

THE EAST SIDE OF  
CHICAGO

*by Linnea Johnson*

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Published April, 2014, in pdf format at <http://www.LinneaJohnsonauthor.com>.

## Publication History

- "Chicago Sestina," *Spoon River Poetry Review*, 1987; *SRPR Anthology* 1988;  
*Benchmark: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry in Illinois*, 1988; *Augury*, The Backwaters Press, Omaha, Nebraska, 2010.  
 "Graduation, June 1964," *Blue Collar Review*, Fall 2005.  
 "Grandmother Lake," *North Central Review*, 2006.  
 "Martha, When We Went Very Near Them," *Augury*, The Backwaters Press, Omaha, Nebraska, 2010.

## Acknowledgments

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to the states of Illinois and Nebraska for their Arts Awards assistance.  
 Ragdale Foundation, the Tyrone Guthrie Arts Center Foundation, Ireland, and the Chateau De Lesvault, France, for residency awards.



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For Viola & Erik, eternally

*There was a time when you were not a slave,  
remember that. You walked alone, full of  
laughter, you bathed bare-bellied... You say  
there are no words to describe this time, you say  
it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort  
to remember. Or, failing that, invent."*

– Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*

## Freshwater and Sand

The last scrape of glacier scrawled north fourteen thousand years ago, scribing five inland seas, five great lakes, freshwater and sand shaped like an irregular wet handprint, beneath which sailed the safe-keep aquifer half the size of the continent.

At the south of the southernmost lake  
rose an intricate lacy rabato of prairies, woodlands,  
wetlands, sumptuous marshes, quick trickle streams,  
quiet teal ponds, thick rivers, little lakes, thready tributaries,  
and deep, sweet, unequivocal artesian wells –

the strong lungs, veins, arteries, pulse and quick of earth

refreshing food and shelter for the song, savannah, and vesper sparrow,  
Great-horned Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, bluebird, meadowlark, catbird,  
the anciently migrating Sandhill Crane,

anima rookery to Black-crowned Night heron, egret,  
moorhen and rail, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, and Wood Duck;  
alma to shorebird Yellowlegs, curlew, sandpipers, and Avocet  
nesting and breeding on sand bar, reed and rush, and mud flat.

Thousands of years of sun and moon, fire and water, bird and bear  
found grass prairie and violet woodland, trillium meadow and orchid marsh  
held tight by muscled roots threaded with breathing silver water,  
voice of wind, storm and thunder billowing, pushing through,  
alone or accompanied by sundering kinetics, lightning  
bolting heavens through clouds to earth.

## Ultimus Terre Terminus

All and always have men boarded ship, as Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Phoenicians; as Celtic monks from Greenland, Romans; as Leif Eriksson sailing to Vinland; as Mediterranean and Black Sea voyagers; as Portuguese, Chinese, the Spanish Armada, English Trading Companies, the Dutch, the French, the Japanese; as unappeasable Americans –

onto the sea by fortuity or storm, want or wanting, flung by priest or company or throne for unmet need, unbent knee, or unbowed head, heaved out onto water which is, at first, as shallow as toes are thick, until it becomes the abstruse azure graveyard sea. Men worm their way deep into a ribcage hold

sail from Here to someone else's Here, away, away to the furthest land known

aboard rickety, untrue coop that they want to be raft, to be boat, to be explorer ship or magic slipper, to bide whole, to lug their skimpy, exploiter hearts away. Men leave and leave and leave again, look to star or crow or cupidity for guidance. Gob to fo'ksul, men fight the wailing water which wants them like a hunger, in it

until they roll onto faraway soil on which they, as upon a bride or mother's body, procure some food, secure some rest, acquire some shelter before

they buy or sell or take it, raid, divide it, tyrannize it, fuck it, eat it, convert it, mine it, farm it, colonize it, use it up, have it, hold it,

silver to Spain, gold to Portugal, slaves to France and everywhere, small hands sewn into the fabric of cheap clothes even now, gutting the stitching, holding together our shoes, the land and labor of others become the pulverous spice on our morning toast. As if picking a few

wildflowers from open meadows, men take flesh and metal for their own use. If it is there, men reason it is theirs for the blind, deaf, dumb steel it takes to take it, using the conviction that it is theirs if they can but take it, teach it, dead or alive, god in the fist holding fast and tight.

