

AS THE CROW FLIES 4

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KEITH ROBERTS R.I.P.

I've lost a good friend, a friend with whom I've shared meals, day trips, much music and many letters. His name was Keith Roberts and he was one of England's finest writers, though much underrated. There have been any number of remembrances of Keith in the sf news zines and on the internet. Some of them are none too kind to Keith, written by people who were his editors, publishers, or otherwise worked with him on book projects. I'd like to present my remembrances of Keith.

I first wrote to Keith in 1973, prior to a trip to England which we were planning. I didn't know whether he was married or not, but said that Anna and I would like to meet him and asked if we might take him and his lady, if there were one, out to dinner. I got back a very nice letter of a page-and-a-half in which he said that he'd be happy to do so. Other correspondence followed setting a date and time. We met and dined, but I don't remember where. I do remember that we went back to his digs and talked until 2 or 3 in the morning. This was the beginning of a wonderful friendship, a friendship filled with letters, talk, music and sharing some of Keith's special places.

On almost every trip to England we would plan to spend several days with Keith. Usually we would go somewhere during the day, then have a fine dinner and repair to his flat to talk and listen to music. On one of the earliest trips I recall that he talked his then employer and good friend, Peter Pearce, into showing us places in London which we might not normally see. Dr. Johnson's apartment, the inn where Charles Dickens often had his supper, the small alleyway where Dryden was stabbed. And Peter drove us, in his posh car, from the Embankment along the

Thames through the service entrance of the Savoy, right under the hotel, emerging on The Strand. And then out to St. Bartholomew's Church, reputed to be the only church left after the great London fire, where Peter claims to have seen a ghost. And St. Bart's Hospital and a stone's throw away, the market where butchers came in the old days to fetch their meat.

This was only the beginning of many day trips. On other visits to England Keith showed us Stourbridge with the great park designed by Capability Brown, St. Alban's with the Roman museum and nearby coliseum, Kettridge, his home town in Northamptonshire, Chedworth Villa, the Roman villa which he used as a model for his historical novel, **The Boat of Fate**, a cruise down a river on a cruiser with his agent, Leslie Flood. We stopped at a riverside pub to enjoy a lovely lunch.

And always at the end of the day was supper in an interesting place followed by talk and music in the evening. Keith had a remarkable collection of tapes which he had taped from the BBC, many of them live productions. He loved vocal music, especially opera. Perhaps best he loved Benjamin Britten and we had many an evening of excerpts from Peter Grimes or Paul Bunyan, this latter not being available on disc at that time. There was a beautiful English soprano whose voice he loved and I'm sorry that I can't remember her name. I do remember that he thought highly of Frederica von Stade and presented me with a tape of her singing on one trip.

Though he never married, Keith had a keen eye for women, as is easy to see if you've

read much of his fiction. Indeed, several of his books revolve around strong women characters. Anita, the witch, was the first. Kaeti and Molly Zero were others. The protagonist of his novel, **Grainne**, was physically based on a woman news commentator on one of Britain's television stations.

Keith loved his beer and we spent happy hours in **The Maltsters Arms** outside of Henley-on-Thames and later in **The Rose and Crown**. He had a remarkable memory for places to stop during our day trips, always in time for a pint and lunch. Later, when his landlady died, he moved from Henley to Avebury. I don't remember the name of the pub there, but I know that it was a pleasant place with a friendly innkeeper. And I was able to show him my find, **The Black Dog**, out in the nearby countryside. And finally he was made to move to Salisbury.

He had contracted multiple sclerosis and essentially had become a ward of the state. His hair turned white. Eventually he spent a year in hospital and lost both legs. When I last visited him in '95, his motor skills were much eroded and it was painful for me to watch him threading a tape onto his reel-to-reel recorder. And though we weren't able to day trip, it didn't stop us from talking for three days and listening to music and meeting the wonderful people who came in twice a day to assist him. He was able to have his own flat to update his listening equipment, moving into cassette tape and CDs and to buy a new somewhat automated typewriter. He didn't get to the computer stage but he was quite content with that. I recall seeing the portable typer in the caravan in which he wrote one of his early books, living almost like a hermit up behind **The Maltsters** and pounding out the words.

