling asleep.

Back and forth, with a rhythm throughout the day, my grandmother on a mission to prepare, preserve, prepare, preserve.

I first heard the word *vaquero* walking down Natividad Road to the rodeo grounds with my grandmother and brother.

We were walking because she never learned to drive the car.

Maybe she whispered to me in dialect, *vaqueros, vaqueros, di la—* over there, or guttural *scat, you!*, my grandmother's ability to accent that thing I should attend to, three muscular horses, sixteen hands, galloping toward us, salt-rimed withers, cinched leather saddles, ruddy men, reddish brown hands holding whips, chestnut manes, burnished flanks, three abreast, Nona speaking to me, not my brother, the word *vaquero* a triptych with doors for three distinct riders outrunning shadows cast by the eucalyptus arcing Natividad, stage for remembrance, the past careening into the future where there is no safe hiding place, riders unyielding, horses surging forward like time and the story of what to tell the granddaughter so she can transcribe the dictation of an immigrant woman, of what to tell granddaughter so she will know the heart of the woman who saved for a piece of land in America.

I'm lost again, wrapped up in my sentences, and forgot to save.

Now I can't return to where I was in the reverie asking myself what she meant as she held my hand and walked me, walking with me and my younger brother, down the road to the rodeo grounds because she didn't know how to drive and because another wouldn't or couldn't take us that afternoon, and so she grabbed her *borsetta*, the purse with the black handle over her arm, and away we walked out of the protection of the niche drive and onto the wild of Natividad, the thoroughfare I would grow to obsess over, thinking for years that my grandparents had only lived here when in fact there had been many waystations in which they were tenants of the ranch, the dairy, the plot, the plat, with a daily schedule to fulfill around the clock, year-long, until the owner decided to develop the land, uprooting them.

Sometimes, I realize the same woman I recall vividly is also the one with whom I never held a long conversation, yet the receiver of her goodness, a girl going along for the ride, the cinema of her life filming around the clock and I'm one of the inhabitants no bigger than a prairie dog or vole, another creature she must have wondered about and fed leaving crumbs beside the back door step.

Who is this woman and how did she shape the one I've become, woman who writes to create a meal, woman who keeps returning to the dining room table with platters of risotto, lasagna, embedded knowledge. Who is the girl she impressed with the language of sensory—connecting emotions to words though there will be a trunk load of experiences the girl will never explore with the woman, and only later will the girl shake out each embroidered item to watch the questions tumble from the folds, photographs, the cinema of memory, the girl and the summer, when they walked to the rodeo and in synch stepped aside for three *vaqueros*.

I recall variegated patterns of seeds, bean seeds shaped like ovals smooth as pebbles on the beach; large seeds the colors of rust, vermilion, wine, maroon and burgundy, some marked with calligraphy. I collected, one by one, the strays that fell to the ground, hidden in dark corners and cracks. I picked them up learning their names from Ercole; lima bean, butter bean, red kidney bean, Fava, pole, bush and Cannalleni, pinto and Barlotti, Barhunya and Argentin.

And in the tool shed, a different space—a shack, beside the cooling room with padlock to keep me and my brother away from the miscellany of hoes and shovels, pruning hooks, chisels and chains, latches and keys.

We were kept to the threshold, yearning.

Yet nothing of farm life, essentially the production of food, was held from us.

White rabbits for instance, grabbed by the ears and snatched from the hutch, beheaded and skinned, hung from a wire at the tree Dennis and I watched but couldn't describe in drawings or words like *entrails*.

Here we were handed the good luck rabbit foot I didn't ever share with friends back home.

The universe of her kitchen with the window sink view of rows of pole beans and potatoes, mounds of beets and kale, and the fish pond shaped like a figure eight with a tiny bridge we crossed midway to sprinkle fish pellets. And later tiny minnows appear in vinegar, olive oil, brine—where did she learn this?

Midafternoons, customers come to buy our eggs and home-made wine; families living in rentals across the street. Cowboys wearing spurred boots walk up from the rodeo grounds a mile away requesting to buy grandfather's Dago Red. Migrant workers stop for eggs.

But also to envisage the future as visitors paused to embrace the vista and read the text of the land farmed by Italian immigrants equipped with the rural farm skillset to grow more food than they or their family could consume.

Where everyone contributed, workload managed without a *John Deer* tractor, rather relied on hand-hewn work in which the sinew of the arm connects the land, aligned to what it means to have four acres and a shed full of tools.

This life held my grandfather rapt, such that he never lost the joy of the task, a series of processes that enfolded season after season.

I remember our family visited for my grandparent's Golden Wedding anniversary, and to distract me because boys on the schoolyard chased me, and I skinned my knees, grandfather walked me to the cold storage room to show me giant gourds, too heavy to lift, though I tried, harvested for seed to dry and give away.

I remember the arc of blackberries crisscrossing barb wire, my arms dotted with dried blood droplets, the ripe berries out of reach but my brother found a way to crawl under while I pulled back on a vine, sweet and juicy, warmth to melt the scoop of vanilla ice cream.

