



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service

Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

WHERE THE TONGUE ROOTS LIE

Patty Archer

**A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

June 1990

©Patty Archer, 1990



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Canadian Theses Service Service des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-64661-6

Canada

ABSTRACT

Where the tongue roots lie

Patty Archer

The four sections that make up *Where the tongue roots lie* are linked by the theme of the narrator's search for family identity by the development of a history. This history juxtaposes myth and reality, document and fantasy, as the narrator tries to come to terms with what she discovers, about family, about her family, and about herself. Within each section, the poems are organized chronologically.

The first section, "To find such a thing", introduces the characters of the narrator, and her two sets of grandparents: Sam Archer and Sarah Pickles, and Tommy Walker and Jean Glen. The narrator develops the poetic field for the following sections by including poetic and prose poem adaptations of documents, letters, photos, archives, oral history, and dreams, recreating the search. Voices other than the narrator's are set off by italics, with different voices giving different sides to stories. Images of searching, isolation, anger, and ambiguity dominate, to be developed further in later sections.

The second section, "Grandparents -- Sam & Sarah", explores the narrator's paternal grandparents' relationship. Images of manual labour, isolation within and away from family, alcoholism, industrial accidents and fear of the British Columbia countryside dominate the section. The understated tone echoes the family mythology of silence. Sam and Sarah's son absorbs their inability to communicate and his father's dependence on alcohol.

In the third section, "Grandparents -- Tall Tommy Walker with Jean, and then her other husband", the narrator becomes fascinated with her maternal grandfather, Thomas Walker, and his influence on his family's life. Images of his alcoholism, romanticism and his crippling stroke dominate the section. Again, the family does not communicate, and is isolated by alcoholism and marital breakdown. The narrator tries to see Tommy and Jean's romance, marriage and divorce through their eyes. The scars left by Jean's second husband's molestation of children are revealed, as Jean's daughter tries to escape her family as Jean did, through marriage.

In the final section, "Descendants", the weight of generations of alcoholism, sexual repression and the lack of communication bears down upon the children. The poems show the narrator's increasing fragmentation through the structure and images of the poems. What the narrator remembers is juxtaposed with the family's "official" story of many events, devaluing the concepts of truth, and historical fact. The themes and imagery revealed in the first three sections are repeated, as the problems of the parents and the grandparents are multiplied and compounded in the third generation.

The narrator concludes on a note of disintegration and rage at the end of the fourth section. However, the letters from the father throughout *Where the tongue roots lie* temper the narrator's negative discoveries with a strong sense of loyalty, hope, and love within the family unit. There is no one true family history for the narrator to discover.

For my friend Lois Berry
who taught me how to fight a good fight

No story is ever told just once.
Michael Ondaatje
Running in the Family

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1: To find such a thing –	1
Not quite the real story	2
When a B.C. person comes to study in the civilized navel of Central Canada	4
<i>Letter from home</i>	5
Full moon tracing	6
<i>What my mother tells me</i>	7
The documentation of funerals	8
<i>Stamp River and Logging Truck, Vancouver Island</i>	9
Hunting grandfathers	10
<i>What my father tells me</i>	11
Where the horses are buried	13
(OPEN!)	15
Letters: A	16
Grandfathers' dream	17
Letters: B	18
<i>1915 Dodge Touring-4 cylinder, 30/35 horsepower. Price when new \$785. On display at Harrah's Automobile Collection, Reno.</i>	19
Dreaming of babies	20
Letters: C	21
You'd know me	22
<i>Historacle book</i>	23

The Toronto phone book	24
20 years after	25
2: Grandparents -- Sam & Sarah	26
Grandad: Sam & photographs	27
Grandma Archer's poem	28
Before this photo	29
Hidden documents, hidden details	31
Mid 1930s: Sarah	32
1: Document: <i>The War Letter</i>	33
2: Not document	34
Song for Rose Marie	35
Deadfalls	36
A water falling	37
TV Guide	38
3: Grandparents -- Tall Tommy Walker with Jean, and then her other husband	39
Document: <i>L.G. Backward Movement</i>	40
Listen to John Henry rock of ages	41
After they are married	42
Photograph: Mom in the hat	43
Jean's flight	44

The new house	45
Walking through Tommy's old neighborhood: Vancouver	46
My grandfather's day	47
At sixty-three	49
Echoes: Jim, her second husband	50
The other grandfather	51
4: Descendants	52
Father	53
And if	54
A fine romance	55
Doors	57
Things happen not in daylight	59
The borrowed suit	61
What I don't remember	62
When you fed me your milk	63
Remember	64
February	65
Christmas morning	66
The play: whispers	67
Hospital	68
<i>Birthday card</i>	69
Mother night	70

Penis poem(s)	71
<i>Faller, Vancouver Island & Sitka Spruce. One Truckload Equals a Two-Bedroom House.</i>	73
<i>Echoes from the new divorcee</i>	74
<i>Back to Port</i>	75

1: To find such a thing --

*tracing the wounds
of love*

Not quite the real story

I've gotten out of the habit of drinking when I talk about it. It was a New Years' resolution, to stop drinking when alone or telling these stories that make me want to gag, how I finally managed to escape. If I drink when I think about it or if I'm drunk when I start telling the stories, I get violent and maudlin and throw my body around and start to shake and I taste salt and I usually break something, my glasses or a chair or bruise my leg where it shows. Sometimes I bum smokes, I have to burn myself or something. If I break my glasses I can't see and I start crying and I usually have to get somebody to walk me home. I lose a lot of friends that way.

He's a cheap man, never pays full price for anything, always has to haggle, bargain. It is embarrassing to go into town with him, he'd stop people on the street as they were going into Fields or Robinsons and ask them how much they wanted for their car. He had 18 Pontiac Strat-o-chiefs from 65-68 among the trees in the yard. Always had one running, was always looking for parts for it, tinkering with it, trying to find one in slightly better shape. For a good price. Always going for coffee when it rained. *I'm taking the girls to town.* He wanted to have us to himself, to stare at our breastless t-shirts and crinkly shorts, turn up the country music on the radio, drive the logging roads with his hands on our shoulders, on our hair, on our legs.