## Splitting the World in Half: The Treaty of Tordesillas, 1494

As it was known that the world was a sphere, Portugal was off to sea, eastward toward the spice islands; Spain was off to sea westward.

In 1492, Columbus returned to report that he had sailed to India, which he had not. Would Spain and Portugal go so far that they would meet where east meets west, compete for spice or "red gold" slaves, ivory, amber, brazilwood, sugar, silver, tobacco, cotton, cacao, rubber, timber, gold, food, or for land itself?

To forestall a clash of competing claims and because he ruled church and state and fancied he ruled the world, the Pope split the world in two, dividing the earth between

Spain and Portugal, a bigger half to Spain from the Spanish-born Pope, a notional line along longitude he did not comprehend, could not calculate.

To the Pope, to Spain and Portugal, this apportionment made absolute, peaceful, arrogant sense, determination made before problems could arise.

The inhabitants of the lands divided knew nothing of this bull, this papal nonsense determination. The bull mentions no people, only land and island. These unmentioned people had no part in papal decision, were neither asked nor told, land to them like air and light, used, not owed, and not amassed to surplus hoard. From the beginning,

the *raison d'être* of exploration was exploitation, power derived from fantasy and force, twin eternal gods of the Catholic church. If Spain and Portugal

did not exist until the late fourteenth century, in the 'Before' there was still someone else to convert, to commercialize, to command. 'After' there was someone else to convert, to commercialize, to command, church and state, church or state or company

the unholy hoary fingers rasping, slashing lines into the soft sacred tissue of the frangible globe, inscribing bodies to the bone and beyond use and extinction.

## The East Side of Checagou: Recitative

### Recitative 1.

On 12 August 1833, the Town of Chicago was incorporated  
away from those who had lived there for six hundred  
or six thousand years

by an act of a legislative body  
not speaking any of the languages  
of those who had lived on prairie,  
in marsh or woodland near Lake Michigami  
for those six hundred or six thousand years,

an act aided and abetted by virulent disease,  
violent displacement, and vehement death.

As of 12 August 1833, Chicago was bounded  
by neither religious nor civil morality, but, instead,

by streets called Kinzie, Desplaines, Madison, and State,  
a real area of about three-eighths of a square mile,

population: three hundred fifty collaborators –  
those who benefitted by this sleight of hand,  
this slight of probity, this slice of American life.

### Recitative 2

Chicago Historical Society legend,  
er, “history,” has it that the name “Chicago”

was derived from “Indians,” though which tribe,  
band, or group of “Indians” they didn’t record.

Still, trusty white history records that “Chicago”  
comes from an “Indian” word for “wild onion;”  
okay, maybe “stinking root.” And here a linguist,

there a linguist, might unironically asseverate  
that the “Indian” word, “Chicago,” might also mean  
“skunk,” “horribly powerful, stinking strong skunk.”

Yet, infallible white babblers, unabashed, maintain  
that the etymological meaning of the word “Chicago”  
is “strong,” as in “anything powerful and great.” Babbler

legend says that: “The Indians seemed to apply the term ‘Chegago’  
to great white leaders as well as to the strong Mississippi River.”  
We know this because, described in Great White Leader journals,

is scenario after scenario wherein ‘Indians’ would historically  
say the word ‘Checago,’ gesturing first to the great white leaders,  
then to the great river, after which they would invariably  
clasp their left inner forearm with their right hand,  
left fist snapping up to point to the sky, signifying –

-what else could it mean?! – that the name “Chicago”  
unequivocally means “any one or thing great and powerful,”

though street historians have been known to deconstruct  
similar semiotics, briefly and without nuance,  
as “Drown, stinking skunk,” one “history” accurate as another.

