

HOW DO WE WORSHIP A PLACE CALLED HOME?

Story by DAVID CAMPICHE

In the middle of the night, the sleepless can hear a storm brewing. Fierce wind is whistling — what trumpet call, what cacophony, what sounds are these? Like the song of a whale or dolphin, we simply don't know or can't define that tune.

Rain is pelting. It slaps the flat surfaces of home like a strong backhand. Even in solitude we are surrounded by the pattern and thrust of nature.

Laurie and I once traveled to Wisconsin in the dead of winter. The thermometer read 40-degrees below. Snow and ice shrouded the world. I walked alone in the deciduous woods beside one of the thousands of lakes that punctuate the state. This was as close as one might get to natural silence — so cold, indeed, that the ice over this large frozen lake seemed to protest under the stress of that great freeze. Occasionally, the ice would crack, stretch or moan as it expanded. That sound shot like an arrow through the copse of trees where I walked. For a moment I thought of it as the ricochet of small rifle fire. Tree limbs burst, the moisture inside the limbs expanding and exploding like fire crackers. These sounds

rang in my mind like a Buddhist brass bell.

Back at home, what do we hear in the deepest of night when rain and wind throw a winter tantrum? Is the experience rich, frightening, overwhelming? Perhaps, like the visit from an old friend, it calms the soul. Do we feel safe under a pile of blankets? What would it be like to be homeless on such a night?

What I'm exploring is this: What are the terms of endearment to this place we call home? How do we learn to praise or worship the time and place we live in?

I'm driving my faithful pickup truck from Seaview to Tucker Creek. Potters are gathering to build a new Anagama kiln on Richard and Patti Rowland's property. To many of the local artists, this place represents home, represents a kind of security. Yes, a home away.

In our own way, many of us worship the land, the forest, trees and bramble that encroach on this kiln. If not our first home, it represents security and comfort, an outreach and expression of creativity.

The old Anagama has been fired close to 150 times. In the middle of the night, stoking the dragon's belly with armloads of dried and split firewood, one



Photo by Dwight Caswell

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feels the fine sense of being alone. Early in the firing when one is often alone on shift, a potter might follow sound like a meditation. The sounds are familiar: the crackling of split alder and fir, kind of an explosion as dry firewood confronts 2,000-degree heat. If it is winter, a sou'wester frequently races up the sloping hill that snakes from the Rowlands' home to the door

of the kiln. Alder trees dance to and fro in the wind. Limbs cross, rub and screech. Those limbs fall to the ground. Even an occasional four-footed animal breaks stride as it maneuvers through the copse. You catch the sound; stop, listen, and feel.

Our distant ancestors, living in rock caves in France and Spain, faced the same weather patterns. Did they worship their

landscape, their inhospitable homeland? Did they listen to the sounds of storm with awe or respect? Did they savor the soft drone of Autumn? Savor freshets in springtime? How they must have loved summertime. Don't we all?

I drive my pickup beside the mouth of the Columbia River. That river is churning. Gusts tease wave tops, and the river appears in full frenetic motion. The gunmetal-gray water appears agitated and wild. Hopefully, the fishers are in port, secure in their warm homes. Do they respect or worship that wild sea? Do they sometimes curse it?

The bridge rises into view, catapults its five-mile trestle over those troubled waters. A flock of airborne cormorants presses against a headwind. The eagles appear grounded. They hover in high limbs, harassed by rain and storm. Do they complain to each other? They appear stoic, but what do I know. Do they worship?

Across the bridge, my small

truck sprints. Windshield wipers clap time to the wind, each mimicking the other like some jazz band in full swing. I am fascinated by the storm, and the powerful river bowing down to the tempest and its force. In its own inaudible way, does it curse or praise? Is there language in those natural sounds, to the tide ripping and rippling and writhing?

A container ship slips over the Columbia River bar, seeking sanctuary, hungry for port.

My truck gallops up the steep incline toward the 200-foot summit of that bridge. At this moment nobody else is driving across.

Wind strikes my faithful truck. Wind and rain and storm, and some small apprehension. I say a prayer of thanks for this place we call home. To be able to feel gratitude for where one lives is, in itself, something to be thankful for.

At the very least, let's paint this landscape in bold strokes and call it a masterpiece.