I remember the delivery of a truckload of sugar beets from Spreckels Sugar Co. used to fatten a steer, rows of rabbit hutches, neighbors with kids chasing ball on the dust beyond the gravel, an elderly woman in a wheelchair who is found late afternoon at the windowsill surrounded by cats drawn to her consistency like the man who keeps the sugar water bottles full for hummingbirds.

To visit the farm meant you'd eat, fall asleep dreaming, this I realize now.

In this dream customers offer rhubarb or heads of lettuce in exchange, vegetables from their gardens, picked by farm workers, vegetables my grandfather won't grow in his own garden to allow the exchange to take place, the gift economy to flourish among his neighbors.

In this way my brother and I learned the dignity of each person living on the borders of Salinas, as were we.

Yet there were other observations and synthesis so that this could fulfill including the legend of my maternal grandmother Gene Bonino Airaudi (pronounced Jenny), daughter of Caterina Calvetti, who emigrated to America in 1894 when her husband Giacomo found work in the coal mines of Lehigh, Oklahoma. Choctaw Country is where my grandmother and her two sisters were born though the family returned to Balangero within five years. Though I never met my great grandmother Caterina, I adopted her name when I became a writer.

Grandmother Gene, who lived in Redwood City on the Peninsula, told me the story of preparing extra food to share with those who came to California looking for work during the depression. She baked hundreds of loaves of homemade bread to accompany hearty minestrone soup for the hobos who arrived by train at night.

Living off Middlefield in a house my grandfather Domenic built with the help of other Italians, their home was located near the railroad tracks to San Francisco. My mother remembers the tired faces of the itinerant workers who knew they were free to ladle a bowl of soup from the communal pot left out for them on the porch, my mother almost asleep by the time two young men arrived, miles between where they were and where they came from.

Towns, railroad tracks at twilight; niches you left behind,  
Fortuna, Eureka, and Arcata.

Niches you left behind are a redwing black bird singing from a  
bulrush in a critical area, culvert in the subdivision turned into  
marsh where wild things pulse; profuse cottonwood and big leaf  
maple, blackberry vines looping scotch broom, dandelion, clover,  
cedar and fir, and swordtail fern because of the rain.

You return as a writer to rescue memory.

Against the drama of buttes, bobcats oversaw sandstone ledges  
littered with shale and the miscellany of withered fauna as the  
morning light gradually formed spheres, and streaks, and other  
amorphous shapes, mistaken for angels, archangels, and any  
imagined shape of the remnants left behind, the lost losses of the  
heart woven loosely within the warp and weft of a frayed text,  
tattered like burlap, the textile that held things together when  
the calendar moved to ordinary time, the task to hue memories  
you come back to as a dreamer, writing.

The poet's hands placed fingertips down on the keys, moving 100 wpm, remembering.

Sometimes you get there by walking, here and now, copy in hand of your current draft, to let the mind riff, confirming cycles of rhythms you've taken for granted; early July for instance, and the deciduous dangle gold earrings of helicopter seeds, evergreens erotically charged, sap running.

Sometimes, it's merely a stage of early childhood, time of autonomy, initiative, industry; a girl, maybe five, six, seven preparing for Holy Communion, mentoring nuns and Father Armstrong, popular priest at St. Pius, altar boys trained to tease while you wait, kneeling for confession, telling the lie that you'll die because you drank the Holy Water in the church vestibule on a dare.

Nun who won't accept what you offer her, the thimble-size vial of the water your father collected from the grotto of St. Bernadette, a refusal you realize is an attempt to undermine your father's credibility, not the legend of the shepherd girl.

I remember staring at my dark brown eyes in the mirror, just a girl, realizing they were beautiful, and if I could just keep knowing this, I would be able to prove how beautiful they always had been, even now.

Sometimes you turn on the computer and what you have is the lit gray screen.

You type as though receiving a message from yourself, tapping it out on the flimsy plastic keyboard, to channel the deeper sediment, click the mouse deleting what is underscored by the psychodynamic underpinnings and vexations; sometimes this both worries and exhilarates, in the groove, not the rut that keeps you stuck.

Sometimes, the nut-brown rabbit in your peripheral vision on the walk, the world there, present, spinning, intoxicated, impinging on your dream like the fallen manzanita branch, silvering the ground.

And, then, again, my brother, Dennis.

Tire spinout, and gravel flecks the muzzle of the stray dog. Not sure where to go. Angular limbs, leathery skin, reddened cheeks, cigar between his teeth. Yesterday the BB gun you use to swat flies, scattering the wrens, wings broken. I was lucky; you aimed the barrel toward the chickadees taking dust baths and not toward my face in the mirror on a hothouse humid August in the valley.

Hallucinations of the hinterlands whose trails prong in multiple directions, embroiled forked forms shrouded by dense fog or burnished haze, rising from the mist a crag revealed, the horizon's scissor cut mountains zigzag the backdrop of reveling, a place never seen before, on the map the trance elevations for quarry and creek, timberline and scat.

And I could not write this landscape without consideration for the Pinnacles, the place I continue to wonder if it exists only in the imagination of my father's stories rife with elk, coyote, white tail deer and the rattlesnake I knew to listen for by the time I was three; Domenic, my maternal grandfather, bitten by a diamond back, rumor he drowned cats in a gunny sack, killed a man in a Butte copper mining camp accused of cheating at liar's poker.