I owe Keith for much more than the books he wrote which have entertained me and caused me to think. He introduced me to the ghost stories of M.R. James, he presented me with **The High Kings** by Joy Chant, the poetry of John Betjeman and on one trip, the photocopied manuscript of Robert Holdstock's **Mythago Wood** for me to read on the flight

home.

Others have written about difficulties in working with Keith. That may have been so. And yes, Keith thought that he got a raw deal from the publishers. I can't say. My relationship with Keith was on an entirely different level and we were never on any but the best of friendships. Nearly an entire bookshelf is devoted to his works and I can think of no better way to remember Keith than to slowly re-read them. It will not be a sad duty but a joyful one. For the past five years Keith had talked about wanting to die. I don't know how much he suffered. Considerably, I should think. I do know that he is much happier now, wherever he is. Goodbye, old friend.

OUR JENNY

I'm pleased that so many people have written to ask about our granddaughter, Jenny. And many of the people whom I saw at Corflu, lo those many months ago, also asked how things were going and how Jenny was. Well, I'll try to keep it short. And I have to talk about my daughter, Shannon, too, for the story to be complete.

I've written about the process of taking custody of Jenny. Shannon was involved in that process and agreed willingly to our taking Jenny. She had already turned herself in to detox, and from there went into treatment. After treatment she went to live in a "clean and sober" house and in fact, went to work for the man who owned a string of such houses. She worked steadily and hard for the guy, but got little thanks and less money. So she quit and went to work for Metro 1, which is a cellular phone answering service. She has worked there for a couple of years and is now a supervisor.

Meantime she met a fellow at AA meetings and in January of this year, married him. They found a house to rent which is a mere ten blocks from our house. So we see them often. Jenny was determined that she was going to move back with her mom. Which she did the day following the wedding. She now lives in a

neighborhood where several of her closest friends live and is able to continue at the same middle school. We have a difficult time believing that she will be a freshman in high school next year.

Jenny has done well in school and likes athletics. We're not sure where she's going to end up. She loves softball and maybe this is her best sport. But she made the school team for volleyball. I didn't get to see her play but her mom and grandma think that will be her best sport. She's not playing organized basketball this year but did play soccer. At home there is Jack, a Jack Russell terrier, and three cats. She took my Leo, who used to curl up in my lap when I read at night, with her and we miss him. But he was her cat. So she keeps busy and is quite a normal early teen who loves Leo De Caprio, 'N Sync, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera and Buffy, the Vampire Slayer. Whatever happened to The Kinks, The Who, Led Zeppelin, Supertramp and the good stuff? Choreography? We don't need no stinkin'.....

Anyway, I intrude. Everything is going so well that we are very grateful. End of that part of the story. To follow, another family saga.

MEDICINE WHEEL JOURNEY

Herewith a report of a trip we took with our daughter, Shannon, in mid-July. It was in the way of a celebration for her commitment to becoming free of drugs. Over three years ago, while sitting at a pow-wow with her shortly after she had been through detox and a treatment program and had moved into a clean and sober house, I told her that when she was clean for two years we would take a trip to Wyoming, visit the Medicine Wheel there and give thanks. This was the trip.

The first day was just steady driving with only rest stops between Seattle and Missoula. The next day we drove south to Hamilton and stopped for Shannon to do some thrifting (thrift store shopping). Then we went to a gun shop and pawn. I didn't see a lot of pawn, but there was a lot of Indian stuff. Shannon had broken a squash blossom necklace, silver and

turquoise, and was looking to match some silver beads to mend it. The young lady asked to see the beads and she matched them pretty closely. Then she told Shannon to bring the necklace in so she could see how many beads were necessary. She ended up restringing the entire necklace, hiding the new beads behind the blossoms because they matched pretty closely but not exactly. When Shannon asked her how much, she said, 'Oh, just the cost of the beads.' How very nice.

