



In 1974, refusing to settle for a life in mainstream society, George Wolfe quit his job as a stockbroker and decided to live his life outdoors. Over the span of five years, George journaled about his travels that took him to several continents and literally into many bodies of water. In this book, follow George as he seeks to LIVE LIFE on his own terms through the good, the bad, the hard, and the rewarding.

Wolfe's Howl

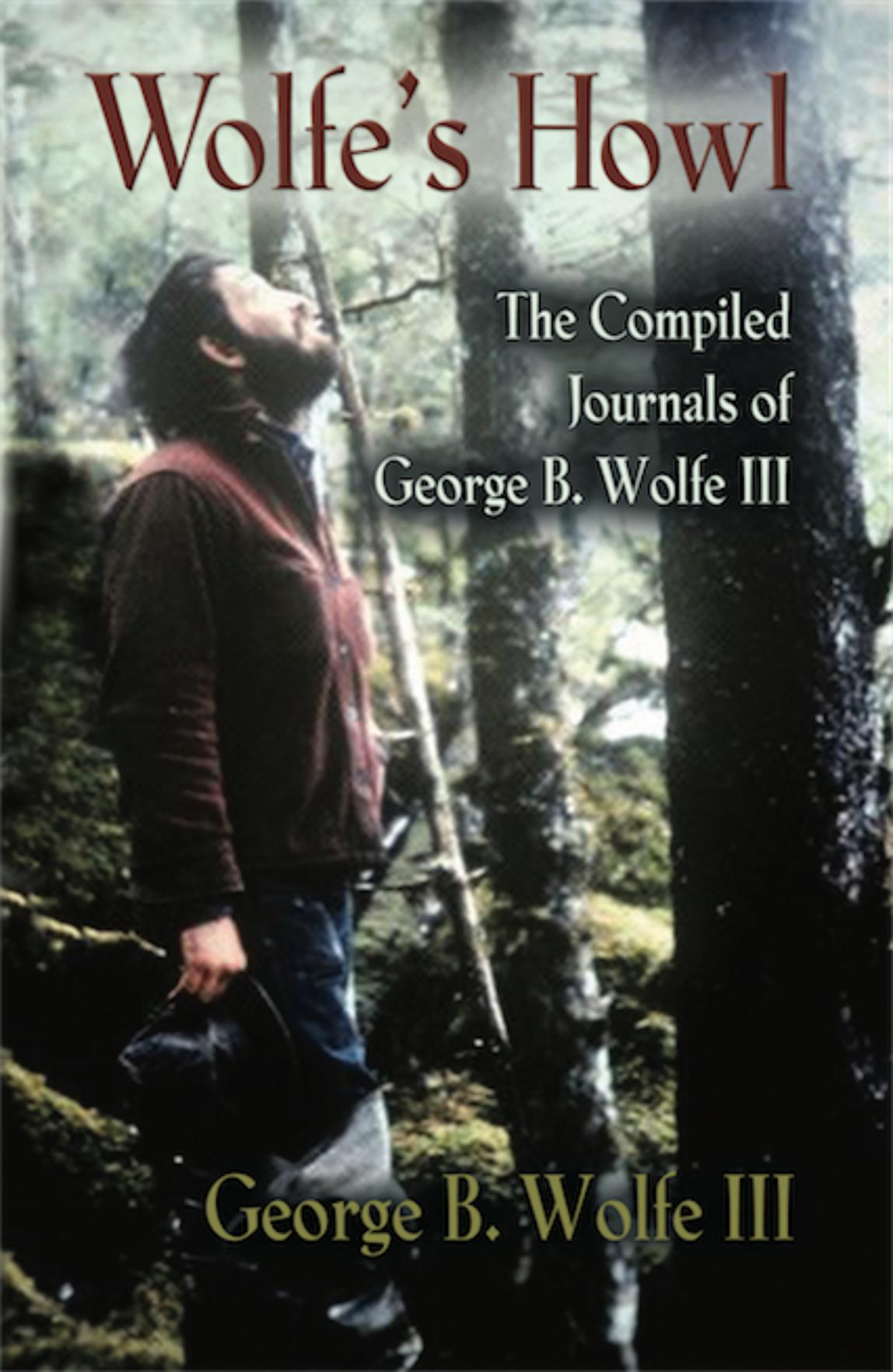
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A photograph of a man with a beard and long hair, wearing a dark jacket and a red scarf, standing in a forest. He is looking upwards towards a tree trunk. The background is a dense forest with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Wolfe's Howl

The Compiled
Journals of
George B. Wolfe III

George B. Wolfe III

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Alaska

September 21, 1974

DAY ONE: The one I had waited for...for months: the day I headed for the Unuk River in Alaska. What a day! Yesterday's rain was replaced by bright, warm sunshine. The early morning fog burned off, revealing a cloudless sky. After loading my supplies onto the riverboat, the *Sea Bear*, Terry Wills and I left around 11:00 a.m.

On the way, we stopped for an illegal, but what we felt was the morally correct, thing to do. Somebody from town had crab traps out in this area, but never pulled the traps, thus, letting the crabs die, others crabs feed on them, then die, etc.—a needless waste. So, Terry and I pulled about 15 of the traps, released the crabs, and stashed the pots on the shore. Quite illegal. If the person pulled the traps and used the crabs, it would be different. I hope, for Terry's sake, no one finds out we did it. He is often in a vulnerable position; I'm not.

Anyhow, we enjoyed the beautiful day traveling to the Unuk River. About an hour or so away from our destination, Terry opened a bottle of Strawberry Hill. We drank it and a couple more, while traveling. We were both feeling pretty good and enjoying ourselves. Guess it will be one of the last times I'll drink and have a good time with anyone for a while. By late afternoon, we arrived at the Unuk River post.

The mountains accented the wide valley as we left the cold and muddy water of the river and entered the clear water of the Eulachon and the dock. Bruce Johnstone, a long-time

“sourdough,” and a friend of Terry’s, was waiting for us. I never cease to be *amazed* at that man. He has done so much, seen so much, and lived so much. Will I ever be thought of, in a small way, as people think of Bruce? The man is a legend, a living folk hero.

Tonight, I don’t feel the doubt I felt about my stay here when I was back at Yes Bay. I wrote this poem while there:

Many days, many nights,
Lots of bean too.
Do I long or do I dread
What I am going to do?

The nights will be long and the days cold.
The cabin’s small and we are two.

Will we last, will we survive
To see another spring?
What do the days hold in store?
And what will the nights bring?

Well, I guess I’ll find out.



September 25, 1974

I've spent the last couple of days cutting wood and getting everything in order. The cabin where we are staying is 8' x 20' and made of frame lumber and shakes. There are three other cabins here, plus a warehouse and a bathhouse. All are beautifully made of peeled logs and are much larger, etc. than the one we are staying in. But we hope to move into our own cabin. The plan is that I will help Terry cut logs for a large cabin and a small cabin on his land (about 400 yards from where I'm sitting). We hope to build a small cabin to winter in, which Terry would later use for a workshop. We plan to start building the big cabin before the snow starts, and then to complete it next spring. The only trouble is, we don't know how to build a cabin. Oh well, with Bruce's help we can learn. The main reason to build the small cabin first is for us to gain the experience. The second will be nicer and better built after we've learned from the first one. Then, of course, we plan to trap after "freeze up." (We are on the forks of the Eulachon & Unuk Rivers and both freeze from December through April). We expect snow accumulations from six to ten feet. That should level most small bushes and make walking easier; that is, walking on snowshoes. Hmmm... I wonder what they will be like to walk on. I guess time will answer a lot of questions.

Doesn't it always?

September 27, 1974

Has almost a week passed since I got here? I don't believe I have ever spent a shorter or more enjoyable week. I divided my time between making preparations for winter and playing. But this week they seemed to be the same thing. For instance,

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yesterday Bruce and I went to the “grocery” to get fish for the winter. ‘Course that means we went fishing, but in the line of duty, by all means. Anyhow, we took the jet boat. This is a 20’ square-bow, flat-bottom boat, almost identical to the Jon-boats used down south. It has a 50 hp outboard motor. The propeller has been removed and replaced with a water jet unit, allowing operation in shallow water. We went up the Eulachon for silver salmon. After only a couple of hours fishing with light spinning tackle, we caught nine salmon, eight of which weighed over 10 pounds. The river, where we were, was shallow and clear with a few deep pools. We saw hundreds—no, *thousands*—of salmon preparing to spawn. What a beautiful, pristine, wild spot. Of course, we only went because I needed the meat. Ha! We both had a ball!!



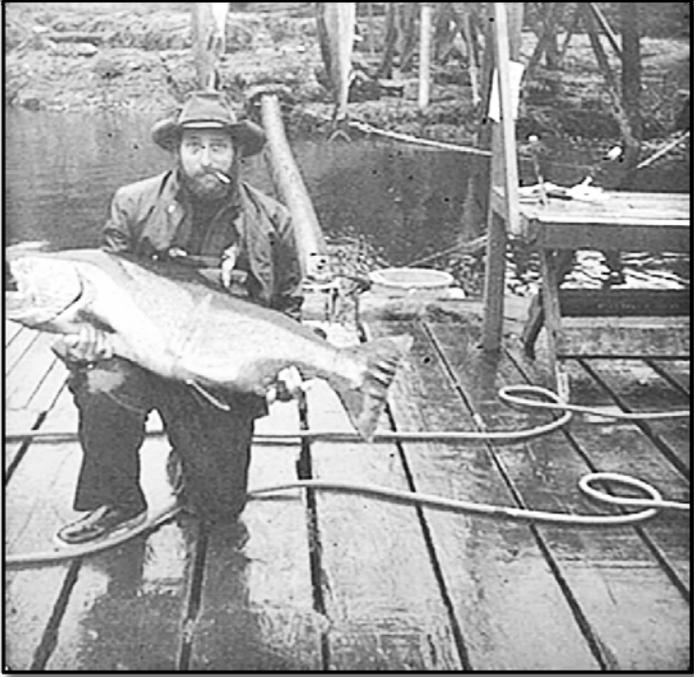
When we got back, I prepared to clean the fish. I went into the house for a minute and left our catch on the dock. When I came out a mink was tugging at one of the fish. In case you don't know, a mink is only about 12 inches long and not about to move a 12 pound fish. But don't tell him! He had a gleam in his eye and hope in his soul and was tugging for all of his few ounces worth, and totally unafraid of me too. When I finally walked down to the dock, he moved aside. As soon as I started to work, back he came, tugging and chewing. I cut off a couple of chunks he could handle and tossed them his way. With one eye on me and the other on the big fish, he grabbed the chunk and backed into his hole for a feast.

Even though we are planning to trap, that fellow is safe. While minks are mean and would never make a pet, it's nice to have one around. And I think it's sort of appropriate (or something) for two trappers to have such an animal around camp. Maybe it will show we aren't the heartless, money-hungry men some people think we are. Animals have their place. As long as people enjoy them, I'll let them be. But up in the woods, where they are never seen, I feel that I can put them to better use by selling their pelts to pay for my stay here this winter. In my opinion, this is better than letting nature take its course. At least this way, *someone* is getting some good out of them.

It is sort of like those fish I like to see in the stream. They are beautiful creatures. But I need them, and as long as they aren't wasted, I don't feel bad about taking them. I'm smoking half and salting half. It should be great eating in December or January.

So, with still over six months left ahead of me, I'm looking forward to it with as much joy and excitement as a kid at Christmas or a groom on his honeymoon.

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I don't think I'll mind the cold (it's now 50° but will be 0° and below) or the snow. The mountaintops around us are capped with snow, but by February we will have almost a tunnel of snow to get through just to get to the john. I only fear boredom or cabin fever. Or am I simply saying, "I don't fear the elements, only myself?"

October 2, 1974

I am still in awe of this country. I didn't realize that any place in the world could really be like this. I've read about and talked about country that was magnificent beyond description, and now I know what that means.

I'll try to describe our setting.

Our cabin is about 50 feet from the Eulachon River. Sometimes Eulachon is spelled and pronounced "Hooligan." It is named for a fish that makes a run up this river (sometimes a creek). The river is normally about 150 yards wide and about two to four feet deep. The water is clear and the color of very weak tea. There is some tide influence here as we are about a mile or so from Burroughs Bay. The current normally flows out to sea of course, at about the pace of a slow walk. Before a high tide, the sea pushes the muddy waters of the Unuk (a fork is maybe 300 yards away) up past us. There is quite an abrupt line between the muddy water and the clear seawater. The muddy water pushes back the clear water, and then as the tide reverses itself, the clear water returns.

There are fields behind us and to one side of our cabin for several hundred yards. These fields are full of grass from three to six feet high. The river valley is anywhere from a quarter-mile to two miles wide on one end for about four miles where it is divided by a mountain, Old Baldy. (There must be more mountains named Old Baldy than any other name.) There the creek branches and continues on another two miles in either direction, ending in box canyons.

Our Old Baldy earned its title last night. While we had rain here, its top was crowned with snow. And today, between rain showers, the sun would fight its way through the low clouds and light Old Baldy up. It looked unreal. I mean when I was

staring at it once today, I couldn't *believe* it. You know the slides you look through the viewfinder to see—the ones where everything stands out? Well, that's how Old Baldy was. The snow coming down to the timberline, the sheer rock walls looming out of the snow, with the green trees below. And the air between was so clear that it brought the mountain to me.

Okay so it was raining where I was, and I was cold. But that was a small price to pay for such an experience, especially when I had a nice warm cabin waiting for me. And the cabin *was* nice and warm! Even, or maybe especially, because I don't have any electrical switches to throw. The cabin is 8'x 20' outside. Small? No, cozy. It now has a porch, extending about four feet in the front. A new porch I spent three days building. The work is crude; the corners aren't square, and the tin on the top isn't too even. But by damn, it's dry and I made it. Pardon the pride, but it's nice to look at something and say, "I did it and no one else helped."

As you come through the door, the heater-stove greets you on the right. It will be replaced by one Vic is bringing up as this one is really just a heater with no cooking arrangement. It burns wood. And know where the wood comes from? I cut it. I appreciate its heat as I earned it. Cutting, floating, hauling up, splitting and stacking wood is no easy task for a man used to "switches." But it is a fun task. It's almost humbling to watch a big tree, weighing 100 or 1000 times as much as you, go crashing down, knocking smaller trees out of its way. And the knowledge of what it could do to you stimulates you more. Then when splitting the wood, the sound and feel of the sharp ax is good for the soul as it separates the log into four sticks.

Back to the cabin's interior: in the front of the room is a partially folding table where the lamp is set. For light, we use a kerosene lamp. In fact, we have two types, an ordinary wick

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lamp and an “Aladdin.” I use the wick lamp for emergencies. The Aladdin puts out a bright, white light. Certainly, it has to be refilled, lit with a match, and allowed to warm up, and then you move it to where you want light, but it is *appreciated*. Its mantle is delicate and it must be handled with care (TLC). Without it, our light is yellow and dim. We can’t run to the supermarket in 10 minutes and buy a new bulb.

The rest of the room is simple. Food cabinets are on the right a little further in. Bunks are in the back with shelves on one side for our “needed” stuff. Plywood sheets lay on the rafters for the freezable foods and the rest is stored in the warehouse. Clothes are kept in a bag under the bed.

It is a simple room—small but comprising all a man would need. I wonder why some people have such big and fancy houses? With so many switches?



George standing in front of the cabin he lived in for a winter

October 11, 1974

Well, I'm back at Yes Bay, but for only a few days.

Terry and Mike Vunderhill (the cook at Yes Bay for the season but now working for Terry on his boat) came up to the post three days ago. We left on the Sea Bear, Terry's boat, for an island close to Yes Bay to cut cabin logs. In the last three days, we have downed and limbed about thirty trees or "poles." Up here in timber country, anything under six feet thick at the base is a "pole." Our poles are red cedar and measure from 12"- 20" at the butt, with only a slight taper, and are from 30'- 50' long. These are what we will use to build Terry's big cabin. In a sense, we were "hand-logging."

And that reminds me, I must recommend a book that I read a week or so ago. In fact, I even recommend the purchase of it. It is Handloggers by W.H. Jackson with Ethel Dassow. Mr. Jackson or "Handlogger Jackson" as he was known throughout these parts, was Bruce's brother-in-law. Bruce is mentioned throughout the book. I enjoyed the book for its content and the fact that I have lived in and know the area where it takes place. I have, on my own, without a guide or directions, fished the same creeks, enjoyed the same lakes, and stood on the same cliffs "Handlogger" did. I really enjoyed the book. Try it.

Hand Logging is a thrill in and of itself. 'Course, our trees are much smaller than those in the book, but the thrill of seeing it go down a hill and splash is just as big. First, "we" select a strand of red cedar on a hill or cliff overlooking the water. When I say "we," of course, I really mean Bruce. He's the one who knows what we are doing. Then "we," as often as not, unless Bruce cuts himself, get it "sky-bound," meaning hung up in the limbs of another tree. After much cutting, pushing and an appropriate amount of cussing, we get the tree to the

ground. The “limbing” then is fairly simple, unless the tree is projected over a drop off or another tree—if so, you are working from 10 to 40 feet. Bruce selects which trees to fall, where to drop them, and, in fact, in what order, sometimes even higher above the ground. But, as we say, “It’s only one or maybe two seconds high!” It’s really not all that dangerous, but enough to get a nice tingle.

After being limbed and topped, the pole is ready for the “ride down.” If cut on a steep hillside and conditions are right, one push and whoosh...it goes barreling down the hill, knocking smaller trees aside, to make a beautiful splash. But that’s only when things are ideal. Much more often, it’s grunt and push, look and cuss, strain and push some more. Inches can be slow or yards can be fast. When she goes, she GOES...and we scatter like mice when a cat shows up. Except Bruce. He knows what the log will and won’t do. And he acts accordingly while the rest of us just run like hell.

But you know, even though the work is hard and accented by the spice of just a little danger, it is fun! It’s sort of neat to watch a pole that you selected, cut and pushed, go screaming down a hill on its first journey, its first step in becoming a house.