## The East Side Nishnabek

Where did we come from? *Ni pi je ga je byeyak?*

Until October 1851, Nishnabek lived on the East Side of Chicago, where I grew up a hundred years later. I missed

the wolf pack of Wolf Lake, the night heron,  
prickly pear cactus and lily, Phalarope, Northern  
Harrier, ancient eagles and orchids near Lake Calumet,

though each Spring I knew, a wren built a nest  
in the birdhouse my father made in our basement,  
then installed on the eastern edge of our garage roof.

That October of 1851, according to a white man's history  
of Cook County, a Potawatomi woman, Togah, sold land,

near what's now Calumet Park, to George Ewing for \$1000,  
the land soon filling in, up, and over with cash crop white immigrants  
and the mills, rail yards, grain elevators, and factories where  
they labored, and with the rooming houses, apartments, homes,  
and flophouses in which they lived. Marsh and plain and woodland

became shop and forge and factory, steel mill, railroad, and thoroughfare  
when they came starving from Ireland, Germany, and Sweden  
after the U.S. Civil War. Twenty years after that, Poland, Serbia,  
Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy emptied out onto land which had been

Nishnabek gardens alive with beans, squash, pumpkin, onions,  
corn, and tobacco. Gathering wild rice in the marsh, growing corn on this  
prairie, sugaring maples, and making birch canoes went the way of  
spearing and netting edible fish, bow-hunting deer, and trapping beaver,  
the population of the East Side of Chicago increasing from  
one white guy in 1851 to 16,513 folk in 1940 to 21,619 in 1950  
and 23,211 plus me, my mom and dad by 1960. Feet and rails

and concrete displaced Nishnabek, rush and Seaside Crowfoot,  
sedge, Marsh Cress, Grass Pink Orchid, Bulrush, Lady's Slipper,  
Buttonbush, gentian, and water lily, bittern, egret, wolf,  
cormorant, Snowy Owl, Falcon, and Cooper's Hawk.

Will the Nishnabek, rush, and wolf return if I call them, pray  
their names above steeple and smokestack, plant birch  
and beans in place of bank and boodle? Why is it  
all of us who come after don't belong here, never humble as the bean,  
sweet as the onion, useful as the birch, nothing like a reed  
at home in a living marsh, and why don't we return  
to somewhere or some way that, were we to leave,  
our return would be prayed for, welcome, a blessing?

## Grandmother Lake

I could see Lake Michigan glinting or glowering from our third floor living room windows. Always, I had sailed her water in little boats, crossed over her on bridges, ran from and toward her on her sandy beaches, watched my father swim along her shoreline when he didn't go off to work at her docks, mills, harbors, and piers.

One summer we circled her long shore around: Milwaukee, Manitowoc, Green Bay, Manistique, Mackinaw City, Traverse City, Ludington, Gary,

and back home to Chicago with my jar of sand from each beach, leaves, gull feathers, jars of lake water – green, blue, grey – curls of sloughed birch bark, and pebbles. The lake was dying,

my father said. Fish lived in her I knew, but until then, did I know she herself was alive? Alewives died in her water, but how could water die?

All my life, he said, she's been dying, alive and changing

fourteen thousand years since a glacial lobe advanced and receded again and again, dug an inland sea, and left an arc-shaped highland flanking the south lake basin, moraines, the dams behind which water could pond, dry to wetland, marsh, woodland, and prairie.

For six thousand years and almost cast as she is today, Ancestral Lake Michigami rose or fell a hundred twenty feet, high water sprawling miles farther inland, or low water leaving miles to walk from where today's shore would be to find a fish.

Quakes cracked earth to form riverbed and tributary. Rock eroded rock. Sand ridge dunes moved with wind and water almost as if sand were wind and water. Waves moved sediment to nurture this or that curve of migrating shoreline. Alive as any life, the lake – breathing, moving, re-forming, growing sand spit, sustaining her own life and the lives of others.