You never take a bath when mom isn't there, she has to be in the kitchen, not out in the yard. If you can't hear her humming shuffling around, you call to her, get her to come in, to wash your hair. If she goes away on a visit, away for two weeks to relatives, you and your sister take turns watching the door, making loud noises, dropping the pot on the stove when he comes in from outside. Now, you have to scrub 15 minutes in the shower after you tell the story.

(cont.)

Look at these two girls you guys aren't my girls the sharpest little girls there ever was? They're not going to mess with any trasy guys from around here when they grow up always touching grasping shoulders, pulling arms this way and that, showing his friends in the Golden Lantern how soft we were, how malleable, how good and loving and quiet. My stomach lurches every time he touches me, goosebumps, my eyes grow tight and I think he can't touch me here all those people will they know can they see it on my face my face must be dirty. Holding my breath over bumps when we are in the truck, hoping he'll use both hands on the wheel. I am the oldest. I have to sit next to him, to save her from him, keep as much from her as I can. I close my eyes as he drives, pretend its a snake I feel on my neck, curling round my ears, crushing my shoulder.

When a B.C. person comes to study in the civilized navel of Central
Canada

there are people here
who have never seen an alder split
red wood open to the cold wet air

never seen the Island from the ferry
the green edge so sharp
salt air cuts salt water

here there are bird prints
in the foot of snow on my sill
women in fox fur coats
shovel the sidewalks of boutiques

Letter from home

246 C-8
Port Alberni BC

Hi patty
Things are going preety good
I ges it is no good to hold your breath and wait.
I like the mug
I use it all the time.
It make an Old man feel pretty good.
I hope everything is good on your end.
I ges I get a little depressed
but I get pissed of when I can't do the thinks I want or like to do
so much for that Bullshit,
I have been going to write you for 2 wk.
but to sit down long enough is hard.
It is 2 PM
and it is raining like Hell so I can't get myself organised yet.
Take note of addresse at Top
don't look spelling or. writing
Just sink, you are lucky you get 2 pages,
I sending you rightup on Sheila.
I was talking to your Mother.
She gave me envelope + stamp
and addressed it.
God you see it rain + blowing outside
thank Christ I am not working in it.
So much for this Bullshit,
I am going to town an have a coffee and mail this to you.
I hope everything is all write
I will phone you next wk.
early morning 6 AM here

Lods of Love
Dad

Full moon tracing

look at that moon up there
 above the car dealership
peeking through my blinds
 at me tracing the lines of family
born where
 died when
you nosy moon you know this already
 go pull tides somewhere else
go affect someone else's blood
 go burn some other poet
with your one clear eye

What my mother tells me

ABOUT TOMMY WALKER, AND HER MOTHER JEAN:

My dad used to work in the woollen mills, he was a loom fixer in Ontario, in Vancouver later on. He was born in Markham, Ontario.

When I was 8 months old, he and my mom lived in Bridal Falls, he loaded gypsum onto trucks in the mine there, August 1938. Then, I think they lived on my grandparents' farm until he joined the army. He was in the Rocky Mountain Rangers, an Okanagan reserve militia outfit, but he was in the militia in Ontario before too, in Borden, Ontario. When he trained in Victoria, me, Mom and Verna stayed in the Gorge Motel until he went overseas in January 1941. He joined in June 1940, Verna was born that January. We moved back to Enderby in February 1941 and my mom started teaching again. We moved into a brick house owned by an old lady, Mrs. Jones. 1943 or so we went to Ashton Creek, then in 1944 back to the brick house in Enderby. Anne Kirby was the housekeeper, the butcher used to stay there too, at different times, looked after us kids.

When dad came back from overseas we all lived there until we moved to Arrowhead in 1945. Uncle Alan drove us in the 2-ton farm truck, all our stuff, sewing machine, furniture, clothes, it took all day to get there on logging roads. Dad came afterwards. We lived above the general store in Arrowhead, and my mom taught school.

The documentation of funerals

clouds of death notices
 clippings and letters
for funerals my dad can't remember
 his mom dad aunt grandparents
saved them the black and white snapshots
 catalogue of family without the bible

each clump of words
 tastes of the old country England
another link broken
 to the cool clay soil

now we are rooted
 to this rocky valley
a wildness that is catching.

Stamp River and Logging Truck, Vancouver Island

Hi Patty

Well since you went back east

We went to Oyama in Aug 18

Sept 1 we went to Penticton

to a A.A. Rally this weekend

was A.A. in P.A. Everything is O.K. here if

I take these back pills it helps to.

Doreen is off work

holladay till Oct 1.

We are going to drive to Reno

and see if she can win some moneys.

I have niver been there

We are going to be gone 8-9 days.

Sheila is raising hell because

I didn't fix her car (too bad)

I will try to send a card. I put \$100

in Bank for you. I hope everything

is O.K. with you. If not phone me. Lots of Love

Dad + Doreen

Hunting grandfathers

I am hunting that red-haired grandfather
who always lied about his age
mom sends me a copy
of a militia certificate

*according to this, he was a brigadier(?)
in the canadian artillery*

letters smudged, corner-chewed
.it hid in his pocket for years

This is some other Tommy Walker
keeping the card in his wallet
till it rotted
destroyed it rubbing against himself

What my father tells me

ABOUT HIS FAMILY:

My mom and Aunt Millie both worked in the mill, a woollen mill or a linen mill, they used to run the machines, my mom could tell you how good a piece of material was by the feel of it. In World War 1 your grandma was only fifteen or so, & she was crying and a man asked her "what you crying for, lass?" and she said it was because she could only work a 8-hour day, she was too young to work a full day at the mill.

Dad & Mom got married in 1923, he went back to England and talked her family into coming out. There's a big church south of the Globe beer parlour in Nanaimo, the church towards the Bastion, that's where they got married. Came up to Port from England, then afterwards went back down island and got married.