We drove on to the border between Montana and Idaho before turning east to Big Hole Battlefield. This was the site of one of the major battles in the Nez Perce War. We walked over the site of the Nez Perce encampment, paying our respects to Joseph, White Bear, Yellow Tail and others. Back at the visitor's center we listened to a woman ranger tell the story of the battle, one which the Nez Perce were not anticipating. Onward to Wisdom where we paid the highest price per gallon of gas in the entire trip, \$1.79.9. This place is pretty isolated. Most of the time we paid in the neighborhood of \$1.64. Thence south to Dillon, home of Western Montana University.

Onward to Yellowstone. We pulled into West Yellowstone about 3 in the afternoon and it had begun to rain pretty hard. I suggested that since we were going on through the park the next day, heading east and without a lot of time to explore, that we have a snack and then take a northwesterly turn to see if we could see anything. It continued to rain, but we did manage to see a few elk. When we got to the visitor's center at Canyon Junction, the rain was pelting down and the lights were out in the center. We viewed what we could of the buffalo exhibit and then the lights came on. Before long the rain stopped and we were able to go to the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone and view the canyon and the falls. Shannon got some excellent photos and was delighted to see the canyon and falls.

We had a fashionably late dinner at the Old Log House, where I have eaten each time

I've been in West Yellowstone. Excellent food and portions, and looney waiters. Lots of fun. In the morning we delayed long enough to visit The Book Peddler where I bought a couple of books on the mountain man era, one by Robert Utey and one by David Lavender. Then it was back into the park, trending eastward now with the major stop at Old Faithful. We figured our time until the next eruption and walked for about a half hour out to one of the geysers. Then we came back to sit with the thousand or more people all waiting expectantly. The old girl gave a pretty good show. We stopped for a few moments in the Hamilton Store, mostly for ice cream. Shannon had wanted to see one of those deep blue pools, and the one I remembered was about an hour's walk out. There is another, however, a couple miles back down the road and quite close to the parking area. So we drove back. Our only problem was that the steam from the pool was obscuring most of the pool most of the time so photos didn't turn out very well. (Actually better than expected.)

We left the area of Old Faithful and were a bit sad that we had not seen any buffalo. We drove on to Yellowstone Lake and along it until we reached the Fishing Bridge where we turned east to take the highway out of the park on the east side. Just as we crossed the Fishing Bridge Shannon spotted two buffalo, then a third. And a bit farther two more, magnificent bulls grazing contentedly at the edge of the forest. We were able to get out of the car and get some very good photos; the buffalos couldn't have cared less.

By now it was mid-afternoon and we had some steady driving to do in order to reach Cody by evening. I was beginning to doubt that we would reach Cody in time for the evening rodeo. I think we switched drivers a time or two and pulled into Cody about 6 in the evening. As we passed the rodeo grounds we saw the sign that told us that the rodeo would start at 7:30 p.m. so we had plenty of time. We found a motel, cleaned up a bit and drove into town to find a meal. A new restaurant has been built near the Buffalo Bill Historical Museum since we were last there and it provided a splendid meal for us.

All stoked up, we headed for the rodeo grounds and bought tickets for the Chutes, where you sit up above the stalls where the bucking stock and the bulls are mounted by the riders. Not only do you get to see the action up close but you get to see the cowboys going through their sometimes nervous gyrations in loosening up and the looks of disgust when they are thrown. Actually one big young fellow had his bell rung pretty well when he was thrown and staggered quite a bit when he got up. The clown came over and assisted him back to the chutes. I'll bet he had a pretty good headache in the morning. And I'll bet he was back the next night to give it another try. The stock at this rodeo always seems to be good, certainly better than the cowboys. We've been to this rodeo three times now and the cowboys try hard but never are up to their competition. Shannon had never been to a live rodeo although she had watched them on television. So it was a thrill for her. She got some really good photos, including one of a bull trying to climb out of a chute.

In the morning we went to the Buffalo Bill Museum. It's several museums in one. There is the Whitney Museum of Western Art, with western paintings by many famous western painters, including Frederic Remington, Charley Russell, R.D. Koerner and others. There is a museum of the Plains Indians with dwellings, dress, tools, beaded artifacts and many other things depicting the life of the Indians who lived on the plains. Naturally there is a wing which depicts the life of Buffalo Bill and his Wild West Show. There is a gallery of contemporary western art, and a Remington arms museum. There was also a special exhibit of Audubon's animal paintings. This is an outstanding museum and we could easily have spent a whole day or more there. But we were on a rather tight schedule. So in the early afternoon we left Cody and headed east.