I learned to suck out the venom and tie a tourniquet above the bite.

All I have is the cascade of fragments from my dreaming to help me to make meaning from the lives of the departed men in my family. Men who resided in America a handful of years, savvy of the wilderness, so unlike their homeland.

When I imagine the influence of the environment on my father I must take into account the wilderness of mammals and birds, abundant when he was a boy going to school in Gonzales, Soledad.

By then he would have learned English and continued to speak the Piedmontese dialect and more, it would serve him well to understand others with similar language patterns, migrants from Mexico, neighbors who heard Spanish growing up, and Italians with work visas who would feel welcomed by his friendly disposition, helpful and outgoing manner, here—hot cup of coffee for you, and a map of Yosemite, I'll take you there when you have a three-day weekend—not a problem, you have to see Yosemite.

Lorio the Swiss, his wife Netta and their sons, stopping by the farm on the way back from an unsuccessful trip, rifles loaded in the back of the pickup.

But the Pinnacles, first a national monument and later designated a national park by President Obama, captivated as a place no one could box him in, contain him, a place to stake out his tent, suspend a sack of food from a hook on the trunk of a tree, watchful for what he could watch for.

Sometimes the convergence of wild grass and chaparral conjures my father, all I need is the rustling scent, and the lyrics that emanate from place names, the Pinnacles, as though destined for remembrance. Even now, a dozen years since his passing, I increase my compassion for my father, drawn to his attachment to place, the sacred west propelling him as though he's dreaming again, the dream of another road trip to Yosemite, next summer Yellowstone, when I have three weeks.

California, if not America, I would say, was his place of birth where a boy learned to run, then read. It was here my father loved, made a family with my mother.

Again, the reverie of summer's parched terrain, a water mirage appearing in the distance, yet always out of reach—ahead of us, lulling us forward, promising to quench our thirst, Chevy car windows rolled down as though this lure of illusion will satisfy.

It is the snare of the thing that can't be reached, vanishing the moment I open my eyes, gone the instant I dare believe I can catch the fleeting.

This is the way it is. Something seers into memory—a phrase, tone of voice, fragrance and taste sensory, though more than the well of texture and scent, color and shape.

Remembering brings back feelings to expresses emotions laden with varying intensities; the original experience meant something, a conveyance, already disappearing as it is remembered, but a presence that is by its very nature a shapeshifter.

This I could not have known as a girl.

I was in the state of becoming, apprentice in the service of the beautiful life, here, not there.

My father knew the sensory liberates.

He learned this as a boy, traipsing the byways between San Miguel and Paso Robles.

His parents a people of gestures.

Their creative work to cook, repair, swaddle; all forms of writing.

And here I'm lost in the reverie, where I no longer understand.

I remember teaching the neighborhood children to play school, organizing makeshift cardboard boxes into desks to face the imaginary under the willow. My friends with their younger siblings in tow told me they wanted to learn to read. And neighbor boy Eddie Velasquez did learn, using both sets of letters, upper and lower, to spell his name and his brother's. Copying words from *Dick and Jane* and the *McGuffey Reader* my grandmother was given to learn to write English.

But on the farm there were no neighbor children; only my brother, eleven months younger, age and gender threading the lattice of childhood.

In this fragment my father is pulled out of the eighth grade to bale alfalfa on the ranch, sweet scent he says he'll never forget when we drive through farm country, scent of alfalfa and timothy on your neck, your clothes; ranch hands smell of cows' milk twice a day between fence mending, catnaps, grub and whistling.

This is the lyric my father sings though there is also silence.

Phases of his life unknown to me between the time he left school and stint in the Navy, maybe fifteen years, two wives, daughter Catherine I never meet.

Bits and pieces when I immerse myself in the art of the era my father lived within, artist age-mates he may have become given the chance.

Photographer Edward Weston with a studio in Carmel, a weathered redwood cabin on the cliffs above Big Sur, renowned photographer of Point Lobos, collage motifs of driftwood hunks tangled in kelp, the Tina Modotti nudes. Modotti, an immigrant the same age as my grandmother, two women who may have crossed the street together in San Francisco where my father was born.

I remember we took Sunday drives: North Beach, Little Italy, across the Golden Gate to Sausalito; pastel pink *Capezio* ballet slippers for sale in shop window, artists on houseboats, clotheslines and easels outdoors. Ansel Adams photos of Yosemite, though I'm not sure if my father knew of either artist, but to know they lived in California, the tenacity to make art.

I was the girl with the big brown eyes shaped like my mother's, but not blue.

Large dark eyes with the topaz flecks I found when I looked closely, through which I observed the world near-sighted until I was given glasses and noticed for the first time the leaves on the maple trees across the street from the optometrist's office were crisply edged, not blurry.

When Dennis and I stood before the mirror in the bedroom we began by making faces, comparing our eyes to one another, color and shape, searching for evidence of the expressive emotional content we were capable of making, close in age, psychically connected, the feminine and masculine version of the other, we might have been twins. There, between the gold flecks of the delicate filigree of the iris, we saw our humanity.