Yes, it’s still a good life even though I’m not, or maybe especially because I’m not, working for wages. The gut-busting strains, the sore shoulders from pushing, the end-of-the-day tired feelings all seem worthwhile. We are doing *something*...something we want to do, something worthwhile, something we will remember and enjoy remembering for years. It will be something to talk about if we ever get together in future years. No one here is working for the money or for the bank or for the bill collectors. We are doing it because we want

to. And there is no better reason for doing anything, anywhere, anytime.



October 19, 1974

Well, I'm back at the post, and it's nice to be home—so little yet so much going on. I don't know how to tell it all. We are planning a lot, but doing only a little. Or maybe doing all we want, all we need to, and enjoying more. At any rate, we are back. Because of weather (rainy and windy) we only brought 30 or so logs back. Left 25 for another trip. But at least we have started on the cabin. And before you can finish, you must start.

Bruce will be leaving soon, maybe in three or four days. Vic and I will be sorry to see him go. My thoughts of Bruce are many and varied; I plan to write about them soon. Bruce has shown us a lot and shared with us too. We can now set traps, if even in a clumsy, amateur way. We know a little of the country, but only on a “first date” basis. And while we know only a little now, we will learn more.

We are off to a great start trapping. Two days ago, with Bruce’s guidance, we put out two traps for marten. It’s still early; the season isn’t legally open. But in those two days, we caught two mink (kept one to learn how to skin, stretch, dry, etc. and turned one loose), and lost another bait! That is a really unbelievable average. We visited 75 percent of the traps daily (the one trap that was snapped and bait gone might have been a bear, but of course the trap was way too small for him to care). But at any rate, a great start.

The skinning and stretching is a lot of work for \$10 or \$20 a pelt. Many hours are involved in collection, skinning, and drying of only one skin. Gee whiz, since mink coats are so expensive, I wonder why the pelts don’t bring more? And of course, we have no guarantee (and no good guess) how much the skins will bring next spring. If the economy goes the way it’s geared, the hides won’t bring much. But then, we have neither expectations nor dreams of getting rich from this.

We expect much more than wealth.



George giving a pelt a dancing lesson

October 21, 1974

Well, this was the first day that wasn't that great. A day when the cold and rain got to me; a day when I stepped in water that went over my hip boots, and I lived with wet legs for a couple of hours; a day, that looking back on it, seems like we got little done. But maybe, just maybe, we accomplished more than we realize. We (Vic and I) went to the "forks" of the Eulachon for the first time and learned a little about the river. We found the shallow spots where we have to get out and pull the boat across, and we learned where the water is too swift to run against. We realized that the country can "turn the other cheek." Okay, maybe while it is still fairly warm and there are people around, we should learn our lessons; they are easy now.

Today, we went fishing...and caught no fish. We went hunting...and shot no ducks. It rained...and we got wet. But isn't that, in some small way or another, what we are here to learn? That we must accept, not try to control, the elements? That we must adjust *to*, not simply "adjust" our surroundings?

And don't think we are suffering in the least. We have to be the first trappers in Alaska to brave the wilds with a stereo in their cabin! A couple of days ago, Vic's dad came for a visit. He brought a hand generator and Vic's tape deck. Music! Such comforts! And he even brought the new "Playboy!"

Which reminds me of a subject on my mind: Sex!

To you, Mother, it is a subject that is best not brought up—thought of, but not talked about. Well, since I consider myself normal, I'll do both.

When I decided to come up here, I began discussing my plans with friends and strangers. The friends encouraged me, and told me of the good times. The strangers seemed to know

nothing but the bad and seemed amazed that I would dare to risk such a period without a woman. I don't know what to say in rebuttal. I *really* enjoy sex. But surely that can't be the only governing factor in my life. That can't be my only goal. The long winter ahead will be...well...long. I will think of a woman, or even women, but I won't get to share the pleasure of life with one for a long time.



November 5, 1974

Well, we got the Eulachon Hilton finished. Vic and I went up yesterday and put the roof on. We slept there (under a tarp because the roof leaked) and finished it up today.

We finished our "home away from home," which is a 7'x 8' cabin with a leaky roof, made from salvaged lumber.

Truthfully, it looks like a tree house built on the ground for a 12-year-old. It has one window covered with plastic, one door, two bunks (well, boards laid out flat), and is nothing to brag about. Or is it? Since I have seen a lot of places that I had only previously read about, I've learned that the brochures, while telling the truth, don't tell it all. So, I'll try to describe our shack as a brochure might read:

COME VISIT THE NEW EULACHON HILTON!!

Looking for a spot to get away from it all?

Looking for a quiet, secluded place to relax, enjoy life and nature in magnificent surroundings?

Look no further! Here is just such a place.

The brand new Eulachon Hilton can be reached only by boat, up the beautiful scenic, and truly untouched Eulachon River. The journey up this pathway of nature is considered a majestic highlight by many who have made the trip. The river is winding and as clear as water can be. It is pure enough to drink, as we often do.

Once you arrive, you will find the Eulachon Hilton really fits its natural surroundings. The architecture is patterned after a simple trapper-line shack. With the thought of nature in mind, the entire structure is built with recycled materials!

As you enter the building, you will notice several things: the cozy, intimate atmosphere, the lack of bright lights and loud music, and a simple, but adequate theme that prevails throughout.

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Then you wander back to the front door to gaze upon the magnificent natural surroundings. From our doorstep, nature reveals herself for all to enjoy.

A quick look around, and you will spot three nests of the Great American Bald Eagle, our truly beautiful national birds. If you look to the right, you may spot a nimble-footed mountain goat perched on a precarious cliff. The river rushing by will hold (in season) one of the several varieties of salmon on their way to spawn, dressed in their bright spawning colors.

If you are especially lucky, you may see the largest meat-eating animal on the face of the Earth: the truly great Alaskan Brown Bear. A thrilling experience!

Our meals are served family style, cooked by real Alaskan trappers. Their sourdough cooking will be remembered always.

So won't you come and join us in Nature's Hideaway?

Come relax. Come to the simple life. Come to Nature's call.

Come to the Eulachon Hilton.

Rates: Men, married women, and children \$100/day, plus transportation, food and bedding.

Single women: free—we supply everything.

(And not a lie in the whole thing!)

November 7, 1974

Yesterday I lost a friend. A friend I had for only a little over a year, but one I had known very well. One I've eaten with and yes, even slept with. One that helped me out, even in the worst weather. It hurts to lose a friend, especially one that you were so close to, knew so well, and who complimented your personality.

Yesterday I lost my hat!

But before you laugh, understand it was MY hat. True, it was bent and worn. Its holes were patched with leather. Its color had long since been replaced by weather worn gray. The eagle feather that had once been proud and bold was now broken and crooked. The braided leather band and "evil eye" had quietly surrendered to the rains. I guess to many, the hat was worn out. But to me it was just broken in.

It happened on a trip up the Eulachon. In a narrow, white-water spot, a limb caught me in the eye, then took my hat. In the 10 or 15 seconds I couldn't see, my hat sank in the swift water. We looked and will look again when the water is lower, but there was no trace of it. At least it went under honorably, working on a good river, doing something—better there than in a junk heap.

I will miss my hat. I will remember my hat. But I will have other hats—certainly some better looking and more fashionable. Maybe even one that is almost as comfortable. Maybe there's an outside chance I will find one that I will like as well. But I doubt it. It takes time and trouble to make a friend out of an acquaintance. Time to convert a stranger into someone you want to live with and be proud of. You, who have never met my hat, will laugh and say I have cabin fever a little early. But if you saw my hat and liked it, you might feel at least

a moment, a fleeting second of regret. It is only when a friend has turned away the rain, shaded the sun, and kept you warm in the cold that you realize what a special friend it was.

Did I lose only a hat?

NO. Yesterday I lost a friend.



George before he lost his hat

November 12, 1974

Well, we have made a journey—a memorable one for us. On November 7, Vic and I went to Lake Creek, only about six miles up the Unuk, but what a six miles! The Unuk twists and turns like a “burned snake.” The depth varies from deep to motor-ruining shallow. And it’s always muddy and cold—very

muddy and very cold. To turn over is to be uncomfortable for quite a while, if you are lucky.

We, of course, made it in three hours, bucking the current. We went there to trap. And we did, with mixed success. We stayed in a plywood cabin on Lake Creek, one Bruce and some friends had built (illegally, as it is on Forest Service land, as is ours, the Eulachon Hilton) to trap and hunt out of. Upon arriving, Vic and I discovered that the river had flooded into the cabin. We had to clean three inches of mud off of the cabin floor and live with the inch we missed. Because we were unsure of the amount of fuel we took, we used only candles, morning and night.

Our days seemed long *to us*.

We took turns getting up at 6 to 6:30 to light a fire. Then we made a quick jump back into a warm sleeping bag for 30 minutes to an hour of more comfort. Then up at 7 to 7:30 (still very dark) for coffee, and then breakfast. Soon after daylight, we were in the boat and ready to start checking our line.

First stop was Kingsbury Creek. There we had eleven traps, for mink and marten. The trail was up through thick, hard-slapping, and always wet, brush. Then we headed down the creek and waded through the canyon. After that was a climb up to pass through two hairy spots. A fall here would be bad; the path is only five or six inches wide. Then we waded more and headed back to the boat.

Next we checked Lake Creek. Easy. We just cruise up the creek, jump out, check the traps, back into the boat and on our way. Here we have 13 or so traps for M&M (mink and marten). Plus five beaver traps. Easy going...until we run out of water and have to pull the boat across a sand bar. That's not too hard really. Then we followed our line up the Pass to Jeanes Lake.

Again, out of the boat, pull it up the flats and tie it, and start up the creek. We have nine traps here.

In the six days we were here, we caught two beaver, four mink and four marten. We were modestly successful. We collected about \$200 worth of furs. We paid for our grub. We saw new country. We learned new ways.

We went back to our cabin at the post. Now, our cabin took on a new light. It seemed larger, warmer, and much more comfortable than before. Again, I learned that I don't always appreciate what I have when I have it. I must do without it to truly understand what it means to me.

I appreciate my cabin and will appreciate it more, for we are going back to the Eulachon Hilton for a while. We plan to concentrate on beaver until the ice gets too thick for them to get around. The beaver trapping up the Eulachon looks promising; some new territory, some country we haven't seen, some promising country.

And that sort of sums up life, doesn't it?

November 19, 1974

The last couple of weeks we have been trapping fairly hard, and the last few days we've had no success. I mean it's tough and disheartening to go out in the rain and/or snow and check 25 or 30 traps and have nothing. And that is what we've had three days in a row. Maybe in January or February we expect this, but not in November. Now is when we expect to harvest "the cream," but we haven't been getting it.

Two days ago, several of our traps were sprung, the bait gone, but no animal. It was also the day of the first snow down on this level. We saw the tracks and knew the guilty party. Wolverine!! One of the smartest, meanest animals up here. Their pelts are valuable and beautiful but seldom collected.

So we put out large traps for him. And he visited our trap. He successfully stole the bait and walked away.

Let me say that I think trapping is fun. For most animals, we select a spot that looks good and set the trap. This is for anything that ventures by. But, by God, this was personal: me and him. We both knew of each other and respected *our enemy*.

So, I set traps again. I knew his route. I knew what he liked to eat. Today we checked the traps. At the first trap, I found tracks, but nothing else. When we got to the second trap by boat, we stopped and listened. Nothing. But as I walked up on the trap, I saw him. We had him. Wolverine. When I approached, he tried to run, but the trap held. Then he turned to face me with eyes glaring his disposition, and the same snarl that backs bears down. I learned why the Indians fear him and call him, "Devil Bear." I shot him through the neck and ended his trap running days.

He turned out to be a small animal—with a large heart.

We now think, from the tracks we found, that there are one or two more living in our valley. If there are, we may, if we can outwit them, get them in a trap. The next one is Vic's, but I don't care. Even if I get 10 more, I will always remember this one. And the look in his eyes when he turned around to face me.

November 26, 1974

Vic and I are back home after six days at the Eulachon Hilton. We were trapping, of course. We went up to get all those furs while the marten were concentrated along the salmon spawning area. This was our “cream-off-the-top” trip we had looked forward to, and the trip wasn’t easy by any standard.

The river now is very low, with ice in the back pools. There are sandbars too shallow to run across and, in many cases, too shallow to float the boat; they have sprung up like weeds in a garden. We made it, but with more time and muscle needed than a month ago. We were late getting there and got no traps out the first afternoon. The second day we put out nine traps but gave up early because of the heavy snowfall and the tough brush. Instead, we used the time to explore the new country. The next day we debated whether to fight the country and the snow (now six inches to two feet deep and still falling) or pack it in.

We stayed. Not because of any lofty challenge or to prove anything, we stayed for the fur. That night we put out 29 traps. The next night we put out 36 more. The last night, 14. Our day went something like this:

One of us (depending on whose turn it was) would get up about 7:00, light the fire, and jump back into the sleeping bag. Actually it wasn’t very cold, ranging from about 28 to 34 above zero every night. We would both climb out of the bags about 8:00. This sounds like a late sleep but it is still about one-half hour before sunrise; *that* made it *seem* early.

After coffee and breakfast, we set out in the boat: a short ride, only a few hundred yards through pools too deep to wade and two bars too shallow to motor across. We checked our traps on the left fork. Then we jumped back into the boat, motored and

pushed up another quarter mile or so. Here we left the boat for the rest of this part of the trip. We waded up the creek. We both have hip boots as standard dress. The water was from a half inch to “too deep to wade.” The footing in the creek went from soft, mucky sand, through nice gravel, to hard walking rocks.

We often had to climb and fight through the brush to get around the deep spots. To get our traps, we had to plow up the bank, through the snow, find the hidden logs and holes with our feet, ignore the snow falling off the limbs (that has a keen eye for the back of your collar), and forget the small brush that loves to swat you across the nose. Oh, yes, and remember to get up every time you fall!

And we sing. We sing most of the day. Or recite nursery rhymes. Why? Because we don't want to surprise any Brown bears. Personally, if I never hear “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” again, it will suit me just fine. I wear a .357 magnum pistol like most people wear socks. It's the first thing on in the morning and the last thing off at night. And I carry my trusty 12-gauge shotgun when we are trapping. If I ever have to use it on a bear, the range will have to be 10 feet or less—and he will be coming fast.

On second thought, maybe “Old MacDonald” ain't so bad after all.

We were usually back at our “home away from home” shortly before dark (now about 5:00). Tired. I mean really tired. Plumb weary. Usually wet from the snow down the boots, having found a pool one inch deeper than my boots could handle.

Now let me say, “Trapping is hard work.” But good work.

I get cold.

George B. Wolfe III and Eadie Wolfe Camp

I get tired.

I get aggravated.

My temper gets short.

But at night, when I'm warm and comfortable again, the day seems better...because of the fur we are going to get tomorrow.

Up at the Eulachon Hilton we had 88 "trap days." When you pack the bait and traps on your back, and YOU have to walk that whole line, through the snow and brush, it is a lot of work.



George (left) and Vic with their pelts

We got one small marten, worth about \$10-\$15, on the whole trip.

Disappointed? Yes.

Disillusioned? No.

No one asked us to come up here and trap. We hoped for much, much more. We expected more. We had set our trapping goal at \$2,000 for the season (that's \$200 a month each for five months work). I don't think we'll make it now. Oh well and what the hell. As long as we don't end up like the Donner Party, I guess our winter will be a success. (Co-author's note: The Donner party was a group of 90 traveling to California in 1846. The trip normally took four to six months, but they took a new route and ended up snowed in, resorting to cannibalism to stay alive.)

But I sure wish Terry or someone would stop by. We've had no mail for over a month and have a list of supplies we hope to get before freeze-up. And if you read this, this winter, we will have gotten them.

Please, mail. Just one more time. I might get a letter.

The one I want.

From a Special Lady.

To winter on.

December 1, 1974

Well, Thanksgiving has come and gone. And a nice one it was too. One that I'll remember. We went out fairly early in our boat to check out the trapline. Nothing on our mink or marten line, but we had discovered a beaver pond not yet frozen and we put out two traps. When I approached my trap, I saw the chain led out to deeper water. Not where I put it! I pulled in a VERY large beaver. A bonus, for we had given up on beaver until spring.

On the way back, we shot a couple of ducks and saw several flocks of geese! It was a thrill. I've seen geese before, but have never killed one, so I always cast a longing eye on them. A little farther, we went through a slough—the tide had flooded, and we were relaxed and happy.

Then a big bird took off in front of the boat.

At first, I thought it was an eagle or maybe a crane. But in the next half second, I knew. Goose! I don't remember bringing the shotgun to my shoulder or taking any kind of aim. But many years of hunting with my father had taught me right. The gun went off, almost by itself, and the goose fell! Thanksgiving dinner!!

So we got back and cooked it up, and what a feast. We had roast goose with dressing, rice with goose gravy, homemade real yeast rolls and for dessert, pumpkin pie!

Tell me how we suffer!

Now, I've got to admit it didn't taste like "mother used to make." The goose was a bit crisp (maybe burned) and the dressing was, well, different. The rolls tasted like biscuits, and the pumpkin pie was a little soggy. But I thought it was good! Maybe because we cooked it. Maybe because we were hungry. Maybe because we don't have meat often. But most probably because we appreciated it. And if that isn't what Thanksgiving is about, I have the wrong idea of what our forefathers had in mind!

December 3, 1974

Not too much going on.

Wolfe's Howl

We have a line out in the bay, and only 13 traps are out—nothing for the last two days. But we took inventory, and in total, we haven't done badly at all. We now have 22 mink and marten, worth \$15-\$20 each; eight beaver, one otter, one lynx, and one wolverine. In fact—doggone good for the first month of ever trapping. We won't be able to keep this pace up of course. Probably no more beaver till spring thaw. We will eventually catch most of the mink and marten in our limited trapping area.



George with a Lynx

But we have a wolf trap set out!