They had four kids, two dead daughters-- Lily at 9 months, then ten years later Betty Jean, still-born. In between, me and Rosie.

Dad started working on the docks maybe 1922, started steady 1928 or something, his pension only went back to 1932, there was the Alberni Valley Waterfront Workers Association from 1935 that he was involved in, but there was a big strike and Vancouver broke the union-- after 1943 all the unions and so forth joined to one, joined the ILWU, except Victoria, they joined the ILA, now that's the mafia and so on on the east coast.

(cont.)

Before he retired he got hurt. He and Jack Sherwood were playing around on the deck of the ship in June 1955 and he slipped, had to have 2 discs removed, he'd had shrapnel in his back from the first World War, 17 years in the hold and it never bothered him. He was 52 when Rosie was born and he went topside, he'd had to go back down into the hold cos they went from 15 gangs to 3 in World War Two. In World War 1, he was a machine gunner, a shell burst and he was the only survivor, he had shrapnel in his back and a big chunk of meat out of his right leg, at Verdun I think. Course, the compensation board fucked him around some after the accident at work-- he was retirement age and they used that against him.

He did odd jobs after that, carpentry, helped build the house, helped Tommy when he was sober.

ABOUT TOMMY WALKER:

Tommy helped re-build the house the year after you were born, 1959, him and Sven Berquist on Labour Day weekend tore the old roof off and put on the other one-- we had to dig up the garden of potatoes and we put them all in the back bedroom and it rained on them. Potatoes a foot deep in there, over a ton of potatoes going sour. Tommy was ok when he first came over, then he got wind of a job over in Vancouver, for a while he was at Miracle Valley rehab centre with the Salvation Army in the Fraser Valley trying to kick the drinking. When he had his stroke I went over to Vancouver-- he was living downtown, been there 5 or 6 months and was in a little room over the Army & Navy, used to hang out in Victory Square. He had his stroke in the old White Spot on Carroll St, first thing in the morning. 1960, I think. He gave me shit when I went to see him cos I didn't bring him a bottle into Shaughnessy Hospital.

Where the horses are buried

when the father loved the mother
we were a family of small people
 there were holes in our house
a silence pulling the hair tight
at the back of our ears
 wax and ashes
 stuffed down our throats

black things
waited for us to open our mouths

where the horses are buried in the back yard
how we ate
dad rabid with alcohol
 throwing all the dishes down the front steps
or those whispered things we thought we dreamed
playing house with the lights out
under the blankets
in our small beds

the old innocent tongue pulled out
new edited versions broken in
 don't tell the doctor about...
 grandma mustn't know...

(cont.)

that faint blue crease runs
from my lower lip
between breasts
over belly
to my groin
to my cunt
where the tongue roots run
where the secrets of the family return
born there

(OPEN!)

Hi Patty

**I hope this info. will
do the trick for you. Well how
are you doing. I had that flue and I was good
and sick for 10 days.**

**I lost 10 lbs but not my gut.
I switched Doctor's now I have a Female
but she is good. She has got me
taking lots of VITAMINS.**

**She has got me feeling in a better mood
+ healthier than I have in the last 2 yr's.**

**Has you can gather
everything good here for now Hope everything
is O.K. on your end. I think
I will phone you some time.**

**Lots of Luck
All the Best
O X O X O X
X Dad O
O X O X O X**

Letters:

A: Ask Veterans' Affairs about my two dead grandfathers:

which reserve units before the war, and where
when did he join the regular forces, where did he train
what was the name of the ship he went across the Atlantic in
who else was in his unit, from where, what did they do
travel route through England and France
when would they get leave, where would they go
which battles were they in, where were they wounded, which hospitals
were they sent to, when did they go back to the front
promotions? demotions?
who was mentioned in Sam Archer's "War Will" listed in his paybook

Grandfathers' dream

We were running
climbing to the top of the mountain
from the fortress built beneath
the green curve of cattle farms

We heard the noise a long way off
and they came over the edge of the rise--
two helicopters bearing horses
slung by chest harnesses
stallions hanging
like kittens pinched by the neck
back heels dragging

That's mine you said arm waving
when a gust pulls one chopper down
and the blades hack into black
slicing red flesh
black horseflesh cutting the green grass
heels haunches stomach lungs
and finally the chopper pulls up
half a horse swinging beneath

Letters:

B: *Reply from Veteran's Affairs*

26 October 1989

PROTECTED

Dear Pat Archer

This is in response to your letter dated 13 October 1989 in which you requested information on your two grandfathers, Samuel Archer and Thomas Walker.

I have taken the liberty of transferring your request to the Personnel Records Centre of the National Archives of Canada as this is where all military documents are maintained. The National Archives will reply directly to you.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

etc....

1915 Dodge Touring-4 cylinder, 30/35 horsepower. Price when new \$785. On display at Harrah's Automobile Collection, Reno.

Hi patty

Well we went and came back
We had lots of fun it is a diferent lifestile
we broke even on the machine's We went
to see all the old car's

That picture of that old truck my dad had
was 1917 Dodge touring car that was made into a truck
Dad put 2 transmissions to double is power.

From the front

it looked a lot like this one.

We wnt to Vergina Ct. it was Nuts.

A letter or Ph. Call to follow

Lots of Lov

Dad + Doreen

Dreaming of babies

me 31 years old
in a white box far from home
some strange weather here
strange language

I swallow my grandmother
carrying my father in her golden belly
the 31st spring of her brown eyes
.a continent away from home
baby Lily already buried
under the heavy cedar roots

her spring my fall
same lightning

Letters:

C: *Reply from the National Archives*

PROTECTED
(Personal Information)
43-4975
PRC-RQ

Dear Sir:

Re: 180930, Samuel ARCHER
Thomas WALKER

This is in reply to your letter, in which you request information from the service records of the above named.

May we explain that under the stipulations of the Privacy Act, access to records or release of personal information relating to an individual is not permitted without the written consent of the individual concerned. In the event that the individual has been dead for less than 20 years, limited information may be released to members of the immediate family, if proof of death and evidence of relationship are provided. There are no restrictions placed on information contained in the records of individuals who have been dead for more than 20 years.

