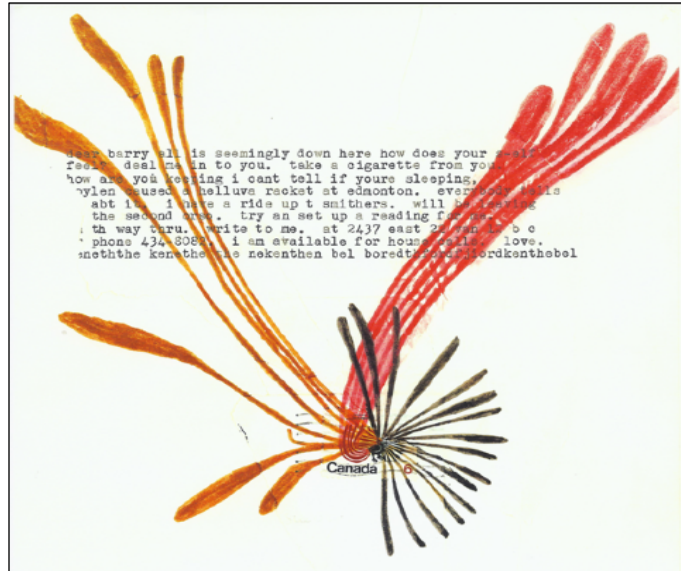


An aerial photograph of a river winding through a vast forest. The forest is a mix of dark green evergreens and trees with bright yellow and orange autumn foliage. The river is a light, milky color and flows from the upper right towards the bottom right. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is a dramatic, natural landscape.

SEARCH: KEN BELFORD

INVISIBLE INK

Ken Belford



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Ken Belford died in March 2020.

Search: Ken Belford: Invisible Ink was written at a time when Ken had little visibility beyond a handful of poets and friends who recognized his importance as a poet. Simply, I wanted to bring attention to the fact of his intelligence and poetic skill during this part of his life.

As the poet Charles Olson writes, *what does not change/is the will to change*. One's will to change, however, may open as it did with Ken, a *new* path - a divergence and personal reinvention no matter the risks of whatever else happens in-between – success, loss, love, failure, sickness ...

This memoir/tribute, I hope, gives some of the complexity of his life as a poet, *and* the experience of our 46 year friendship. I wanted to keep these aspects evident and alive.

Others more aware than I am of his later life and writing can ignore or argue with my presumptions and voice another version of the story from here. I sense it will never be finished.

Barry McKinnon

Prince George B.C.

Canada

14 March 2020

*Love is a place, not a person, love is
a weather of time, a convenience to absent sorrows.*

from Love

Robert Creeley

Search: Ken Belford/Invisible Ink



The poet Ken Belford is such a large figure, presence, and inspiration to other poets and serious readers in his proximity that when the world-wide-web search turns up so little information about him and his work - and most of it inaccurate and slight - makes this issue of *It's Still Winter* to feature and promote Ken Belford seem all the more important.

There are reasons for his absence and exclusion in the official literary and academic contexts: Ken's life as a poet doesn't follow the career path most Canadian writers seem to take. He's lived exclusively and reclusively in the woods, mountains, and small northern towns of BC and published only sporadically via small BC presses, (Talonbooks Caitlin, Gorse, and Harbour) and more recently by his own limited run chapbook series, *off-set house*.

In 35 years he went south a few times to live in Vancouver between guiding and fishing seasons. Most biographies make reference to his work as a guide "outdoorsman", "woodsman", etc. - convenient but narrow definitions that preface most discussions of his poems. Whenever word got out that Ken *was* in Vancouver, however, the writers and poets would gather at places he'd read, writers' beer nights, or after reading parties to hear *Ken Belford, the poet* (this "rumor and legend" as Al Purdy characterized him) - prophetically talk within the complex range of most everything: poetry & poetics, ecology, politics, health & athletics, pacism, and the north. And for anyone left out of that range who needed help with a chainsaw, (or fly fishing) he could break from the big discussion to demonstrate, for instance, the proper technique for casting a floating line, or filing chain rakers.

His first book, *The Hungry Tide*, self published when he lived in Vancouver in 1965, isn't on many bookshelves including Ken's - and what copies that do exist are most likely in California as part of the notorious late bookseller Bill Hoffer's archive: *The Hungry Tide* has "no matches" with AbeBooks.com. I remember seeing a copy of it in Hoffer's collection in Gastown; it was a standard size homemade-looking book, a bluey-green cover with a title and hand drawing, stapled spine, and Gestetnered text. The poems? Whatever embarrassment that leads a poet to destroy (or want to destroy) his or her first book didn't seem evident here. I don't remember much about the poems now beyond the immediate and unmistakable Belford tone, intelligence and urgency of emotion - a young man's hungry tide to inform the sensibility and writing ahead.

I first read Belford's work in the early 60's in Calgary. Brad Robinson, a writer in touch with the west coast literary scene had copies of *Talon* magazine and urged me to submit my poems. I became a regular contributor in the good company of David Phillips, Bill Bissett, Judith Copithorne, John Newlove, Pat Lane, Jim Brown, Ken Belford and many others. Margaret Atwood writes this in a review of Belford's second book *Fireweed* (1967): *His poems read with the kind of inevitability of image and rhythm that makes other poets grit their teeth with envy*". I got to grit my teeth regularly for the several years whenever *Talon* slipped thru the mail slot door.



Fireweed: Talon Books / Very Stone House: Vancouver, 1967.

As other little magazines in those days - *Gronk*, *blewoitment*, *Repository*, *Tish*, *Iron*, and *No Money from the Government*. *Talon* became a little community of writers who eventually met somewhere along the literary trail. For instance, meeting David Phillips for the first time in Vancouver in 67 was prefaced with the pleasure of knowing his poems via *Talon*. *So you're David Phillips! So you're Barry McKinnon!* And so it was for some of us to become life-long friends bound in common practice: poets and the poet's life ahead!

I first met Ken one night in the fall of 1969. My first image of him: a big man in the shadows getting out of a cab by the side of our shack on Queensway street in Prince George. He had

phoned earlier to say he'd read my poems in *Talon*, that he was on his way to Vancouver to read in Al Purdy's class at Simon Fraser University, and wondered if he could crash for the night. *Hell yes!* I said. *Purdy's invited me too!* - and so it was without my prior knowing that we were to read together.

I remember Ken was wearing a cowboy hat, and in the cab-light stood over 6 feet tall, weighed I would guess close to 200 lbs. He carried a huge army duffle bag slung over his shoulder and on closer look as he entered thru the porch light - a big, knowing and sly smile, coincident with penetrating eyes looking right at me - *the legend and myth* in this first physical immediacy.

I firstly told Ken that I had read *Fireweed* with great pleasure and attention. It had become a much discussed book amongst west coast writers for its poetic weight, and remarkable stanza to stanza mental, emotional, and content shifts. Many of his lines, for me, had become indelible - lines like this from his poem "Carrier Indians" -

an ugly people with large eyes.
Having nowhere to go:
I am one of them.

And these lines from "Omega"

The first was to make my own law.
The second was to break it. To distinguish the limits.
Apparently the third is to pay for it.

That night we talked, drank beer and smoked late into the night and early dawn: two long lost and found poets in some kind of mysterious and large agreement - the beginning of a 38 year friendship. Later the next day I drove my wife Joy and Ken out to highway 67 South to hitch a ride to Vancouver; Joy decided to make the trip with Ken at the last minute. We were all broke, in our mid-twenties and just starting out with real jobs - me in my first shaky year as an English teacher at the College of New Caledonia. Most of our money went out to pay student loans, rents and the high cost of general living in the north. Plane travel was out of the question and the 1957 Plymouth my father gave me could barely make it to the high school free repair shop. So I left later that day after work on the overnight Greyhound and hooked up with everyone at S.F.U sometime around noon. Al Purdy met me outside of a large steep lecture room, lit his cigar and ushered me in. I remember an audience of about 50 people scattered throughout the lecture hall and this, my first occasion to hear Ken Belford read - a voice connected to a serious and large rhythmic force. My recollection of my reading is blurry, but I do remember Purdy sprawled in a cloud of smoke in the front row bellowing out halfway through the reading, *Baaaryyyy - read your poem about fucking!* Al, as they say, is another story.