We found tracks nearby today. We put out traps. I guess this is Vic's set. He thought it out; he engineered it. When, and especially if, a wolf ever gets in it, it will be his right, his

privilege, to shoot it. But the pelt and at least part of the thrill will be “ours.” And if and when that happens, it will be some thrill! Maybe, just maybe, if we are lucky and use enough care in making the set, just maybe...

But then, it's that “just maybe” you feel every time you walk up on a trap. Most are empty. Completely neglected. Everything as you left it. Sometimes just a sprung trap or a Jay (Vic lately) or a field mouse (me lately). But once in a while, there he is: what *you* set the trap for! I guess trapping is mostly routine and a lot of disappointment, but made worthwhile by the rare but memorable excitements and fulfillments.

Am I talking about trapping? Or am I talking about life?

December 5, 1974

We may go out to visit Yes Bay. Not important news to you, but to us? Well, it's a very long trip, and one where we are apt to be very cold for several hours. It's 32 miles in our sport canoe, powered by our six hp kicker. We are planning on three to five hours, depending on weather. In fact, whether or not we go, depends on the weather. If the wind is blowing, we don't go. We must cross open water that gets too rough for big boats, much less our 15-foot canoe. If it's too cold and raining, we won't go. Too much to pay for what we will get... But, weather permitting, we will have a go at her!

Funny though, it is the thought of mail and getting some letters off that makes me want to go. Of course, it will be nice to see some other people. Roger, Sue and children are nice. But I don't seem to miss people. Friends, yes; people I like, yes. But somehow I don't miss people in general. Does this make me

strange? It must make me different. People tend to live in clusters. I tend to live where the neighbor is known and appreciated.

This will be our last mail out. We will be here until spring, unless we chicken out and call for someone to come get us. But we stay because we want to and not because we have to. Because, as a free man, the only thing I *have* to do is die. It is the only thing I have no alternative to. The only thing I must *do*.

And I'm not planning on doing that for a while.

So, until spring, we will be relatively warm, dry, comfortable and happy. And wish that the rest of the world could be as lucky.

Since this is the last mail out, Happy New Year!!! May yours be as good as we think ours will be...and that's *great!*

December 11, 1974

We made the trip to Yes Bay. Both ways, as we are now back at the "post."

Our trip out—well, it was sort of the kind you wouldn't want to make every day. We started out one morning, but turned around after 45 minutes because it got too rough and promised to get a lot worse. We made it the next day. We only had rough seas for a half hour or so as we crossed between Burroughs Bay and Behm Canal. We made the 32 miles to Yes Bay in about four hours, running time. Roger, Sue and Sam (a fellow guide this summer and a real nice guy) were there. Sam especially seemed glad to see us. Roger, Sue and children went

to town the next day, aboard their big boat, the *Jeanie*. We had a chance to go with them, but refused. I refused mainly because of finances. I would spend quite a bit of money in town “raising hell and chasing girls.” And I didn’t figure I would catch one, so we stayed at Yes Bay with Sam.

Then at 8:00 or so last night, Terry, Mike and “Old Number One” (Bruce) showed up on Terry’s boat. They were on their way logging and offered us a ride back. We had to take it rather than fight the weather and waves all the way back. We had only about an hour to get our gear stuffed in bags, bring the boat aboard and start off.

My biggest disappointment was that I was not able to get through via radio-phone for two calls. Damn! But we are back safe and sound and comfortable.

Vic may go out for Christmas. I want to—almost did. Still wish I could. But again, the elusive dollar prevents me. So, instead of having Christmas with the people I love, I may spend it completely alone. But that would be sort of neat too. Now don’t get me wrong—I’m no hero. Far from it. Matter of fact, I’m still scared of the dark. For the 10 days or so that I would be alone, I would run only a short line. I wouldn’t go out in the boat; instead, probably spend most of the daylight hours puttering around the cabin, splitting wood or the like. And probably spend the hours of darkness looking out the window for monsters.

But for some reason, for some inner urging that I can’t explain, even to myself, I want to be here, completely alone with the nearest person 22 miles away and the nearest town over 70 miles. And if weather permits Terry to come back around the 20th to get Vic, I will have the chance to be completely alone, to be totally self-sufficient, and to be dependent on no one else.

Few ever have the chance.

And fewer take the opportunity if it is there.

Will I be one?

December 16, 1974

Trapping has been real slow lately—real slow. I will try to describe how we set a trap or “make a set” for mink or marten. First, we start off on a good, established game trail. Animals of all kinds use these trails—from wolf to bear, through moose and down to the small fur-bearing animals we seek. We follow the trail until we find one of several things: a leaning tree will do; a large tree with a small hole at its base is just fine. Any place where we can place bait above a hidden trap will suffice. To make the set, we nail the bait just out of reach of the animal. The bait can be anything that smells bad (to us) and good (to them). We most often use fish eggs, rotten fish, seagull, or a piece of well ripened beaver.

After the bait is secured, the trap (either a #1 or #1½ for mink and marten) is cocked and set where the animal *should* step on it when making his way to the bait. Then the trap is hidden. For marten, this isn't too important. A couple of leaves or a little moss will do. For mink we must take greater pains.

I have, on several occasions, set the trap off accidentally while trying to hide it. When it catches your finger or hand, it hurts. But not too badly. If we got caught by a beaver or wolverine trap—well, that's something else. It would probably break something. That's why we are more careful with them.

The set is now complete...on to the next one. Traps may be as close together as 50 yards or as far as a quarter-mile, depending on the territory. When an animal is caught, it is always by the leg, and almost always still alive and quite mad by the time we get to them. Now, this is one part of trapping I don't like. I don't like for the animals to suffer. I would like for all our sets to be like our beaver sets—the animal is killed quickly and humanely. When we catch a mink or marten, we must kill them ourselves.

As you see, trapping per se, is quite simple. It's an active way to earn a living, and I have no qualms harvesting animals that people can never see or enjoy. Their death at our hands is quicker than nature's way: being torn apart by a larger animal or slow starvation due to increased population or severe weather.

Or maybe I am trying to justify what I'm doing? I do feel tinges of regret sometimes when the animal sees me, tries to run, but is held fast by the trap nailed to the tree, and I must kill him with my hands for some woman who cares nothing about the animals who died, or the men who sweated and froze getting them just for her. They wear it as a status symbol—to be important in her circle of "friends." But even with these reservations, I trap and enjoy it.

I especially enjoy trapping larger, smarter animals, like wolverines. We got our second one today! It was Vic's trap. He had stolen our bait several times and had gotten caught once, briefly. And today we got him. He was beautiful in that trap, a small but savage animal. One that would have been happy to take us on, no holds barred. We got within six feet before Vic shot him. He came at us several times before he was finished. We felt somewhat safe, of course, because he was in the trap. But his hatred wasn't masked a bit. After he was dead, we

discovered that he was caught by only *one toe!* Had he come loose...well, I guess it would have been "his turn." If he had gotten to us, the "friends of animals" would have said, "Good. They deserved it." But I don't see them out here wading the sloughs, climbing the hills, or fighting the bush. I think we earn what we get.

December 20, 1974

I'm alone! Terry came by today and picked Vic up. He's on his way home for Christmas to see his family, to stay for a week or so. He wanted to go. His parents seemed to need him there; I'm sure he will enjoy his trip out. And so will I, for different reasons.

We have both been getting on each other's nerves lately—probably my fault more than his, too. But to live with another person all the time, especially when he is of the same sex, is hard. And I do mean "all" the time. Together 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a month or more is hard on anyone. Vic is a fine guy and does his share, but everyone must have time to get away and be with his own thoughts once in a while. So I will enjoy not seeing Vic for a while. And I'm sure I'll enjoy seeing him again when he gets back. We will get along better, for we will both be refreshed.

And I wanted Vic to go because I wanted to be alone...to climb one more hill...to learn something else. To learn how it feels to be alone. And I am alone. I am and will be for the next week or so completely self-sufficient and dependent on no other living human being. No one will take turns lighting fires to keep me warm; no one else will help me carry water or wash the dirty dishes. And no one to help me if I get hurt. No one at all. For I

am alone. Alone with my stereo, with my mirror, and with my thoughts.

I have not yet tonight felt any fear or apprehension. It may come, but right now I feel only a gladness to be totally alone. And I must thank a guy named Terry Wills. For Terry didn't "stop by" in his boat to pick up Vic. He flew his Beaver in, *just* to pick up Vic; for he knew that Vic wanted to go home for Christmas.

Terry is an interesting person. He's a young guy...young? Hell, he's my age, but he has done a lot in his 31 years. He didn't finish high school, but his speech and manner don't reflect it. He is both polite and considerate. He asks no one what you can do for him – just what he can do for you. At 31, born and raised poor, he's had more money through his hands than most men see in a lifetime. He's owned his own flying service—having employed six or so other pilots. And lost it because of lawsuits resulting from "pilot error." And the "error" was always on his other pilots, never on himself. He is the finest pilot I have ever seen. He still loves every minute of flying, and I've flown into a box canyon with him where we wouldn't have come out if he didn't have that special skill. And yet, as most bush pilots, he will probably die in a crash...of his own making...because of one simple error. But I'll fly with the man, anytime, anyplace. He can fly an airplane. I respect his judgment; I respect the man. He has done much for me. He brought me here, and he has supplied me. He brought us back from Yes Bay, where we still would be stuck if it weren't for him. And with no money or favors mentioned, he flies up here in his airplane that charts for \$80 an hour, just to pick Vic up so he can go home for Christmas. That's some man!

Since I have been in Alaska, I have met two men that I really respect. Terry is one, of course, and the other one is Bruce.

Wolfe's Howl

And today, we tried to pay a little of our debt. Vic carried out a wolverine pelt for Bruce. Yes, a wolverine is the most valuable fur we can get. It is worth, in dollars, about five marten and maybe 10 mink-- about \$100. We thought it a small gift to a man who has given us so much. I wrote him a card to go with the skin. It ended with: To someone we consider a “Man among Men” and to someone we are very proud to call “friend.” And I meant it.

And to these men I owe my right to be alone—for I *am* alone.



Drawing of Terry Wills
By Southeast Alaskan Artist, William G. Stewart

December 21, 1974

Today was many things. It was the shortest day of the year. Sunrise today was about 9:15; sunset around 4:15. From now on, we can look forward to longer days, and they will be most welcome. It was also the first day of winter, but what a

beautiful day! The sun came out; I mean I actually saw it most of the day. That is most unusual—can't remember when it stayed out all day. For the last three months, it has rained or snowed at least six days a week. I can remember stretches of 10-14 days where it rained or snowed every day.

But temperature wise, it has been one of the mildest falls and winters anyone can remember for this area. The thermometer has been remaining around 34° day and night. And except for the brief period we had in November, ice has been rare. We had about a foot or so of snow on the ground, but it has been melting. The thing that surprises me the most is that we aren't frozen in. Usually by this date, our river has frozen solid, but not this year—a most welcome surprise.

And today marked the “peak” of our stay here. I planned to stay here about six months. Today starts downhill on my stay here. I arrived on September 21.

Trapping and weather will probably both go downhill. Weather looks like a fairly mild winter, but a wet one with a lot of snow. There are at least three unpleasant duties in life: cutting grass, getting out of bed before daylight, and shoveling snow. At least I won't have any grass to cut.

December 22, 1974

I spoke too fast about the mild weather; freeze-up has started I think!! Yesterday I didn't go out to the Bay to check out two sets there because I didn't want to have to pull the boat through a couple of shallow spots by myself (actually I guess I was just being lazy). I put it off until today, when I could catch the tail end of a high tide to ride over the bad spots.

It was too late.

I tried to get an early start to take advantage of the tide, but the motor wouldn't crank. Since the temperature had been around 26° all night, I decided the trouble was a frozen float in the carburetor, so I rolled the engine off and brought it in where it's warm. After it warmed up, I tried it again. And again—no go. I discovered that the gas tank had enough water in it (a problem we have been plagued with) to freeze and block the passage of gas. So I had to warm it up. This time I got the motor going. The tide had long since gone, but because of the ice building up in the river, I decided that I had better go. No real problems either way, although I had to pull and cuss through a couple of spots.

The traps were empty. But the trip was worthwhile. It was sort of “strangely but savagely” beautiful out there. The tide had left ice everywhere. I even had to cut across a few small thin patches on my way. The snow that was falling was remaining just where, and the way, it fell. But most of all, I'll never forget the silence. It was so loud you could hear it. There was no wind. The falling snow made no noise. The only sounds were those I made, and I tried to make few. For I was in a large church—the largest in our whole world. For that was where and maybe even what I was worshipping. If people could have been with me to see and appreciate the beauty of a new snow on a twisted, upturned stump on a tidal flat, to smell the evergreens and the ocean, to feel a calmness and an appreciation of what I have, there would be no problem of “destroying our environment.” No one would want to.

If only you could stand where I am now and watch “freeze-up”...

I understand that from where you are, “freeze-up” has only a distant meaning. So the river freezes? So, ice instead of water? So what? It blocks our only route to the “outside!” We cannot go out by boat, even on a high tide; the river will be blocked by ice. No plane can land. The water that they used to land on will be replaced by a ragged jumble of ice. After freeze-up, the only way out will be either wait until spring when the ice melts, or, in case of emergency, try and radio the Coast Guard and hope for the best.

If freeze-up does occur while Vic is out, the plane bringing him back will have to land in the bay and he will have to walk the last quarter mile or so and wait for the tide to go back out before he gets back here—that is if it occurs fully while he is out. The temperature is still about 26° and ice is flowing faster. I think freeze-up has started.

December 25, 1974

Merry Christmas!!

I’m having a nice Christmas, but a little lonely one. And it has nothing to do with being alone, at least not in the physical sense. I wanted to go home for Christmas—and almost did. But logic and finances stopped me, as it very often does. And I will remember this Christmas always for both the freedom and chains...for both the joy and the tears.

Yesterday as I was walking the line and pulling my traps, I remembered Christmases past. Last year (1973), I was in Colorado with Sheila and Aldo and children. It was a good one as I enjoyed the children’s enjoyment. Christmas is for the young. And I looked forward to my Christmas present that was

coming. The year before (1972), I was in the Florida Keys working, if you call it that. I had a dive trip that I will never, as long as I live, forget. The water was almost perfect; the company completely so. My day was “Sunny.”

The Christmas before (1971) was also spent “working,” and even at the same place: Ocean Reef Club, Key Largo, Florida. But that year, I was mating on a charter boat, the Sea Elf. I remember the sun. I worked only in a pair of shorts.

The holiday season before (1970) found me as a stockbroker! And yet, even though I was then still “wealthy” and had the answers to all the questions, all I remember of that year was a Christmas party for all the “brokers.” I wore a most fashionable outfit, and escorted a young lady who was quite beautiful and very busty. But yet I didn’t really like her! I remember, but will never *understand*, the envy of the people there.

And the year before? I don’t remember the presents given or received. I’ve forgotten the tree and decorations. I’ve forgotten the parties and friends. All I remember are my children.

Enough remembering. I am here because of only one fact: I want to be. So I sit here, on Christmas day, with a few regrets and many dreams. A little sad, but a good sadness. The regrets are truly few. I guess I’m different than most people. I enjoy being alone...even enough to share it. I wrote a poem, quite a few months ago, that sort of sums up what I’m rambling about. It is, as all my poems are, childishly simple. But I still enjoy writing them.

A Simple Man

*Some were born to live in the city
To enjoy the city lights.*

*Some were born to thrive in crowds
And ignore the city's blight.*

*Some people need the civilized world
And the whole electric scene.*

*But I need only the earth and the air
And not one damn thing in between.*

*Many enjoy their shiny cars
And their cultured lawns.*

*What I myself enjoy the most
Is the very early dawn.*

Not of money to make or to spend

Do I lay there and dream,

But of this fresh new day

And the beauty it will bring.

The complicated life beckons most

And they will heed its call.

But I am a simple man;

I have escaped the bouncing ball.

Wolfe's Howl

*I ask only that I have the chance to find
What my life means to me.
For the other numbers really don't count;
It is simply what I must and will be.
I ask to live until I die
No second guesses and few regrets.
Others chose their way; let me choose mine.
I'll take it trapping or tending nets.
Let my sun shine high, let my shadow be short
For my time is measured, let it be well spent.
Let my tracks be followed
Let my thoughts leave a dent
On the thinking of others that are left
In the crowded slums and streets.
Let them know more than they can see;
Let them know life can be sweet.
Tomorrow the sun will shine
And wash away their thoughts
Of the money that they made
And the souls that it bought.
Let me live the life of a simple man*

And go under with a smile.

Crossing that one last pass

And walking that long last mile.

December 26, 1974

I discovered something that both makes me laugh and scares me a little. I'm a little bit "bushy." You know, like bush-whacky, cabin fever or the like. I discovered it when I had a visitor. I looked up as this guy was coming into the dock in a small boat. I didn't have any idea there was any other person anywhere in this area. It threw me off balance. I did ask him in for a cup of coffee, which he accepted. Seems like he was taking a look around for gold. I discovered that I was a little bushy when we talked. It seemed *strange*; my mind kept going from subject to subject. I talked too much. It was sort of funny.

Now it could have been due to my physical condition. Last night with dinner I opened the only bottle of wine I brought. It was a quite nice California wine which I proceeded to finish. So this morning I suffered, as I'm sure a few million others did, with a hangover. But it was more than that; I had a touch of bush fever. Now don't worry. I'm perfectly okay now. This afternoon I was my old self—talking to myself, singing at the top of my very bad voice and making faces at the weather. Completely normal. Actually no different than I've been for years.

Looks like Vic won't have any problem coming back in. The weather has warmed up to 31°- 33° and has been raining and snowing for two or three days. The ice in the river is mostly

Wolfe's Howl

gone. So, if you read this in the fairly near future, you'll know Vic got back in with no problems, and I was able to send this back out. Then we both can get "bushy" together. I'm kidding, of course. Actually, I don't think it would bother me to stay here until spring by myself. Except my singing is so bad that even I might get tired of it!