Accordingly, before we can comply with your request, please provide us with their signed authorization for release of information or, if deceased, with evidence of their death as well as proof of your relationship to them.

Sincerely,

etc...

You'd know me

Grandad you'd know me
by my liquored smile when I walk home
that stare I give the mirror
cooking always cooking something
And the drink

yes and I could sing to you
you my whiskey-haired grandfather
dedicate 'Al Bowly's in Heaven' or Springsteen to you
as I sing them I smell you behind me

there are no bars where you are now
where the hell can we go
where they show hockey games and serve good beer

where are you with your grizzled red hair
your dragging leg and fading sex life
I need the myth
have to write it somehow
I swear

Historacle book

Hi Patty

This is that Historacle book
I was telling you about you can get the drift
of what it was like when I was a kid.
You can editt what you want.
I hope you will excuse my spelling,
sound it out and you will get it.
Anyhow everything is O.K. here
I have a hell of a cold
I cant seem to get rid of it.
I have been taking Cod-Liver Oil for year's
8 yr. and I think they help.
I would like to know what you want for Cristmas
I think I will send you monies
then you can get what you want I am
going to close for now see you latter
Lots of Lov.
Dad + Doreen

The Toronto phone book

**** A column and a half of Archers, five S. Archers, one Fred, one Reverend, one Archer Q.C., Archer Advertising, Archer Manufacturers, Archer's Drug Store**

**** 41 Glens, six J. Glens**

**** 18 Pickles, no S. Pickles, but a Pickles Deli & Grill**

**** Two and a half pages of Walkers, including Walker Silencers, Walker Marketing of Canada, Walker Hiram and Sons Limited, Walker James Lion Packing. One Thomas Walker**

20 years after

the beggars in the metro
are my grandad Walker

20 years after he dies
30 years after he falls off the west coast skid road
into the hospital losing half his body
his eyes are rubbie's eyes
red and chalk blue
skin like winter-skimmed milk
he too leans against the stained wall
holds his dead left hand cupped
shaking as he holds it with the good arm

yet I cannot put anything
in that pink bowled hand

2: Grandparents --
Sam & Sarah

*he falls in love with her--
she is a strong green tree
arced in the heavy wind*

Grandad: Sam & photographs

he loves the idea of a camera
stares back at his device
a hundred times
sends picture postcards of himself
to his mother in Kelfield Yorkshire
to his girl wherever

that smile mouth open just a bit
. always a smoke in his hand
his eyes quiver at the lense
he doesn't trust
a machine he can't drive or take apart

Sam takes photos of his pigs trucks
children houses horses brothers in law
always something in his other hand
always standing
hand tight around the lit cigaret
face fading into yellowed paper

Sarah Pickles' poem

Sarah learns about sex in the woollen mill
how babies begin
where they come out
working twelve-hour shifts in lint-clotted air
the oldest of six kids
thirteen years old and her first job
making heavy blankets for soldiers

Babies didn't come from the clock
the midwife brought
they didn't come in laundry wagons
or out from a woman's navel
There it was
the story so bloody
she held it in her mouth for five years
before asking her mother
on the night before her third marriage

She tells me her story
I learn
babies come from woollen mills.

Before this photo

**before this photo my grandparents marry
in the biggest stone church in Nanaimo
beside the Queens beer parlour**

**before this photo Sarah operates a loom
has her own bank account
travels across the Atlantic, across Canada
by train to live with Sam**

**before this photo Sam gets drunk
he is happy because his brother-in-law is visiting
he is close to Jack
who introduced him to Sarah
there are boxes of beer
cooling in the cellar**

**before this photo they have dinner
roast beef mashed yorkshire pudding
brussels sprouts carrots bread gravy
apple pie and ice cream as a treat
drop of sherry before 4 o'clock dinner**

(cont.)

before this photo the cow grazed
where the house is now
in another photo Sam saws a tree
wider than he is tall
where the bathroom now sits

after this photo Sam gets into an argument
with his young cousin Fred
about the raising of children

after this photo the Second World War starts
Sam is injured in an accident at work
and his son begins to drink heavily

after this photo they all go back
into the house from the porch
the men smoke and talk in the front room
the women do the dishes and clean up in the kitchen
Jack and Margaret leave to go back to New Zealand.

Night sneaks through the heavy douglas firs
behind the house, over the rise
treading into their dreams.
Sam and Sarah dream in black
and white.

Hidden documents, hidden details

How much is a man worth?

\$6 a day horse logging in the early 20s
running a 6-horse sled down the skid road
hauling logs

At work before breakfast, feed the team
then feed yourself in camp
stay there over the weekend for your room and board
look after the team
\$6 for handfallers and teamsters, \$4.50 for millwork

How much is a leg worth?

\$17.50 a month
Claim # 142420 March 14 1936
Firm # 10174 24 years old
Harry Pickles at Spratt's mill
labourer, part-time blacksmith
plays trumpet in the Legion band
Saturday nights
the 24' x 24' timber falls
as he works on the timber deck
smashes his pelvis crushes both legs

First they cut off half a foot
then at the knee above the knee
chasing the gangrene

\$17.50 a month from the WCB
a wooden left leg
from mid-thigh

Mid 1930s: Sarah

Sarah's right hand on the railing
legs broad apart under flowered housedress
her jaw and hips jut proudly at the camera
a secret in her belly

black hair black eyes
centre the frame
beneath the roof's peaked crown

Sam's face beside her
the color of the grass my west coast sky
he waits for the photograph to end

their new house crowded by douglas firs
hay field on the left
ravine to the right
Sarah smiles darkly
a figurehead cutting the wind.