“We should be able to drink this water, you know, this lake water. For thousands of years, people did, like mothers' milk,” my father said during that vacation around Lake Michigan, stopped as we were

in Gary, to allow oil tankers, coal barges, and ships rich and heavy with copper, coke, steel, and gold midwestern grain, to pass beneath an opened bridge.

That day, this lake seemed a grandmother who'd died before I could speak, before I could say her name, run my hands over her soft as cake flour sandy face, before I knew she had ever looked different than she did before I knew her, when I knew geologic age only as a warm nipple between my lips, my mother's body nourishing my body.

Fourteen thousand years alive, her shoreline now ruptured and raggedy, given this last century of valuing livelihood over life, the lake herself like an elder hit, slapped, kicked, and used up within a community of jackals organized around greed, rapacious exploitation, neglect, and early, unnecessary death.

At home, I positioned portraits of my mother's honored mother and my father's honored mother on our living room windowsill, grandmother lake visible and dying in the distance between them.

## Red Hots. Circa 1961

For me, Then, it wasn't summer without a black cow:  
 root beer, soda pop, and vanilla ice cream. One box of sparklers  
 July Fourth on the third floor back porch. One trip to Riverview  
 to look forward to, then look back on. Daily Vacation Bible School:  
 taking it, then teaching it, story book and flannel graph.  
 To sleep scorched with sunburn or exhaustion, skin peeling,  
 hot and cold from shock, cold washrags to the forehead over layers  
 of Noxzema and Caladryl, wrists run with cold water from the tap,  
 feather pillow wet with prayer and fever and sorry. To sleep  
 before the cold faded from the skin, the cool terrycloth getting  
 hot as if it had been ironed. All day the three-story building  
 soaked in the heat, our third-floor apartment hot and dark and still,  
 the puckery white cloth, fringed shades down, the windows closed  
 to keep out indefatigable Chicago summer heat, shades and windows  
 opened at dusk to let in the slightly cooler  
 breeze off the lake, if there was one. Inside, with  
 Mother, Father, and me was the low purr  
 of the icebox out-running heat and humidity,  
 of reading shivery crisp onionskin Bible pages and poetry,  
 embroidering, cooking, of varnish beginning to blister  
 on the oiled, polished, furniture, of steady work  
 and steadfast faith cooking like eggs  
 in hot water on the stove.

The 1958 Skyway was built just past Avenue A, the state line with Indiana.  
 It looked over the prairie where my mother and I caught the hundred insects  
 I was required to pin to a board, and name, for my high school biology class:  
 advanced, me in tears having to kill. Near the Calumet River. The Forest  
 Preserve. Cal Park Beach for nights too hot to get to the yacht harbor  
 further north by LaRabida, the sanitarium full of children  
 with bad, holey hearts who were confined by stiff clean  
 white sheets in unforgiving white iron beds.  
 Friends Lynnea on Avenue F, Susan on Avenue J,  
 David on Avenue G, Jimmy on Avenue A, and the rest  
 here and there, in three flats and two flats and bungalows.

On four-lane 106th Street, between my house  
 on Avenue C and Ewing Avenue, were the Chicago  
 Red Hots in their own narrow shop, bright red all beef hot dogs  
 I never ate, slammed inside a sturdy, warmed poppy seed bun  
 piled on with yellow mustard, green sweet relish, diced white onion,

red tomatoes, a slice of green dill pickle, a dash of celery seed,  
 yellow banana peppers, sometimes sauerkraut, but never ketchup.  
 I ate at home where I knew who cooked what, never  
 a child who took from the hands or fingers of strangers,  
 candy or hot dogs or anything else.