December 29, 1974

Vic is two days late, but I expected it. I don't know when he got to Seattle because most of the planes were full. I mean, I

wouldn't go home for only a couple of days. I would stay a while and enjoy myself. And the weather has been bad—bad enough to keep him out of Ketchikan probably, and certainly bad enough to keep him from flying into here. But, no hurry. I'll be here waiting when he does get back.

And it looks like “waiting” is what I and we will do for a while. ‘Course we will run a trapline. But the great expectations are over. We have gotten most of the fur that we will get since weather gets to be more of a factor. Our trapping range will become more restricted due to what we have already trapped and what we can get to on snowshoes. From now on, it will be more “wintering” than trapping. And both are nice. I would prefer to be busy, but will contend myself to just “being.” I just hope I have enough firewood cut.

January 2, 1975

Still no Vic. But I have the feeling that he may get here tomorrow if the weather permits.

I'm not doing much; the weather has been rather nasty lately. Rain and/or snow most of the time. I did sneak out and get another four stacks of firewood...more than I had when Vic first got here. I believe we now have enough. I have been staying inside most of the time puttering with things, cooking and reading—mostly reading, at a rate of a book a day or nearly so. Got to slow down; we don't have that many books. And a lot of the books I read, well, I think they are bad. I mean well written, but such bad plots! They are much like reading the funnies in the paper: they keep your mind busy for a little while, but are soon forgotten. But I don't think I could do better. But I may try someday.

January 3, 1975

Vic's here. But, as you can see from this date, I didn't get any mail out...or in. Damn, damn, damn! I wanted to get this out; I wanted to mail some letters. But because of the low tide, the plane had to land out in the bay, and I took the boat out to get Vic. Vic had to fly back in with one of the charter airplanes. Terry didn't bring him as his plane is in dry dock in Seattle. And because of this, Vic couldn't go by Yes Bay and pick up my mail. It hasn't been that long since I got mail. I picked it up when we went to Yes Bay in early December—about a month ago. But that *seems* like a long time when you don't get any mail. Oh well, Terry is supposed to come up by boat in a couple of weeks and maybe he'll bring it.

January 9, 1975

We are frozen in! No one will get in or out until spring!

The temperature dropped about four days ago. When we went to bed, it was 32°. When we got up, the thermometer read 16° and dropping. Ice formed the first night, and the mercury continued its descent. The next night it was five degrees. Since then, it hasn't been above zero. And it has been *nasty*. I mean plumb bad and completely unfit.

Now, I've been where the thermometer was lower. In the last three days, it hasn't gotten below -5°, but the wind! Oh, it was blowing a steady 25 mph with gusts to 45 or 50. And let this poor, misplaced southern boy tell you: that's cold! Instantly cold. Don't-touch-anything-outside that-is-metal kind of cold. Zip-our-sleeping-bag-all-the-way-up-and-huddle-at-the-bottom, cold.

What have we been doing? Trying to stay warm, what do you think? Like sitting most of the day with wool jackets on, and with our feet on the stove. And keeping that stove stoked up. Eating and reading. Pacing the cabin for a minute, then getting to be good friends with the stove again. But today the wind let up some, and we got out a bit. I got my three-trap trapline checked. I'll tell you what I had on: over my underwear, I had on my wool "union suit" that I've taken off for only a few minutes since the middle of November. Over that I have a wool sweater, wool pants, a ski jacket and ski pants. I also wore a knit cap and scarf (one of the most important items in cold weather), a pair of cotton gloves under a pair of heavy wool Norwegian mittens, with my feet in a pair of wool socks under my heavy mountaineering boots. 'Course I wore my snowshoes. And I was warm...at least most of me was warm. My beard had a nice growth of ice crystals by the time I got back, but it didn't feel cold, only uncomfortable. But my feet? Doggone, I thought my toes were going to drop off in my boots! But I've got to admit, if I'm going to be 100 percent honest, that I'm glad I have seen it this way. I would have been disappointed if 26° or so was the lowest I saw it go this winter. It would have been too easy. Okay, I've seen it. It can get 70° tomorrow and I won't complain—I promise.

January 15, 1975

Warm again; it's been between 28° and 34° for the last few days. It seems warm as we have gotten adjusted to it. Outside we wear only a wool shirt over our long johns. In fact, when we check our line, we get hot. Now I'm not complaining—just stating a fact. But walking in snowshoes raises the temperature about 50°. Breaking trail is far and away harder than back

tracking. And since it seems to snow most every day and night, plus occasional high winds, we have to break trail almost every day. Snowshoeing, per se, is not difficult. I had thought it might be like skiing: pretty hard to get the hang of at first. Not so. You just put 'em on and walk. But it is hard work. In soft snow, you sink about knee deep with every step. In snow like that (for an old fat man like me) it's walk a few hundred yards, stop, pant, then go again. I guess it is good exercise. That's about the only excuse we have to put them on because we haven't caught one animal since Vic got back.

We've given up on small animals; we've pulled all our small traps. We have separate lines. Vic goes one way, and I go another. He has three Wolverine traps out, and I have two baits (no traps) out trying to get one interested. So we go out and check these just to get out an hour or two a day. And it looks like that's about all we will do until the ice goes out.

January 16, 1975

We have a new addition to our family. A pet ermine or weasel (same animal—just called ermine in the winter when he turns white). Vic was standing in the door when he saw the little fellow eyeing him from the woodpile. He stared at Vic for a couple of seconds, then darted into a small plastic garbage can on the porch that we keep our frozen meat in. Vic clamped the lid on and we had him.

More or less.

We decided to put him into a wood crate. In the transfer, of course, he got loose in the cabin—'round and 'round he went, with me trying to chase him into Vic's net. I was piling chairs,

clothes, boxes, wood and everything else up on the beds. We finally got him in the net, into the crate, and the net on top. We looked around the room and laughed—it was almost completely a mess. We laid firewood across the net on top of the box then started to look for a piece of wire to put in its place. In a flash, there he went: up the side of the box, wiggled through the net, and back under the beds.

Well, by the time we caught him again, the room was in *complete* shambles. But we got him and he's settling down quite surprisingly. Weasels are reputed to be one of the wildest, fiercest animals for their size in the Northern part of America. But this Little Tiger seems to be one of the gentlest wild creatures I have ever seen. He even let Vic rub him a little. Only bit him once and didn't draw blood then. Now we have to name him. Vic wants to call him "Herman the Ermine." I had a pet snake once I called Herman, so I want to think of something else. I guess if he bites me, I'll think of several names to call him—but none I could use in mixed company.

Anyhow, I hope he works out better than our last pet: About a month ago, we caught a raven in one of our traps, and he was unhurt. We removed him and brought him back to the cabin. I held him very patiently in the boat and refrained from wringing his neck when he bit me. If you think a raven "pecks" instead of bites, you are *wrong*. I had great visions of a pet raven—I mean Poe and all that. So we got back, tied a long string to one of the porch columns, and a leather thong to that. Then I tied the leather to his leg, very carefully, with two half hitches and a single knot in the end. We turned him loose—he hit the end of the line and it jerked him to a stop. He tried it a couple of times then quit. We turned to go and he pecked at the knot. Once, twice, three times—but I had tied it well...or so I thought. A couple of quick pulls and he was free. He stopped, looked back

at us, and I swear he called me a miserable so and so, and then flew off.

So, I hope our pet ermine turns out better. Our poor cabin couldn't take him loose again.

January 18, 1975

Today was one of the kind that I came to Alaska to find. One of those rare days that, when it is happening and your heart is pounding, you know you will remember as long as you live. First let me say that when I put one of my baits out yesterday on the edge of the frozen Unuk River, I stopped and stared. The frozen river is that kind of place: it makes you stop and wonder.

I guess, in retrospect, that it was the wolverine tracks crossing the river that made me stop. I stood in that one spot for 5-10 minutes I guess, and visualized the wolverine crossing the river. I imagined he was there—I could almost see him. And today I *did*. I was walking on the ice, thinking not about any animal, but wondering how safe the ice was. It had gotten slushy in the last day with the temperature around 36° and a little rain, so I was concerned with the ice and little else. I had gone about 50 yards when I looked up. I was in about the same place where I stood yesterday. I saw a wolverine, this time for real, at about 50 yards. I froze—he didn't see me. I took two quick steps to my left and threw myself against the high bank. He continued diagonally toward me. I waited with my .22 pistol in my hand. I wanted him. Oh, I wanted him so badly. But I knew he would never get close enough for a good shot. And I didn't want to take anything less. I laid there for four or five minutes (which seemed much longer). He was working his

way toward me. Surely he could hear my heart; I sure felt it pounding.

Then he disappeared. I lay there beneath that high bank. I began to look over my shoulder, over my head. I didn't want him to surprise me—my .22 suddenly felt small. I thought about the three wolverines we shot in our traps: they all had taken between two and five shots to put them out for good. I stood up slowly...*very* slowly. Then I saw him no more than 25 yards away. I didn't dare move my pistol up too quickly as I would scare him. He vanished before I could get up. Again I waited...and waited. My heart was pounding harder. I saw him again, slightly back up river, but coming down off the high bank. He was on a lower bank and was heading my way! I picked a spot that was clear, about 30 feet away, where I would shoot. He was coming toward me in his funny lope. As he came on, I brought the pistol up and aimed at him. Too many branches in the way—if he would only step into the clear... Then when the wolverine got to the last limb that separated us, he saw me. He never stopped and he never hesitated; he turned and I fired.

He vanished.

I ran and stumbled forward for 10 steps to see if I could get another shot. Nothing. Not a thing moved. I could see nothing over the edge of the bank above me. Then, standing below the bank, I began to feel it. I knew a wolverine was a small animal, and that they were normally shy and avoided man. But I wondered, then and there, how one that was wounded would act. And I knew that if I found blood on his trail, I would have to follow him wherever he went for as long as I could. That was the way I was taught.

Wolfe's Howl

I went back to where I saw him last, and I climbed the bank. He was lying right where I shot him, and he was about three feet away. I realized there was no trap holding him. I started to shoot him again, but didn't. He was laying still and moved only once. I was aware that if he got up, I was going to empty my pistol into him—three feet ain't much distance! But my first shot had done its job. It broke his neck. I had done something I had thought would be completely impossible for me to do and something I had dreamed about as a young boy: I killed a wolverine with a pistol, on equal terms, at 30 feet.

Thanks Lord, I owe you another one.



George and his wolverine

January 24, 1975

All is well, and I'm fine. We aren't doing much. Vic has four traps out, but hasn't caught anything in the three weeks he's been back. I have no traps out, but I get out and around most every day to look things over. I'll probably put out some traps tomorrow. With the exception of some beaver trapping in the spring, our trapping is over—unless we are lucky and have an early thaw.

It is time I find another "purpose," another "reason." Now sleeping until 10:00 is fine...until you find out that you can't go to sleep at night until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. Reading is a wonderful pastime...until you realize that it is all you really do. But in addition to my dreams of what I will do tomorrow, I must feel a purpose for today. Even though I am lazy, I must work.

When I came up here for the winter, I realized that boredom would be one of my biggest enemies. And yet, I am not bored; I stay busy. I'm feeling something deeper. I guess I feel that I've done what I came here to do; I proved things to myself that I wanted to prove.

I felt bad about not being able to finish my whole 35 days at NOLS (National Outdoor Leadership School). I wanted to find out to what extent I wanted and needed other people...and whom. I wanted to find out just how self-sufficient I really am. All of this I wanted, of course, in addition to the sheer joy of being in this beautiful country doing something I love.

I have answered my own questions, and quite frankly, the answers are to my satisfaction. But they are answered, and it is time to look for new questions.

January 27, 1975

Herman, our ermine, is alive and well. At least physically—I'm afraid he has deep emotional problems though. In fact, he is a classic schizophrenic! During the day, he is the most docile, friendly, wild animal I have ever seen. He lays in his sock and sleeps. If you put your hand in the cage, he wakes up, but lies still. You can pet him easily. He seems to enjoy it. But in the night or mornings? He's a real tiger. He'll leap to the top of his cage to try to get to you. Growl and bite the wire screen holding him back. If he weighed even one pound, I think he would break the cage open and "tree" Vic and me.

Poor fellow—he needs help. He acts like a politician before and after an election. Such turnabout behavior is tolerated, even expected, in people. But he is only a simple animal. Or are we the same?

February 1, 1975

Trapping's better—at least for Vic. Yesterday he got two marten. Today it was an otter and a marten. Great! Wish we could keep it up. But we can't and won't. We'll pull the traps as soon as the ice goes out as the season ended yesterday. Even more than that, we—or at least I—feel an "end." No, not an end, but a transition. For I have begun to dream again!

I love it. I again think of what tomorrow may bring. I dream of the future. I will see new places and old friends. I think of country I haven't seen perhaps with someone I care about. I see new things, new experiences. May life never be as long as one day without a dream!

February 3, 1975

Herman, the ermine, is gone. Escaped! The little devil chewed one corner off his door and got out. But, you know, I'm sort of glad. He was born wild and will die wild. He didn't like being caged and neither do I. He earned his freedom by hard work and by his wits. The place he chewed out of our wooden box was about the only place where he stood a chance. He's now free. I wish him well.

We sort of have a new pet. Actually he isn't "new" as I first met him four and a half months ago, but haven't seen him since. And he isn't a pet but rather a visitor who comes and goes on his own. Our mink is back! You may remember that I described a friendly mink when I first got here, and I said we wouldn't trap him. Well, that's the one—I guess. He seems unafraid, but I've got to confess, most minks look alike to me. Of course, we must look alike to him too. Anyhow, we now have a friendly visitor to whom we toss trap bait as a peace offering. In fact, he even took a herring out of Vic's hand today. He is still scared and jumpy, but he is free. And will stay that way. We won't harm him in any way.

Funny for two trappers to have a mink that lives under their front porch and to feed him at every chance, but we enjoy him. Hope he stays around. He's the kind of wild animal pet I enjoy...Free!

February 4, 1975

I pulled the dragon's tail once too often. He bit me.

Thank goodness it was only lightly. Let me explain what I mean: I do a lot of things that aren't dangerous, at least in a

fatal sense, but aren't really necessary either. It's like a kid and a dare. Things like jerking on a sleeping nurse shark's tail when I was in Florida—not really dangerous as they are quiet and docile fish. Or something like creeping up on a black bear that was eating salmon on a creek this last summer—not dangerous as I had a rifle and got no closer than 60 yards.

Well, today I walked over to a creek across the river. It comes down in a series of waterfalls. 'Course now most of it is frozen over and snow covers a lot of it. But standing at the bottom looking up, I got the urge to climb. And I did. It was indescribably beautiful with snow over the rocks, icicles hanging off the walls, and the waterfalls flowing behind a curtain of ice. Each waterfall was more beautiful, more alluring, more enticing than the one below.

I carefully climbed up three waterfalls with their small, open pools below them. I got to the fourth, last, and most enticing one. The pool below it was frozen over except for a small bit about four square feet right below the falls itself. The walls on either side were sheer and no chance to get to the fall without walking on the ice itself. I got almost to the rocks at the head of the falls. When I looked down, I could see into the open water but couldn't see the bottom. I eased to within two feet of my objective.

Yep, you guessed it. I had been planning to wash my long johns but meant to take them off first. In short, I fell through the ice. I don't know how deep it was; I didn't touch the bottom. As I felt myself going, I fell toward the side. I went down to about my waist or a little higher in the water. I remember talking to myself as I often do in circumstances like this. "Okay, George, you are all right. Now get out." I swam my way up and over the ice. The water was a bit chilly. Chilly, hell, it was cold. The air temperature was about 20°. I didn't

waste any time getting my boots emptied out, back on, then moving toward the cabin. Strange, I didn't get cold in the 10 or 15 minutes it took me to get back—except for my feet. I had on all wool, which is warm even when wet, and I kept moving. Did I learn anything? Maybe, but the next time I see a sleeping dragon I know I will still go ahead and pull his tail. May I never get too old to dare myself.

February 15, 1975

Now for a weather report: the first 14 days of February were beautiful—very rare for this country as we had no rain or snow and most of the days were sunny! Beautiful! The temperature for the first seven or eight days ranged from about 20° to 30° or so. Then it got cold. The low was -5° (the same as January) and believe me, when you have to get out of your sleeping bag in an unheated cabin to light the fire, well, you don't waste much time. And it's a real thrill to visit the outhouse in that kind of weather! I was hoping for a good case of constipation, but didn't get it.

Yesterday it warmed up, clouded over and started to snow. And snow it did! In the last 24 hours, we have gotten two feet four inches. That's on top of the three to four feet we already had. Thank goodness the old snow has packed down and frozen so we could walk on it. The clouds look like we may get more of the white stuff today.

I'm sort of ready for spring myself. I think the temperature will get above freezing soon; that and the tides will break up the river ice. We have now been frozen in for 41 days. It will be nice to get mail again. Might even go to town myself for a couple of days if I get the chance. If I do—look out women!

February 21, 1975

Five down, one to go—months that is. I have been here five months today. I will stay one, maybe two more. It all depends on the weather (amount of snow and when the ice goes out) and Terry (how much time and effort he wants to spend on his cabin). At any rate, if ice goes out, and we can get details worked out, Vic will leave in about a month to go back to school. It may be a long month. We have no traps out. With the exception of beaver (the season is open until May 15), no seasons are open. We can't trap beaver unless we get an early spring and the ice goes out.

So we are sitting tight—very tight. The last few days we haven't been leaving the cabin much. The weather has been snow (boo) or rain (yea—it will melt the snow), so we don't do much. Read (what few, if any, books we have but haven't read), eat (far too much; we both swear we are on diets), or play cribbage (for a beer a game—the score is now Vic 22, George 21). It is a time of waiting; a time of dreaming. And I dream not only of this summer and fall, which I hope to spend in Alaska, but even past then. I dream of the lands that are to the south of the U.S.: Mexico and maybe Costa Rica—of the sun and warm water; of skin diving for supper amid miles and miles of land that a man can buy if he has the money (that is different than here where all the land is owned by our Federal Government—for sale at no price), and of a people who have yet to know what we take for granted. I want to go south. And, Lord willing and the creek don't rise, I will. I don't want to overlook what I have yet to see in Alaska, and I won't. But I do have to go outside the United States. So I'm sitting here with snow you-know-what deep, and thinking of sun and warm oceans. That is the way I think it should be.