Al Purdy became a friend to us - an unwieldy, haywire mentor of sorts but a constant in our lives. In 1971 he edited *Storm Warning* - an anthology featuring young writers from all parts of Canada, including Ken and myself. Jack McClelland, the flamboyant owner and editor of McClelland and Stewart, solicited Al Purdy to pick "the next generation" of promising Canadian poets, to promote their discovery, and hawk the product widely, including the school and university market. This commercial push might explain Purdy's awkward if not unwilling and

apologetic expository notes and student questions that accompany the book.¹ I don't think the anthology sold well or was ever used in schools. Purdy may have rightly predicted that "several of these poets will supplant (though not necessarily eclipse) the present-day literary establishment in Canada". On the other side of the shadow, several, if not most of the *Storm Warning* poets, drifted into obscurity, silence, or for Ken, and myself, years of sporadic writing and self-publishing while living in the complexity of work, personal and domestic demands - and doing so far from the literary centres.



Storm Warning, McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto/Montréal, 1971.

If there was a controversy about Ken's writing during this early period, it would be that he was influenced and directed by the Alaskan poet J. Michael Yates, a forceful presence in the U.B.C. Creative Writing Department, often discussed, and criticized by writers in the various Vancouver factions at the time: these were "the downtown poets", the SFU students and writers where Robin Blaser taught, the Tish group, the Talon group, and the Very Stone House group.

Ken was not a registered student in the U.B.C. Creative Writing Department, but did hang out on campus. He sat in on classes that interested him (including math). He knew Robert Harlow, a novelist raised in Prince George and the Head of Creative Writing. Harlow recognized Ken's ability and subsequently introduced him to Yates, who, as the story goes was impressed by Ken's poems, and suggested a re-work of the *Fireweed* manuscript into 3 line stanzas - and that Ken then take the book to Talon Books for publication.

Yates promoted, as most teachers do, a particular stance based on his own reading and practice. His curriculum included mostly Europeans, South Americans, but also Pound's *Cantos* - a book that attracted me most. Yates's own impressive books at the time, *Canticle for Electronic Music* and the *Great Bear Lake Meditations*, are heavily metaphoric, rhythmically slow, dramatic and surrealistic - a content and style attractive to most of the students under his tutelage. He wasn't too interested in the poets in Donald Allan's *New American Poets and Poetics* that attracted me, but thankfully, in the context of the department, I was left alone. I went my own way, as any poet, including Ken, had to do.

Red Lillard, a onetime student of Yates, in his review of *Four Realities*, a northern anthology edited by Don Precosky in 1992 - puts Ken and the U.B.C. connection this way: "Belford's lines are traditional, but some readers may find him difficult, even cryptic. *At it's least successful point, Belford's work reminds me of what was being written in the U.B.C. Creative Writing Department back in 1966.* (italics mine). Lillard goes on to rightfully say: "Belford's poetry offers a haunting vision of the north. This is as it should be. Belford's *Fireweed* remains one of the best collections of poetry to come out of the central and northern interior."²

Whatever the debate regarding the source of Ken's early influences, the poems in *Post Electric Caveman* published by Talon in 1970 break from his earlier "traditional" triadic stanzas in *Fireweed*.



The Post Electric Cave Man, Talonbooks: Vancouver, 1970.
Cover: Patrick Lane standing, Ken Belford sitting

In *The Post Electric Cave Man* the poems are variously formed to the page. The lines are still driven by a confident narrative *I* with something important to say, but resemble in places, Charles Olson's projective line / page spread.

...And
I can remember my father
remember him
 now
 as he turned
down the road toward us one day in winter -
 watching him as he grew
 larger
 until when he passed the window
 his face was splotched purple from a disease
there is no name to;
 that his skin was stretched tight
 and no features showed.

And at their tightest, the Robert Creeley line break and breath line that many west coast writers began to practice as a truer rhythmic and spoken measure.

Take a look, i
sd, I sat
there

singing, dumb
ly, as all
things

do, alone.
And I sat there
as long as

you, a sound
became
a breath

to me, saying
the same
dumb

sound
over, and
over.

The title, *The Post Electric Caveman*, in a sociological sense, predicts what Ken had become and was to be: a man who leaves the urban, goes back, not *to*, but *into* the land - to live life as poet, homesteader, shake-splitter, rail splitter, hunter, fisherman, father, husband, guide, ecologist, lobbyist, land claim spokesman - to live rurally in the local of Smithers, Hazelton, Two Mile, Blackwater with no more, at the beginning, than what skills he had *and* what skills could learn from native old-timers and fellow northern survivors. Ken persisted /survived. It was *not* an easy rural life, and yet in these various struggles made evident in his writing, a profound and instinctive knowledge emerges. His language becomes an ecologue in the universal ecology. His poetry and voice like no other.

The Post Electric Caveman was his last commercial small press book until Caitlin press, Prince George, published *Pathways into the Mountains* in 2000.

Thirty years had passed.

We always kept our friendship and connection via sporadic visits, letters, phone calls, and various publishing projects. I would occasionally go to Ken's homestead outside of Smithers, or later to his camp in the Blackwater.³ He would come to Prince George to visit and read at the college. During those visits in the 70's and 80's, Ken would give a poetry reading and stay in town for a few days. We'd yak endlessly, smoke, drink, tell stories and laugh - but mostly talk and talk about poets, poetry and poetics, and the nature and wonder at our persistent occupation in its activity. Typical of these visits by Ken and other writers, I would ask for a poem, or short series and then get us to the college print shop or my basement letterpress to print. Ken's chapbook, *One Word*, for instance, was "printed" one Saturday afternoon: a Gestetnered gray construction paper cover of a stretched wolf hide without a title, hand written poems on a textured paper stock that we Xeroxed and staple-bound into a French fold, and a humorous Belford "self portrait" sketch on the last page. These private publications often lacked any publication data: no press name, no date, no ISBN number etc., - and in the case of *One Word*, a run of maybe 26 copies. Although we had fun making them, these editions had a satiric intent: to register ourselves as marginal and willingly self-exiled and therefore suspicious of what some aspects of the Canadian literary world beyond had become. We took matters into our own hands and with a sense of self conscious and self-righteous integrity (also part of the sardonic) - worked hard and fast without ambition to go or be anywhere but where we were.



One Word: no publishing data

I started Caledonia Writing Series and later Gorse Press⁴, to publish chapbooks by writers whose writing I liked and, for the most part, who no longer had publishing connections because of the various shifts in loyalties, editorial policies, and economics that changed or eliminated the little presses that supported us early on. In the early 70's Margaret Atwood *did* solicit a manuscript from Ken for Oxford University Press, but as he says in my interview with him (see *It's Still Winter*, vol. 2 no. 2, Spring 1999), he did not respond to the invitation. She *did*, however, include him in the *Oxford Anthology of Canadian Verse* (1982) - a canonic collection that supports the ideas expressed in her thematic analysis of Can Lit - *Survival*.

As for my own publishing experience - I met bp Nichol in Vancouver in the late 60's. He saw value in my poetry, and at the end of the 70's assembled my various self-published chapbooks from a 10-year period, then edited and published them in an edition of 500 copies at Coach House Press, in Toronto in 1981. *The the* was nominated for the Governor General's Award and *that* "recognition" for a short while went to my head enough so that I thought I could *now* get a less demanding job, *get* grants, *travel* the world and stare off dreamily into space. I'm happy none of that happened: for writing I did not require time and leisure, but rather a continued articulation of my resistance to the context I often wanted to escape - the troublesome grit and stink of living in a blue collar pulp town and working in a college thru the 80's unsympathetic and resistant to the educational and cultural work required by its regional mandate. In 1980 - 81, the arts and my job as a Creative Writing instructor were eliminated from the curriculum along with Creative Printing, Theatre, Fine Arts and Crafts, Shakespeare, American Literature, Art History, Foreign Languages, Philosophy Music, Classics and Humanities.⁶

In the north, life and the world gets peeled back. The poem is often shaped by a despondency in the face of what it and the poet must reveal. Its form becomes, also, in some sense, its meaning. The critic in his review of Ken's chapbook *Sign Language* (1979) recognizes that the poems are "calculated to scuttle all those hearty rhapsodies of country living found in *Mother Earth News*", but misreads the beauty and force of the voice behind them when he says: "what makes this monologue tiresome is not its dispiriting substance but its tongue-tied and halting style that may not have been intended to suggest the onset of a near catatonic state, or to sound and look like a very private telegram, one not at the end easy to understand"⁵. The title *Sign Language* - that practice of the mute or shocked, or those trying to communicate without a common language, should have given him a clue to the writer's overall metaphor, state and intention. As it is, Ken might answer him by saying, as he once did to me: "there is nothing to understand."