You could say when we made faces in the mirror we paid attention to the similarities and differences to focus us inward, toward ourselves, the nuances that would later become lapses in remembering like the moon waning.

We had not yet betrayed the other, did not yet recognize the shadow, knew only the wonder of the boy, the girl, opposites, yet not, mediated by the land, the language, the family.

The lyric is the desire to breathe underwater, diving for what was forgotten, to rescue this handful of fragments.

To closely observe ourselves, to take careful note of the color of our eyes in the mirror, required that this take place against the backdrop of sunrays lapping through the open window, the bottom pane raised slightly, enamel smell of the freshly painted ecru sill, the pair of billowy wine-colored voile curtains we hid behind to watch our grandmother cut the pink roses for the vase she placed in front of the statue of the Madonna Uncle Frank brought back to her from his annual trip back home to Mexico, bringing this interlude, our performance to a close.

In other words, I didn't know that someday I would understand that the afternoon light, its angle against the window pane, was essential to the way we saw ourselves.

In a room with no windows we couldn't have enacted this.

In the barn with the feral cats, in the midst of the dark forest, something else would have transpired.

Against the backlight, we were given the mirror of ourselves.

Farm is the landscape of running feet, fog and the barn to gather eggs, my grandmother moving within the borders of the farm, spaces that require different ways of being.

Farm, landscape, scratch, scratch of the hoe, squeak of the wheelbarrow, meeting my grandfather on the path as he's pushing the wheelbarrow and stops to ask me about his family I visited in Montaldo Scarampi.

I laugh, knowing something that he could not know, and I did not know, either; at the time, too young to understand the ramifications of what I knew because I was young and he was no longer young and connected in time and space to that life, having severed something that we didn't know could not be severed, only added to, a dream forged in the living of a life.

Farm, land, irrigation, rain, earth, mud and dust, weeds and vegetables, bamboo a texture to stake and tie, palm fronds we gather to tie and stake, and I'm lost again in the wheel ruts that come up that I need to expand.

Things happen. People reveal themselves. Others ignore or chose to help. Families strive to be accepted, but when pained, withdraw. This is the farm, too, composed of the gambler, the writer, the one becoming an American.

People like Bea and Woody Day; Ray and Ruth Doda; Andrew and Jenny Costa; Frank Vargas, and many others.

To write this lyric is to allow myself the obsession with a plot of land, the town of old cars simmering asphalt, heat waves in the distance.

There was a library built after we left, families forming a path with heavy-tread shoes, the backs of the elders bowed from the work of stooping in the fields, the short hoe my father tried to explain to me was wrong.

When I begin, I'm hooked by the manacles that shaped me like the gopher pulled up in a trap, oblong like a football, its whiskers twitching, my grandfather laughing again, as his shovel, loaded with dirt, filled the hole where he set the trap.

In this memory things run amok, the way it does with time; maybe we're on our way to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade downtown, waiting for Uncle Frank to drive us there, my brother's Godfather. I'm waiting by the car, wearing a spanking new red plaid shirt, disobeying the taboo against playing with the feral cats, cuddling a kitten not knowing she's sick, grandmother unbuttons and slips the blouse off, sombreros, Stetson hats, leather boots, saddles, reins swelling in the streets.

The Salinas Chinese Cemetery on Natividad Road is located next to the eastern border of the farm. Here my brother and I took turns peering out through thickets of bamboo. Sometimes we saw no one, only beginnings of the morning sun struck like a match stick. If we were feeling brave and adventurous we'd leave the confines of the farm and walk out to the road. We held our breath, slipping under the eucalyptus during ceremonies we didn't understand, naughty, where we didn't belong, and weren't supposed to watch the families place their kiln-fired bowls of rice on smooth stones, like nothing we had ever tasted on our tongues, pieces of spicy red peppers and fish oil. I imagine the conversation we might have had deciding whether to remain on our side of the fence. Asking what would happen if the ancestors' offerings were disturbed by two child interlopers, boy eight with buzz cut short and fuzzy, sister nine with long ponytail should-know-better. Believing we would have brought down a heaven of shame, raised Catholic with original sin, beginning to understand venial and mortal sin and this we agreed, clearly of the mortal category. So not to transgress, we hovered, twitching like rabbits in the underbrush, chigger bites up and down our arms and legs, scratches to answer to from brambles grandfather threw in the compost pile between us and their dead who we believed were definitely alive and would upend us if we crossed the invisible line of taboo my grandparents reinforced. What held us together, my family and the people on the other side, was the way the work of farming, the gestures and rhythms of being a farmer, shaped the body, exaggerated it in some places, invigorating for some and breaking others. And this my brother and I did not know and couldn't have known then, until years later after we'd both left, not understanding our grandfather who we'd thought would always be there for us, on the farm, identity intact with a singularity of text and scent exuded, living sculpture of garment, leather, facial features and cigar smoke, taking the walk in the morning as it was his practice to begin early in the day.