1: Document: *The War Letter*

Tuesday June 17-41
Banff Lane
Brayton Selby

Dear Sam + Sarah

Just a few lines to let you know
Laura Tom's wife as been buried today at Wakefield.
Mrs Burley came to see me
last sunday June 15 and said if I cared to go
to funeral I could go with her Monday so
I went when we got to the cemetery no funeral
till Tuesday they were preparing
a common grave for her death and he said
he could not do anything they had to
bury her of course you know Edwin was dead
there was Harry + Florence at the funeral
today. When Mrs Burley and I got to the
cemetery on Monday I said we don't want her
in a common grave if we can do anything
so the Registerer of the Cemetery said if
we liked to make up our minds then we
could have a semi Private Grave for 30/- so
Mrs Burley did so but nothing else could be altered
so the Poor soul as been laid to rest
in a Poor Law Coffin but a little bit -

2: Not document

Sam's brother Tom is stationed somewhere on the coast of England, too far from Selby, and his wife dies of TB and he can't do anything. Lily, Sam's sister writes him the letter the day of the funeral, June 17, which arrives in Port Alberni July 12. Mrs Burley is Laura's mother, the dead Edwin is Laura's son. There are no more children.

Or in 1941, Sam's brother John Thomas, 'Tom', is sixty-four. He is toothless in the Kelfield workhouse, having left his wife for another woman in 1929. They had four children: Edwin dead, two boys enlisted, the daughter Florence working as a receptionist for her fiance, Harry, a doctor. Laura dies of liver cancer.

Or the second sheet of the letter is missing. The censor took large chunks from it and when Sarah pulled it from the envelope it fell to the floor in tiny pieces. They used it to light the fire in the stove. Laura doesn't exist. The war and Yorkshire clay ate her bones and my father doesn't remember her, this woman from his parents' letter, without punctuation.

Or Laura is Sam's niece, his favorite niece, married to his drunkard nephew Tom, Lily's son, or Hannah's son, or Miriam's son. She wore her lace dress in her Poor Law Coffin, they sang Abide With Me and read the service together from the Book of Common Prayer. In 1947, Sam, his brothers-in-law Jack and Harry, and nephew Fred raise some money amongst themselves and put a white stone on her grave.

Song for Rose Marie

Sarah, does it scare you,
pregnant at 41?
your husband 52
worked topside until the war
now he's back in ships' holds
the union broken, seniority screwed
he carries his back-full of shrapnel
moving wood

how do you hold your moving belly
save your floating baby
from the cedar roots in the cemetery -
grow her big
like her war-roaring brother -
nine years old and kicking your legs
because there's not enough sugar in his oatmeal

whisper
hold your tongue tight in your mouth
dream in your peach bedroom
beside your sleeping man
see yourself in the round bureau mirror
in that moonlight
see your mother's whitening eyes.

Deadfalls

his teeth shine

his mud grey skin
sucked tight to his bones
he's fed junket and instant breakfast
hoards his life in the darkened room
listens to a mumbled bible
hears horses screaming

his wife turns the egg-timer
makes her seventh batch of plum jam
stirs the falling sugar
as it pounds and jells

plum tree clotted with pink fruit
every breath fills the ground
with bruising sweet globes
peels and pits and stirs
cools the jars outside

his teeth glow
as the cooling wax seals the jam
he wants his children
pushes away his wife

she skins and pits another pot
stirs her August jam.

3

A water falling

In the hospital
he fights it
head bobs and shakes
pulling at the mask
clawed fingers tangle
in tubes and his bird-boned chest
air wrestles in and out
of one fluid lung
he drowns
with his own flesh
swimming in the august sunshine
he caws and jumps

the women hold him
rub his feet
hold the strangling hand
keep the mask over his face
as he bucks
drowning

he slides in

TV Guide

Sarah sits on the orange couch
watches american TV
as warm light sneaks into damp night
plastered papered painted walls cracking

KVOS 12 Bellingham
news wrestling Hawaii Five-O moon launch
my yorkshire grandmother eating her american diet

she loves wrestling
loves the slap of heavy bodies
cable for life
her birthday present from her kids

3: Grandparents --
Tall Tommy Walker
with Jean, and then her other husband

*the velvet currency
that roars between men and women*

Document: *L.G. Backward Movement*
(Tommy's poem)

The gun will then fire till the spring is released of trigger and untill magazine is empty. The explosion having taken place the bullet travels down the barrel followed by the gasses a portion of which escapes through the gass vent into the gass chamber and gass regulator where they are partly purified and regulated.

Tommy Walker hates khaki green

dreams of black and red
sackcloth and velvet
as he polishes his pusser boots

the brick rowhouses scowl at him
Annex Sunnyside Parkdale
he takes the Exhibition streetcar
down to the lake
studies his gun course
in raw February

holds in his mouth
(the key to the city)

Listen to John Henry rock of ages

imagine Tommy Walker singing and playing guitar imagine him whole
both his arms working strumming red-headed and lovely he loves to
sing be the centre of attention have the young churchless socialist
women sit in a circle on the floor around him they all clap and sing the
choruses together long into the smokey night his low warbling tenor
snaking around their woollen dresses fingering the crisp curled hair
tickling their tender pearl earlobes he brings his songs and voice and
body of Toronto the big city the hub of political thought and vision and
virility to the little Interior towns the union meetings in church
basements with sympathetic Methodist ministers and ministers' daughters
and the idealistic young teacher so sharp in the eyes and so soft in the
mouth humming and smiling at his feet.

After they are married

after they are married
he drives a team in the gypsum mine
at Bridal Falls 10 hours
hauling carts with pony teams
out of the mountain shaft
They live in a two room house
and he reads newspapers after work
hunting through the grey lines of type
hungry for news of the International
worries of Germany
glad to have a job
dreams of starting the union

Jean dreams of teaching
going back to work, making money they need
Not accepting married women for positions
too many men not working
so she scrubs the linoleum daily
knits baby clothes
and thinks of ways to make meat go farther

at night
under Tommy's red-headed weight
she stares at the moon and whispers
the names of the towns
on the rail-line back to Enderby

*Bridal Falls Yale Boston Bar Keefers Lytton Spences Bridge
Ashcroft Savona Tranquille Kamloops Chase Salmon Arm Sicamous
Enderby*

Photograph: Mom in the hat

a little girl you are a little girl gone to grandma glen's farm with your mom and dad and your dad so tall and his hair all fire in the summer sun and your mom not very happy with a big belly and she squints and squishes her mouth a lot and dad wears that greeny brown suit and mom just wants to be quiet and him to stay home but he goes out goes out in the afternoon with the haying crew *Hey Tommy, got a thirst on ya?* drives them to town into Enderby town and your mom squints until he comes back home for supper.

