



In much of the western U.S., the citizenry is connected to the military by ear. Part of the price of preparedness is listening to the jet fuel burning, and there was a time when we might have taken a Walter Mitty time out at the sound and tried to imagine what it felt like to throw a warplane across the sky.

That time was long ago, and we'd forgotten about it until just a few months back when we were required to transit, for some weeks, various parts of the greater Seattle area. It exceeds the dial on my funmeter. There are few on-planet activities that match a crowded Seattle freeway on a rainy night, and they either are illegal or suggest a need for counseling.

For those who've been away for awhile in slower places, the basics are speed and quickness, stemming from what seems to be a belief in a sort of Newtonian physics. Five to seven m.p.h. over the posted speed will usually keep you from getting run over. Two blinks of the turn signal to change lanes, then get it over with. Don't worry about people two car lengths behind you at seventy. Most importantly, within fifteen minutes before your freeway entrance, get a double americano (or the espresso drink of your choice) with an ice cube (so you can start immediately), and suck on that puppy as if your life depended on it. It does.

The only major exceptions to the basic mode we noted were when Mt. Ranier makes an unusually majestic appearance and when a Porsche was burning on the opposite side of the bridge crossing Lake Washington. These moments of natural beauty will cause traffic to slow briefly.

As I-5 from southern Oregon to Vancouver, B.C. becomes more and more a megacity connected by strip malls and more people are willing to commute an hour and a half to the east or west to their homes, the trees get cut for the view, the farmland gets paved for the malls, and that three miles of gravel driveway still isn't far enough from the traffic.

Yet, an hour away from the city, there are nights in the dark of the moon when the scattered light from the town across the valley below seems to offer itself up to the stars, when the trees are as black as green can be, and a coyote drifts through the trees like unseen smoke, calling to one patch of sky, then another.

UPPER LEFT EDGE

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