Driving to Powell was simple but then the highway rises into the Big Horn Mountains in north central Wyoming, right near the border with Montana. We were headed for the Medicine Wheel, which was the primary

objective of our trip. The road rises so rapidly that you have to drive in a lower gear. About 35 mph was what the car was comfortable with, and the temperature gages rose right up to the red line. When we came out on top we were able to look back and see the plains far below us. Within a few miles we came to the turnoff to the Medicine Wheel and took the dirt road for a couple of miles until we came to the ranger station and the gate. As we changed into hiking shoes the ranger came out to tell us that the rangers at the top would be coming down soon. I told him that we had come to do ceremony, and he said that we'd be all right. It wouldn't make any difference. We would be able to enter the wheel. He warned us that there was a storm threatening and that we should watch the weather.

The wheel is a mile-and-a-half from the gate and people are expected to walk unless they are disabled. The walk is nearly as spiritual as the wheel. You are up near the top of the Big Horns and able to look for miles. It is green and lush, like something out of a fantasy novel. The dirt road rises slightly then dips and then finally rises to the wheel itself. As we neared the wheel I realized what the ranger had meant. Last time we were here there was a cyclone fence around the wheel. A ranger would let you in if you wished to do ceremony. The first time we were here there was no one to let you in; the wheel was only open on certain days of the year when the Indians would come to do ceremony. Now the wheel is surrounded by a low mesh fence about two feet high, then an open space and then a white thick rope. One could easily duck under the rope and step over the mesh to enter the wheel.

So what is the Medicine Wheel, you ask? It's an ancient wheel laid out on the ground. It is approximately 80 feet in diameter, with many spokes running from the hub to the circumference. The hub is fairly substantial cairn and has been dated to about 500 B.C. Other parts of the wheel have been dated to about 500 A.D. There are other major cairns at each of the four directions. These directions are very

important to the prayers of traditional Indians. This site has been sacred to the Indians who lived nearby for hundreds of years. The nearest tribes would be the Northern Cheyenne and the Crow, perhaps the Lakota who lived in eastern Montana, but it is known that other tribes have visited from time to time. Now it is shared by all tribes.

And why should we go to the Medicine Wheel to give thanks? It seemed a good goal to set for my daughter as she was in the early days of recovery. It was a place which she had heard about from me and she recognized the sacredness of it and it's meaning to me. I have a bit of Sac and Fox blood in me and I am proud of that heritage, though it's almost drowned out by my Irish and English heritage. Still I have a great respect for the Indian ways and have many Indian friends in the pow-wow circle. At times people sitting in the stands at various pow-wows must wonder who these white people (Wasichu) are that all of the dancers are greeting with hugs or handshakes. We have been on the pow-wow trail for five years and have danced at over a hundred pow-wows so we are well-known by sight, if not by name. We've been gifted many times at giveaways, invited to Indian weddings, and memorials when friends have passed on. So we feel comfortable with Indian beliefs and ways of doing things. We've sung songs with people who follow the Indian Shaker way and have attended a celebration with the Red Cedar Circle. We've feasted with tribes up and down Puget Sound. So it seemed quite natural that we would want to take our daughter to two sacred places. The Medicine Wheel was the first.

As we approached the wheel a pickup truck with an Indian family drove up the road. The mother was disabled and the ranger down below had let them drive up. She would have been unable to walk the distance. The family walked slowly around the perimeter of the fence, but left no gifts. Soon they got back in the truck and drove off downhill. To the northwest black clouds had gathered and the wind rose. There was a coldness in it and before we were finished

we were feeling that cold. The ceremony took only five minutes or so, addressing Grandfather and thanking him for delivering our daughter from drugs, addressing the four directions and the sky and earth, praying for our many relatives and friends, and thanking Him for giving us and protecting the other creatures, the four-leggeds, the winged ones, those that swim, and the plants. Then we all hugged and cried. It was good.

