

In the Andrews

I am
diminished
in age
and size
and wisdom,
a good feeling
to be humbled
by a forest.

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Language Requirement

My wife took French in high school;
I tried to learn Spanish. My parents
could speak enough German to get by
while Dad was stationed at Hahn.
My boys have followed their mother
to France, while a friend's son,
who's studying international relations,
is already fluent in Cantonese.
I hope my grandchildren will learn
winter wren or hermit thrush;
my great grandchildren
elk or moose, perhaps with a minor
in fisher or marten. It will take longer,
but maybe someday all schools
will require the ancient languages
of Douglas fir and cedar,
Pacific yew and hemlock.

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Geomorphology

What does a landscape dream of in its unsettled dreams?
Of snowpack still ten feet deep. Of going to sleep
to the sound of sea-drenched wind and waking
to rain in the basement. Of yet another dream
in which nearly every room in the house
is rearranged. Boulder in bathroom. Old growth
hemlock blocking the stairwell. Kitchen faucet
turned to river torrent. Caddis uncased and floating
in yesterday's soup. Fish seeking shelter
in the bedroom closet. The front porch
somewhere at the bottom of the reservoir.
The lock on the dam picked clean.
And this mountainside sliding
into a new zip code.

For Fred Swanson

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Logjam on Lookout Creek

I sit on 1500 years snagged
by its collective weight, by the downward pull
of this valley, and the simple force of water
when it meets snowmelt and rain.
How long these logs will stay is anyone's guess.
Stoneflies have hatched in this place of rest,
time-tempered, bent and slowed by the sound
of creek bumping against pushed up gravel,
the change of structure while bending,
the plummeting of water slackened, guided
and gilded by slivers of light etched
with hemlock needles and fir boughs,
with a shadow-show of alder cones reformed
into a pool of the coldest clarity.

 If you pick up part of this river,
turn over a stone, you'll find its connected
to everything else—pupa caddis and cutthroat,
sculpin and rough-skinned newt. The very trees
whose crowns rise higher than I can see: some
who will come crashing down in hundred-year
floods; others—who after feeding pileateds
and beetles, along with the mouths of so many
we cannot even begin to speak their names—
will lie down across these waters
to form river-pastures.

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