Cirrus along the ridge absorbed by low-lying fog, sparrows and crows on the clothesline when grandmother looks out the kitchen window, her hands wet and sudsy from dish washing so perhaps she pulls her sweater sleeve over her hand to help her turn the knob of the back door as she hurries past the memory of when she slipped and fell on the boot scraper. Maybe she wonders why this flashback now, tinge of guilt, Ercole collapsed on the ground in the garden, the wheelbarrow filled with autumn roots, his thoughts vintage wine splashing the future questions: what to grow, when and where to plant, a wife's sweater to cover him before calling their son, my father, Hugo, his hand in hers, marble, tactile, *Andiamo via, I go now, for a while, on a trip.*

It was my fault. I should have known not to climb into the back of the truck. It was what any boy would do, pick up a shotgun and pull the trigger, my younger brother wild, on the edge. Adults forgot children in the garden. My brother's godfather came for us when he heard, me in the backseat beside Aunt Celia. The water given was to bring us back to real time. In the front seat Uncle Frank repeated to my brother you wouldn't want to hurt your sister. I was close range, smiling as though he held a camera. Grandmother walked me to the kitchen for a drink from a glass I watched her fill and drank to show I was alright. We were hidden in the boxwood. Grandfather swore at his friends. When I turned around the farm would never be the same. While the men were inside the house, my brother and I climbed in. I stumbled over sacks of grain, tailgate to the cab window. When I turned away my brother found the rifle. When Dennis called my name, he was pointing the muzzle in my direction and I don't remember his face. In fourth grade I'll meet a boy from Texas out of reform school and baseball players who follow me home for cookies and milk, packs of boys, but not to one do I confide my interpretation of when I was spared.

The water to drink after the gun shot was to draw us back to real time, protected, where accidents don't happen to frighten the elders who couldn't have known.

Accidents happen when adults forget.

Something breaks down but we were lucky.

It was a moment when adults forgot children in the garden.

It was my fault.

I should have known not to climb into the back of the truck.

It was what any boy would do, any little brother who'd watched cowboy shows, and my responsibility to realize what he might do.

I've been told the reason the bullet missed me, but I will never understand, only my brother smiling as though holding a camera asking me to smile.

Uncle Frank came for us that evening and we drove back late at night, me in the back seat sitting beside Auntie Celia, her daughter Sandra my age on the other. In the front Uncle Frank kept asking my brother what happened, reminding him he wouldn't want to hurt his sister, saying that over and over as I watched the moon follow us into the night; the burden on my brother to answer for his behavior weighing on me. Until Aunt Celia said *it's late, go ahead, rest against my shoulder*, my mother far away, her daughter soothed by another mother, *dorme, dorme, sleep*.

The farm that summer was stolen but I didn't know it.

In the beginning you string beads as though one idea will easily follow the other in linear order because the primary colors call out to be chosen so that you leave behind the pastels and grays to focus on the bold and resonant that are strong featured, not knowing you'll have to come back to sleuth what was missed, the garden scent, phrase, forgotten incident, meaning.

You already know anything can trigger. Yet you are torn between the desire to go where the prompt takes you and the fear of what it might bring. Writing close to the bone is a form of rock climbing, risky. But the terrain draws you including spikes in temperature, fire in the distance, smoke moving out to the Pacific. And sometimes the landscape is a place to hunker as you question, are you using writing to deflect what is unsolvable within the sphere of human relationships?

You think you need to somehow link the passages to allow the readers' coherence. Then you realize you are on the journey you've carved out for yourself. Leaps, synaptic in nature, imagined you here.

In fourth grade I'll meet Casey from Texas, the one to whom I confide my narrative of the accident in which I was spared.

Not to speak shapes the memory.

But this sound is the memory.

When I begin the light is a sheave of barley the color of goldenrod embroidered wisps along the horizon.

Where there are mountains, dawn's line is broken Morse Code, dashes and hyphenations within the gaps of low elevation luminous things: waterfalls, the Army tent's grommets, those coppery tufts of the cottontail, snakeskin snagged on a sticker bush, abalone shards at the bottom of a beach pail, remnants ablaze, scene of camouflage and wonder.

When I begin the light is a slip of goldenrod, first cousin to black-eyed Susan, Van Gogh sunflowers, intense marigold-orange dye made organically from the bark of alder, carrot roots, and sometimes eucalyptus bark, onion skins and twigs of lilac.

I know this because I played with color dropping fragments of vegetable matter into boiling water then cooling.

The sun a color wheel, reeling between dawn and dusk.

When I begin I don't know we'll never reach the horizon on fire.

I follow the sun like my father.

He drove the car north and dawn stabbed our faces but we did not flinch, blinded on the right so that we were uncertain where we were going, transformed into wanderers though the highway clearly marked.

It was more difficult than we knew for the family of four to take their place in the Volkswagen van.

On my way out the door to kindergarten, my father stopped me from crossing the threshold. Not to give me a hug as I had thought, but to tell me to button my sweater. And to listen to the story of when he was a boy and his mother packed his saddlebag with figs and goat cheese, good bread and something he would share with the other children, maybe beef jerky dried on racks in the sun. I looked back promising to ask grandmother. And when I did she gazed out the kitchen window to the land, its barn and corral I never saw, but she relied on, the environment supple, bountiful, and rooting for her son like the vaquero known for his care in breaking horses who taught my father to ride when it was up to the family to get their child to school.