The 106th Street A&P lay across from a car dealer,  
 shiny new cars inside plate glass picture windows  
 in front of which Jimmy told me we shouldn't  
 go steady until we were older but that didn't mean  
 I could go for sodas with his cousin. His new Mother  
 didn't want him giving away his gold initial ring. Not to me.  
 His dead Mother liked me and maybe would have understood  
 us. Around the corner and down the block was Bethesda Lutheran,  
 where Jimmy and I went to church, were confirmed  
 together, and never married one another,

and where our mothers' duets lodge  
 forever in paint and grain and gilding.

On down Ewing one way was Cohen's department store,  
 a florist, a dime store, a branch library. The other way,  
 the two flats started almost right away. That way  
 stretched to Jane Addams Grammar School,  
 10810 South Avenue H Region 6, constructed in 1948,

and to George Washington High School,  
 3535 East 114th Street, built two years before  
 I needed it, to service me and other students from  
 the East Side. Architects Perkins and Will styled it to resemble  
 suburban schools and malls, county airports, and highway truck stops.  
 It is dissimilar from most Chicago public high schools, and, in 1964,  
 157 other students and me graduated,

without knowing how  
 to feed ourselves without going to the A&P,  
 how to make music from a blade of grass or how to identify  
 a willow, much less make a willow-shoot whistle; where life lives, or god,

or who went before us not mentioned in our history books,  
 why we aren't them, why they're not here now,  
 and why we are.

At the intersection of 106th & Ewing sat a couple banks,  
 The Purple Steer for sodas and burgers, a coming and a going  
 CTA bus stop, and the newspaper stand where we got the Sunday  
*Trib* and *The Sun Times* on *Saturday* night, my Dad's arm out the Olds  
 with the quarters.

## Prairie to half block prairie

On the East Side of Chicago, one time or another,  
 and some time after The Thaw, for six hundred  
 or six thousand years, Nishnabek

lived in dome-shaped birch bark homes, spread over in summer  
 with woven reed mats, white cedar covering the floors,  
 protecting against insects and scenting the home.  
 Some time later, but on that very same land, I lived

on the third floor of a brick three flat, wool pile covering the floors,  
 pickled herring from a jar scenting the home. Every few summers  
 my father tuckpointed the brick and painted the wood trim,  
 precarious on a forty-foot scaffolding. Nishnabek

women made baskets and bags from the bark of the white cedar.  
 Other storage containers were made of elm and hickory bark  
 or of animal skins. My mother, father, and I carried wicker baskets

and paper bags of laundry, garbage, and groceries down and up  
 three flights of stairs. Our storage containers were Rubbermaid,  
 Tupperware, or Depression glass, elm and hickory just then  
 as rare as animals other than squirrels, in or out of their skins.

Early on, the Nishnabek used mussel shells and wood spoons and ladles.  
 By the end of the 1700s, they used iron kettles and silver  
 traded from intruder French. In the 1950s, we used Melmac and stainless

steel knives, forks, and spoons, my mother's wedding china, silver, and crystal  
 stored, saved like her linen tablecloths, for Sunday, for company, for good.

Eventually, she left it to me, who saves it for company, and as memorial.  
 Sometimes I open the glass doors of her china cabinet to nose  
 my past as captured in that wood, that porcelain, those doilies.

The Nishnabek traveled the lakes and mesh of rivers,  
 streams and tributaries in log or birch-bark canoes up to fifty feet long,  
 waters full of fish, rich with waterfowl. In forests and on the prairie,  
 they hunted deer, bear, buffalo, and rabbits for food and clothing  
 and would make rattles and flutes from wood, deer hooves, and bone.  
 They gathered berries and fruits and grew gardens. Winters,

many Nishnabek families left the villages, creating small hunting camps from which they would return, come Spring.

We shopped  
on Ewing Avenue, at the Jewel, and traveled the streets and highways of the East Side and far and wide in an Oldsmobile that may have been close to fifty feet long, red top, plastics protecting the upholstery, chrome all over the thing, cold and shiny, trunk large enough to have brought home bear and buffalo and deer, had there still been any on the East Side of Chicago when I grew up. No bears and no berries, either, by the time I got there, nor woods,

except as Forest Preserve. No mesh of waterways between lakes, lakes dammed and drained, desecrated and damned as they all were by then. No garden, either, our yard mostly taken up by petunias, a small square of lawn, and that three-car garage.

