

DEBBY BARENDSE REED

GEOGRAPHY LESSON 1

Two trains speed towards you
from opposite directions
at different speeds and
someone wants you to calculate which moment in time
they will collide: Ignore them.
There's nothing new here.

You are handed a poem on a stiff card and told
to stand, read, tell what you think:
Go ahead.
This too has been done before
but there's no harm in repeating the exercise.

Faced with a problem of two or more variables
and a slope, attempt to answer if it won't take too long.
At least ask why you must.
Who knows, maybe there is a good reason.

Watch out however, if you find yourself in the "description of land, sea, air,
the distribution of plant and animal life including man and his industries..."
Tread carefully. It sounds simple, stationary; those states and capitols,
they rarely change.
The maps with the aerial views, lines radiating from an immovable center
don't appear to hold any mystery.

The poem, the speeding trains, the slippery slope...
may seem the demand more time worthy.
But don't rule out geography. Don't call it solved.
It will be what changes most. Even becomes, at times, unrecognizable.
Don't be surprised if, in the end, it is the geography that takes
the most time of all.

GEOGRAPHY LESSON 2

The first day we learned map folding
and I was disappointed.
The second day we began memorizing
and I was puzzled.
Where were the pictures,
places familiar and unfamiliar?
Just graphs. Clear, indisputable papers with arrows
directing straight ways. Scale to measure a ratio of
how long it all takes.

I wanted to raise my hand, ask
what good is any of this? No one I knew traveled
around this way; a ruler, a piece of paper,
a watch to time the way. But I let them teach on
and was silent.

Perhaps then I should have spoken. Maybe
it would have done some good had I said,
What I know of geography looks nothing like this.
Do you even know where to find the river? The way
to the wild bird sanctuary where Kewpie* and his dog
with the painted tail stand guard? How many bends in the road
to count past the old net shack to Aldrich Point?

These lessons, I would have said, are not useful.
They will not show you the way to anywhere.
Never guide you back again.
These straight arrows pointing four directions won't even get you
to the Knappa Junction and
even my old golden retriever knows
that if you wander too far from the house
all you do is follow the creek downhill. Eventually
you will come back to home.

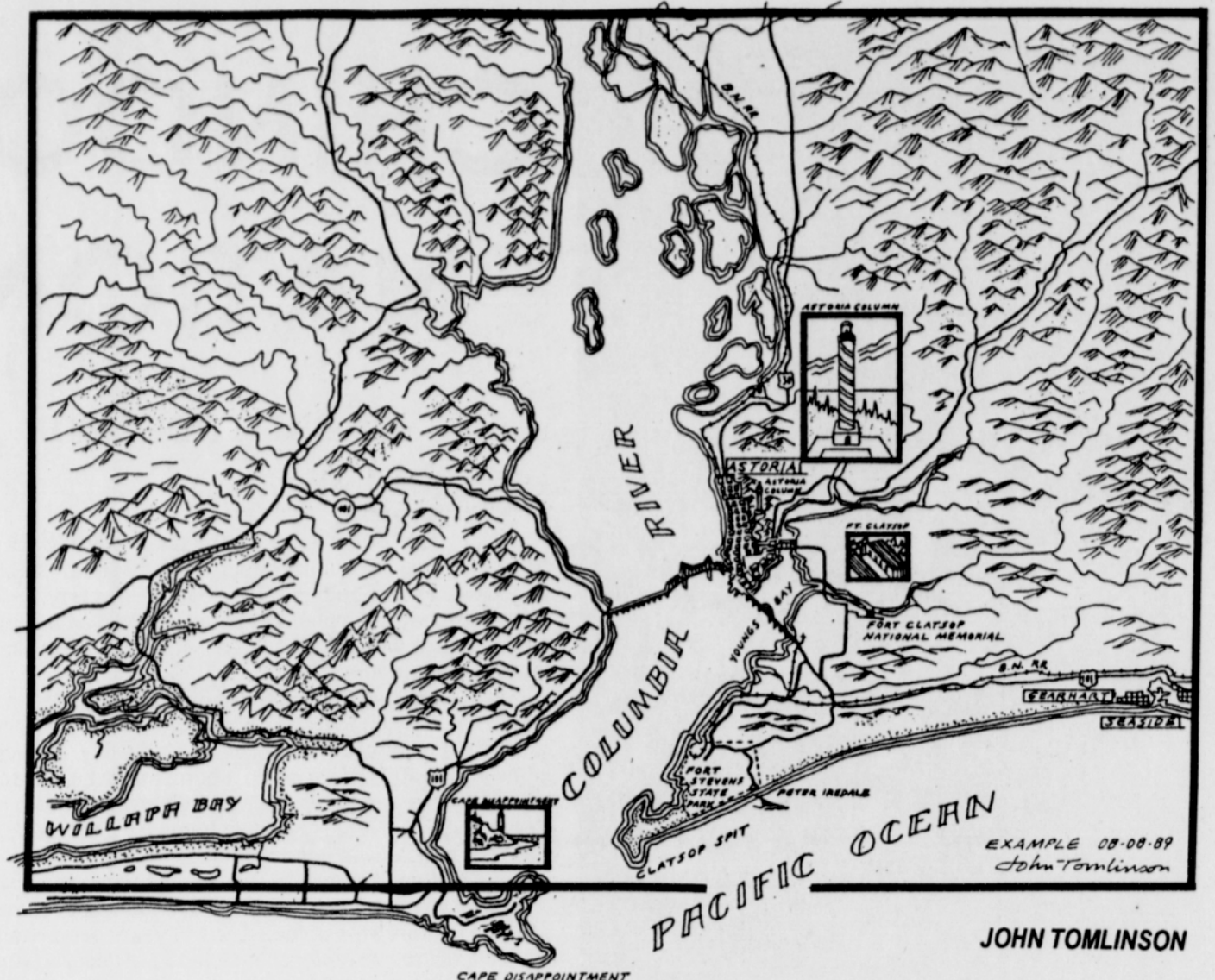
*The world famous environmentalist logger from Knappa,
Robert 'Kewpie' Ziak, creator of the bird sanctuary along
the Columbia River; he died in the summer of 1990.