After supper you're going to go and dad is going to catch the train to go away and everyone talks quiet the women talk soft in the yellow kitchen tucking away dishes and snapping the cloth the men go out and lean on the fence judging the alfalfa your mom won't let you go outside with your dad so you watch out the open window they talk quiet too except your dad who laughs pretends to make a gun in the air waves his hands laughs.

Just before you get in the car big black car your dad wants to shoot your picture sticks his army hat on your head and stands all 2 1/2 years of you in pink overalls in front of the tree. Click.

Jean's flight

her open palm cuts
between cup and saucer

she feeds small food
to her husband
words lie on the tablecloth between them
as they slap down the cards
both playing solitaire

he roams out into the back garden

her palm cuts
between coffee cup and saucer

she twists the ring off her finger
takes the shower
leaves the ring in his cup
on his plate
when she goes out the front door

The new house

even now she hates pounding nails

Jean buys the old army wash-hut
with a cement sub-floor
she and her daughters turn it into a house

The girls will do anything not to pound nails
cook supper, wash dishes, anything but pound nails

thousands and thousands of nails
the house built of reclaimed lumber reclaimed nails
after school and every weekend
Barb and her sister Verna pull and pound nails
pull them with the claw hammer
pound them on the sawhorses in the tarped-in porch
pound out all the bends and curves
that nails remember

When Jean hammers nails in
into the sheetboard or 2x4
they bend and curl and warp
in rusty glory

Walking through Tommy's old neighborhood: Vancouver

The Arco on Pender Balmoral Argyll Sunrise on Hastings Winters
Hotel on Abbot Avalon Salvation Army mission Army & Navy on
Carroll windows out under the A & N sign a rubber plant on the fire
escape rusting hanging over the alley into the noisy street Wonder
Rooms Wonder Hotel rooms for rent transformers on the heavy poles
squaring the alley opening kerosene telephone-pole arch urine BC
Collateral bruises ground into a man's face he leans against the wall
fist clenched just outside the beer parlour door Cosy Corner Groceries
bumming a smoke 'Bella' tattooed on her shoulder Capital Barbershop
between the train station & the greyhound terminal Silver Hotel brick
box no windows the green paths of Victory Square

My grandfather's day

I used to think November 11
was Grandad Walker's birthday.
He'd get up early
pull out the blue Legion blazer
with the blood and gold wire crest
leave for 11 AM service--
fill the kitchen table with cloth poppies
all the week before he would stand
Tall Tommy Walker
his box slung over shoulders outside the liquor store
soliciting all his friends

The crowd of greying men
troop from legion bar to legion bar
people buy Tommy rye and water--
maybe they think it's his birthday too.
The legions are crowded
all the bars closed on the holiday.

(cont.)

door opens there he is
 crashing against the railing of the stairs
after midnight poured out of the Legion
 into the waiting Fairway Taxi
he's lost his cane
 spent the whole day dreaming
 he was whole again
he is tall Tommy Walker
 green-eyed gunner
killer of ladies
 father of babies
dancer socialist god

then he trips dragging his left foot
 left leg left side over the sill
smacks flat hard bounces off the wall
 onto the hallway linoleum
 snoring

At sixty-three

Grandad Walker decides to taste greatness at sixty-three. Dragging his bum-leg, leatherseated largeboned rocker behind him, he enters the CJAV Rockathon at the Kinsman's Fall Fair. The drill hall stage-- he and 5 other fame seekers from the Alberni Valley rock, knit, smoke and drink their way through the 3 day long weekend on the radio. Every hour, the announcer interviews the 'rockers', who resist the fudge booth and smells of popcorn and 4-H cattle barn to rock away in Bentwood, Easyboy and Boston. Through the lonely steamy orange-edged night, the rockers listen to the music roaring from the midway rides, the screams from the salt and pepper shaker, and the laughs and catcalls from the parties in the bushes beyond the fence. Grandad sips his rye from the styrofoam cup, smokes and tells his dirty war stories, hiding from 'tall Tommy Walker' on the radio, from his women and rages and walking dragging his left leg, left arm swinging swinging from the shoulder loose and heavy, 10 pounds of stroked-useless meat and bone. Hiding on stage, on the radio, an old man rocking. An old man intact, telling stories, gently moving down and back. On the radio he is whole, always whole.

Echoes: Jim, her second husband

he is dying
the doctors say it's his liver
after long years of making homemade wine

a stubborn contrary man
won't go to the doctor in their hometown
talks of wills and funerals

she tempts him
with death at the lake house
hopes cedar fronts and cool lake water
will pull him from his bed
away from these tubes and gauges
to sit on the deck
watching the cool autumn coming

That other grandfather

his eyes hood swivel
a cool lizard
propped up in the hospital bed
it is hot outside
it is cold here in the room

his doctor is death
and the food is bitter
his sins roll from her eyes
she no longer touches him
her taut mouth holds back the violence

his body falling in onto itself
and his bones have no bones
she will give him no more salt for his wounds
die marxist unrepentant
hands of a millworker gardener
drinker childmolester
cooling as they cross
in his lap

4: Descendants —

*that thing unsaid
pulls out your tongue*

Father

dad

I love you in spite of yourself
despite your bones that poke out strong
 in my nose and in my voice
your drunken hands
 are hidden
come out as I sit here drinking alone
 writing letters

You should have left the Alberni Valley
 stayed away when you were 17
 stayed on that Chilcotin ranch
kept away from pure west coast women
 and your father's love of rye

And if

if my mom had married that science nerd
she dated in Vernon in 1956,
the one with the grass and cat and everything allergies,
hands breaking out in a rash
everytime he mowed the lawn,
who kept her out 'till 2 AM on Grad night
bought her a pink orchid--

I would have better teeth,
have taken commerce at UBC,
go to Europe every summer
to study french in France,
do Christmas in Mazatlan.

