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## INTRODUCTION

When I first met Red Lillard, he was ambling up the road to meet J. Michael Yates by the flagpole at UBC's rose garden, having followed Mike down from Alaska to become, like me, one of that remarkable man's writing students. I'd heard about this new Alaskan: a Ketchikan logger and boom man recently returned from Germany, where he had gone to learn how to read Rilke. By reputation, a kind of literate Paul Bunyan. The tall lean redhead meandering through the manicured university landscape from the direction of the Buchanan Building looked more like Gary Cooper, Coast bushman style, in jeans, plaid shirt and canvas vest. This guy seems o.k., I thought.

Soon we were yelling at each other's poetry — his, semi-literate, mine semi-effete — walking the mountains and spending a lot of time saying much about life by saying little. I followed that deceptively easy, ambling stride up miles of sidehill and skidroad and through the bottoms of a lot of whisky bottles, scrambling to keep pace. Although we were the same size, I discovered his long leanness was made of two-by-sixes and sinew, mine of spindles and flab. The deal was, in bars and other social venues, that if Red started getting what he called "silly" — meaning he might end up in a brawl, over a woman or some more abstruse point of philosophy — I'd knock him down with a chair or piece of timber and sit on him till he became sensible. I never did need the chair (timber was not often available in the urban environment), because Lillard never ob-

jected to being knocked down. He'd giggle while I sat on him, asking, "Can I get up now? Can I get up now?" And I'd sit till he stopped giggling. The woman or other point of philosophy and surrounding civilians would look on, bemused. More often, when he felt silliness coming on, he'd simply leave, to walk home, regardless how many miles away home might be.

Over the course of some thirty years I was blest with many friends, but not a one as close in easy harmony as Red, from the day we met to the day he died of cancer at the early age of fifty-three. When my father died, Lillard was there to help me pack the old man's body out of the house on Pender Island. When his father died, Red called from Victoria to say, "The old man died. I'll pick you up in three hours. We're going to Oregon." We did, and kept going to Oregon for seven years, until on the last trip, in Dufur (pop. 400) visiting his mother, he told me he'd been pissing blood.

This book is not a memoir of Charles Marion Lillard. Nor is it a celebration of his life and work, except as a wake in the Old Norse sense. It is an expression of the effect that losing such a friend has on one's own life. Most of the poems aren't about Red, but all are informed with his spirit as it informed me — even poems of loss and grief and the coming to joy written before his death, poems which I didn't properly understand until I had to come to terms with life in the absence of the Rilkean boom man from Ketchikan.

Back to beginnings: When Red first went to work the booms, his crewmate and mentor was Joe Hosch, returned from service with the American forces stationed in Japan. I asked Joe — who is now retired in Salem, Oregon — to write something about the early days with his buddy Lillard.

How do I honour this man who rode the logs with me,  
so long ago? I first met Red, as he has always been called,  
on a spring day in 1963, walking down the ramp at low

tide to the boom shack. Red was wearing Malone pants — thick woolen winter trousers — a heavy wool shirt, and a bulky wool coat. He looked like the reincarnation of Brian Boru, the Irish Viking-tamer, sans sword. His long red hair was swirling in the wind. I thought to myself, “Here is an interesting character.” How right I was.

I believe it was Lloyd Wilson, one of the bull cooks, who laid the moniker Red onto Charles Lillard. We got along fine from the start. I found Red to be extremely well versed in literature. He had read the books one should read to be educated. We fed slip together and philosophized on those long log-pushing shifts. . . .

A little later, Red talked me into enrolling at Ketchikan Community College. I must say it was the best thing I had ever done. It also made the log world a lot more exciting as we studied literature and philosophy on the slip. We were known as the schoolboy slip feeders.

We never saw each other much over the years, but we wrote and he sent me copies of his poetry. He honored all of us who knew him so long ago.

I don’t know about Lloyd Wilson, but Red’s own recollection was that he was christened with his indelible nickname by a veteran logger-bushman named Loy, a friend of his parents, who were running a store at Clover Passage, near Ketchikan. The boy Charles, “Chuck” to his mother, heard himself called Red River Red by the big man in the greasy cap and took Old Loy as his role model for life — a man rooted in Alaskan coastal lore reaching back before White contact into the saltmists of time, the pre-time of the Old People, of Muzon Woman and her crew.

In his later years, Charles — as his wife and more recent friends and colleagues came to call him — became a family man, devoted to the lady with eyes blue as the sea off Yakutat and a young son and daughter crazy as their father. The bot-

toms of whisky bottles became few and far between. The writing, long very good, became better and better to, almost, a Governor General's Award for poetry. And the trips to Central Oregon following our fathers' deaths became the first steps toward a dispassionate clarity that is perhaps the middle distance between here and hereafter.

— George Payerle  
Roberts Creek

## Dateline: The Oak Bay Beach Hotel

*for my friend Doug Beardsley*

These are days.  
They are as gulls  
in the sky over Victoria,  
and the willow spreading  
an infinitude of meticulous small leaves  
without order or sense  
as the universe  
is  
and everyone.  
Everyone.



*for PJ*

## Two

look at two, you  
said Frost says.  
And he does.  
Deer, they, and Frost with love,  
his  
and you, mine —  
we  
two  
looking at us  
like startled deer not  
fleeing  
but gentled in the  
moment  
of creation  
just before naming  
of the animals and love  
before the weapons and the blood  
and the love  
and the years  
and we two with child  
leaning against each other  
as the horses do.

## They Say

it's sacred, and  
it is  
marriage.  
They say  
a lot of things.  
We said it was like geese  
mating.  
Konrad Lorenz on bonding —  
*on aggression*, he said  
rightly.  
This space we occupy with great pain  
and joy  
because it belongs to neither of us  
no matter how much we claim “mine”  
but is  
simple.  
Us. They say  
and they say  
and we say  
“We”  
And so we are.

## Knives

on your tongue,  
never knowing how Ninja you are.  
Never knowing you argue  
as though with your father,  
who argues for the sake of argument and  
wins because he fears losing  
as though it were the void — Depression Existentialist  
who thinks Camus is a dog  
your brother had once,  
his son who argues for the sake of argument  
and never understands why his dogs run away.  
Your father,  
who finds peace in the fire he's kept lit  
lo this lifetime,  
tending  
in the stone cave he built  
eight decades of fierce gentle heat —  
his skinny body hunched like a Métis hunter's  
and his conversation still,  
full of silence and hot showers of stars  
sweeping into the sky.  
Your father the carpenter.  
His legacy of hammers and blades  
the steel in your wonderful, deadly  
soul.

## Little One

She slept and  
squalled  
and strung us tight as  
cold-turkey junkies  
for her little life, huge love and  
need. Something  
in the mid-night  
and I soothing her with a bottle of  
expressed milk-of-you, slightly blue.  
Soporific Daddy you named me.  
Only way to get the kid  
sleeping  
I would lie down to nap  
(being nappish)  
and lay her on me and sleep and she  
too, would. Every time.  
No pacing of the floor, no  
soothers  
no nothing but Hey kid, let's  
sleep.  
She, so fine, always  
beautiful as the first morning.  
She looked like Old Harold then,  
her grandfather's jowls on a purple face and wailing  
and stuck on your breast  
new born  
and you  
beatified, saying  
"She's almost as good as you."  
When she popped out you sat  
and said —  
transcendent declaration —

“It’s Bronwen!”  
and saw the white light of god between your knees.  
At nearly fifteen,  
Bronwen is. All of that.