Poetry, I believe, at least in the context I've described above, makes life more bearable in its ability to reveal more accurately the complexity and dimensions of our location and true condition. If *Sign Language* "is (also) an accident report", it is *also* a measure of spirit, persistence, and ontological certitude:

shadows
when the lights go on
circle us, an over flow
of fluid, without

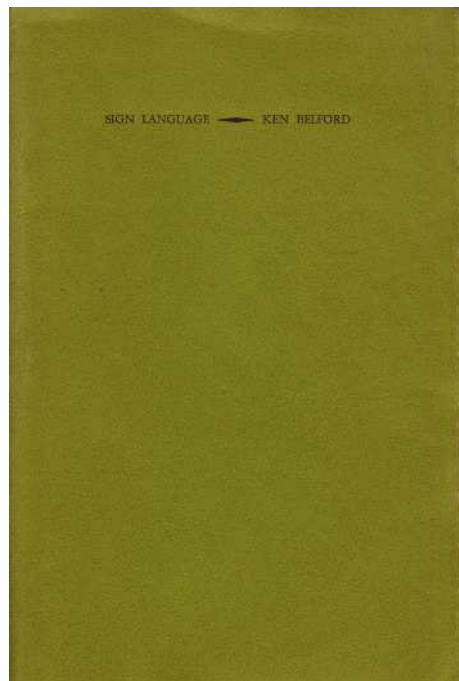
receiving light.
I am on time
since I handle the lamps right.

I swing them casual
and step out
at my own pace.

I will not forget
who I am
or why I am going

Editing *Sign Language* and *Holding Land* (1988), however, was not easy. The poems for my eye and ear didn't require alteration or copy editing to any great degree. My approach was to print what I got, as I did with Norm Sibum's chap book *Banjo*. When *Banjo* was completed, Norm wrote to say that my ordering of the poems in the book was brilliant. I thanked him for the compliment then informed him that I printed them in the same order that he had sent them.

With Ken's work, I'd notice obvious inconsistencies - upper case "I" in some of the later poems, lower case "i" in others. Ken would say "leave it inconsistent - *as is*." But without face to face contact, phone or email connections - ken was way off in the mountains - and because his light penciled script had peculiarities, I'd have to guess at certain words while setting type, and being slightly drugged by nicotine, ink, and blanket-wash fumes - hope to hell I was right. I do remember one or two calls from his radio- phone but the medium was useless for any conversation about editing. At the end of each spoken line, the speaker must say "over" - then after a few minutes in mid-sentence the phone would crackle and break up, followed by faint and lost voices. "Can you hear me? Are you still there?"



Sign Language, Repository - Gorse Press: Prince George, 1979.

Ken did, however, love the design of *Sign Language*: a letter-press book with rich green cover, simple 12 point title, and clean French folded pages; it still feels good in the hand. None of *that* was a problem, but as he put it, the *content changes* were! The line I remember that got “changed” from Ken’s original version reads, “not pleased”

it is mostly water
there in that birch
I saw
not pleased to see
it slide

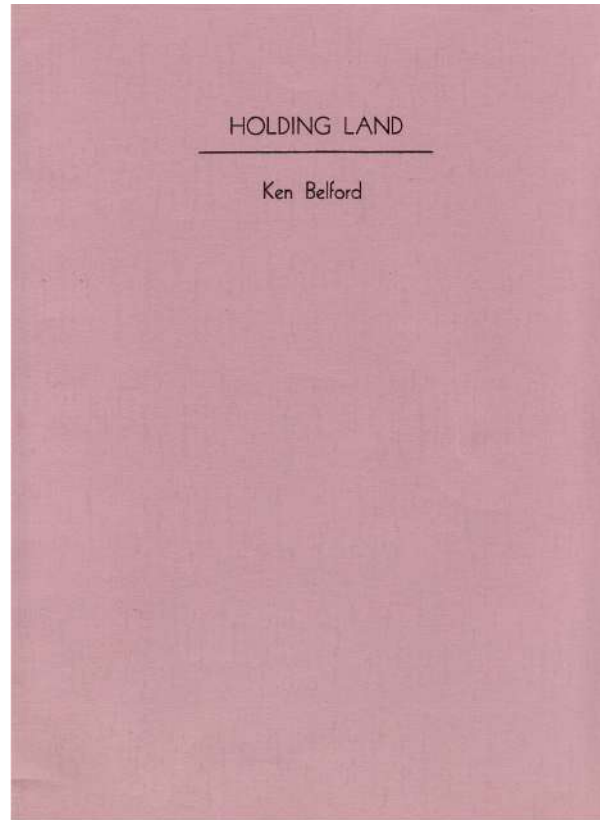
When Bill Bailey - a friend and former student and I hand-set the poem, “not pleased” became “so pleased”

it is mostly water
there in that birch
I saw
so pleased to see
it slide.

There were many other “meaning” errors - both slight and large shifts; for instance, “all rivers some/ from the north”, should have read, “all rivers come/ from the north”.

When we next met, Ken looked thru me with his sly grin and kept silent before he let me off the hook to say it was ok. My guilty and humorous response (that I hoped would lighten the scary load) was to say that “so pleased...” was what he *really* wanted to say - a line that gives the true surprise of a Belford line! He might have chuckled. The book was out! Too late for an errata sheet!

I printed *Holding Land* as Gorse Press book in 1988 - almost a ten-year spread from *Sign Language*. In these 18 pages of poetry Ken continues his concerns with the land in its social, political and ecological dimensions, and specifically his relationship to it now that he, at this point in his life, “holds” it literally: *the land* held in his stewardship is the vast guiding territory of Blackwater - a huge space in his imagination and experience and where Ken, his wife Alice and his daughter Hannah lived and worked for more than 30 years.



Holding Land, Gorse Press, series 2: Prince George, 1988.

The concept of "place" in poetry is usually defined by geography and description of physical location, and I believe in *Holding Land*, this is in many instances no less so, but the poems *also* go thru and beyond specifics to create a timeless, beautiful, and universal music not often heard in Canadian poetry. As the great poet Robert Creeley exclaimed approaching Ken after Ken's reading in Prince George at the Words / Loves Conference⁷ in 1980 - *I hear your music man!*

"The Transplant", I believe, contains the sound Robert Creeley was responding to.

The Transplant

Divergent from the beginning,
I was born in another land
and though a variant
at odds with my makers
was grafted, took root and held:
my parents were never truly mine.

At first glance into the heavens
I saw an unlikely elemental ancestry
set in motion: the head and shoulders
of a faceless charioteer

drawn by stallion. Who else but Pegasus
could this be, that I who would later be
the animals husband and would then know
the stem of such descent?

My father farmed, his brothers too, his father too.
His hands husked chaffe, instinctively he
disliked weeds and this bad blood
he saw was not his type and suddenly
he was out of love with me.
There were fireflies in the pasture,
in the night, and against the moon,
multitudes of breeding and broody birds.

Bedrock, groundwork, beginnings:
one thousand acres of grain
they grew with simple tools.
Chancing upon his hothouse
I would lift the lid.

Yet, within the music of *Holding Land* , as in all of Ken's work, there are verses of risky
direct/rapid simple sentence commands that pressurize to quick surprise and unexpected release.
Here are 3 illustrations of that pattern I admire in the overall weight of his poems.

Don't go to zoos.
Design in the nude,
Changing, the face of the hill
is no still life but
suggest reproduction,
some photographs,
anything, you want to say

...

I love this: my land and my work
and hate putting the tools away
some of them dull and broken.
We are wasting the caribou.

...

Wolves don't make deer better
except by being better at hiding from wolves,
what's left. None of them return
to the open places
or the feeding stations

and we don't either.