When the ceremony was over, we placed many tobacco bundles, wrapped in red cloth around the fence, with the hundred of other offerings which had been left. During the evenings of the trip we had spent several hours preparing these tobacco bundles, each about an inch in diameter. We strung them together in strings of fifteen and wove them through the mesh of the fence. I also had some braids of sweetgrass to leave. As we were doing this a black gentleman came up and asked if he might take a photograph. Since the ceremony was finished, we said that it was all right. He told us that he had only recently learned that he was part Choctaw and that many runaway slaves were taken in by Indian tribes. He said he was only beginning to learn about that side of his heritage. I told him that I knew of runaway slaves joining the Seminole in the Everglades of Florida. We chatted for a while and then he headed back down to his car.

We gave a last look at the Medicine Wheel as the thunder nation spoke and lightning struck many times not far away to the north. I told Anna Jo and Shannon that we would not be rained on, that we would reach the car and still be dry. The sky was very dark. We headed back down the mile-and-a-half to where the car was parked. The hike warmed us up a bit. We reached the car, changed boots to shoes, stowed my pack in which I had carried what was necessary for the ceremony, climbed into the car, and the first tentative raindrops hit the windshield. Grandfather was kind to us, not for the first time. Last summer as we approached the Bear Paw Mountains where Chief Joseph surrendered the Nez Perce it had rained all the way in from the highway. When we arrived it

stopped raining. We followed the trail for about forty-five minutes. As we arrived back at our car it began to rain again. Thank you, Grandfather.

Driving on eastward out of the Big Horn Mountains it was well after 6 p.m. and evening was settling. Suddenly off to our right I spotted a cow moose and her calf coming down through a meadow. I pulled quickly off the road and Shannon and I got out to take pictures. The cow easily cleared the fence with the calf right at her heels. She didn't seem too concerned about us. She crossed the highway and jumped another fence and headed into the red willows. The calf, however, didn't have quite so easy a time. He had to try three times before he got over the fence. The second time his front legs got over but the back ones didn't follow. Not one to give up, third time's the charm. The cow was 30 yards away, well into the willows, but waiting. When the calf caught up they soon disappeared.

Not long after a doe deer crossed the road. About the time Anna Jo said, 'Watch for the fawn,' I was thinking the exact same thing and stepping on the brakes. The doe went one way and the fawn stopped at the edge of the road, then scampered back to the edge of the woods. I waited until I had spotted the fawn standing still before I crept forward. This was our night for wildlife. The next incident wasn't exactly wildlife. We were driving through open range country and I rounded a curve to find a good-sized Hereford in the middle of the road. Brakes on again until the steer took his time getting across the road and up a bank into the place where the grass was greener.

Now we really began to descend from the mountains and I was getting a funny sound in the left front. I hoped that it was only the tire being funny. We made it into Sheridan without any fuss, but every curve made the sound a little more ominous. We celebrated the events of the day with a superb prime rib that evening after checking into the motel, which seemed to have a

resident bunny rabbit on the lawn.

In the morning, not willing to take chances, I looked in the phone book to see if Sheridan had an Oldsmobile dealer. They did, so I went to the motel office to get some help with directions. The lady told me that I could probably get helped but that if I needed parts, I should know that I was 'in the middle of God-awful nowhere.' Then she proceeded to tell me that the Olds dealer was 'squinty-wampus' from the Hardees, a hamburger chain in these parts. Colorful language, indeed. I found the dealer and explained my problem. He had someone go out with me and drive the car. 'Sounds like a flat spot on the tire,' the mechanic said after a few blocks. He drove back to the shop, got under the front left and said, 'no problem. There is a flat spot on the inside. It won't give you any trouble beyond the noise.' I heaved a sigh of relief and went in to see what I owed. 'Aw, nothing. Have a good trip.' Nice folks there in Sheridan, Wyoming, but I don't think I'd want to live there. Cheyenne, maybe, or Buffalo, even Laramie, but Sheridan didn't show me much beyond the kindness.