Digging one June with my dad  
to plant Morning Glories up the side of the house, I found a bone older than the bones of the birds I had always buried there, the bones of the dozen puppies killed in a prairie fire in the Ten Empty Lot Prairie spreading to 106th Street from next to our house. He said

he didn't know what it was, that bone – chicken, rabbit, finger, maybe something ancient I should keep in my cigar box treasure box, which I did. I would have worn Nishnabek deerskin shirts,

leggings, or colorful cotton dresses, the large collars and shawls, ribbonwork, and silver brooches, had I been Nishnabek instead of

first generation Swedish. Wouldn't my father have looked spectacular, feathers in a fur turban, bear claw necklace around his strong, brown neck, my mother smiling down to her flower-beaded moccasins. Had we been there at the right time, wouldn't we have been Nishnabek?

That Spring of the backyard bone find, an only child and all by myself, I roller skated back and forth on the sidewalk in front of those five three-flats, all there was for awhile on Avenue C between 106th and 107th, half my block

still prairie, unpaved, for half the life I lived there. That Spring, roller skating, had I known who had lived there before me,

I could have heard, in the gravely roar of steel skate wheels on grainy concrete, someone tapping maple trees, syrup drizzling into birch bark sugar cones. I could have heard hands playing over skin, like hearts beating beneath skin,

dry grasses rustling like flutes rattling in the Queen Anne's Lace,

Nishnabek naming and marriage ceremonies styled in the caw of crows, in the skitter of rabbits, mice burrowing and nesting on the East Side of Chicago, one time upon another.

## Graduation, June 1964

George Washington High School  
3535 East 114th Street Chicago, Illinois 60617

The day I graduated from high school, after the ceremonies there in the un-airconditioned auditorium, my father, fifty-four years old earlier that June, walked me outside, congratulating me while getting a breath of air, if not fresh air, given the working steel mills ringing the lower basin of Lake Michigan then.

“What did they teach you? What do you think you know now?”  
He pointed to a riot of awkward weeds kitty-corner from my school

where for four years I had studied Latin, Social Studies,  
Geography, English, Algebra, and the history of everybody

everybody but my father and the fathers and grandfathers of  
virtually every kid at GWHS, most fathers union steelworkers like my father,  
many of them from the Old Country, though not the same Old Country  
as my dad – my dad, tall and strong and perfect, I thought, that day to this.

“Do you know what happened over there?” he said.  
And of course I didn’t. What could have

possibly happened over there, across 114th Street,  
there in the weeds, on land that didn’t even have  
the little Monopoly houses, chain link fence backyards,  
alleys, or even streets like the rest of the neighborhood.

“No, Dad,” I said, there in my blue graduation robe, never  
surer of myself than on that day: “What?”

The East Side was a snug hive of a neighborhood then,  
in which happily I would wear little white gloves to Bethesda  
Lutheran on Sundays, sometimes hop the CTA with my Mama

or, in high school, go downtown myself to all those grand places we all held  
as our very own – to the Art Institute, the Fish House, The Lyric Opera,  
the Natural History Museum, the Grant Park Bandshell summer  
outdoor concerts, Orchestra Hall, the ballet, the circus,  
Soldier Field for Fourth of July fireworks, the Lincoln Park  
Zoo and Conservatory, and, o, the Planetarium,

Chicago’s working class modestly honeyed and saving up,  
given the mulish union jobs everyone claimed and tended, little me  
never crossing a picket line and proud of it to this day, vacations then  
sometimes extended because of strikes, my father refusing  
management jobs he was offered because he knew what he knew  
and knew which side he was on, why, and that one sunny May day in 1937,

just after three in the afternoon about fifteen hundred women and men  
including my twenty-six year old father, walked a dirt road  
across a marshy prairie in the hot sun at 114th Street,  
chanting “C.I.O., C.I.O.!”