February 28, 1975

It's starting; it's starting: it's break-up time. We started having large tides about four days ago—tides of 15 to 18½ feet. Now we don't get the full effect since we are up river a little from the bay. It takes about a 12-foot tide to reach this far. The ice on the river, until recently, just floats up with the tide, then settles back down, just as it was, when the tide goes out.

But these large tides have moved the ice around, causing it to split and break up. There is still a lot of ice between us and the rest of the world, but I think a couple more days and it will be clear from here to the bay. Then we may have visitors, get mail in and out, and sooner or later, we will go out. Oh, that first bath, beer, green salad and steak will be wonderful—and phone calls.

But strange as it seems, even to me, I do not miss civilization. Traffic, people in a rush going nowhere, television, and bills to pay, are things I have escaped recently with no regrets. Oh well, maybe I am bush-wacky, shack happy, and bunk bound. I *will* be happy to see the ice go out.

March 7, 1975

Not yet, damn it. It's still ice between us and the outside.

The high tides ended about two days too soon. There's only one patch of ice left, about 150 yards wide, but that's enough. When the ice is completely out, we think someone may come up here, either by plane or boat. We hope we can get word out as Vic wants to go south sometime between March 15th and 25th. Our radio doesn't seem to work.

We haven't been able to reach anyone via radio in the four or five times we have tried. I didn't want to mention it before because I thought someone might worry. Oh well, we didn't need it. Thank goodness for that!

I may go out with Vic for a few days if I can make connections both ways. What I do the next month or two depends on what Terry wants to do about me building his cabin.

Oh, by the way, we had a scare yesterday: a helicopter flew up the valley. It scared me because I thought it was the Coast Guard and was going to land here—that would have meant one of us had an emergency back home. But it wasn't and they didn't, so we both assume that the ones we love are fine. I hope that assumption proves true.

It is strange to live without communication to the outside. But that's not completely true—we get the world news by radio, which I could do without. But I do enjoy the rest of the radio. We have it on all day—from before coffee in the morning till lights out at night. Of course I enjoy the music but we have a couple of favorite programs. We get “old time radio” a couple of times a week with the old radio programs like “You Bet Your Life” with Groucho Marx, “Fibber McGee and Mollie Show” and “The Shadow.” I love them. I guess I was the last generation of Americans to remember them live. The other two programs we like are the Ketchikan police report (we, for no known reason, never miss it so we can laugh at the arrest of drunks and fights and family arguments), and Paul Harvey (he seems to love to jab needles in American Society for its excesses and triviality; it's a show we happen to agree and laugh with). But of course, we have no personal communication—and that I miss.

I have determined, through my stay here, that I don't need people, but I do need certain persons. And that simple realization makes the whole winter worthwhile.

March 13, 1975

Time is getting short. A plane flew up the valley yesterday and buzzed us. I guess it was Terry in a borrowed plane by the way it was flown. But whoever it was, it was good to see another person, even if it was for only seconds. Vic wants to go out the 20th of this month so he can get ready to go back to school. So if we don't have a visitor by then, we may get out by canoe to Yes Bay. There, Vic will call a plane or boat to pick us up and come back here to get his gear.

A week. In one week: a bath, a phone call, mail, somebody else's cooking. WOW!!! A warm seat, clothes that don't smell worse than I do, and hot water—lots of hot water. Gee whiz, maybe I am civilized after all. That sort of disappoints me. But cooking? Well, I have no guilty feelings about looking forward to that. Now, don't get me wrong. Vic and I get by (barely!). Like tonight: I fixed crab au gratin, green beans and mashed potatoes. The potatoes were instant and tasted like it. The crab was good we thought, but not like it was supposed to be—too runny. How do you make white sauce? At least the green beans were good.

This winter has taught me respect and admiration for, not only the early mountain men, but also the modern American housewife! God bless her, preserve her, and introduce her to me! Oh, to go back home and watch mother and Lizzette cook! I promise to watch closely and learn. Now I can make bread, cook beans, and fry bacon. But none of it comes out just right. I

read “Joy of Cooking” with all its references and we eat what I cooked, but it wasn’t right. Oh well, as long as foods are put up in cans, I won’t starve. Maybe I won’t dine, but I will endure.

Thank God for good cooks, loving women, and quiet mothers. And I know all three!

March 27, 1975

Well, I’m back at the post. Vic’s and my trip out was pretty much of an anticlimax. The weather to Yes Bay was smooth. Vic stayed at Yes Bay while I flew to town with Terry for two days. There were some things that were really nice—things like mail for the first time in three months. Every letter was read, reread, and appreciated. I mean, *really appreciated*. To get an idea of what I’m saying, think of not opening your mailbox for *three months*—not opening mail once. You get the idea. And the phone calls! Oh, well, my phone bill will be more than two weeks’ pay, but I don’t care. Every minute was worth every penny.

But other things were a bit disappointing. My first steak was a bit tough and a little lonely. My second was better, maybe because Sam took me to dinner. But the salads, both nights, were worth the trip.

The first beer was somewhat warm, but as I had it with Mike (our second cook at Yes Bay this past summer), it was good. The first bath turned out to be a shower in my old room at Yes Bay and seemed kind of flat.

Town itself was as I remembered it, the same bars but different drunks. My hangover the next day was not a pleasant memory either.

So I've been out, and now I'm back. Okay, I know I'm odd and all that, but I prefer to be back in the bush.

Vic, of course, went back to school yesterday. But I'm not here by myself. Vern, the brother-in-law of one of the owners of the post, is staying in the main cabin. And you know, I like it that way. So far, we haven't bothered each other. He stays over there, and I stay over here. We see each other in the daytime and work together as needed. At least today we got wood, and that is nice.

Now I realize you, who normally see several hundred people a day, think that I must be nuts to not want to share my privacy with one other person. Well, maybe I am "bushy." But since Vic left, I have enjoyed being almost by myself. I have promised myself not to say anything bad about Vic. We got along as well as I guess two guys could. We never hit each other at least, though it was a bit close at times! He put up with me and I put up with him. I guess our personalities didn't "fit" as well as I thought they would. Maybe we were both too individualistic. Or maybe I'm too damn hardheaded.

At any rate, I'm glad to have the cabin to myself. And I look forward to a good year. I plan to spend most of the spring and summer on Terry's log house. Mike will probably come up to give me a hand for the month of April. I'll probably work on the house until late July, and then I'll go up to a small town northeast of Anchorage to work for Dan Clark.

I will, no doubt, write more about Mr. Clark. But at least for the moment, let me share my joy: Dan Clark is probably the most famous guide in Alaska. I have read stories written by him and about him for 20 years. There is NO man, anywhere in the world, I would rather, now, at this time, work for. To say it is a dream come true is to repeat an old, but true, cliché.

Of course, I will only be an assistant guide. The qualifications for an assistant guide, according to a guy from the Fish and Game, include “a weak mind.” That means I’ll do the dirty work. But I don’t care. I only hope I’ll measure up, and I know I’ll try.

So, my many prayers of the winter seem to have been answered. But “there is many a slip between the cup and the lip.” (Co-author’s side note: that is something you say in order to warn someone not to be too confident about the result of a plan, because many things can go wrong before it is completed.)

And yet, this is only one of two things that look great for this summer. The other is that by May or June, or at least some period, there will be “Sunny.” There is little more I could ask for.

April 6, 1975

Doing little but enjoying myself.

I’ve started on Terry’s house. That means I shoveled a little snow around the site. The snow was about a foot higher than the foundation, and that is three feet. I guess I’m rushing things a bit, as I really can’t do much until the snow melts some.

And I wonder if I can really do anything then. I have two books that sort of tell how to build a log house. The pictures and drawings make it look so simple that any idiot could build one, but I’m not sure this idiot can. They omit so many details; details that I’m sure *they* understand but *I* don’t. Also, Terry wants his house to be larger than their cabins. Have you any idea how much a 37 foot log that is over a foot in diameter

weighs? Well, neither do I, but they are *very* heavy. Every movement will have to be done by hand (by me), thus slowing and complicating everything.

Oh well, maybe I'll figure out how to do it. Sure hope so. I truly want to build it if I can do a good job. Oh, to be ignorant is such a helpless feeling.

But I only shovel snow an hour or two a day. I've got a couple of beaver traps out, and since Vic took our boat back to sell, I walk. Actually I am, and always have been, lazy. I do enjoy the walk everyday as I start thinking about getting into shape for this fall. These last couple of days I've started carrying a 35-pound pack for practice. The pack feels a little heavy now (but not as heavy as a couple of days ago), and I don't walk too far (one to two miles). It's a start. My goal before I go north is 6 and 60 (6 hours with a 60-pound pack). But after I get there, I may find that is not enough. A green (just skinned) bear hide will weigh around 100 pounds and no day will be as short as 6 hours; nor is much walking done on level ground. So I have to try to get in shape. Too lazy for my own good, but this time I had better get with it—or I'll wish I had.

As you can tell, I'm fat, dumb and happy. Fat because I like to cook and I love to eat (yesterday I cooked an apple pie; today, the pie is gone—and so are the oatmeal cookies). Dumb because I know so many people smarter. And happy, because while the dreams and fires of tomorrow still burn, I'm content with today.

I will try to never ask for more.

April 16, 1975

Still no Terry or anyone else. I looked for him to come up and bring Mike about a week ago, but he hasn't been up. I'm not sure Mike will come up at all now, as he was planning to go to work for the Alaska ferry system around the first of May. I guess it's just as well that he didn't come to help on the house, as the snow is still too deep to do much. But it's shrinking fast! On Terry's site, it is down to about two feet.

The weather has been *beautiful*; perfect—my kind of weather. The nights get down to 28 or 30 degrees and the days up to between 50 and 60 degrees!!! That's warmer than a lot of the "lower 48." And we've had full sunshine all day. The days are getting much longer, of course, with 14 hours of daylight now. Late June will have around 18 hours of daylight between sunrise and sunset.

And surprising (to me at least) still no bears. I thought they would be up and about by now, but we haven't seen any bears or bear signs (but Vern thought he might have seen a track today). At any rate, they will be stirring soon. I carry my rifle most of the time now, but honestly, more for a chance at a wolf than for protection. The chances of a Brown bear being aggressive are slim and for a Black, almost nil. But Vern did have to shoot an old Brown a couple of years ago. So I carry a weapon usually, if I'm going far from camp.

I do have a wolf set (trap) out. The wolf, as I have said before, is the smartest animal up here (or most any place), and I have only a faint hope to get one. Wolves in this area are too numerous and kill too many moose, so I don't feel bad about trying to get them. In other places, they are protected, as they should be when their numbers drop to a certain point.

And it may be a long time before I get lucky and get one!

April 19, 1975

Well, today is my birthday, and it had to snow! Several inches, in fact, but I don't think the fresh snow will last long. The temperature is still in the 40's, and we are getting rain now. Good old southeast Alaska weather. Oh, I bought a copy of *Alaska Magazine* when I went out, and in it I read that Ketchikan got 183 inches of rain last year. That's over 15 feet! And almost four feet fell in October. No wonder I was wet and cold all the time. But weather be damned, I'm going to have a real "feed" for my birthday supper.

It's cooking now. I'm having Crab Maryland and Near East Green Beans. And, OF COURSE I have a cake. It is pecan and coconut (a snacking cake: good and *easy*), with coconut icing (I made *that* from scratch).

I was going to have barbecued beaver but I ate it all yesterday! I thought it "fittin" since I had goose for Thanksgiving, duck for Christmas, and Hooligan (a type of smelt) for Easter. But the beaver was good, so I ate it *all*.

At least the crab that I'm having came from up here. Even if we did can it last summer at Yes Bay. Actually, I do little living off the land up here even though, since I have been here, I have caught native salmon, trout, hooligan, crab, clam, duck, goose, lynx and beaver.

Better rescue dinner, eat and will then light my "candles" (matches). The "32" will probably blaze up and burn the cabin down; that's what I get for growing old!

Well, I've had dinner, and it wasn't too bad. The crab was a little bland, but the beans were good. The cake was fine, but

the icing was grainy. And I burned a finger lighting all of my “candles.” And a couple burned all the way down and fell into the cake before I could get them all lit and blown out. Thirty-two matches are quite a few. And each represents one whole year: 365 days, 8,760 hours or 525,600 minutes of my life. The pile of matches seemed large. Have I really lived that long? And the burned-out matches were pulled up and thrown away. My life, thus far, has been good, very good, to me. I just hope when my light goes out, that I leave more than just a burned-out stick!

Still no visitors. I expect them in two or three days as the tides will be right, and Terry said something about bringing a float house up.

As I said earlier, I have a wolf trap set out. And both days before today, I had visitors. The first time there was no way a wolf could have been caught as an eagle was caught in the trap. (Excuse me, Audubon Society—I didn’t mean to catch him. I had my traps under water—a place no self-respecting eagle should be. I have since covered my bait with spruce limbs so the eagles can’t get to it.) But, the second night, the smart so-and-so wolf tiptoed between the traps and stole half my bait. Last night, he didn’t come by. But *if* he keeps on, sooner or later he’s going to make a mistake and get his toes pinched. But, boy are they smart.

And I saw two Moose today, cow and calf. The calf probably weighed 400 or 500 pounds. I tried to get closer but they strayed away before I could. I’m sure they are the ones that have been living a mile or so up the river all fall and winter. I’ve seen their tracks a lot (once on top of my footprint that was five minutes old) but this was the first time I’ve seen them in person. I’m glad the wolves didn’t get the calf this winter. I

guess he will make it now as the cow will chase him away pretty soon and have another. I'm glad he made it.

April 24, 1975

Terry stopped by yesterday in his plane rather than coming up in his boat, as I expected. He took my mail out, which is good, but he didn't bring any mail in, which is very bad. I told him if he came up again without my mail, I was going to burn all his cabin logs! I think he got the idea.

This has been a bad day. It started at midnight as I got up to catch an exceptionally big tide and went over to Terry's place to try to get some of the cabin logs up where I wanted them. It was a waste of time, so I came back and went back to bed about 2:00 a.m.

Then I went back over there this morning and got little done. I've spent a fair amount of time there and doggone-it, I don't have much to show for it except sore hands. The house isn't even started as I'm having a hell-of-a-time getting the logs up to the site. I'm about to concede that they are too big for me to handle alone. And everything seemed to go wrong today: I stepped in over my hip boots (but that's nothing new; I do it about half the time I wear them), broke an oar (we don't have a working motor) and I had to paddle "up-current." Almost nothing was accomplished!

Pardon me while I cry in my beer (I wish I had one!), but I'm coming to the conclusion that I am not physically or mentally able to build that house by myself. And since I started writing this, it has started to rain.

On another note, I wish I had a dog. I *miss* having one. If my future weren't so uncertain, and my lifestyle so mobile, I would definitely have a dog. I don't know what kind I would get, maybe a Lab or German Shepherd. I really wouldn't care as long as he was *smart*.

Well, one nice thing about days like today: tomorrow has *got* to be better!

April 29, 1975

I'm so doggone tired my eyes are crossed. But at least I'm getting some things done on the cabin. I took some of the logs up to the site yesterday with a "come-along" and managed to get the rest of them up today. Then I moved two of the logs from where they were to where I wanted them, alongside the foundation posts. It was only 40 or 50 yards, but moving those two logs into place took five hours. One stroke of the winch handle moves the log about one inch and there are a lot of inches in 50 yards. Plus, it was necessary to change the winch every couple of minutes, muscle the log around, etc., etc.

But, the last couple of days, I've accomplished something, and so that rather eases the aches and pains. It's definitely easier to go back to work the next day when you can see you did something the day before—or at least it is for me.

Vern saw the first bear tracks today. Even though they were a couple of miles upriver. I'll probably keep a gun a little closer than I have been. They were not only a Brown's tracks, he said, but they were from a *big* Brown.

I have decided, after much thought and soul searching, that I want to shoot two bears, a Black and a Brown (or Grizzly, as

the experts have now decided they are the same species with only the location being the difference).

May 1, 1975

Wow! I was sitting here those two days ago, writing the above paragraph, when I heard a plane. It was Terry; he circled once and landed on the Unuk but couldn't get up to our cabin because the water was too shallow. Thinking he had some supplies for me, I jumped into the boat (with no jacket and dirty clothes on) with Vern, to row the couple hundred yards to where he had pulled up on a sandbar.

I yelled at him from about 50 yards away and asked if he had any mail for me. He replied "No!" Well, I'm afraid I said several very uncomplimentary things about his mentality, his ancestry, his flying ability and about the sad state of the world in general. He then informed me, after I finally had to pause for breath, that he had come to get me to take me to Yes Bay, where he had a boat waiting for me to bring back (along with my mail!!!).

Well, it only dawned on me today once I was back at the post, that he had flown from town just to pick me up and take me back to get his new boat, just so I could have one up here. And I didn't even thank him. In all the excitement (I got on the plane just like I was and Vern had to go back and take my supper off the stove) I didn't realize that the whole purpose of his trip was to get a boat to me. At least, *I don't think* I thanked him! And I bet he didn't even realize it. See why I think he's one of the *niciest* people I know? See why I'm trying to build him a house, and we have never discussed how much I will be

paid? See why I've made up my mind not to accept all he offers me when (and if) I get the house built?

A friend like this has no price.

Anyhow—I got the boat, spent an extra night so I could get a phone call through, and am now back at the post. I had good news and well—I guess bad news. Some of my good news was that beautiful pile of letters waiting for me. But the bad news was a letter from Vic. He sold our furs. I'm sure he did the best he could, too. It seems that the quality and value of our furs amounted to about half of what we expected. We did not expect to make money trapping, even though our catch was larger than we expected. But it did hurt to receive the check that represented six months of fairly hard work for us.