So onward to Devil's Tower. Or Bear Lodge, as the Sioux would have it. There is a lovely Lakota legend about the tower, but I won't go into it now. This is another sacred site to the Lakota and the national park has asked climbers to desist during the month of June when many Indians come to do ceremonies at this place. We had planned to hike around the base and changed into hiking boots. I've been here three times and hoped that we might see wild turkeys, but no such luck. The hike is not difficult nor long, perhaps 1.3 miles. From each side you get a much different view. And from the back side (from the visitor's center) you can watch the climbers. It was fairly late in the afternoon and the climbers were coming down, rappeling in pitches of probably 100 feet at a time. We watched one group of three who were obviously climbing together. I remembered doing some of this when I was young and foolish.

When we had finished circling the base

of the tower and marveling at the huge blocks which have broken from it over the centuries, we visited the visitor's center and found that a Lakota man was carving pipes from pipestone down in front of another building. We walked on down and had a very nice conversation with him. We told him what we had done the previous day and he congratulated us, especially Shannon. He has been digging pipestone for twenty-five years and carving from this for twenty years. Anna Jo and I have visited Pipestone in Minnesota, a place which the Indian tribes considered neutral. There was never any fighting between tribes there. There is a beautiful stream there with small waterfalls and a trail which one can walk. The stone is in narrow veins and is considerably deep, not easy to quarry out. The pipes carved from this stone are used primarily for ceremony and are considered sacred objects. We talked about 'awakening' the pipe, that it is not considered anything more than a pipe, until it has been used in ceremony.

We said goodbye and drove back down the hill, stopping briefly to watch the prairie dogs in their village. There is a gift store where we knew there was excellent ice cream so we stopped. We had met a family on the trail with six girls, some of whom had beautiful braids. I had joked with them, asking if they were willing to trade braids with me. We met them again at the gift store and had quite a chat with them. I suspected that they were Mormon and one of the older girls said that her boyfriend and dance partner was gone for two years. On mission, certainly. It turned out that all of the girls did ballroom dancing and have been on television many times. There is apparently a Good Life network where they have appeared often, but Anna Jo said that she had seen them and we don't get that network so they have been viewed by an even wider audience. They were all beautiful girls, ranging in age from 6 to 21. The one who spoke of her boyfriend intends to be a professional dancer. She looked to be about 18.

The ice cream having been consumed, we headed for South Dakota, intending to visit

Spearfish and Belle Fourche before turning for home. Just a couple of miles down the road we came upon a terrible accident. It appeared that the front left wheel had come off an SUV and had the vehicle had sideswiped a sedan coming in the opposite direction. We couldn't see that anyone was injured and quite a few people had stopped to give assistance, so Shannon at the wheel negotiated through the accident site and we continued on.

By the time we reached Spearfish, the sky was black, lightning was zigzagging down and the rain drops were huge. Shannon had wanted to stop at the Wal-Mart where she knew that there was fabric for which she was looking. So we found our way to the store, ran for it and she was successful, adding to a store of fabric which she had purchased way back in Missoula. She'll have plenty to keep her busy this winter. We drove on to Belle Fourche (can you say Foosh?), had a fast food supper and found a motel. Between the two towns we saw a grass fire that had been started by lightning. (Last week Idaho and Montana had thousands of acres on fire and both Marine and Army units were called in to fight the fires. And people in Missoula were warned to stay inside if at all possible because of the smoke. The paper reported that there had been an estimated 75000 lightning strikes.)

On the last day but one we once again had some steady driving. Belle Fourche was our turnaround point and the road that we took clipped the corner of Wyoming and back into Montana. We stopped for lunch in Ashland, Montana and afterward drove a short quarter mile to the St. Labre Indian School. Not much happening there during the summer but we were able to visit their church and the museum with quite a number of Indian artifacts, especially those of the Northern Cheyenne, on whose reservation we were.

A couple of hours later we took the time in the late and very warm afternoon to stop at The Little Big Horn, the site of what used to be called The Custer Battlefield. We listened to a

Crow gentleman, with a penchant for memorizing bits of conversation and memoirs of the participants in this final major battle of the Indian Wars of 1876. As he told the story of the battle he would quote from some of the major participants. Oddly, he didn't talk much about Custer. In the grand scheme of things, Custer and his men were only one part of the battle, with Reno and Benteen and their men several miles away. It was much too hot to walk any of the battlefield or the area where perhaps as many as 10,000 Indians were camped in several thousand tipis across the valley of the Little Big Horn River. We did drive out along the ridge to where Reno and Benteen fought their part of the battle.