What does it mean to become enthralled by the memories told to you by your father? An invitation, I would say, for someone like me to become the archivist of her father's repository, conduit for a transfer of knowing, the bridge for historical context within its own singularity, the boyhood of Hugo Joseph Bianco and a lesson he learned from the vaquero during the heat of August. For the vaquero is the man my father conjured during the last winter of his life. For what reason I imagine respect, the bond of child to elder, Agostina his mother, willing participant in the fledging of her child.

Maybe some will say I take it too far, romanticizing the ranch, embellished by nostalgia.

On a dark night in December he will recall with rapt intensity as though he is the storyteller at the fire, as though my husband and I were standing out in the afternoon sun with him in the dusty paddock as he was lifted into the saddle and handed a pair of reins.

Maybe they would be right and okay with me; this, a notebook not meant to bring comfort to the reader.

Spring hairbrush memory: Maybe I was nine or ten, during one of the summer vacations on the farm, not wanting my long hair washed and combed out, my grandmother sharing with me the story of her early days in America when she worked for a family with a daughter who had hair a similar color, chestnut brown, reddish, and long waves, my grandmother's job to help ready her for school with tangles combed out braided with pink ribbons, details lost on me as she related the experience of her first job in America, a newly wed, her spouse leaving her behind in New York City to work for a family with a houseful of children while he made his way to California and would call for her. That's all I know, my hair was the same color as that girl, and my grandmother wanted me to know, to imply I too was worth someone who would look after me. There is no more to the story than what I've written, except to say my grandmother had a job where she cared for children in a household that could afford a servant devoted to the task, while she couldn't wait to leave for California to join Ercole and begin their new life. There is no more to this story than what my grandmother said except to say that when she told me about the job of caring for a girl and brushing her hair, I was ten and she was maybe 70, with fifty years gone by since the time of that job and what was not spoken, image of Grandmother at the mirror as she brushes granddaughter's hair, wistful nature of putting words to reflection, the past a wave of associations steeped in longing for the self, for the girl sitting in front of her in the mirror, for a girl, long ago.

In retrospect Yosemite is not a black and white reminiscence but a continuum of the range of dark to light within which there are infinite grays the artist plays like the keys of a piano

For me, a brown-eyed girl, there was comfort in knowing nothing was lost to the negative.

Why I write this now I don't know except to say pay attention to the bones of a place—why it's interesting, not pretty, photographs by Ansel Adams masterful, each angle a decision toward how to undress the place to essentials, disrobing the scene to make visible the textures of grooves and protrusions on the granite face, for instance. Not to focus on the wildflower, rather reveal snow at tree line against spiral rock; not the nature scene of woodpeckers.

Formidable, massive, and grand, easy synonyms to the page, Yosemite a haunting cataclysm, Half Dome's indelible consciousness of sensory overload that mesmerizes as many are drawn beyond danger signs, cameras in hand, to plunge to their deaths.

We did not beg to go to Disneyland. In the backseat Dennis and I found our sleeping bags. We left before the spires of Pinnacles Monument haloed in light. Against the drama of morning the bobcats oversaw their sandstone ledges littered with fallen rock, the miscellany of withered fauna.

I remember the light formed shapes mistaken for what remained behind. Interior, within the backdrop, muted, like the task to mold, fingers hueing clay.

Light is a workhorse without a proper name, the daily molding of sentences you come back to as a writer.

Where is the map I would turn to so that you could begin to understand the deeper reams of the farm originating in my childhood? Should I begin with another bricolage of recall, or, perhaps, take a different tack, stand with the girl, within the framework of *terroir*, French for the concept that the very soil of a place affects the taste and development of all that grows upon it, especially pertaining to the grapes of a vineyard. How best to describe Salinas *terroir* but record the word *earth*, *black earth*, tell how low-lying fog and shape-shifter oak become coyote and mustang, my brother standing in a field where the valley is grooved by tractor tines and rimmed by the distant hills that dishevel in waves of erosion, gullies the essence of coastal mountains, my brother leaning against the little hills, to hold them in place, what memory does to you, hold belief in a place. It's dusk. Dennis scoops up handfuls of dirt we toss high up in the air to touch the sun, to glitter the sky.

In my fourth grade classroom my father broke the boundary between home and school, coming into my class to show the films he'd taken of the art he'd seen on my parent's trip to Europe the summer before I entered fourth grade. The room was hot, muggy, afternoon with no air, children restless, hoping for long recess while projector warmed, children drowsy after peanut butter and grape jelly sandwiches.

When my father arrived the curtains were drawn, lights dimmed, taking time mid-day from managing his grocery store to talk to us between the snickers and jests, about the body beautiful, Michelangelo's *David*, in particular, imploring / admonishing us not to laugh, the artist a student of the body like the rest of us, learning his trade 500 years ago, the sculpture of Moses he would strike on the knee to bruise him, form a welt to force him to speak, make marble behave as though human.