The handful of northern poets and writers who can hold their weight in a national and international context often find it hard to find small press publishers who will publish and distribute their work to make them more visible. When Cynthia Wilson bought Caitlin press (www.caitlin-press.com) and re-established it in Prince George in 1991, a range of northern writers, including Ken and myself, now had a local publishing venue; we were launched, so to speak, beyond our own private mailing list for the 126 copy-run. Yet despite the visibility of occasional publication, other aspects of literary life and work did not open, especially in Ken's case. In the 70's, 80's and most of the 90's, Ken was not invited to give readings or attend conferences, unlike those writers solidly connected to academic institutions or eligible for Canada Council grants. I've been more visible as a poet because of my activities as a college teacher, small press publisher and literary organizer; I've read at various Canadian and U.S. colleges, universities, coffee houses, libraries etc., and have attended several festivals and conferences. Any invitations Ken did receive usually came without a realistic sense of the time and adequate funding it would take to get him south, east *or anywhere*. When I invited him to be a featured reader at the Words/ Loves Conference, I got him as much Canada Council and college money as I could, but even with that amount and because of bus scheduling, he had to hitch-hike to Prince George.

In one instance, he was invited to read and speak at the international and prestigious Banff Mountain Book Festival. Once again he was narrowly defined and confined as "a mountain poet" and unlike the narrator in an earlier poem who declares, "I come to the meeting late/when they are cleaning up"⁸ - Ken didn't make it at all! He only managed to get part way, frustrated as he was by the difficulties of taking a helicopter from Blackwater to Smithers, catching a small plane to Prince George, and then a jet to Calgary, and then a bus to Banff - and then expected to arrive on time for a waiting audience? *And* for this chunk of time and hard travel, receive an honorarium that wouldn't have covered expenses? The northern poet. The literary life.

Further, and apropos of the northern poet's life, and experience, Ken writes: "In Canada, there are language zones in Vancouver and Toronto. In those cities and in America, *it's as though our north doesn't exist, as though northerners write in invisible ink.*" (italics mine)

So it is within these levels of literary politics that placism for any poet (north or not) becomes a concept to think about. Geographical "place" is, some of us believe, a large factor in determining literary worth when measured by those outside who sense they inhabit the centre, whether they be book or journal editors, professors, literary historians, critics, literary organizers, or jury members. In the centre (*Vancouver, Toronto, and America*) and that which passes thru it, can be defined/mis-defined, read/mis-read, and at worst, ignored or dismissed. The stereotyped and pejorative view of the north, its inhabitants, its poets, the place itself, inspires reaction.

In Ken's landmark essay on language and poetics, "lan(d)guage = post language writing" he addresses and probes the complex idea of north, and his relation to it as an intellect and poet. Here are some of his ideas that fit this discussion:

A new area of studies is in this expansive use of the term “northern” as applied to poetics. Almost always that gaze looks from the urban centers to the forest. When I say the word “northern”, I’m talking about what it is to see these issues from the forest, looking out.

§

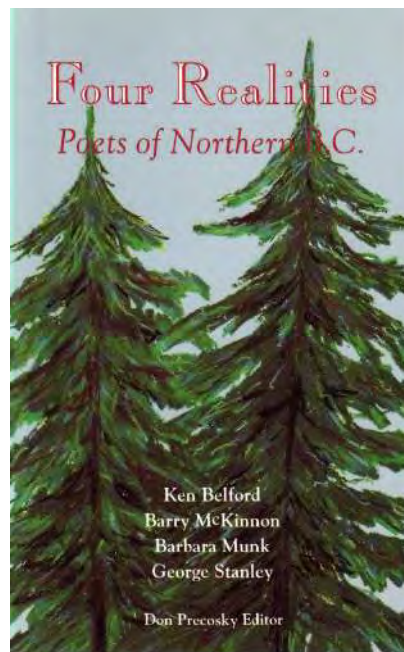
...This (lan(d)guage) writing works out of the idea that the north is not a matter of latitude and longitude but that unroaded land that begins at the edge of the rancher’s field, wherever that is. It is that territory that exists beyond the colonizer’s restless, ongoing and most recent efforts to clear and commodify, to make land safe for cows.

§

The land writer will be of the idea that the land is for continued use. The writer from the outside will see the land as holding resources and have many names for things. The outside writer may drive across or into the land in the summer but likely not get out of their car for very long.

•

Four Realities: Poets of Northern B.C. (1992) is the first northern poetry anthology to group 4 of us together - Barbara Munk, George Stanley, Ken Belford - bound in the most general sense by northern experience, place and landscape - and an insistence to be true to it and the various exigencies it generates: to write as Ken says - “a land poetics that isn’t naïve, in the way so much of the rural poetry has been.”



Four Realities: Poets of Northern B.C., The Caitlin Press: Prince George, 1992.

La vita nuova for Ken Belford begins in 2001.

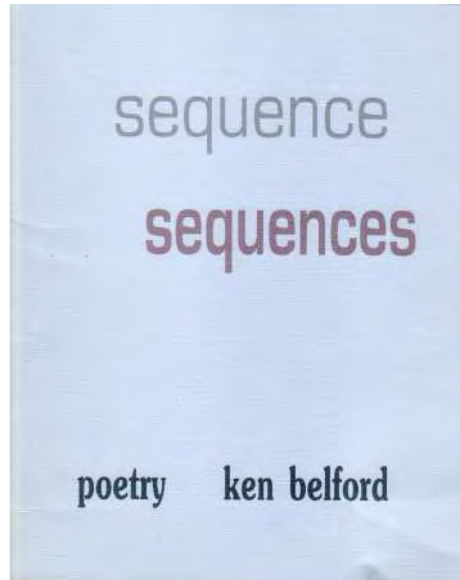
Ken Belford left Blackwater - left the life he had known and lived, and moved to Prince George to live with his partner Si. The complexity of this change, the gauge to his thinking, and the story, as they say, *is* in the poetry emerging from his new life that *It's Still Winter* wants to celebrate and present:

Ken Belford -

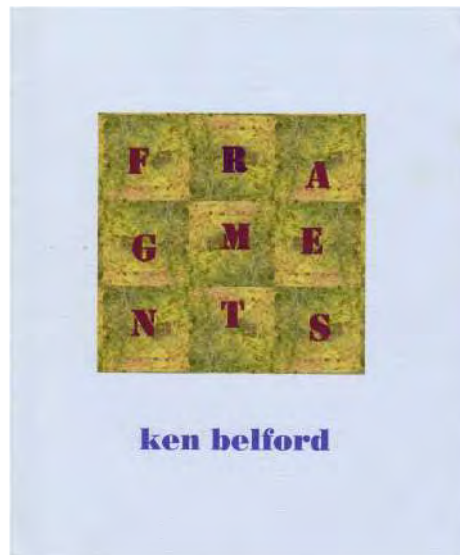
*deeper and deeper
until the unknown*



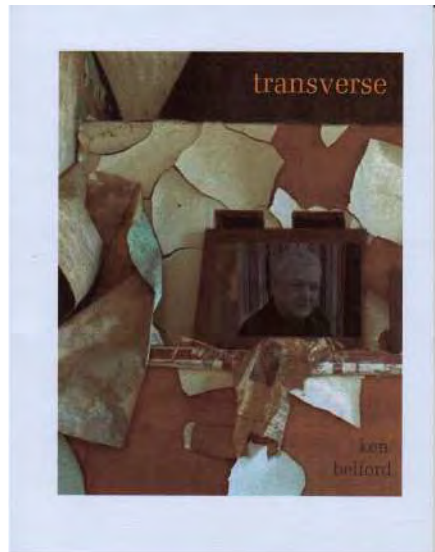
Ken Belford: Self-Published Chapbooks



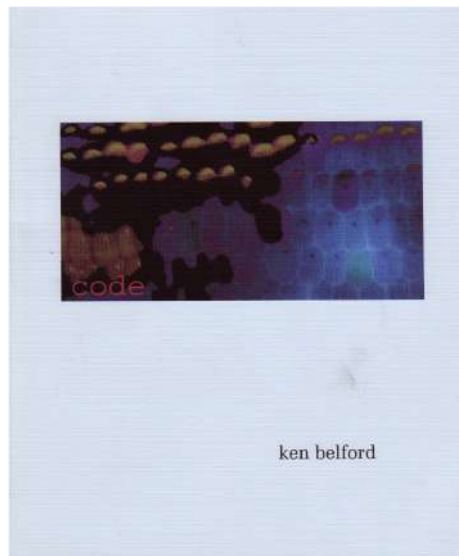
Sequences, off-set house: Prince George, 2003. (50 copies)