My share was \$208.14.

I strongly suspect that I now qualify for food stamps and welfare!

Of course I'm joking about the "welfare." As long as I am free to choose my own road, I feel no other man, no big brother in government, owes me a damn thing. I work for what I get (but unfortunately don't always get what I work for). So, while I am a little *disappointed*, I am not sorry. I enjoyed (especially in retrospect!) this past winter much more than any simple monetary value could reveal. My memories will last much longer than any large sum of money that I could have made elsewhere would last.

And this bad news was overshadowed by the good news.

I received letters and thoughts from people I love and care about. I also had a letter from Mr. Clark giving me the instructions on getting my Assistant Guides License. I was able

to see and enjoy people at Yes Bay—people I really like (people like Mike Underhill, Bruce and Charlie). Good people. But the *best* news came from the phone call that I stayed overnight to make. After that, I didn't have to come back by boat. I floated! Sunny is coming up in ten days!! She is going to be in Portland and will come up here for three days. Oh, I am young and a man—and it is spring! Yes I am, and I love it!

May 8, 1975

Terry's house is coming along, but oh so slowly. At least now I am making progress I can see. I've got the first three logs (sills) up! It was a job, but doggone they look good to me. I can't put anything else up until I get a few tools and the lumber for the floor from Terry. We will have to get more logs before long, too. Sure hope Terry can get enough time off from flying to come get me and go logging.



I had a most enjoyable evening yesterday. Vern came over (he seldom does) about 8:00 and we talked until 11:00 or so and drank beer. He's a nice guy (about 23, with a full beard) and a loner (like me). It was both surprising and enjoyable to learn that we thought so much alike on things like town, bears, people, and being alone. We both confessed that we not only talked to ourselves, but answered ourselves as well! We also talk to the bees and the trees. We both expressed disbelief that people thought we couldn't live without a woman. He told me about being attacked by an old Brown in a sour mood on May 6th three years ago. The bear charged from about 50 yards and Vern stopped him with three shots from his .338 magnum.

Vern found fresh (a couple of hours old) bear tracks yesterday, not too far from here. He even takes his rifle to the outhouse now. I haven't yet, but may start. This time of year, bears can be in a nasty mood. I *still* haven't seen one around here. I want to see one and plan to. I am aware that bears can be dangerous; still the chance of one attacking is quite small. But I keep a gun close by, just in case.

May 15, 1975

She was here, but she is gone.

Sunny came in on the afternoon of the 11th. The day was rainy and the clouds were close to the ground; I was afraid she wouldn't make it. My cabin was clean, my clothes washed, and I had a bath. The day passed so slowly with me "hearing" an airplane every hour or so. At last, about 6 p.m., while I was reading Hemingway, I heard the plane for real. I felt many things while the plane taxied up to our float: elation, anxiety,

and a happiness that was warm and welcome, but accented and heightened by a trace of fear.

Sunny was just as I remembered and loved her: warm, bright and funny. It is not by accident that I call her “Sunny.” I enjoyed her stay more than I can say. I believe she did too. We enjoyed watching the hummingbirds at our feeder. We enjoyed a “meal” of bread and peanut butter, by flashlight, standing at my “kitchen counter.” We went up the Unuk and Eulachon Rivers. Sunny paddled down the Eulachon by herself; her first solo canoe trip. We laughed at the Eulachon Hilton, my line shack. We sat on Terry’s cabin site and talked and dreamed.



“Sunny”

But out of everything we did, we (at least I, and I think she) both enjoyed just being together most of all, just talking—getting to know a little more of each other, the quiet moments, when we were just being ourselves, when we were talking and

listening, when we were touching, when we were trying to, without using words, express a *little* of what we felt...those were by far, the best moments of all. Those were the moments I will remember.

Sunny left early this morning with Terry and Mike. She is by now, I hope, back in Philly.

Since I knew she was “going back” when she got here, her leaving didn’t hurt as much as it might have. But the main reason I could let her go is that she is coming back. And for a longer visit. But sooner or later, I hope, for good. I will wait.

May 16, 1975

Yesterday, when I wrote the above, I wanted to include something that happened the first day Sunny was here, but didn’t because I felt—well, maybe you know what I felt. And so while I still feel her here, I mean *physically* feel her presence, I will tell it: After Sunny had been here only a few hours, and after I had explained that we were in bear country, but I had not actually seen a bear in the seven months I had been here, she needed to go to the outhouse. So, being the gentleman I am (and mostly, I wanted to impress her) I said I would watch her go out there. We stopped at the hummingbird feeder to watch and enjoy the tiny birds that seemed more like insects. While I was standing there, talking to Sunny, I looked over my shoulder toward the “john.” And 60 or maybe 70 yards away, between the outhouse and us was a bear. I wish I could have thought of something really cool to say. Instead, I just turned Sunny’s shoulders so she would see the bear. She saw the bear but wasn’t unduly concerned. Maybe she thought I saw bears sniffing the john every day!

At any rate, we went to Vern's cabin to tell him. He and I debated whether it was a Black or a Brown (he was fairly small and the color doesn't always tell the difference). When I moved (too fast) to go to my cabin to get my binoculars, he saw or smelled me; he let out a "woof" and ran for the woods.

Vern and I decided it was a Brown, even though his head was different (one of the characteristic differences between a Black and a Brown). And the next night, when he came unseen to pick up a beaver carcass that I had thrown out for him, he left tracks that clearly spelled "Brown." Now when I go to the outhouse, I stop and look before I proceed. And sometimes I carry a gun. But Sunny, for the rest of her visit, made the trip quite unconcerned!

May 22, 1975

Well, I'm at Yes Bay again. Vern and I came down in the riverboat on the 17th to get some more cabin logs. The first day here, we downed five logs and took 10 the next day. The third day here we "showed" the logs out of the woods (that means we sweated, pushed, cussed and pried), into the water and floated them to a nearby beach, where they are now.

Mike Underhill came out from town yesterday to give me a hand for two days. We got eight logs out of the woods today (three of which were left from a pile we left in the woods last fall.)

We are "hand-logging," which is fun but hard work. The fun part comes in selecting a straight tree of the correct size, then figuring how to get it to the ground in a place where we can get it to the water. Since the trees are quite thick, they easily get

Wolfe's Howl

sky-bound (hung up in another tree) if you don't "figger" and cut right. The most fun comes when the tree starts to fall in the right direction, and when I yell and encourage it to "run to the water!"

But once that tree is down, there ain't nothing left but hard work! After the limbs are removed and the top cut off, we take peaveys (a tool with a spike and hook on the end with a 5' wooden handle) and push and roll and grunt and fall. And cuss. And cuss. Inches can be so slow! But, when and if you get it in the right spot, on the top of a steep incline or cliff, the "pole" can go the last 30 or 50 feet in seconds and hit the water with a splash and a cheer. But more often, it's pushed all the way down the rocks into the water. Then the splash is quiet and the cheer turns into a grunt. Then we climb and get another.

But it still scares me to think that one of these days I'm going to have to quit having fun and go back to "work!"



May 23, 1975

I'm going to do it! It's insane! It's not practical! But I'm going to do it anyhow. Two days ago, I got two letters. The first was a really good letter from Sunny. The kind that makes you feel warm and tingly all over. The second was a tongue-in-cheek invitation to a graduation (from college) party for Sunny. And I'm going.

It will cost me a lot of money that I don't have. It will mean long hours of hard work to pay back the money I hope to borrow. It will mean working for the summer just to break even. But I'm going.

Now, Mother, who I may *have* to borrow the money from, would disapprove. Too much money for too short a stay. But (1) I love the Lady and (2) really enjoy a practical joke like this. A surprise. Sunny has no idea I'm coming.

Of course, I'm taking a certain risk. I may get there and find that she already has a date or something, but I'm willing to take that chance in exchange for the possible joy, and certain surprise when she sees me at her graduation party. It may turn out all wrong—but I really don't think it will. I'm willing to fly those thousands of miles and spend those hard-earned dollars, just to see the look on her face; and to see her, even if for only a couple of days.

But then, I always said I was nuts!

June 6, 1975

I'm on the way.

I'm in Seattle, with about an hour and a half to kill. It's 11p.m. now. I left Yes Bay about 12 hours ago. Terry came by, so I hopped aboard. And flying with Terry is always fun. We left Yes Bay and headed north. Terry explained that an old man he had staying at one of his places wanted to leave, so we were going to get him and all his gear—free. (Terry sort of looks out for the old fellow). Soon after taking off, I mentioned that if we saw any Yes Bay boats, we might say goodbye: “wiggle our wings” at them. We saw a couple and instead of a wiggle, we gave them a mild buzz job. Just a mild one as a real Terry Wills' buzz job scares the hell out of everybody—except Terry. After we told everybody “goodbye,” we continued north. Terry complained that the heater wouldn't turn off. It made his feet hot he said. So right in the middle of nowhere, he put the plane down on the water, taxied to a stop, got on the float, took out his knife and cut the heater wire! We flew on with Terry's feet comfortable.

When we got to the Chickamin River and landed, we found that Dave, the old fellow we had come to take out had changed his mind. Terry seemed quite happy that he had, and we started toward town. On the way, we passed a boat we knew. They waved their arms, so Terry “set her down.” They came alongside and we talked a few minutes. They didn't want anything too important so we talked awhile and then took off.

Our next stop was at a logging camp for several passengers. It was just after noon, so the guy in charge insisted that we come in for a sandwich. We went into a *very* clean mess hall with a beautifully laid out spread. Of course, we didn't even think about offering to pay. That would have insulted him. I just

thanked him and told him that if he was ever up my way to stop in as “the coffee pot is always on and the latchstring out.”

Then we made it to town.

And I have been doing a little traveling and a lot of waiting since, and I guess I will for a while more. Next stop Chicago and change planes to Philly. I finally arrive at 10 a.m. their time. The party is at 8:30 p.m. tomorrow night and, as I want to surprise Sunny, I won't let her know I'm in town. I will check with her friend, who is giving the party, to be sure that Sunny doesn't have a date and that the surprise will be okay. I sure hope this trip works out. I believe it will.

June 7, 1975

Today was a long, interesting and truly beautiful day. I will never forget it. I arrived in Philadelphia this morning about 9:30 a.m. and caught a taxi to King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. The ride out (about half an hour or 45 minutes) sort of freaked me out. Not in the sense that it scared me or even made me too nervous, but rather it reinforced my negative feelings about city living. The driver was rather rude, at least by the standards I'm used to. He certainly seemed in a hurry, to the extent of weaving in and out of the heavy traffic and periodically blowing his horn. The other passengers were uncommunicative except for a girl who sat next to me. The air smelled. And maybe because my sense of smell had been sharpened by my outdoor living, I thought the people smelled too.

I was glad to get to the motor hotel where I would spend the night. I checked in and called the girl who was giving the party for Sunny. The conversation went something like this:

“Marilyn Fitzgerald?”

“Yes”

“Are you giving a party for Lucille Burbank tonight?”

“Yes I am.”

“Well, my name is George Wolfe and I received an invitation.”

“Oh!”

“I just got in from Alaska.”

“Oh!”

Silence. Then she asked:

“Where are you?”

“King of Prussia.”

Then a loud “Ohhh!!!”

It turns out she knew all about me and everything, but was somewhat shocked that I had really come. I loved it! After we talked a few minutes, I asked if Sunny had a date or “anything” and she said, “No.” We agreed that I should surprise her at her apartment before the party. Marilyn said she would pick me up about 5:00 p.m., so I caught a couple hours of much needed sleep (I had been traveling about 21 hours).

Marilyn picked me up, and we went to Sunny’s apartment. Sunny was not at home, but Marilyn had a key so we went in and waited. I got nervous as we waited about an hour. A long hour. Finally we saw them coming (Sunny, her sister, and her brother-in-law, who had come in from New York for the party), so I hid in the bedroom.

Marilyn made Sunny sit in a chair and close her eyes “for a surprise.” I came in, leaned over from about two feet away and said, “Happy Graduation.” She opened her eyes, sat for a stunned two or three seconds, let out a happy scream, and literally leaped into my arms. The look on her face and the spontaneous nature of her reaction was enough to make the long hours of travel and the dollars spent worth every minute and every penny. And it was only a start to a beautiful weekend.

Oh, I have to tell you something that Len said. Len is Sunny’s brother-in-law, who I had never met, but who, I soon learned, has an excellent sense of humor. It happened while Sunny was still screaming in my arms, with her feet off the floor, while we both were oblivious to the rest of the world. With only a trace of a smile he commented, “I gather she wasn’t expecting you.”

Yeah—something like that.

And Renée (Sunny’s sister who is a beautiful seven months pregnant) made a comment when we were introduced that made me feel warm all over. She said, “George.” Then a look at Sunny and “George?” Then she beamed and said, “*That* George?” Sunny could not have paid me a higher compliment!!!

And at the party, the only way to describe how everyone made me feel is welcome. Quite a few people there knew about me. Stop and think for a minute what that means, and you will know how *good* that made me feel. One girl greeted me with, “I want you to know that as soon as I heard what you had done (coming to the party), you won my heart!” And she was really good-looking too! And another really fine looking girl, after hearing that my name was George and from Alaska, asked with a somewhat surprised look, “Do you mean Lucille’s (Sunny’s) George?”

The guys were equally as friendly and seemed to be impressed with how I'm living. *Why* is beyond me; maybe my lifestyle sounds glamorous to them, but to me it seems natural and fun, but full of some damn hard work. One guy, with whom I went to get extra tonic water, said something to the effect of "George, I admire you. You had the ***** to go and do what the rest of us in the rat race dream about doing, but never will." I was sort of embarrassed. Judging by his clothes and car, etc. he was probably making \$50,000 a year more than me. And if he wanted to do what I am doing, all he has to do is do it. Funny how the grass looks greener, etc. Or maybe he was just being nice and making me feel welcome, which he, and all the others did.

June 7th has been one of the really *fine* days of my life—all because of a Lady I call Sunny.

June 10, 1975

I'm somewhere over the mid-U.S. at 50,000 feet (the plane is only at 39,000 feet). It wasn't a good weekend—no, it was a GREAT weekend. I guess I made this trip for two reasons: I wanted to (1) surprise Sunny and (2) let the Lady know I love her.

I think I achieved my reasons for going.

I not only surprised Sunny, but it was a *good* surprise. I thought I was taking a chance (at least everyone told me I was) by dropping in totally unexpected, but as it turned out, my fears were without foundation. I'm glad. Very glad.

And I believe I achieved my #2 reason, too. To say “I love you” is easy. Many, many times, it is *too* easy. I think of the old saying, “It ain’t what you say, but what you *do* that counts.” Now, my trip wasn’t that much—only a couple of days and hundreds of dollars, but I think Sunny understood and appreciated it.

In case you don’t know, I’ve only known Sunny for about fourteen days total, spread over two and a half years. And every time she came to see me, every mile traveled and dollar spent was *her* to *me*. She *never* expected me to come see her. That’s one reason I love her. But I thought that maybe I should show my Lady that I love her enough to go to her. I think she understood. Hell, I know she did.

But, now that I’m heading back North, I realize that what I enjoyed most about this trip was something I had thought about some, wondered more, and maybe even was scared of seeing. I got to see Sunny’s friends, apartment and way of life. And I loved her even more when I left than when I got there. Neither of us really *knows* the other. But I know her enough to tell her before I left, “Any time, any place, any way.” Guess what I was talking about.

June 22, 1975

Oh, the cabin goes so slowly, but at least it’s going. I’m at the post, alone, and working on Terry’s cabin. It’s good to be back. I was planning on being away for five to seven days and was gone a month. I did a lot and managed to get a lot of things done while I was away, but it was *very* nice to get back “home.”

And it is nice to be alone. Well, if I had my choice, I would have *one* other person here (but she is in Philadelphia), but since I can't have that now, I'm enjoying being by myself again. Ain't nobody here but me and the birds and the bears (haven't seen them lately). And it's really beautiful here now. I've been here for nine months, and this is the prettiest I've seen it. When I left, the new grass was peeking through last year's dead grass and the patches of snow were still hiding in the shadows. No more! Summer is coming on like a loco steer on a narrow trail! Grass is knee-high and getting higher by the hour. The sun's been shining and the thermometer has been topping out over 70° every day.

I shouldn't tell this but I will...

Terry brought me in via plane a couple of days ago and it was hot. Had to have been over 80° and maybe 90°. He had a young lady with him and they stayed for a while so I had to act civilized. But *as soon* as they left, I stripped down to my shorts (that's a nice word for underwear) and enjoyed every bit of that sun. And like they say, "If a little will do a little good, a lot will do a lot of good." I peeled off my drawers and walked through the grass and wildflowers, loved the sun and the day and the time and the place, and lay on the dock bare—well, you know: naked. No other person for miles and miles and miles. I loved it. It was a good time.

Since then, I've been working on the log house for Terry. I can see my progress, but I can see my mistakes, too. Now if the house was for me, I wouldn't worry about the mistakes. A log cabin isn't *supposed* to be perfect. But the cabin isn't mine, and I worry. Right now the notches worry me. Each log has to be notched or cut out the shape of the log below it. Ideally the notch should be the exact size and shape of the log below it. That's ideally! Mine ain't so. Mine have gaps around them. It

won't hurt anything structurally, and they will be filled later with caulking, but they don't look good to me now.

Oh, the books make it sound *so* simple. So simple, in fact, I wonder if any of those guys ever *really* built a log house. Well, tomorrow things will look different. All I have to do is lay the joists. And make sure they are completely level and straight and strong and square, etc. Wish me luck!



June 24, 1975

The joists are laid—at least as many as I had lumber for, and as level and square as me and my level could make them. Hope they turn out as level as I think they are. I'll find out when the

subfloor and floor get put on (when *that* will be, I don't know). As far as I know, Terry hasn't even ordered the lumber yet. If I drop a marble in the center of the cabin and it beats me to one side or the other, I'll know I goofed. But so far, it looks pretty good.