He's a doctor in immunology now,
lives in North Vancouver.
I'd have even more allergies--
cats dust pollen men--
I'd drink just as much
and my mother would drink much more.

I wouldn't be in Montreal
a scorpio
political
or constantly in love.

A fine romance

he used to tell us
about leaving hickeys on her belly
on their honeymoon
we were six, five, four
we thought hickeys were a candy

Barb was working in the bank, eighteen years old. It was 1956. All the women in the bank were getting married, having babies. All the men were married. She'd just come home from failing grade 13. All the men in the bank were married. Of course she was a virgin.

Charlie
of course
was not

Her sister Verna used to hang out with Charlie's crowd. Sometimes she'd bring along her sister Barb. He remembered her from ten years before when he drove her dad home from the bar. She liked to dance.

the doctor said
he only broke his leg, lucky he lived
with a tire track up his back
the alcohol relaxed him
as if he was asleep

Always the father coming home after midnight smelling of rye. The mother's absolute silence freezing him out. He sold the kids' ice skates, hocked them to buy booze on a sunday night. Burned down the car when he dropped a cigaret butt in the upholstery, falling out of the car into the house. They dream of the house burning down for months.

(cont.)

Verna talked her into it
she went to see Charlie in the hospital
Verna was two weeks pregnant
Barb was still a virgin

He promised her he'd quit drinking, and he did, for a while. Barb stopped dreaming of her father stepping on the puppy, breaking its neck. She thought of how surprised her friends in the bank would be.

at twenty-eight
he thought her small pink smartness would save him
from rye
and the back seats of Pontiacs

They got married in June in the United Church, because it was cheap. Verna was six months pregnant so a woman from work was the matron of honour. They drove to the Calgary Stampede on their honeymoon, in a blue and white 1956 Pontiac sedan.

nights he comes home late from work
sits us down on the couch
under the gun rack
tells us how much he loves our mother

Doors

Their bedroom had no door
 down at the end of the hallway.
when we woke them up early
 for Christmas mornings and emergencies
we would walk LOUDLY
 as if we knew we had to signal our coming.

at night they would talk
(at night they would fight)
 we could hear the rumbles
 through the unpainted walls
 my father's gravelly growl
 rolling under our doors,
then a pause
 for my mother's too quiet answer.
we were scared to hear
 the noises from their cave,
all too certain
 something we didn't want to know
 was going to happen.

(cont.)

All that tension
 because of the lack of a door.
one day, as a gift,
 we nailed a blanket to the arch,
 cutting off the cave from the rest of the house.
but my father
 in his drunk rage
tore it down, ripped the tacks from the door frame.
he needed the open door to escape
 he needed to make noise.

we stayed quiet
 at our end of the hallway.

I have a door
 you have a door
we both have locks and chains and keys.
 we don't make noise
 when we fuck
we hardly make noise
 when we fight

we don't have kids

Things happen not in daylight

that grandfather babysits
slides cool hands around between legs
sweet little girl, shh
you stand stiff, on his lap
dress shoved up to your armpits
he wants just to smell
to see the pink roses on your panties
You are maybe four, he granite-headed.
the words for the secret
are too old for you
its ugly teeth already clamped round you.
A good victim.

when you are seven
your uncle brings over a friend for dinner.
his eyes glint at you
he wants to tell you a secret
he wants you to help him hide something

eyes can't leave his face
struck as stone
you want to fall down
stop that word
from shining through your body
Things that touch you in the dark
move your face

(cont.)

Always in your life
there's a hole in your belly
the shape of a grey man's hand
sitting cold still holding the flesh dark
those pink roses wither
language grows smokey perverse
as you curl the corners in
hiding with your fancy edges
a shamed dark void unshared.

The borrowed suit

first time I saw my dad
in a black suit
small on him, he looked tense, tight
we asked where he was going
to a funeral
we asked what's a funeral

Dube was his best friend
they worked years together in Passmore's gang
when the lumbership tipped he stood on the load too long
slipped down between the hull
and Assembly Dock
timbers slipping in the water on the dock
then she tipped back upright
balanced in the wind

two million feet of douglas fir bound for Japan
when they finally got him out
they knew him by his tight caulk boots

What I don't remember

the friend of the family
at the christmas party
sings old swedish songs and plays accordian

in the dark leather chair
white hair and pale old man skin glows
fills his study.

He unzips pulls himself out
does not touch me
just begs me to touch, to look at him
glowing in the darkened room

I am more interested in the shiny things he has on his desk
in his pretty books
I don't remember escaping

In summer he comes to visit my grandad
wants to go look at the garden
grandad sends me with him

I am ready for him this time
laugh at his cock
tell him I know what THAT is
and my father's is bigger
dance down the garden path
to my grandad easing his stroke pain
in beer

I don't remember telling
anyone.

When you fed me your milk

(after reading And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other by Luce Irigaray)

When you filled me with your milk, mother
blood roared in my ears
songs of long insidious battles
gurgled burning down my baby throat
You had the scars to prove it
and a magic glass that hid them every night

there were bones in that milk
bones that led my bones into your paths
pulled my taut skin into patterns
You filled the void with food
always cooking always feeding, filling

Now I turn back to find you mother
after birth and age have pulled me taller
I cannot find you
Your milkshape bloodshape
warm and missing

I am too grown
the milk sits frozen in my mouth

Remember

smells

the black grit on the wet window
which window my window
I see that and blankets
pink blankets and I feel a hot hand
pushing my head lower
look look touch touch
where is my mother
I am wearing pajamas
I don't think he touches me

Hiding one night he can't find me
between the desk and the wall
curl up close to the window
late and it's cold
in my blue pajamas
maybe he'll never find me
stuck and the smell the dampness
green of the tree outside the window
rot of the grit inside the window
smell of hiding
smell of sex
can't remember what it looks like
just the smell of leaf mould
on wooden window frames
in summer