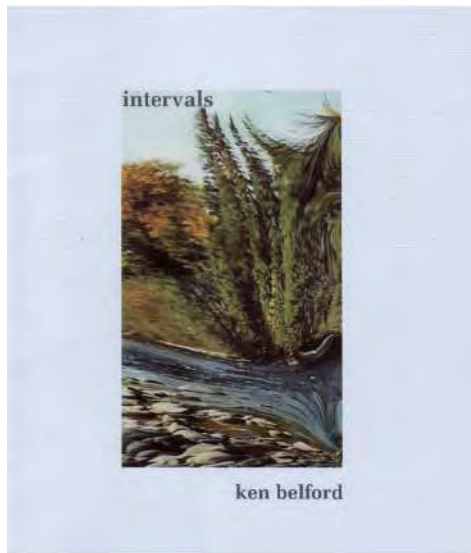
Fragments, series 3, off-set house: Prince George, 2003. (60 copies)



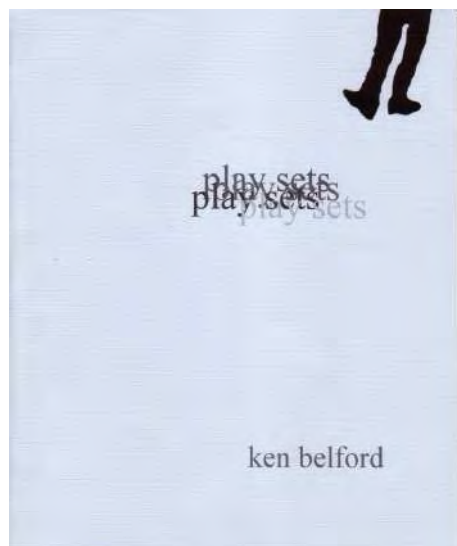
Transverse, series 4, off-set house: Prince George, no date. (100 copies)



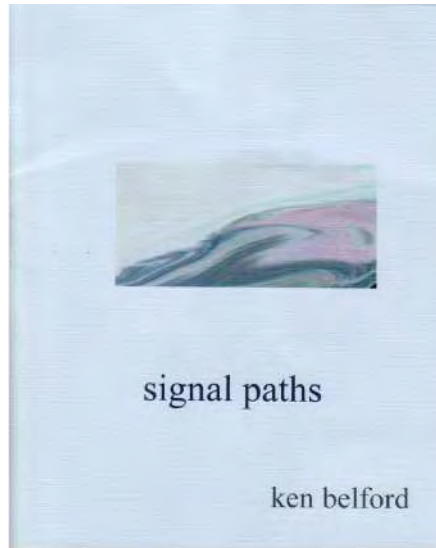
Code, series 5 off-set house: Prince George, 2005. (100 copies)



Intervals, series 6 off-set house: Prince George, 2005. (100 copies)

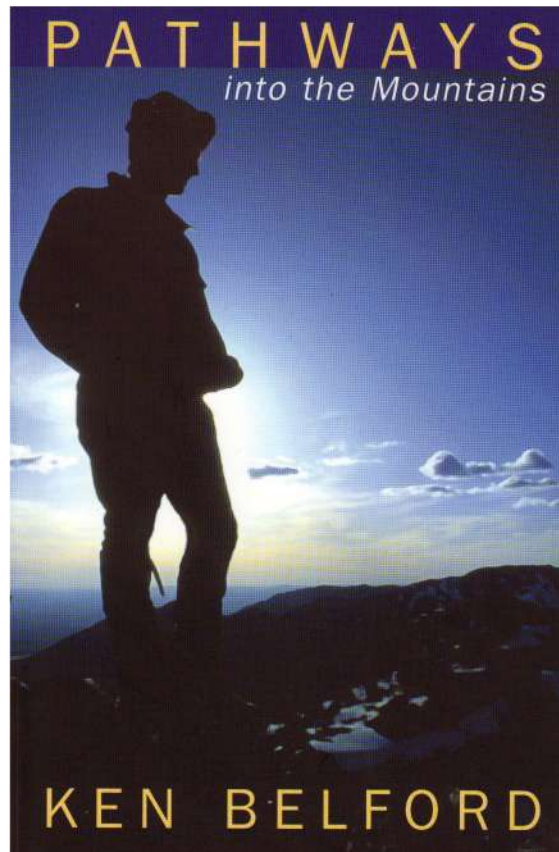


Play Sets, series 7 off-set house: Prince George, no date. (100 copies)



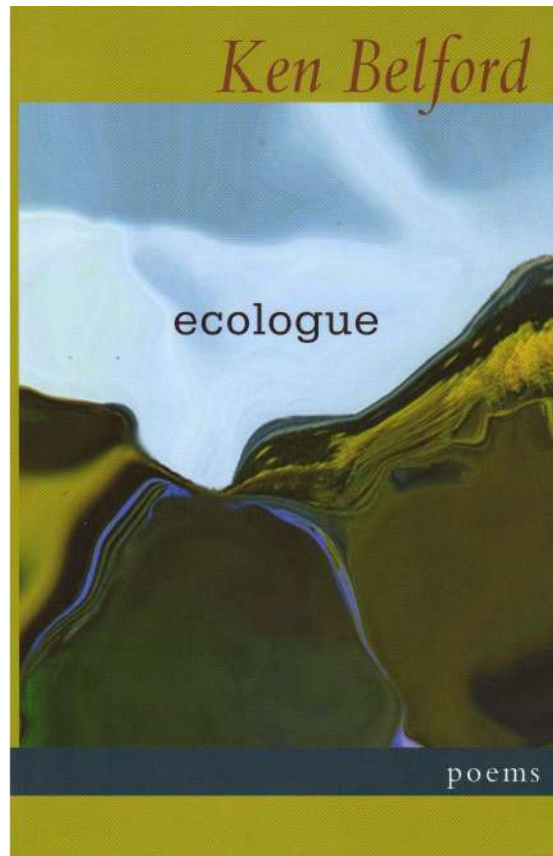
Signal Paths, series 8, off-set house: Prince George, 2005. (100 copies)

Ken Belford: Recent Books



Pathways into the Mountains, Caitlin Press Inc.: Prince George, 2000.⁹





Ecologue: Poems, Harbour Publishing: Madeira Park, BC, 2005.

Back cover statements:

“Most of British Columbia is not Vancouver, and nearly all of it is not the “lower Mainland. Most of it is mountains and valleys and trees, and Ken Belford lives there. He learned to write, he says, ‘ in the middle of the night after work was done.’ Lots of us have known for years about his excellent ear and resolute skill with words, and we have had to make do with a thin volume on a rare occasion. Thank goodness we now have a nice big book such as this one, to show our friends here and abroad.” **George Bowering**

“Belford is a delight. [His poems] read with the kind of inevitability of image and rhythm that makes other poets grit their teeth with envy.” **Margaret Atwood**

“Ken Belford speaks from outside the literary centres and brings a freshness to literature itself. He finds poems in the untamed places where direct experience and language are inseparable.” **Robert Kroetsch**

“All the major traits of Belford’s poetry, coolness, understatement, wry precision, a hesitancy to use too ‘poetic’ a language...Belford is so aware of the distance and the need to cross it, a very Canadian concern.” **Douglas Barbour**

“An eco-poet who examines the archtypically Canadian conflict of development and preservation, Ken Belford looks at both sides, delving into the heart of each argument. Though favouring the preservation side of the argument, it is clear that he understands the reasoning for both arguments.

In some of his poems, Ken feels that his way of life - his continued survival - implicates him in something about which he should feel guilty. The food he eats, the house he dwells in, and the oil that keeps him arm are all the products of the development that is destroying the natural habitat.

For Belford, development means sadness, loss, and bitterness. The does not, however, stop him from retaining hope that humanity as a whole can find a way to cherish, and preserve, the beauty that surrounds us. **Don Precosky.**

Footnotes:

1. Al Purdy's *Storm Warning* biographical notes, and student questions regarding Ken's poem "Omega".

"Ken Belford is rumour and legend, hence may not have been born in 1946. He homesteads near South Hazelton B.C, a land of snow-capped mountains, rushing rivers, the home of the Gitksan Indians. One might think a writer living that kind of life would be a simple soul, but Belford is not. What do you think of that business of making his own law, and then breaking it? Is that a fairly common human trait? Why was the ice 'surrealistic'? What is the significance of 'bitter aloe'?"