For now, I'm waiting on help. While I was away from the post, we (Vern and I for a couple of days, then Mike and I for a week or two) downed, limbed, got to the water, towed to a beach, later rafted together and towed up here, 40 cabin poles.

Let me explain how we towed the logs up here.

Mike, a girl from Yes Bay named Rita (who Mike was interested in) and I towed them up on the *Sea Bear*.

The *Sea Bear* is Terry's 55 foot boat; an old, but beautifully built, wood boat that is much older than I am. And, of all the things Terry owns, it is the only thing I know he loves.

George B. Wolfe III and Eadie Wolfe Camp



Photograph by Richard P. Kauffman, courtesy SitNews www.sitnews.us

The Sea Bear is on the left, and while it is 70 years old, it still exists.

Mike and I sat at Yes Bay Lodge for a couple of days waiting for Bruce or Terry to take a day off and bring our raft and some lumber up here. Finally Terry told Mike, who had worked on the boat last winter, “You guys take it up.” But I could tell he was a little nervous about us taking the boat. He shouldn’t have been. Mike handles her at the docks like a “Loup-de-Mer.” We made the round trip back to Yes Bay without a hitch or a speck of trouble. We were both a bit proud.

Anyhow, I now have some 40 logs up here in the river, and Terry is supposed to fly up here with three or four guys to help me get them on the bank, peeled, and into the proper stack alongside the cabin. I was a little embarrassed to ask for “help” but four or five of us can do in one day, by muscle alone, what

would take me weeks to do with a winch. And time is getting important. I don't know exactly when I'll leave here (should hear from Mr. Clark soon), but it will probably be about a month or less.

And Sunny will be here in 17 days—for *two weeks*—the longest we have been together so far.

July 3, 1975

It's been a busy week and I've accomplished some things. Mike came up last Thursday and left Tuesday. (He works a week on the Ferry and a week off). The extra help was needed and appreciated.



George (left) and Mike pull another log up a makeshift ramp to put into place.

And Terry brought his brother and another guy up for two days, so the four of us (Terry didn't stay) got the 40 logs (that I had in the river) up onto the bank and 16 or so moved to the proper sides of the cabin. Mike and I put three of them up the next day, so we now have a total of twelve logs into place and about two-thirds of the floor joists in.

The trouble now is that the chainsaw (at this point it is the only *essential* tool I have) is broken. As soon as I get it back, I'll go back to raising the walls. My goal is two logs a day, which is slow, but measurable progress.

I was hoping to get the saw back today as Terry was supposed to come up with a bunch of people who work for/with him at Coast Air. It was supposed to be 10 to 20 people who planned to spend tonight and tomorrow here. But the weather is "socked-in" now, and I don't expect to see them tonight. I guess, weather permitting, they'll come up tomorrow for the day. It will be nice if they come, I guess. I know most of them, at least on a speaking basis. And I like a couple of them. I would definitely enjoy watching them enjoy "my country." I feel about this country like a homely boy with a beautiful girlfriend. I love to show her off. While she will never be "mine," I am proud to just know her. And while most strangers and visitors will never see more than her pretty face and good looks, I'm beginning to learn the love that she can express with her heart.

I'm talking about this country around me—and a Lady who will get here a week from tomorrow.

July 4, 1975

Terry and his gang didn't make it. The weather was too bad this morning. So I'm in a sort of limbo. Can't do more on the cabin until I get my chainsaw back. I may "pay" my rent here by cutting the grass around the post tomorrow. I really have a hang-up about cutting grass. I mean it seems so pointless because it grows right back. Anyhow, I'll probably run the mower around the post tomorrow, weather permitting. The owners of the post should be up soon, and I want everything to look nice for them.

There are a few bears around—six that I know of. There's one bear, then one sow with two cubs from last winter, and one sow with one cub from this winter. I've seen all of them; usually from several hundred yards. They break and run as soon as they know I'm around. That's fine with me—if they go their way, I'll go mine. I try not to surprise any of them. I hope they do the same.

The ground, a few hundred yards behind the cabin, is torn up with "bear diggings" (they eat the grass roots, etc.). But I really had to laugh when I found, two days ago, where a bear had been digging about 10 feet from the back of my cabin—I thought I heard something one night!

While we live close together, I feel no danger as long as I let them know I'm around. They will run—usually. But I still carry a gun. As Terry's brother, who grew up in this country, told me, "If you live here long enough, you *will* have a run-in with one." I hope not, but I plan to be ready.

July 7, 1975

One of the owners of the post is here. His name is Thomas, and I don't like him. Terry brought him out this afternoon. Apparently, he didn't know I stayed the winter here (we got permission through Bruce, who I thought, talked to all three partners). Anyhow, Thomas says he didn't know I would be here. And he's really made me feel unwelcome ever since he climbed off the airplane. Another instance of somebody making a beautiful place less nice.

I mowed the other day for five or six hours. I've cleaned all the cabins and warehouse. Since I've been here, I've fixed their float and ramp, dug them a garbage pit, replaced the visqueen on the roof of the cabin they are building, built a small dam to prevent washing, and various and other sundry odd jobs that nobody *asked* me to do. And Thomas just walked around muttering "I've got to clean this place up!" He can kiss my you-know-what! Okay, I've blown off steam. I'll be nice and help him as I offered, etc. etc.

It's *still* a beautiful place.

I saw a moose coming through my "backyard" a week or so ago, early one morning. Then I saw him as I was going up the river in my boat. We got 50 or 60 yards away before he broke and ran. Then I saw him in the field behind my cabin two days ago. I snuck up on him and got 30 to 40 yards away and took his picture before he saw me.

And I saw the Brown bear sow and cub right across the river from the cabin this afternoon, and a mink on the float, and baby Mergansers (ducks) right next to my cabin, and Old Baldy (mountain) still stands at the head of my valley. The lupine, wild iris, wild celery, and paintbrushes are blooming. There is a pair of swallows nesting on my front porch. And if I leave my

front door open long, I always have to catch and put out a hummingbird or two.

And Sunny will be here in four days to enjoy this with me.

Why did a “somebody” have to show up and screw it all up?

July 9, 1975

It's time for me to move on.

Understand that I always get antsy before I leave one place for another. It is partly the fear of the unknown, of giving up something that I like and enjoy for a promise of more. But it is more the *anticipation* of new things and new places and new experiences that makes me nervous or unsettled between places.

But this time I have an added push—I don't feel welcome here.

Thomas (one of the owners of the post, who has the reputation of being a little hard-to-get-along-with) has made me feel unwelcome.

I guess I'm seeing things from my point of view only. He says he didn't know I was here (I heard he was asked and agreed). He owns a third of the place (the other two partners I have met and *they* knew and agreed that I could be here). He sees the things that used to be done (I see the things I have done in the *nine months* I have lived here). He talks in terms (all the time) of a commercial operations and \$90 a day for guests (I think of being a caretaker, night watchman, repairman, and guard without pay). He talks of being ripped off by persons unnamed (and I offered to pay for any piece of equipment we might have

damaged and for anything of theirs we might have used). He has his point of view, and I have mine. I'm still being nice and bending over backward but when I get fed up, I may bend *him* backward. I'm *proud* to say, "Thomas ain't from Alaska."

And I have problems on Terry's cabin too. First is that it goes so *slow*. I look at a month's work and it looks like a few days. My chainsaw *still* isn't running right. I had a structural problem, but I think I've solved it, at least temporarily. And I know I must leave here with the cabin unfinished. The walls are now only three feet or so high. I had thought that they should be six or seven feet by now.

And because I no longer feel good about staying here, I may leave early. I've never stayed where I wasn't welcome. If Sunny wasn't coming up day after tomorrow, I would consider (but that's probably all I would do) moving into a plastic tent on Terry's place. (The mosquitoes are *so* numerous, I would last about one night).

I had planned, when I left here, to leave all my food at the post and a lot of my equipment that I can't take. No more—I'll dump it in the river first.

And Sunny's coming day after tomorrow. I will *love* to see her. She makes any day better. But I hope she can put up with me now.

The hell with it. I'm going to get drunk!

July 11, 1975

Well, it all hit the fan today.

Mike Underhill, Mike Barrett (a friend of Mike's from California) and I were working on Terry's house when Thomas and Bob Williams (another partner in the post who had just arrived) and Bob's wife came over. I thought they were coming to have a look at the cabin. Boy was I wrong!

Bob first tried being a little nice, but his wife jumped on him with, "Don't pussyfoot around—tell him why we came." So Bob said, in a way that was unnecessarily rude, that they wanted me to move out. I said, "Fine" as I had asked Thomas if he wanted me to leave and he had said, "No." Thinking that they wanted the cabin within the next week or so, I asked when they wanted me to move all of my equipment, etc. Bob said "Now!"

So we stopped work and went to the post, threw and piled all my stuff into boxes, hauled it over here, covered it with plastic, and tried to rig up a plastic sheet to keep the rain off us at night. Everything I have is getting at least damp. I was going to leave all my extra food over at the post (under the circumstance, I did not) and a lot of the dried goods are going to get ruined. The bugs are horrible. And I'm mad.

Don't get me wrong—I didn't lose my temper, even though I think *what* they did was wrong and the *way* they did it was worse. I told them in no uncertain terms what I thought, but I think I did it in a polite manner. I even apologized I had stayed longer than I was welcome. (Bill claimed that he didn't know I was still there—I know for a fact that he *did*). I told him that I was disappointed that my beautiful nine and a half month stay had to end on such a sour note.

It all points to what I've known and said all along—"I must be independent; I must depend on no one else for my lodging, my food, my transportation, and my work in order to be happy."

I was willing to take care of the Unuk River post, to do what needed to be done, to clean and maintain the cabins in exchange for living in the smallest, oldest cabin. I depended on them. This is where it got me. And the worst part, the only part that really bothers me, is that Sunny is coming tomorrow. I can't and won't ask her to live like this. I guess I'll take her to Yes Bay.

July 29, 1975

I am very sad and very, very happy.

I am sad because Sunny is gone. I put her on the jet last night in Ketchikan.

But I am happy because she was here for two weeks. It was a beautiful two weeks. Not weather-wise, for the weather was miserable with rain *every single day*. Not comfort wise, for the bugs at times were close to unbearable to me, and I'm *used* to them—think how they must have been to Sunny. We stayed in Mike's small (about 3' high) tent. I offered to take Sunny to Yes Bay, almost every day, but she stuck it out and never complained, never got in a bad mood, never had a cross word to say. And put up with me. See why I love the Lady?

But it *was* a beautiful two weeks because we got to know each other. Our campfire talks at night were the most important and most beautiful communication I have ever had with anyone. These talks were when the ever-present fire was burned down to a small pile of hypnotizing coals, with a drink or cup of coffee in our hands, and we discussed ourselves, what we wanted in life, and "us." And the "us" we discussed was our life together. If we were married, could we both be truly

happy? We both have been married before and know that it takes more than just love for two people to be happy together on a long-term basis.

Our only major obstacle is that I need the outdoors, the freedom that it implies, and the dependence on self and not society, while Sunny needs to be involved in media, education, or a combination of both to be completely satisfied for the long term. This would be an area of compromise for both of us. But we believe that we could find that middle ground where we both would have each other and the other things needed to make our lives satisfying.

Sunny went back to appraise, to step back one more time, to take a final look at “us.” But we are both confident enough of ourselves and each other to have made a commitment. We are engaged!!! And *that* makes me very, very happy!

August 8, 1975

We aren't going to get the roof on, dammit!

I had renewed hope about a month ago (just before Sunny came) that I would see a roof on the cabin. It came in two forms: I learned that Mr. Clark didn't need me until August 20th, and I got permanent help on the cabin. Mike Underhill had a couple of friends from California who came up for a visit. He talked them into working on the cabin for a week. They then decided they would stay until I left. A “roof on the house” changed from “my goal” to “our goal.” And we had a real chance to see it. But we can't make it now; too many negative factors worked against us, like bad weather, running out of spikes we need, and having to go logging again. So I won't see

a roof on the house. That I regret. At least we will have it ready to put the roof on the house. With *any* break in the weather, we will have the log work done. The roof should go on fairly simply.



And I will leave here, after working on the house for four months, without it being complete. I am sorry. And I won't get any money for my work. And I'm glad—that is *my* choosing. I'm making out my "bill" for Terry. I will adjust what he owes me and what I owe him so that he owes me \$10 (that's from a bet he lost). Don't get me wrong—Terry Wills would probably pay any bill I gave him—and not complain. That's the way he is. And of course he gave me the money to fly back to see Sunny in Philly—with no hesitation and no strings. And he has flown Sunny in and out of here with never a question of me paying him or how. He has flown supplies in to me and flown me out to town and never thought of asking me to pay. But most of all, our "bill" will come out even for selfish reasons: I have been doing something I enjoy, in a beautiful place, for

someone I *like*. That's enough satisfaction for me, even if I am broke.

I will look back on these days with a smile. I will forget the rain, the bugs, the equipment breakdowns, and the frustrations of learning, and remember instead, the beautiful surroundings, the quiet solitude, the satisfaction of solving problems, and anticipate the pleasure that someone I like will receive from what I have done.

I don't want any money for building "my" house. I have been paid well.

August 12, 1975

I left the Unuk today.

And I left with what I ought to call a lump in my throat, but it wasn't that; I left with tears in my eyes.

It was a *beautiful* day! I knew it would be. It was a gorgeous day when I got there, and I knew the Good Lord wouldn't let me down and let me leave in the rain. And he didn't. The sun was bright and welcome.

This morning I sat alone for a few quiet minutes in the cabin that I've thought about, often cussed, and sometimes dreamed about for the last four months. The roof didn't get on but the "crowning glory," the ridgepole, looked good over my head. I looked at the wall, the gables, the purlins, and knew every log. I lived with all of them from being a tree to being a cabin. I remembered the slow, oh so slow, way the cabin grew. I saw the mistakes and errors that I had made while learning.

Now I must admit that “I” didn’t build the cabin—“we” did. When Mike and Bruce came up a month ago, I was only four logs high on the walls. Now they stand twelve high, with twelve logs on each gable and have ten purlins and a ridgepole in place. It was due to all of our efforts. But *I have* seen every log out and sweated over. I have planned and read, cried and cussed, pushed and pulled the cabin thus far. And today I left. I left the Unuk after eleven months. Eleven beautiful months. Eleven months that I can reach back and remember in the future when I need to. Eleven really *good* months—to go to something I hope will be even bigger and better.

And I believe it will be.

But those weren’t raindrops running down my cheek as Terry circled the Unuk River one last time, and I said my goodbye.

Wolfe's Howl



August 19, 1975

I am at the Clark Ranch, after traveling via ferry, rail, bus and “riding my thumb” the last few miles. The trip up was nice, but as always, I was quite glad when I arrived here.

The ferry ride up the famed *Inside Passage* was no disappointment, especially from Juneau north to Skagway. The glaciers, which look like huge white masses of melting snow flowing to the seas, were numerous. The mountains rose ten thousand feet straight out of the water, and had numerous waterfalls decorating their sheer faces. Yes, the country *is* truly beautiful. And the boat ride is relaxing. The pace is fast enough to get where you are going and slow enough to enjoy it. I slept on the deck (floor), but didn’t suffer as I had my sleeping bag and gear.

I spent one night in Skagway, Alaska and caught the White Pass-Yukon Train to Whitehorse, Yukon. For much of the trip, the railroad follows the old Klondike Gold Rush Trail and was the most beautiful scenery on the whole trip. While we averaged only 14 miles per hour, no one complained as we enjoyed the spectacular, ever-changing route up mountains, across passes and muskeg fields, around lakes, and through forests. All of us admired and wondered about the men who blazed a lot of the same route 77 years ago, with hundred-pound packs on their backs, on their way to the “Gold Fields.” They had to have been tough, determined men of a breed that must have died out since then.

The bus ride was—well, a bus ride. I’m not suited to buses and buses aren’t suited to me. The country was simply what I wanted to pass through to get to where I was going. And I’m here, ready to work for John Clark, Master Guide—the man I have read about and whose stories I have read for years. And I

am now a Registered Assistant Guide in the State of Alaska. I am proud of that too. I hope I can do what is expected of me—I'm going to try.

It should be interesting!

August 25, 1975

I'm afraid my idol may have "feet of clay." John Clark, Master Guide and author, now appears to be in the business for a totally unacceptable (to me, at least) reason—MONEY.

Maybe I am judging John too fast, but I don't think so. And my judgment of John hurts me for quite a few reasons. It hurts to find one's hero is human and getting old. It hurts to see hunters who have saved for *years* to come to Alaska to hunt (John gets \$240/day per hunter) and describe the hunt as a "rip-off." It especially hurts when I can't take pride in the outfit I work for. I have always prided myself on working for "top-boat" or the best outfit around. And it hurts because, as a person and companion, I *like* John. But our outfit isn't run right. A lot of the trouble stems from John's wife, Elizabeth. While John is 63, she is much younger. And, she is one of the tightest, penny-hungry people I have ever known.

Our camps aren't set up as comfortably as they should be (we set one up yesterday—in the middle of the season!!!), and the food is skimmed on. Our camp cook is an 18-year-old kid who thought he was going to be a wrangler-packer and has never cooked before. The hunters were promised more game than is here. On a 10-day hunt, about three days are wasted traveling into and out of camp. John doesn't stay in camp, but ferries people and gear around via tractor. And, I am asked to do

things that I don't think I should do—things like having to guide a hunting party to the next camp when I haven't ever been there! And things like being turned loose, completely on my own, without instruction, to take a hunter after game over country I have never seen, for game I have never hunted. And things like having to “wrangle” the horses every morning at daylight by myself because the only other guide in camp is an Indian woman too lazy (or something) to help.