This was one of those moments of learning when my father used his authority to teach by showing how he could prove that to travel was the thing no one could take away from you. You could be changed by what you saw, your viewpoint altered and expanded and when that happened you would forever have a responsibility to share of that context. As the black and white film reel ran its course students in my class imbibed sensibilities of the man who would return to Italy in a couple of years with his daughter to make good on the promise of his lesson. I don't know how to explain the father who eventually told my mother to call the pediatrician when, having had a stomach ache for two days, I was diagnosed with appendicitis, the operation scheduled four hours later. I don't know how to reconcile the man who appreciated the body rendered through the artists' work but distanced himself from his eldest born eight years before me, my sister with cerebral palsy from a difficult birth; the juxtaposition of tensions between the image bound within the marble statue and the dynamics which one can't control of the living body that emerge, unfurl, evolve and enfold.

I thought that one day I'd reflect on those experiences that made me a brown-eyed girl crossing the ditch, observer of bordered spaces, narratives.

Last night I returned to the drawer in the basement where I store old maps.

I found the one of Monterey County, the route circular to Arroyo Seco, one of our destinations, because of the morning light that impelled the aesthetic my father was following. His practice to showcase sunrise, capture it, in the hillsides, an outcropping with cougar on the precipice, yes, true. Because I saw it, heading east into morning, an example of *la bella figura*, Italian phrase meaning *to make a beautiful image*, against the foothills, within the shifting elevations that abut the Pacific Coast Range and barricade from the ocean. And allow us to return by a different route in the evening through Gonzales and Soledad. Boyhood towns of my father he did not avoid, pointing them out to us, a form of cherishing, to breathe in the dust of these dots on the map that whisper his name in the shade of oak weeping acorns to the ground.

We drove the two-lane highway passing through little towns.

Two places merge on the map, though actually not near one another at all when you look closely, and separated by give or take ten miles, the way one town becomes another town, superimposed, the way emotional terrain hovers, trying to engage geographical space, then drifts away, disappearing, then reappears, later in the dream.

Summer Space. Towns. Soledad. Gonzales. Paso Robles.  
Morgan Hill. Watsonville. Castroville. Monterey. Salinas.

Railroad tracks at twilight; niches you leave behind. The niches  
you left behind are a redwing black bird singing from a bulrush in  
a critical area.

The culvert in the subdivision behind the middle school turned  
into marsh.

Here, wild things pulse the thickets of cottonwood and big leaf  
maple, blackberry looping scotch broom, dandelion and clover,  
cedar and fir, swordtail because of the rain.

You return as a writer to rescue memory.

Remembering is what you're doing.

Sometimes you get there by walking, here and now, copy in hand of your latest draft, the mind riffing, affirming the cycles of rhythms; early July for instance, and the deciduous dangle gold earrings of helicopter seeds, evergreens erotically charge, sap running.

Sometimes, it's a stage of early childhood, autonomy, initiative, industry; a girl, maybe five, six, or seven preparing for Holy Communion.

Father Armstrong, the popular priest at St. Pius, altar boys trained to tease while you wait, kneeling for confession, telling the lie that you'll die because you drank Holy Water in the vestibule on a dare.

A nun you adore who won't accept what you offer her, the thimble-size vial of the water your father collected from the grotto of St. Bernadette, a refusal that undermines your father's credibility, not the legend of the shepherd girl.

Salinas, again.

Something in grandfather's question interpreted my response he was one of them, but he wasn't, leaving him of the land, heading down dirt paths to weed vegetables.

The writer puts everything on the line like that day grandfather came toward her with his wheelbarrow and the question, did you see my family?

For now, we're in the dining room waiting for the ice cold bottle of Asti Spumanti to warm slightly to room temp.

We're eager for the cork to pop when the effervescence in the bottle synchronizes with the energy in the room. Tiny, delicate, hand-blown liquor glasses / *bicchierri* set before us.

My brother and I toast with family and friends on the occasion of our grandparents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

The back story is my father's warning—*the cork could take your eye out. Don't get too close.*

Something in his question interpreted my response he was one of them, but he wasn't like those people, leaving him heading down a dirt path to weed tomatoes.

Giving me a poetics for why I write how I write the sentence that will carry, that will bridge, that will splice emotion to experience and emotion to memory, the girl, the writer, under sail; she jibes, everything on the line, like that day when grandfather came toward me with his wheelbarrow and the question, did you see my family?

We're in the dining room waiting for the bottle of Asti Spumanti to warm slightly; my father has cut the wire cage that keeps the cork in place.

We are waiting for the cork to pop, delicate glasses set for us at the table and my brother and I toast our grandparents' 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

But my father's warning, the cork could take your eye out, lingers in memory.

Future warnings murmur in the distance.

Don't stop.

This is how fragments are sorted, listless and pale, robust and festooned, so that I won't stop as though all is revealed; somethings may never be known.

Make of the pieces what you can.