Ken Belford

Omega

The dog in the snowbank is dead
Because he trusted me as meat
And I fed him wine for a laugh.

That even with innocence I cannot be trusted
Is one more reason why
There is nothing to laugh about.

The first was to make my own law.
The second was to break it. To distinguish the limits.
Apparently, the third is to pay for it.

To repay, purify, you heap one death onto another.
You trade a twenty-five dollar wolf hide for the dog,
Figuring somehow that one more death equals zero.

You are not expected
To know
What it is like.

But I hunted all day on the surrealistic ice.
Until I stood there in the belly of night,
Listening. . . .

To the circling sound of furred feet
Pacing the edge of my flashlight limit.
And I just stood there wondering if it was a wolf or a dog.

It is the same problem here.
The alternative is to believe.
Bitter

Aloe, how cleansing
From the flower gun aimed in the darkness.
And there is nothing to laugh into.

2. Charles Lillard, col. "An Audience of One: Voices from the North Blend, Curiously", *Times-Colonist*, (Sunday, November 21, 1993). p.13

3. See "Wrestling the Alligator" in *Going Someplace*, Ed. Lynne Van Luven, Ottawa: Cocteau Books, 2000.

This personal account of a weeks visit to Blackwater gives some sense of the Blackwater context and setting: Ken and Alice in their daily chores and activities, the clients, ecological issues, and the questions regarding the north back woods under the constant industrial spread and threat.

4. See *The Caledonia Writing Series (A Chronicle)*, Gorse Press: Prince George: 1989.

This chronicle gives the story of my publishing and printing activity and rocky relationship as a poet and instructor at The College of New Caledonia.

5. Peter Mitcham, *Canadian Literature* No 92 - Spring 82.

6. See "No Method at All: The Story of the Liberal Arts at the College of New Caledonia". *Issues in Education and Culture*, Simon Fraser University (May, 1985); pp 53 to 58.

In this article my friend and colleague John Harris and I document the eradication of the Liberal Arts at the College of New Caledonia in 1981. This story might seem unbelievable downriver in the main centres, but it is true. "No Method..." presents a researched argument painfully revealing the struggles that the college, and in a larger sense, the struggle smaller industrial commodity outposts have with governments, local institutions, industrialists, power brokers, and imported administrators motivated and directed, it seems, to cynically keep these populations as hewers of wood and drawers of water. These politics heavily inform the poetics.

7. The Words/Loves Conference: For more than a decade B.C. college Creative Writing instructors organized yearly conferences for their students. When my turn came to host the event I was worried that our northern and distant location would limit attendance. Despite some criticism for inviting an American writer to headline the event, I decided to invite the poet Robert Creeley to act as a draw. If he would come, why wouldn't the others? The writers I know have such respect for Creeley I believed that this event would probably be a onetime chance to bring him north (beyond his sporadic visits to Vancouver) - to hear and meet Ken Belford, David Phillips, and the 200 others who showed up in Prince George for Words/Loves.

8. "I come to the meeting . . . Gorse Press: Prince George, April 1979. (100 copies).

The few books I printed as letterpress limited editions required weeks of hand setting type, designing, and printing. The Gorse Press Broadside Series, including a few of Ken's poems, needed less time and expense to produce. When a poet came for a reading, I tried to have a broadside for the event - initially to sell for a dollar or so, but feeling awkward to mix money with readings, I'd usually give them away.

I come to the meeting. . .

I come to the meeting
late
 when
they are cleaning up.
I had wanted
 to the tune
 of rain
no better weather
to do it in.
And I had wanted some thing
not so unlike bark
for all the battles
from the bottom
of the spine, up.

One works alone in the shed
when the wrenches spread.

Break any bone you want
but break the back
and no more fight: this
side of the building is white.

I come late to the meeting,
in time
 to wonder
who came,
 who left
and who spoke.

And I among things
that distress children
wanted to know
if he spoke at all.

 And
if he did,
easily.

Ken Belford



10. *Pathways into the Mountains*, published in 2000, by Caitlin Press was Ken's first small/commercial publication in the 30 years since the appearance of *The Post Electric Cave Man*. Cynthia Wilson, owner and editor of Caitlin Press Inc., was required by The Canada Council to publish at least one "literary" text per year in order to receive grants for the other books on her list - books mostly solicited and written by local writers engaged in a wide range of local interest topics: personal histories, travel guides, gold rush and paddle-wheeler stories, memoirs, biographies and autobiographies by or about local cowboys, trappers and other assorted characters. When asked to recommend a book by a northern poet, I immediately said: Ken Belford. Over a long period I coaxed and gathered the poems for publication. Although I received hard copies by mail, and corrected versions by E mail, again, the task of editing over the distance and the difficulty of keeping a clear communication line with Ken, contributed to the botched book that resulted; for instance, E mail documents, attachments, cut and pastes got garbled and scrambled by computer incompatibility, and/or didn't match the hand-written originals. It's difficult to sort through all of the sources responsible for the multitude of errors in the book - typos, line break changes, idea changes, spelling changes etc. etc. - but this to say that despite my good intentions and diligence (and rushed as I was by Wilson's unexpected "last-minute" courier deadline) - Cynthia and her young and naïve assistant (in terms of editing poetry) made many unauthorized changes, believing as they did that this or that did not look "right". They went ahead and made "the corrections". My cover design was rejected. I protested theirs. Ken and I did not receive a final blue-line proof copy from the printer. The process and the manuscript was out of our hands - and the book was published. I liked the late Cynthia Wilson for her hard work and good intentions, yet want this note here as part of this record for anyone who reads the Caitlin version of *Pathways into the Mountains*. It needs to appear corrected in a second edition.

Barry McKinnon/Ken Belford Interview

**K e n
Belford: I
s t a r t e d
writing on
the farm in
Alberta. I
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having something in
the order of 50 poems
when I was 10, all
w r i t t e n i n
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n fashion, a
l o t o f
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wrote sonnets
until I was
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In September of 1993 I interviewed Ken Belford at his fishing camp at Blackwater Lake. The camp is one and a half hours N.W. of Smithers B.C. and only accessible by float plane or helicopter. Over a few days in between the camp chores and guiding, we sat in Ken's workshop near the pot belly stove talking about poetry, politics, ecology, love, language - the subjects we've been discussing since we met in 1969. This transcript is a reduced version of the talk. I hope it will give a sense of Ken's life and engagement as a poet. I've selected some of the poems he refers to in the interview and include "Limbic Journal" Ken's most recent poem. —Barry McKinnon

Barry McKinnon: What prompted you to begin to write?

Ken Belford: I started writing on the farm in Alberta. I think I remember having something in the order of 50 poems when I was 10, all written in Shakespearian fashion, a lot of sonnets. I wrote sonnets until I was about 15 I think. I can remember having collections at various times in my early writing of sonnets, and a lot of rhyming couplets too with the same metre that so many of those things were written in. Somehow or other I was reading it then. I don't know where or can't remember where I even learned any of this from but I know that I felt that I was a poet and that I should be writing poetry. There was no influence from anyone in my family to write it, that I can remember. I don't recall anything, any books of poetry. There must have been a book that I was reading at the time. When I got into the city I started to hang out in bookstores at an early age and to read poetry and I think one of the great early influences on me was Irving Layton. I was really interested in his early books. They seemed to me to be such wonderful years, poetry wise. They were so interesting. Milton Acorn was publishing and Alfred Purdy was hanging out, and I read early Leonard Cohen.

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BM: This would be in the early 60's I imagine. Layton was getting quite visible then.