Then it was time to head for Billings and find lodging for the night. In the evening we did a little touring about town to look at the growth of the town and to do a little window shopping. In the morning we began the long drive to Missoula and playing tourist was pretty much over. On down I-90 through Deer Lodge and ugly Butte, with its Our Lady of the Rockies statue and its atrocious pit mine. On past Anaconda with its smelter stack where copper was smelted. (Read Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*.) Ugly places with an ugly history, but that's just my opinion. A restful evening, a good dinner, and a good night's sleep and we were ready to hit the road for home with a vengeance.

But not before I hit a couple of bookstores in Missoula. The Walden's book store in the South Gate Mall has a manager who does an excellent job in stocking books by Montana writers and books about the west and Native Americans. I've been stopping there for quite a few years. I managed to control myself to four books, well, five actually. When I went to pay for them the clerk told me that if one bought four books, a fifth one was free. I had chosen four trade paperbacks about the west, so went back and chose another. The other store is the Book Exchange, primarily second hand but always with a good choice of hardcover remainders, generally by Montana writers or

those associated with them, which somehow Jim Harrison has been, even though he lives in Michigan. But he's friends with McGuane, Burke, Crumley, Russell Chatham, the painter, and others and often comes west to fish, so I'm told.

With books stuffed into the last crevices of the trunk, we gassed up and headed out around 12:30 p.m. And without much fussing and only rest stops and sandwiches and fruit along the way, we pulled into Shannon's house about 8:45 in the evening.

We had a wonderful time sharing this trip with our daughter. Both of us originally had reservations about how we would get along, it turns out. Shannon spoke about it on the last day driving home. She said that anticipation always seems to be better than the reality of events, and she wondered if her great expectations for this trip were far too high. But she said everything lived up to her expectations. Yesterday we received a card which she had written while spending a few days at our cabin with Jenny. She repeated that for her it was a fabulous trip. It was a great trip for Anna and I also. My regret was that it wasn't eighteen days instead of nine. We could have seen a little more and spent a little more time in Yellowstone, in Cody, in Sheridan, in Billings, in Missoula. But it was grand. And now it's over. Well done, Shannon, and a happy rest of your life to you. You take good care of our Jenny.

KIPPLE

Or filler, if you will. There is a bit more than a page too fill up, so this is just a warning that nothing very important will be revealed here. Something I always forget to do is acknowledge those persons who have been kind enough to send locs, either by snail mail or e-mail and of course the many faithful folks who do produce fanzines and send them my way. I just received fine issues of For the Clerisy, TheWeber Woman's Wrevenge, Ansible, and within the last several months, Trapdoor, Quipu, No Award, Steam Engine Time, Derogatory Reference, and Challenger. And let's not leave out those giants

Mimosa, SF Commentary, and Stet. All of which I enjoy and very few to whom I ever write a letter. My apologies to one and all. I'll never be a Harry Warner, I guess.

Which somehow reminds me that Ken Cheslin has died, quite suddenly, I read. Ken was most generous with his zines and the reprints which he had been producing of late. And if his cartoons did not produce exceptional art, the wit was always amusing and sometimes outstanding. I will miss his zines and I'm sure that British fandom will miss his presence. Most recently he had produced some outstanding John Berry volumes and much of Atom's art work.

George R.R. Martin's third volume in the trilogy which he calls A Song of Ice and Fire has been published and can be found everywhere. I was in Canada for a couple of days over the Thanksgiving and there were literally stacks of the latest novel in every bookstore I visited, both in Vancouver and in Chilliwack. The young lady in Cole's in Chilliwack was nearly beside herself in trying to find room for the copies. I have had the first two volumes sitting on my shelf for quite some time. My friend, Reed Andrus, says that they are a must read. Reed now lives in Texas and you know how those Texans are.