February

snow

the weekend dad had the ulcer cut out of him

when we woke

blood in the toilet on the bathroom floor

later the scar across his rounding belly

side to side a smile in his flesh

Christmas morning

I remember the kangaroo lady. When we woke up Christmas morning she was there, on a kitchen chair in the livingroom. She wore a baby-shit yellow sweater, smelling sour. She was laughing and talking with Dad. She had bruises on her face, on her neck, scratches all over her hands. I was fascinated, watching her puffy laughing face. Mom was quiet, breaking something in the other room. She was mad. The lady told us she got the bruises boxing with kangaroos, that she won the boxing match. The scratches came when they kicked you. We saw a big red male kangaroo, a rope ring and the crowd cheering her on. Dad kept laughing, we kept asking questions, she drank more rye from the teacup.

The play: whispers

fascinated by where babies come from
five kids in our family, five in our cousins'
theories swirled in our mouths
whispering in the beds under blankets at
birthday sleepovers-- show each other how
to masturbate at ten can't imagine breasts
or hard cocks see them all as
soft like Grandpa Jim's or small like our brothers'
think of bondage and heat and
pain as we dry hump whisper against
each other drive each other on

Hospital

can't go to school
have to stay home
your mother has to sleep with you
calms you from your pain
pulls you from the edge of the night

you go to the hospital with the ulcer
a week of tests for you ten years old

brain scans barium x-rays enemas bladder x-rays where the nurse can't
insert the tube properly cos you're so small a non-dairy diet castor oil
blood tests urine samples a psychiatrist

have to be careful
he asks about school about your family
your dad made you promise
you wouldn't tell about the half-made house
about the drinking the yelling the broken glass

you don't tell
but you fear he can read
behind your eyes.

Birthday card

Hi Patty

Sorry it took so long to write you
but I had a shed 12' X 14'
built to put tools and sutch
also a porch on the mobile home in Cherry Cr.
and I was helping as mutch as I could
and we painted the inside of our house.
I hope you are having a good time.
When I was doing thing around here I was thinking
about all that I was going to say in this letter,
and now I got a day
when its raining and I got time
I cant think of them all.
I gess it is Old age setting in

Lots of Love + Happy

O X O X O Birthday X O
X Dad + Doreen X
O X O X O X O X O X O

Mother night

she is it
she drives me mother night
here in this city of saxophones
and windows open to the dark

I drink of her
I get drunk from her
no one is as beautiful
as mother night

run the fan as I sleep
eat and drink deep in the clock
body roaring can't rest
and the dreams are crazy

it's hard to shake mother night
hard to wake get up
all day long my lazy eyes
want to roll back to sleep
back to mother night

in the early morning
I am she
mine the power
skin that aches ambrosia
I am she mother night

Penis poem(s)

makes me laugh
 this silly little piece of flesh
one-eyed brainless mole

playing like putting on lipstick
 hold you in my mouth
stubby & wide yet
 bigger round than my wrist
count the veins on the shaft
 wet the purpling eye

when he's small he's very very small
and when he's good
 he's awe full

foreskin-- what's it good for?
 something to pull, pinch in the dark
hides your private eye
 your long long skin
puckered and tucked
 a hot pink budded rose
a fist of a flower

as I move up and down
 I think of tongues
mine yours penis as a flat tongue
 try to hold my teeth away
think of breathing eating

(cont.)

I always move too slow
up & down
holding you to my own rhythm
your fingers prod and tap my shoulder
faster as your heart beats faster
you twitch in my mouth
your body talking

grandma said Burt Reynolds
couldn't have been "very big"
if he could hide it on the bear rug
with his hand
maybe he has big hands

I have to stop now and then
to catch my breath
to calm my throat and tongue
I grab a sip of water
your leg thrown off the bed

eyes still hurt
from the shine of your white hips
the glow of your tight morning skin

I come up off your groin
my mind full of salty dreams
you pull up my head
with your hot hands
kiss me hard
suck me to your sweaty chest
your tongue searching flavour

hot you are always hot
in my mouth

Faller, Vancouver Island & Sitka Spruce. One Truckload Equals a Two-Bedroom House.

Hi PATTY

Feb 22

I got your postcard 2 wk. ago
so it time to write you.
Everthing is good here.
I am going to send a letter or phone.
I can put more in a letter.
As you can see I am having trouble
Well it is raining like hell.
and windy it has been miserable for 2 weeks
and trying to work around the house.
My back is about the same.
But I will get by.
Doreen got May of work.
We went South. We got into Oregon,
About 30 mi South of Portland.
I hope everything is good for you
I hope to send a letter soon
I am going to get your mother and
I and some old picture and put something
together
Keep your chin UP.
Lov. Dad.

Echoes from the new divorcée

you took away my babies

lay with me whispering in the sweat
and grain dust
held my swelling belly in your arm

now this diamond ring cuts me
and I burn
spit to make you hurt

you touched your own little girls
in the dark, sweated over them
covered their mouths
their eyes stopped their ears

touched them behind the corners of their mouths
pushed sounds of sshhh and push
in the growing creases of their brain
made their eyes see penises
inside every pair of pants

I will turn you out of your skin
like you pulled my babies
out of their little-girl skins
make you choke
on this diamond ring

Back to Port

I could give it all up I guess & just roar on back there to that twisted cleft between mountain ranges where fingers of inlet and twisted lakes almost touch I could do the midnight move stuff just run drown myself in the Arlington Hotel nightly dance that last slow dance with a different logger or millworker each weekday night getta pair of romeos like my Dad maybe go someplace classy like Polly's or Stardust on the weekend making it back to the Arly for last call and off-sales of course maybe I'd join the Portal Players help them put on existential plays for the tiny intelligencia maybe I'd work at the local rag at a bookstore at a gas station keep myself in dope grow it in my basement get all my friends to set me up with men they know any men intelligent men abuse my body write a lot