KB: Ya, who else? I lived in the city and began with more conventional American hardcover books of collections of poems. I remember reading when I was 13 or so, T.S. Eliot, not knowing anything about it. I was just reading it - and Anne Bradstreet, Lowell and just stuff that was being published in very boring books usually with black covers and small print. But it was interesting to me even so, but then I remember getting those early Contact Press books and reading books like *Love Where the Nights are Long*, and this was a little bit before I became aware of the *Tish* writers but I was already well into it at that time. I left home when I was 15 and moved into the west end of the city which at that time was mostly just wonderful old houses with eccentrics living in them. So it was a good time - a lot of fun and it didn't cost a whole lot of money. I worked on the log booms for MacMillan & Bloedel on the Fraser River as a boom man and I worked in a few sawmills out on the Fraser and sort of hung out in the early years of Robson Street when not working - when it was a place where young people from all over the world hung out there and it was pet stores and interesting people who were travelling, crazies and haywires and drunks, and then I became aware of Jaimie Reid because his mother - I think Jaimie had grown up in the West End - certainly lived there for along time - and I learned that Jaimie lived not so far from where I lived, and I learned then that John Newlove lived only a few houses away and so did Gerry Gilbert and I think it was Gerry Gilbert, the first poet that I met, and Gerry and I would travel around when we were young - go places together and do things like - we'd lay on our backs on floors and take scarves and throw them on ceilings and watch the scarf calligraphy and (laugh). We had a lot of fun. I liked Gerry a lot and he always carried his camera and tape recorder and he was always on poetry business.

BM: Exactly, and he's still doing that. Newlove at that time might have been published by Contact Press.

KB: He was, yeah. He'd published I think - one book I can remember, *Elephant, Mothers and Others*.

BM: Actually that was a Vancouver publication by Tako Tanabe who ran Periwinkle Press. A great title, *Elephants, Mothers and Others*. and then his Contact book is one of the great books in modern Canadian verse - *Moving in Alone*.

KB: It affected me deeply, that book. When I was living across the street and down the block from John at the time, I didn't know him. He was certainly around a lot. I'd see him around. I would stand back from him. I got to know who he was, what he looked like and so on, but I'd sort of stand back. The book affected me really deeply and I wrote I think a lot like John for a long time. I was concerned about it then because I didn't really want to write like John, but I liked his subject matter and I liked the way he wrote so that's what I did, I think, for a few years.

BM: What you might have picked up is a kind of seriousness from Newlove.

KB: The spareness of the prairies. The sense that there was a great sky over everything that he wrote somehow. The sense also of an older man with a hammer beating on a rusty nail that wouldn't go into the wood. (laugh)

BM: Great clear drama in his work: " do you remember the town you were ruined in" - lines like that. He writes with clarity and strength - a good model for a young poet to follow, with envy, to think that somebody could say that much in some of those short poems.

KB: And usually there was stuff in his writing that would indicate where he was hanging out in the library, so I sort of learned from that a little bit and we, my friend Bob and I - we were the next, the next in line I guess after John in a way. We did what he did.

BM: Ya, there is that sense of somebody ahead of you, who makes an easier way of it in some ways

KB: Oh for me it was so - sure, because I felt that my family and my community had utterly failed me on virtually all levels, and so I didn't have a sense of belonging to anything and through other men who wrote verse I felt that I was part of a family and felt that I was really just in line, and so they became a kind of family.

BM: I guess these people you've been talking about would have constituted the Vancouver poetry scene at the time: Newlove, Gilbert, and ...

KB: For me it was more Jaimie Reid and Milton Acorn and Al Purdy and sort of a scene that was more like Hastings Street poetry. I think I learned more from Purdy and Acorn and watching Milton knowing where he went and what he did. Some of the other names, even now, are fading ... Joe Rosenblatt ...

BM: He came west I think in 67, although those books from Coach House and Contact, were coming out from the east. You mention Layton and Cohen. Their books were available at the time.

KB: Ya it was interesting. I liked the poems of Fred Cogswell, I remember, and of course Louis Dudek. Sometimes I liked - not too much - who was the man who was the banker?

BM: Raymond Souster.

KB: Raymond Souster was someone - I liked his poetry. It had a sense of being Canadian that I liked. Just those images of him raking leaves, and I think those were good times.

BM: Standing at the bus stop, working at the bank - the feeling of botched humanity in those really short poems. There seemed to be so much energy during that period - great work, and as you say you seemed to become a part of the next generation from that.

KB: I felt I had my place. It was like a feast hall, like the Gitsan feast hall. I had my place, each of us had our place and I really felt good and ok in those days. It doesn't feel that way now so much.

BM: Jaimie was kind of a wild guy wasn't he? He got pretty heavily involved in politics.

KB: He was very big in the community that I knew - very much a leader and people were very much aware of him. He was a person who was seen to be someone worth listening to. He was someone who people respected highly because of his principles. He was a principled man when he was young and he had vision of a better world, and I think that age and class of young people that I knew then were ready for that - their ears were open and they were eager to hear of these things.

BM: We should also mention that there was a split of sorts. Hastings Street, downtown guys who were not university people and who at the same time were learning the art and craft of writing poetry.

KB: I was influenced by the downtown non-university poets a lot at first because I lived that life. The city then was - the old part of the city from Granville to False Creek through there and down to Hastings was that part of the city I came to deeply love and even now when I go there I can

still find remnants of that old city that had, what seems to me, to have so much wonderful character to it - great places that - just even street corners that are left now that I still go and stand on and feel those original feelings. I very much was sort of like Acorn and like Purdy in a way. I came from that working class kind of downtown background but then began to move slowly over the space of a few years more towards Stanley Park. I made it across Granville. Granville was the barrier and it always was the barrier, and then I became aware of Earle Birney who lived on the other side and Jaimie, and out of that I began to be more aware of eventually the younger *Tish* writers, - young George Bowering, Atwood when she was first publishing. What was Margaret's first book, the one that had so much influence on so many of us? Do you recall the name of it - a contact press book also.

BM: I just saw that book not too long ago. It has a image of a snake on it. I was thinking of the *Enchanted Adder* but it isn't that book. What was Purdy's first book, the one that he tracked down and destroyed, called *The Enchanted Echo* . He showed it to me once and said in his crazy manner, "this is the worst shit in the world (laughter) this is the last copy and I'm going to get rid of it! " (laughter). That reminds me of your first book. I actually saw a copy of it, in Hoffers most likely - *The Hungry Tide*.

KB: In which there is a poem about Purdy being wet and dirty and riding on a bus and smelling like an old dog in a storm or something.

BM: I don't have a copy of that book. I don't see why you would want to get rid of it, or maybe you didn't.

KB: At the time I did.

BM: It was self-published?

KB: Ya, with drawings by my friend Bob Curr. It was a good time for me so I feel ok about that book now. I think there are some copies somewhere. I don't know. Bill Hoffer had a copy.

BM: It doesn't show up in his catalogues though.

KB: I should track it down and get a photocopy of it sometime.

BM: It's sort of necessary to get that first book out. I've talked to other writers who wish they hadn't started publishing until they were 35, but I think it takes a great sense of energy and risk taking to jump into that pretty exciting world of writing and publishing and then essentially making all of your contacts because of that, even though technically there were some faults.

KB: You mean like how the cover was glued on for example?

BM: (laugh). Not so much that - it's that the early poems might embarrass you later. But then you might also see the energy and innocence of early work. First books are pretty interesting sometimes for their clear sentiments, the experimentation that it takes to learn how to write. Sometimes I'd like to get back to that sense.

KB: Well if we had lifestyles that were simpler we could probably get there. No more wives and children and all of that - approximate it or parallel it somehow. I thought of setting out to do that for a year or two sometime, just to take it kind of easy and let the poems happen again ... quite an influence from *Tish* magazine I think, but at the same time I didn't feel ... they had us interested but I didn't feel compatible.

BM: Not part of their agenda if that's the word for it. They used to say to writers, "gee we think these are great poems, however, they're not the kind we want to publish" - a kind of dogmatism which...is ok in one way. They were working out their own poetics and prosody.

KB: Oh it was fine. I chose not to be included in *Tish*. I think I could have - I don't recall every having sent anything to them. I don't know if I was ever published in it or not. I'm not sure but at the time even I consciously chose to go another way because I didn't seem to feel too compatible with it. It seemed closed even though everyone it seemed to me, publishing in it, were advocating an openness in language in an open kind of poem that in fact seemed to me to be kind of closed - not necessarily in the poems, but something else in addition to the poems seemed to close it off.

BM: Some of the *Tish* work was a kind of incidental projective lyric verse that didn't last - experimental and disposable stuff in a way. Your poems always seemed to me to move toward some maybe " old fashioned " notions of the poem having a meaning, an emotion driving it, a passion working away, the poem as a dramatic event.