So I have vowed to begin reading A Game of Thrones this very evening, in spite of the fact that I have a half-dozen other books in various stages. The first two contain 1400 pages so it seems that I am in for a long haul. I've not been very successful with other writers who write to this length. Probably to the dismay of other fantasy readers out there, I have to say that I've given up on Robert Jordan, Tad Williams and Terry Goodwin because of the length of their books and what I sometimes consider a dearth of activity. Too slow, to this old mind. I have kept up with Bob Silverberg's Majipoor books, however, so there must be something besides length that doesn't appeal. Anyway, I'll see how these go. Shall I report back?

Now comes a major interview in the December 2000 issue of Locus. Therein George comes close to apologizing to his readership. His intention was to write a trilogy. Now he

says that it will run to six books and he will do everything within his power to keep the story within those six volumes. That's not a promise, exactly. At least now I'm prepared. I've read about 100 pages and already it's fascinating. I will proceed.

Sunday, Dec. 3rd, was not a day for sitting at home. Just too beautiful and I was very much in the mood for a walk, not having done much of it lately. I particularly felt like walking along the Seattle waterfront. Good intentions and all, we did get a late start. But the weather was sunny and not too cold, probably in the 40s. Parts of the waterfront are very touristy and it's always fun to see what characters are about. Two young fellows within a hundred feet of each other talking up a storm to themselves. "Bob, you son of a b—," one of them said as he passed. The other fellow was having a pretty logical talk with himself. One hand would go out, as he obviously said "On the one hand." Then the other would shoot out, "but on the other." I hope he figured it out. Later there was a car at the curb honking for an indigent to come and get a donation. As I drew near I could read the sign in the fellow's lap. Not only homeless, but deaf. I went over to the car and told the driver, "he's deaf." He handed me a couple of dollars and it wasn't until I put the bills into the fellow's hands that he was aware.

There were some pretty big yachts in the yacht basin, making me wonder who the owners might be, jealous of anyone having that much money and thinking of better places it could be spent. I can admire their beauty but I have this social conscience which knows a hundred places that could use even a small portion of the money that was floating in the basin.

We walked for a bit over an hour and turned around just as the sun was setting over the Olympic mountains. We decided that we would stand and wait before we got back to buildings that would block it out and watch it go below the horizon and see the afterglow. It was worth it. Beautiful. Except, I should know better. Looking at even a little bit of the sun will cause you to have an afterimage in your eye for quite a while. Here comes an in-line skater and he has a head and he has legs but he's got this shimmering

bit in the middle. Still, it was worth it.

We managed to look in a few shops for Christmas presents and, sure enough, even made a couple purchases, crossing a couple more off our lists. And then stopped for a bowl of clam chowder at Ivar's Acres of Clams. Ivar is gone now, rest his soul, but even before we moved to Seattle, we had come up to hear him sing folk songs at some little cafe. Ivar was a sort of ne'er-do-well from a wealthy family who had a hard time settling down. When he finally did, he became eminently successful, known all over town, the owner of a number of fish-and-chip restaurants, and ultimately the owner of the tallest building west of the Mississippi. Well, it was at one time. The Smith Tower is now dwarfed, but until sometime after the Seattle World's Fair, it was taller than anything in L.A. or San Francisco. And eventually Ivar bought the building. The restaurants still exist and the main one, on the waterfront, has a wonderful metal sculpture of Ivar feeding seagulls and a seat one can sit in. I have to say, though, that they seem to have changed his clam chowder recipe and my recipe of his, cut from the newspaper a long time ago, is better than what they are now serving. Still good...but not as good.

It doesn't pay to subscribe to magazines or be part of a bulletin board which is literary. In one day, I've been through the Forthcoming books in Locus and have a list longer than need be, then jotted six recommendations from somebody's message on Rara-Avis, the hardboiled detective fiction bb, and finally cruised through Geoff Bradley's Crime and Detective Stories from England, netting some recommendations of authors whom I had not previously known. This will never do. I can never catch up.

Only a few lines left. Anything I can recommend? I just finished **On the Rez** by Ian Frazier, whose book **Great Plains** a few years ago I found very good. This one about life on the Pine Ridge Reservation where the Lakota live. Pretty truthful, some positive stuff and some negative.

I wish you very happy holidays and have a great New Year. -endit-