THE PURE WHITE DOVE

It flies across the midnight sky
Over the moon so bright and high
Over the castle as silver as the moon
It flies to my bedroom
I run to the door
But fall to the floor
And it flies away
Peaceful and gay
But it's gone forever
I'll never see it ever

~HAYLEY CLARK

Hayley Clark is in Stanette Klatt's 7th grade
class at Astoria Middle School.



GEOGRAPHY LESSON 3

For Olivia

Me with my half-drawn maps,
I know I need them more than most.
Lacking a sense of direction,
I never go anywhere. I'm convinced
adventure is for those
sure of happy endings.

Fewer people now give geography lessons.
It does no good to miss who began mine.
Amateur cartographers, they kept their eyes ahead.
With little concern for getting back
they failed to mark the path clearly.
Like Lewis and Clark, they accidentally bequeathed a lay of the land.
In the same rain with no forts or canoes,
just inner tubes, pickup trucks and whiskey-like courage
they faced the swirling river, the sliding creek showing little fear.
But for their trouble they came away with
casual knowledge of razor clam tides,
wild blackberries far beyond the spray of county crews,
moss growing on the tallest cedars deep behind the skunk cabbage
that I can only tell of, not show.

Perhaps your mother has a clearer picture than I... one
filled with more directions... landmarks... exact patches of grass...
Perhaps, somewhere in her there lies
a turn in the slough that is more fully apparent.
It's possible, even probable that this map she is drawing
on will get you farther.

But don't let us abandon the study of this remote past just yet.
We'll shrug off the regularity of the Mother's school-day bell
for the steadiness of November rain on the float houses.
We'll go deep in the margin to Marsh Island even risk Devil's Elbow
where there is no guide or key.
We'll recall those earlier, incomplete sketches till we pass
Gun Club Road and follow the signs along Old Highway 30
till we come to what we know by heart.

LEWIS & CLARK COLLEGE, 1986

There is a book on the windowsill,
Anatomy of a Fly.
Two hundred and nine pages for a speck creature.
The manila envelope arrived in June, well before Indian summer.
When sailboats still dodged container ships
just past the river bar.
The enclosed note said "required reading for freshmen,
to teach studying the smallest things
carefully." Deconstruct may be
a word they used.
I never read the book. It's not that it was too big or I have anything
against flies.
I didn't even want to try.
I read the back cover. It has a good drawing of a fly on it.

Remember the discussion questions after the poems
in high school English? It took time to get those out of my head;
to get to this point where I could write without asking them.
My roommate Emily is in the corner
reading the speck book for the second time. Look, I tell her,
there is a fly sitting on my book and she frowns at me
you better read that book she says, disapprovingly.
She will do well here. She wants to be a teacher.

Me, I don't even bother unpacking.
I leave the book and the fly on the windowsill,
go back to my car, point north towards the river and
head back to Brownsmead.
I figure I'll become a waitress.