“Two hundred cops,” he said, “lurking out for us, brand new  
Republic Steel billy clubs slap-slappin’ their leather gloved palms,  
itching for it to be our backs and skulls. Republic Steel goons  
supplied them with their tear gas, too.  
All of ’em had guns.

The cops,” he said, “got between us and where we were going,  
those of us in the back moving up to see what was going on.  
We were there to set up our picket line, legal

as legal can be, everyone shouting elbows and fists at one another,  
about ninety degrees as only ninety degrees can be in Chicago  
on Memorial Day. Hot as pistols. Next thing I knew,

the cops were shooting us. A couple hundred shots. One  
on either side of me, dead. This Swede dead. That Pollock dead.

Dead, and the cops weren’t done with us yet. They clubbed  
everyone they could reach still standing. Four of us dead,  
dead right then and there. Six more were gonna be real soon.

Thirty more shot, fish in a barrel. Two hundred shots, but the cops  
only got forty of us.” And here he smiles in a way, and then goes on  
as if watching a newsreel he sees, but I can’t, over there,  
kitty-corner from my school across 114th street,  
in the weeds still there. “They teach you any  
of this in your school? You know  
what happened over there?”

People hit were picked up like wet kindling, taken roundabout  
and slow as they could go to hospitals, bodies bleeding  
from the clubbing, eyes burning from the gas.

A coupla cops maybe tripped over the people they killed, stubbed  
a toe here or there, but mostly, the golldarn cops weren't hurt a bit. What

did we have? Weeds, a few small pebbles, sticks, and dirt. All of us  
shot in the back or in the side, as I remember. I'll never forget."

He looks at me. I see him seeing me and I must look scared; he says,  
"Don't worry, that's all over now. All in the past. I guess it was your mother  
who taught you policemen are your friends." He laughs. I don't.

"So, now you're really graduated, I guess, rank and file this summer,  
off to college this fall. Then you'll know what they'll teach you there,  
kitty-corner and across the street from who knows what."

## Proclamation

Public Law 88-577, 88th Congress, S. 4. September 3, 1964: (revised 2004):  
What We Meant to Enact

WE MEANT TO establish a National Wilderness System  
to ensure the permanent good of the entire planet,  
no ifs, and, buts, or exclusions. We meant to

set an example for the rest of the world. We meant  
to acknowledge persons as part of creation, not as  
creators, controllers, or know-it-alls. We meant to  
simplify our own human needs so that, for instance, elk  
might migrate without skipping over gas pipes; we meant to  
control our human population so that we might not have to slaughter  
deer who munch our suburban sprawl shrubbery;

we meant to found our acts upon the axiom that humans  
are neither master nor keeper nor even steward, but are  
one species among many species. We meant to define

Wilderness as if we meant it. So, from this day forward,  
when we say 'Wilderness' we will mean water pure and clean  
and baby-bottle drinkable filling each and every lake,  
river, tributary, stream, pond, and aquifer. That is, Be It Enacted

and about time by the Senate and House of Representatives  
of the United States of America in Congress assembled,  
that the entire planet is hereby designated Wilderness,  
to be left cleaner than we found it. We meant to,  
and now we will, lead by example. From this day forth

we acknowledge, and plan to act in accordance with that knowledge,  
that The Wilderness is not a place like a mall, like a theme park,  
like a zoo, like a museum, but that The Wilderness is another name  
for what some call god, for the exquisite essential intricate  
interrelationship among and between all matter.

Sorry it has taken us these last long forty years to figure out  
that no one even in their wrong mind would, say,  
preserve a single sample glass of water and, keeping it clean,  
believe that Water, therefore, is preserved,  
that when one needs water, one need simply visit an example of water  
for one's thirst to be quenched, for one's goldfish, lawn, garden,  
farm, village, ocean, or grandbaby to be nourished.