## Part Three

I remember fishing poles and hooks / rainbow trout in the wicker tackle box. Cardboard box of day-old chick under the stove to keep warm; collecting brown double-yoke eggs. Rattlesnake tail / skin, a talisman saved in poker chip box. Food scraps in a pail; hens pecking order. Raccoons / skunks in the barn. Sunrays on the river rafts. Sunday afternoons at the beach; vanilla wafers and biscotti softened by salt air. Heel of parmesan cheese in kitchen sink drawer to grate for risotto. Radio station set to shows. Italian gazette / Reader's Digest. Collecting palm fronds after a storm. Bull in paddock. Dairy, peacocks, breeding Holstein. Inside the barn to milk and chase cats. Sherwood Forest mushrooms on the way to Monterey. Ordering prune cake from Pink Pastry for birthdays. Gigging frogs in the canal. Mosquito bites that swell my eye shut. Joining hands with Dennis and my cousins to run toward the sunset, horizon aglow. Bea and Woodie and grandfather cleaning up the house after a binge to begin again. Slaughtering the steer. The Graglia's. Tools / sheds / wheelbarrow. Music phonograph and Victrola. Sewing machine – treadle. What I have is their stories. Valise to America. Poker chips. Wine apparatus. Leaving, driving away. Towels in the hallway closet. One photo of my sister Catherine.

There were stars.

Infinite Blue Nova's; galaxies yet named.

Suns that had died to form us, the pink eyes of the white rabbit  
bore witness when the summer fog lifted.

When the boy with the sister found the address it was impossible  
to locate, not the same memory.

Is there one fairy tale that captures?

Because there was the first time when I would have run alone,  
but my brother beside me trying to keep up, so I held his hand  
and also my cousins', linking us in the long chain of children who  
watch the horizon, like birds on a wire.

And, there would have been a time, and someone would have  
found me, but in the beginning the matchstick ember to focus our  
gaze as we ran, the azure sky a field through which everything  
became.

But I do not know if we were right to attend my grandfather's funeral—my daughters didn't know him except for one visit from Florida while I was in college.

What I remember from my childhood is my grandfather thanking me in the dialect of longing for the future I understood wouldn't arrive for him.

Sometimes, I only remember fence posts on the way to Salinas, boot scraper at the back door, shiny black leather shoes muddied, running there.

I'm reading Fanny Howe, lost in my own decades, trying to frame a lifespan, offer continuity across historical and sociological interludes that offer a quality of coloratura, subtle nuances of gray charcoal shadings on thick white artist paper. Other times bold outlines wet and shiny like slurry on asphalt, black to accent the trigger was pulled yet no one died, the assassin in shadows in the South where we lived, year my first child was conceived.

Sometimes I have a dream that I'm trapped in a costume with a broken zipper, stuck within the fabric of history interpreted by scholars, pundits, and others who elevate themselves as different, somehow better, because they're of the Greatest Generation.

My father is an Italian. First in his family born in America. Boy who spoke a regional dialect that is today claimed as a distinct language. When he entered first grade at San Gabriel Dam School in 1921, and I have the photo, a black and white of forty students who ranged in age from five to fourteen in a one-room schoolhouse, it was my youngest who noticed the barefoot girls sitting on the bottom step wearing thin cotton dresses, my father in the front row, smiling, the children perhaps asked to say cheese, sing a good morning song that unified the children like the depression, and the war to come.

He is the history of that one-room school house.

For a five-year period, I was always returning home from another road trip to Rose Haven Adult Family Home, a mile from my mother's residence on St. Francis Street where my parents lived since 1950 in Redwood City. During those trips I tried to activate long-term memories, the last to leave us as we age with dementia. I drove with my husband to the Stanford University Mall to walk the aisles of the grocery market with its outdoor bins filled with fresh local organic fruits and vegetables. Plums and lemons reminded me of the farm. I'd bag them up in brown paper along with artichokes from Watsonville, purplish heads of Gilroy garlic, fragrant rustic Italian bread and slender slices of Fontina, his favorite cheese we had once shopped for in our local delicatessen on Woodside Road when I was a girl. Creamy, yet firm, a gourmet imported, and example of terroir so that when we shared during a meal we experienced place. On one of my last visits he and I opened the package of Fontina from the Palo Alto market and broke off a piece from the loaf. We lit a candle. It was dark in his bedroom, December and we would soon be leaving to make it to Portland before Christmas where my daughter and family lived with our two-year old granddaughter. It would take another visit during the summer on the road trip with our youngest daughter for my father to say what had been bottled up for a number of years, *I'm sorry for the trouble with the little one*, a phrase that healed as it astonished, the mystery of words and their power when mustered with eloquence and timing. My father perhaps aware that he must say this to me now, and that it didn't matter about other things anymore.

I remember fence posts on the way to Salinas, a boot scraper at the back door, the black patent leather shoes I muddied, grandfather thanking me, come again, a dialect of longing I understood, nodding. Persistent rain through the Redwoods, floods of ennui the closer we come to Arcata, Humboldt State, Pacific coast towns bound by the past from a promise to myself I detoured away from long ago to live a history of abrupt transitions and leave-taking. I remember my family saying goodbye to Nona Agostina outside the house, my daughters scuffing the toes of their shoes in the gravel and then we drive away toward the ocean to recapture something, like a gull whose wing we had helped to mend. I remember the mirror of the shop and thinking I look way too thin, unaware I'm pregnant. We decide to buy the porch swing woven of hemp; it reminds me of burlap, my grandfather and the farm when I was a girl, gathering eggs and other living things.