I am learning only from experience; no one is helping much. I think I'm doing pretty good so far, but I wish I could take more pride in my outfit. And I'm sorry my dream about working for John Clark has been destroyed.

Very sorry.

August 29, 1975

We got him! We got him! We got him! Today my hunter and I got “our” first Dall sheep ram and I'm happy, proud and glad! The day started at 4:30 a.m. as most of my days do. I beat the sun up and didn't waste any time between the sleeping bag and my jeans, as the temperature was 30° or so, and we have no heat in our tents. After a couple of cups of coffee (reheated from the night before, but still welcome) I “jingled” the horses (locating them by the bells around their necks) and brought them back to camp. After breakfast, I saddled my hunter's horse and my horse, and we started out before 7:00 a.m. My hunter was Gene Patterson from California.

We rode for two hours up a creek, crossing and re-crossing it many times. We stopped and “glassed” (looked through binoculars at 20 power spotting score) at two groups of Dall

sheep, totaling about 40 animals, but found only ewes and lambs—not a single legal ram.

We tied the horses and started out on foot. The walking was not bad, as it was more or less level and not much muskeg (the soft, wet, spongy ground that is punctuated every few feet with a hump that sticks up from a couple of inches to a couple of feet). Then we saw him: a Dall ram bedded down on a ridge overlooking every approach. No way to get to him without him seeing us and spooking him. So we bedded down to wait him out. We lay there for a couple of hours, and I planned how we would stalk him if he wandered off the ridge where he couldn't see us.

Then, he stood up, stretched and started feeding. He soon fed over the ridge and we took off towards him—like two flushed quail. First we waded, jumped and splashed across a creek, separating us and the ram. Then we hurried up a ridge where we would be out of sight if he returned to his lookout post. We began to climb. And climb. And climb. These mountains have a way of growing as you start up them. A climb that looks like it will take 15 minutes may take an hour. The climbing is really only walking uphill in most places, which is tiring as hell, but not dangerous. In a few spots, we did have to use our “toes and fingers,” and didn't look down.

We reached the level where we last saw him, and climbed higher and began to work our way around the mountain toward where we thought he was. We had to cross a rockslide that stretched from the top of the mountain to the base and was 50 yards or so wide. We inched across it. In places, the rocks, for ten feet in all directions, would slide a foot or so, but they always stopped. Thank goodness!

Then, when we were below the rim where we expected the ram, I bellied up the rim and peeked over. Across the small canyon lay three rams. Gene eased up beside me and we watched them. We had made a good stalk; the wind was blowing from them to us so they couldn't smell us and the sun was right on our backs, so they couldn't see us as easily as normal. The rams were lying where we couldn't judge their horns too well. The law states that a ram must have horns that cover three-fourths of a circle, but it's rather vague as to what that means. Anyhow, the rams stood up and started to feed and I studied them. I looked long and hard and sweated a little, said a little prayer that I was right and committed myself, "The two on the right are legal; take the one in the middle—he's the largest."

Gene said, "What's the range?"

I replied, "Long—about 350 yards."

Then he said, "I like the one on the right," and started shooting.

He missed once, twice, three times. The rams were confused; they ran one way then another. Gene reloaded and fired again. A miss. I said, "You are shooting low to the left." He fired again and missed, but saw his bullet strike at the ram's feet. He held the next shot high above the sheep's head and fired. At the gun's blast, the ram crumpled and rolled 150 yards or so down the mountain (we later found the bullet had broken his back.) We climbed over to where he lay (it took over 20 minutes), and the other two rams stood and watched. When we got to within 100 yards of them, Gene said, "You were right; that one is larger. Wouldn't he be an easy shot! Do you want to take him?" It really hurt, but I had to say, "No, John doesn't want guides to shoot sheep." But, I did borrow his rifle, unload it, aim at the ram and "click." I "shot" my ram with an empty gun.

Wolfe's Howl

So Gene and I got “our” ram. In doing so, he made one of the longest shots I have ever seen made. A beautiful shot by a good hunter. He’s a nice ram, no record, but a legal ram.

Walking down that mountain, with that sheep cape and horns on my back, I couldn’t help but feel a tingle of pride that I had done my job well.



George carrying the head of the ram back down the rocky slope

September 5, 1975

Today was the first time in my life I thought I was going to die. Oh, I know I'm going to die sometime, but today I honestly, seriously considered the possibility I was going to die *today*.

It started at 1:30 a.m. this morning when I woke up with a stomachache. Now, I pride myself on having a "cast-iron gut," and I can't remember having stomach trouble before. But it hurt! And got worse. At 3:30, I woke the cook and said I was sick and needed to get warm. He built a fire, and I lay beside it and *hurt*. My stomach was very sore to the touch, and I figured I had a bad appendix. This is a bad place for appendicitis; it is 12 hours via horse to the nearest road. After everyone was up, Chris (a fellow guide) volunteered to ride over to the nearest hunting camp where they had an airplane and ask them to radio for an Army helicopter to come get me. He started out at daylight, and I got worse. I could only lie on my right side and had to lie still. I was in such pain, I was "bent"—my chin was almost between my knees. I lay there and thought "Ride, Chris, ride." I knew I had appendicitis and if it ruptured, well, I figured they could use my body for bear bait. I knew if Chris missed the plane or if they couldn't get through on the radio, I was going to die before help came. The prospect didn't scare me (probably because I didn't *really* believe I was going to die). I tried to scribble Sunny a note to tell her I love her and for her not to grieve, but I was in too much pain. I took two aspirins, then two BC's, and drifted off to sleep about 10:00. The pain began to ease. Overhead, I heard a plane coming in low. A plane? No place for him to land—the only "runway" was a very short, very rough stretch of rocky creek bed. He couldn't land there...but he did!

The pilot was "Butch" Smith of Anchorage, a pilot and guide from the next camp. He said there was no need for a helicopter

because he would take me to the hospital himself. The pain was almost gone, but I knew I had to get checked over. We took off and had the roughest flight imaginable. The wind was blowing between 60 and 80 miles per hour; it tossed our two-person plane like a feather in a tornado, but we made it to the airport. From there, someone took me to the hospital. The doctor could find nothing wrong. Now, that's embarrassing! He mumbles several things that it could have been, told me to take it easy for a day or two and turned me loose.

I tried hitchhiking to the airport, but had to walk six miles before I got a ride. I caught Butch before he returned to camp and rode back with him. The weather had moderated some. Back here, drinking coffee with Butch, I asked him what I owed him. He said, "Nothing." I pressed him and he finally said, "50 dollars." I wrote him a check for \$75 (all I had to my name) and thanked him. He, without being asked to, flew over here, got me, and took me to the hospital and brought me back. It's nice to find people like that still around.

So, now I'm back in camp and will go out tomorrow guiding or whatever. Sure hope I don't get sick again. I don't think I could take "dying" again this week.

September 12, 1975

I've always believed that you should pay the price for your own mistakes. And I am—I am. But enough is enough! I'm cold!

Now, I admit I deserve it. I mean, to forget your sleeping bag is a real Cheechako stunt (A Cheechako is a newcomer to Alaska who has no knowledge of how to survive there). Thank

goodness it isn't really cold. The temperature has been bottoming out around 25° to 28°, but tonight the sky is clear and holds the promise of dropping down in the teens. When my only cover and mattress are the blankets I pulled off the horses a couple of hours ago, and when the warm horse sweat has turned into cold-as-hell clamminess, but the smell stays the same, I make a promise: I won't forget my sleeping bag again—because I'm cold!

September 30, 1975

We are now between seasons. Sheep season has just ended. I have been asked by John to travel down to the Alaskan Peninsula to guide for Brown bear in a couple of days. So we are just loafing around the ranch, catching up on some much needed rest. And believe me, this rest is *really* needed. I am exhausted due to the 35 days of nonstop, no-rest, hunting. And while I'm resting, I'm enjoying a man I grew-up with but actually only met a week or so ago.

Let me explain:

Almost all of my life, I have read the magazines of *Sports and Field* and *Outdoor Life*. The hunting and shooting editors were Tim Green and Larry Williams, respectively. Since I've become older, I've met people who have hunted with Larry Williams (I should say they hunted for him, not with him). He, from all accounts, must be an egotistical snob and more of a writer than a hunter, with few qualities one could connect with the word "Sportsman." So when Tim Green's name was dropped around here, I began to, well, I guess dislike or maybe feel jealous of him. I assumed he would get preferential treatment, be a big shot, and expect everyone to cater to him.

He came a week ago, and I am very happy—very, very happy—to admit I was wrong. He is getting preferential treatment from the Clarks, but it is to his chagrin, not his wishes. Not only does he not ask for anything special, but he also volunteers for the dirty work: washing dishes in camp, helping carry luggage (he is in his sixties), and today he not only washed the Clark's truck (unasked, of course) but he also picked up dog manure! All of this is in addition to being a genuinely *nice guy*—someone who is happy to talk to anyone who seems interested in the outdoors or shooting and answers questions honestly and in some length from those of us who pester him. It is nice to find that some idols have “real feet.” I consider it a privilege to know Tim Green. I consider him a “Sportsman” in every sense of the word. But, more importantly, I consider him something very rare these days—something I can say of few men I've met—Tim Green is a *gentleman*.

October 5, 1975

I am on the Alaskan Peninsula where I will be for at least 17 days. And when God made the world, I think He put the peninsula together out of the leftover parts, for there isn't a lot of anything here—except muskeg. I don't mean to say it isn't beautiful; it is, in its own way. The land around here is either flat or has low, but steep, hills. There are a lot of bushes and thickets around (too much to suit me), but nothing *I* could call a tree. On the plus side, there are *no* people. But the weather has been, and promises to be, horrible. We will be lucky to see the sun at all during our stay. The sky is usually burdened with gray or black clouds that, while not dropping too much rain, seem to always have high winds.

And there is the muskeg. I can't really describe what muskeg is, for I don't really know. It seems to take different shapes and different forms—all of them bad. It is a type of land that looks green and firm, but never is. Sometimes you only sink an inch or two, and other times, you sink several times that. It is filled with small mounds of grass that are trippingly firm. It is tiring for horses and even more so for the dumb jackasses they call assistant guides! All in all, it is like walking on a three-foot thick marshmallow. And this is the place I will call home for the next couple of weeks. But would you believe: I like it here! Now, if I can just get my hunter a bear, I'll be happy.

October 7, 1975

Today, bear season opened.

Richard (my hunter) and I left camp around 7:00 this morning. Our camp is on the shores of Ugashik Lake, the third largest lake in Alaska. This is a big lake that really reminds me of the ocean with its clear, greenish-blue water, sand beaches and usually its big waves. We followed the shore for a couple of hours, looking around each bend and point for bear. We saw no bear, but lots of signs (bear tracks, droppings, and diggings). We then left the shore and walked uphill for a mile or two to a point where we could see a lot of bear country. Richard constantly "saw" bear, but each one turned out to be a bush, rock or other harmless object.

Then, at 12:15, Richard said, "I see one!" And I could tell by the excitement in his voice that this time it was *real*. I looked through my binoculars at the ridge over a half mile away where Richard was looking. And saw a beautiful bear on the hillside. I quickly—too quickly—surveyed the country separating us

and our trophy. Our stalk would be uphill and through the brush, but didn't promise to be too hard. Forty-five minutes later, we lay panting just below the point where we had seen him last. After our breathing began to approach normal, we crawled up and peeked over.

Nothing.

We eased up and looking around, found no sign that a bear had ever existed. We climbed higher and waited. And waited. I promised myself to wait until 4:30, and then try to get back to camp before dark. When 4:30 came, and the bear hadn't shown itself, I "gave" it 15 more minutes...then another 15... After a final 15 more minutes, we started walking down the ridge toward camp. We had traveled only a few hundred yards when Richard gasped, "George, there he is!" And there he was, 200 yards away and moving diagonally toward us. I will *never* forget that sight! The bear was walking along a green, sky-lined ridge. Behind him, and several hundred feet lower, was the beautiful lake that was being adorned by a gorgeous sunset. He was without a care in the world—truly the lord of all he surveyed. It hurt a little when I told Richard, "Take him."

At Richard's shot, the bear spun around and then took off in the direction he had been heading. I shot, then Richard shot twice more, and the bear sat on his haunches, mortally wounded. Now, flushing a bear out of the thick brush, knowing that he'll probably come for you from pretty close, right before dark, is something a guide may have to do, but I wasn't relishing the thought. I didn't want him to get away or to suffer anymore, so I administered the coup-de-grâce. We walked down to where he lay still, and I positioned Richard off to one side while I walked up behind him. With my rifle ready, I kicked him in the rear. He was dead. We had our bear. Now, I'll go back tomorrow and skin him out. And I was tired when I

George B. Wolfe III and Eadie Wolfe Camp

got back tonight. Tomorrow, carrying the skin on my back, promises to be tougher.



October 8, 1975

I got him here, and I am tired.

Richard, Tim Green, and I walked back this morning. We took pictures, then I skinned him out and tied him on my backpack. I told Richard that if I could pick it up, I could carry it. I got down, got the backpack on, and stood up. Like a fool, I said, "It's not too heavy." Well, believe me, it got heavier. It weighed maybe 80 pounds. I made the first half hour without stopping, but it was downhill, over fairly easy walking. Then we hit the brush. I had to rest after 20 minutes. Then we hit the lakeshore, with the soft, leg-killing sand. I rested more. Even Richard, who wasn't carrying anything, called a couple of rests before I did. The whole trip was only about six miles, which we had walked in two hours the day before. It took us 3 hours and 15 minutes tonight.

I'm tired, but happy. Packing a bear was something I had looked forward to with some dread, some anticipation, and some, well—*challenge*. And today, I packed "our" bear in. I'm glad I did. And I'm glad it's over.

October 12, 1975

Tonight, I am happy, even excited. I have made up my mind where I'm going next: to the country of two of our hunters (their descriptions, enthusiasm and *love* of it convinced me in short order). Yes, I am going to leave Alaska. Alaska is a beautiful place—probably the most beautiful place I have ever seen. But that is the problem: I have seen it.

It's just like when I'm out walking, I "have" to walk up the next hill to see what is on the other side. And the next. And the

next. I hate to turn around, to give in, before I've seen everything! So I've decided where I'm going next: to a country with a lot of space and animals...and few people, to a place with a lot of promise and more hope. Where living is still fundamental, without the mind-dulling luxuries we in the United States have become so accustomed to.

I am moving to South-West Africa.

It is my next "hill to peek over!"

October 25, 1975

Well, hunting season is over. Hunting and guiding has been wrapped up for this year, and I'm glad. Don't get me wrong, I have enjoyed it. But enough is enough. I'm tired now when I get up in the mornings. *One day* without clouds or rain or wind or snow would be *most* welcome. And the hours and hours and hours of walking and looking without seeing anything have gotten to me. There really isn't the game around that I expected or that used to be. And I'm tired of hunters, even though I have liked them—some more, some less. I'm tired of waiting on them when we are climbing. I'm tired of listening to the stories of their other hunts and other guides (all of whom are great).

Really, I guess I have to admit that I'm really just tired. Physically tired, not tired of the weather or country or the people. I'll go home soon, and I'm ready. Ready, hell—I'm really looking forward to it.

November 3, 1975

I am home, and I really mean *Home*. May I always have one.

When I meet people and they ask me where I'm from, I try to explain in very few words. It sounds sort of confusing to some, I guess, because they ask, "Where do you call home?" I usually just take off my hat, point to the underside and say, "Right under there."

There is a lot of truth to that, of course. I have called quite a few places home. When I live in a place, it *is* home. I felt I was "from" Alaska when I lived there. I felt I belonged to it and it to me. I loved it and it gave me all I asked. But when I walked back onto 305 West Harding, Greenwood, Mississippi, I knew I was *Home*.

Greenwood itself hasn't changed. Oh, there are new buildings, new stores, new homes, etc., but Greenwood hasn't changed. I still know people here, and people here still know me. And, I had forgotten how good it felt to say my last name was Wolfe, and to have someone say, "Of course your check is acceptable. I know your family."

And, more than just *being* in Greenwood, my *home* is here.

The house I grew up in and was taught in, brought back a flood of forgotten good times when I walked through the door. Lizzette, my "other Mother" was, well, Lizzette—there is no one else like her, or ever has been, in the whole world. (Co-author's note: Lizzette was hired help who had been a part of George's life since he was a little boy). My sister, brother-in-law, niece and nephews are family in every sense of the word. My family and their own.

And Mother, well, what can I say? That I love her? That is not enough (but I *really* do). There are few people in the world that I have respect for—I mean real respect—but my Mother is one. And, even more than respect, I *admire* my Mother. There are a lot of “ladies” in the world, but Mother is that and more. I consider her a “Gentlewoman.”

Yes, it’s nice to be HOME!!!

November 13, 1975

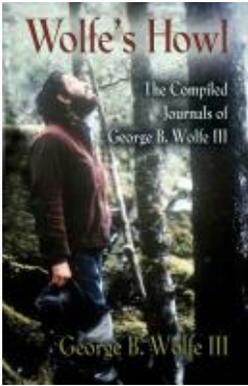
It’s all over.

Sunny and I have broken up. We won’t see each other again. Her letter arrived today. As I mentioned before, she left to take “one last look at us.” During her last visit, we discussed ourselves as few people ever do: our good and bad points, our aspirations and dreams, our expectations, and responsibilities. We exchanged information in a few short days that normally takes years of knowing each other. She went back and really thought about whether or not we could ever make each other happy. The answer she came up with was “no.”

And while it hurts to admit it, I do agree. As I told her, “We are too much alike, and too different.”

So Sunny and I won’t ever “be.”

But she will always have a special place in my heart. Maybe I will always love her.



In 1974, refusing to settle for a life in mainstream society, George Wolfe quit his job as a stockbroker and decided to live his life outdoors. Over the span of five years, George journaled about his travels that took him to several continents and literally into many bodies of water. In this book, follow George as he seeks to LIVE LIFE on his own terms through the good, the bad, the hard, and the rewarding.

Wolfe's Howl

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