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My first job I lose before I’ve even started it. Staring out into an air shaft from a twelve-dollar room at the Biltmore, I wait day after day for my new boss to return my call so I can take up the glamorous Manhattan life of Yale Man, professional lyricist, rock and roll talent scout, and apprentice record producer for Columbia Records, till at last the guy’s secretary calls and says. Well, hmm, there’s been a problem.

My roommate Rick Platt’s dad, Frank, a lawyer (and ultimately one of the best friends I’ve ever had), has said please call when I’m settled. I’m as thoroughly unsettled as I’ve ever been, but I call anyhow. Frank says meet him on the 5:15 club car to Greenwich. By six-thirty we have martinis and a plan in hand. Two days later, never having raised his voice, he’s got me reinstated.

Next thing (1970), I get married. Childhood sweetheart, inevitable as springtime.

I produce my first and only record, a polytonal polyrhythmic Dadaist caterwaul, one of the worst-selling albums in Columbia’s history—for which I am fired (1971). I write poems and publish a few. I go back to work for Columbia, now reduced to writing ad copy. Afternoons, I shut my office door, smoke half a dozen cheap cigars, and write, my own stuff.

Years pass. I write a play—a musical (my composer-partner a kid fresh out of Harvard)—and quit my job in assurance of Broadway bucks and glory (1976). Our producer is arrested, convicted, and imprisoned for fraud relating to a previous production. I’m writing long strange stories that nobody will publish.

Writing slows. Depression sets in. I watch a lot of Johnny Carson and smoke too much pot. Frank Hiatt has taught me fly-fishing, and that has led me back into Arcadia—from which I’d been cast out ages back when my childhood Tennessee woods were clear-cut on behalf of residential subdivision—and I have rediscovered nature and begun to learn ecology and written a thing or two about animals, and a couple of the pieces have been published and even admired.

One piece (1982) grows into a book proposal about grizzly bears, and that becomes a book, The Grizzly Bear (Knopf, 1984).

My bride, meanwhile, after her boss quit to run the Reagan campaign’s advertising, has become the youngest female ad agency president ever and is hauling home money in boxcars, so I remain free to root around Yellowstone amid bear scat, glaciers, and silence while she rides to power breakfasts in limousines and grows accustomed to Armani, the Concorde, and the company of moguls.

Can you see what’s coming? I couldn’t.

Conservation, especially of the grizzly’s last great redoubts, becomes my heart’s love. I publish another book, of conservation philosophy, Nature First: Keeping Our Wild Places and Wild Creatures Wild (Roberts Rinehart, 1987). I join the board of an innovative and tough-minded startup conservation group called the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and in time I become its president. Two partners and 1 buy a ranch on the edge of the Absaroka-Beartooth wilderness

(1989), and from now on it’s all I can do to yank myselfloose and come back to New York.

I have immersed myself in questions of changes in the land and how they affect history, culture, and the identity of individuals. The pangs of longing and loss which wild landscapes have reawakened in me become the birth-pangs of a natural-historical novel, A Story of Deep Delight (Viking, 1990). SDD is my too- late thanks to my mentor, Robert Penn Warren, who was the main reason I had come to Yale and who taught me the stubbornness I have needed to keep writing against so much discouragement, and the book is dedicated to the woman who gave me the long time and the patient support I needed to write it; but by the time it’s published Warren is dead, and my bride, though still in the house, is, in her mind, already elsewhere.

Darkness comes, and in due time divorce. Then a slow dawning. A half- done novel struggles back to life. A book on the return of the Yellowstone wolf, and more largely on the restoration of damage to nature, takes shape, and finds a publisher. 1 discover (always slow to see what’s most obvious) that a not-too-old guy, undiseased and of the faithful sort, is rather quickly scented in the burgeoning single-female community. The New York house is sold. I get a Montana driver’s license, resident fishing license, and organ-donor card.

I used to think that adulthood was a steady state.