KB: What matters to me is my sense of how my writing and how my beliefs and passions and content is fitting with the world that I live in so that its useful to me - it's a way of connecting me to this earth and that has meaning to me, and it has purpose and I have community and I have things that matter to me and even then I learned for myself that while on the one hand I liked and respected a lot of that kind of poetry, I didn't really feel it had anything in it for me and it didn't, couldn't answer the needs that I had. Because of my politics which were on the left and labour-related and somewhat because of that I felt that poems that didn't have - poems that couldn't be not necessarily read to people you lived with, or down the hall from, but a poet should be able to be in the neighbourhood and to be a poet and to have people know that he or she wrote poetry, and that to write in a way that had no or little social meaning - if those people in the neighbourhood were to read that poem they would have some kind of neighbourhood consciousness that even if they didn't like or understand the poem, at least they could sense that this occurred in this culture and in this area- and so it seemed to me that language that was written that didn't have that in it was politically bourgeois even though it was supposed to not be that because it seemed to me that it was insular, that it was irresponsible and took everything further south, and it was akin to moving back to the land with lots of tools and equipment and saying, "well I'm going to survive this world out here on my 5 acre plot of land while the rest of the world goes to hell" and which is an antisocial attitude, and I think that's' whet really bothered me about so many people who were writing that stuff and I still see them as anti social.

BM: David Phillips and I were talking about the *Talon* days and your book *Fireweed*, published in the late 60's. Jim Brown and David Robinson were the editors.

KB: I don't remember how I first ran into Jim Brown or David Robinson. I think they were living on Broadway. David Robinson was living, I think, in a place with no furniture - just a place that was warm and it was dry and it had running water and a bathroom.

BM: He lived at his parents house for quite a period on the UBC campus. He used the garage for collating, publishing, storing books.

KB: I remember going out there to see him at his home. I think I heard of him through writers I knew. At this time I was now hanging around the University of B.C. writers.

BM: How did that come about?

KB: Let me see. I think it was Dorothy Livesay actually who got me up there. I think I sent some manuscripts out to her. I was living downtown on Hastings on the corner of where Eatons was, in

an old abandoned building there with a number of other downtown artists - most of whom were painters, and I sent a manuscript to her, and she answered and I came out to UBC. And through that I heard of David Robinson, Jim Brown and I think then that I sensed immediately that these guys would have to be the ones that I would do some eventual publishing with. I felt that this sort of filled the gap.

BM: They certainly wanted your book, I know that. I was wondering, at one time, if it was Michael Yates (then of the UBC Creative Writing Department) who took it to them. Somehow he seems connected with promoting that book.

KB: I think Mike also saw in me that I was not ever going to be the kind of man who would hang out with the university poets at all, and so it is today. I have really no interest in any of them that I can think of. I think Mike saw that in me that I was wasting my time at UBC - that there was really nothing in it for me

BM: You weren't a student there.

KB: I was there a lot - a year or two. I sat in a lot of lectures. I attended UBC just as a sit-in student for I think 2 years, and just would walk into classrooms and sit down and ... (laugh)

BM: Anyone's class?

KB: Not anyone's, but a lot of classes. I can remember going to math classes. Bob Harlow was good to me. Bob saw in me something I think that he was familiar with from his old Prince George background, and I think influenced Mike Yates to steer me back towards *Talon*. I felt pretty good about Jim Brown and David Robinson and David Phillips and all of us who published in *Talon*. It seemed ok to me. It didn't seem to have the kind of barriers that I felt in most of the other publishing areas that I'd been in, because I'd been drifting from one group to another for several years.

BM: That's what you end up doing. When I was in Montreal I couldn't make very many contacts, but it was little *Talon* magazine that, in one sense, probably saved a lot of writers writing lives. Brown and Robinson were paying attention, publishing and promoting the work and essentially creating a community - they created a situation where I knew your work before I met you, and I knew David Phillip's work and it was just a matter of time before I said, "I'm going to go out and visit those boys" whereas the older writers, guys ten years ahead of us I found a bit more

intimidating. I would never have gone to meet John Newlove. These people had reputations - for me a little intimidating to approach them, so it was the guys our age that ended up hanging out a bit because of *Talon* magazine and *Talon* books.

KB: Ya. I'll never know but I've often wondered if John and George Bowering and Margaret Atwood and others who were a few years older than us - if they didn't - I wondered if they didn't in fact enjoy a more helpful and more constructive environment than we did, in a literary sense - so they were more easily eased into being poets than we were. We I think - at least I met with what seemed to me to be the beginnings of a deterioration. I'm not so sure that a lot of the people I met were all that helpful, eventually. There were people who .

BM: Might want to stop you! (laugh)

KB: Ya

BM: Let's face it. The scene was competitive and it's even worse now. Someone with your experience in writing does not have somebody who says " I'm your publisher - I will look at anything you do and negotiate for publication." Maybe what you're saying is that the generation ahead of us hooked into the major publishers from Contact on up to McClelland and Stewart and were nurtured, supported, and promoted.

KB: I felt that.

BM: We had Talon but then the press went a different direction and lost its stable of writers, writers like Phillips, yourself. They kept Bill Bissett. I think all of this created a kind of self-publishing route. I think some of it is just a result of the economics of publishing. *Talon*, in order to survive at the level they were publishing at had to start publishing drama, cookbooks - and poetry as you know doesn't sell unless it's promoted

KB I think it could sell if it was promoted, but it isn't promoted.

BM: In the case of Bissett ...

KB: He had promotion.

BM: And also a wild man reputation - you know, painter, poet, a Blakean outsider who was controversial and often mentioned at the various levels of parliament.

KB: Well I certainly didn't follow up on it. I think I was not able to for a host of reasons I just didn't follow up on it. I couldn't. I just simply could not. I could not do it . On one level I felt that I needed to be older and to know more about how things worked on the western slope, in the mountains of this province. I wanted to know more about it - how it worked. What the people were like and what the economy amounted to, and I felt that to really write the kind of writing that I wanted to write could not be done unless I knew more about how things worked and I thought it was arrogant to form political opinion that was polarised without that kind of knowledge, without that kind of experience. I didn't feel good about it so I chose to not do it - I chose not to go that way and I think also on another level I had - I was unconscious about my own grief, my own cultural grief and my family grief, and there was a lot of healing to do. I had some pretty tough issues when I was a child that I had to resolve and to learn about, to do something about before I could really be the kind of writer I wanted to be. I think a lot of the writers I knew then, a lot of the young poets weren't so troubled as I was. There were troubles, yes, but I know that I certainly was troubled and I know that I was unconscious psychologically at the time and that while the writing was really all that had meaning to me - it was everything - and became everything. At the same time I knew that I could not continue it .

BM: For what reason?

KB: Because I thought that it was politically arrogant to formulate opinion without experience, because I felt hindered by what I saw as urban barriers to the content and to the style of the writing that were imposed on the writing that really seemed to me that there was on, an unspoken level, they were saying that others who were not of the same milieu were of a lesser level than they were. I felt there was a political class consciousness there that I didn't feel good about which I know is contrary to opinion (laugh)- but there was something there that really bothered me.

BM: What's always in your poetry is a sense of it ringing true. " alice's sweater looks like a dog" (laugh) and from there going into making a kind of drama out of the incidental with direct lines like, "hannah arose moody today."

KB: That was all I could get out of those years. They were tough tough years - probably about 10 or 15 years there in Smithers, and Hazelton. I spent a lot of those years...actually I would go into town. After I got my chores done in the morning, I would go into town by noon and meet up with the old natives - some of the old white men and mountain men, and the farmers - and sit around

with them for 3 and 4 hours and learn from them, and go stay with them sometimes and travel with them. I spent several years doing that, learning from men that were something like an average age of 70, some of them as old as 80 - so just being with them a lot.

BM: And also picking up the skills, and knowing how to do a lot of things that farmers would have to do

KB: Ya there was, what it was in fact, was a form of building that I think eventually related to the writing - but it was a form of building that utilised, or used the free-hand tools as opposed to the rigid square tools of the colonial builders. It was the draw knife, the spoke shave, the axe - all of the tools that were sculptural, and you worked in the 3rd dimension with them, and the round - as working with the whole from all sides. Conceptually that formed my sense of how to make things. It was from all sides. It wasn't just flat, and then from that you learn from the use of those tools - how to never ask more of the tool than what it can easily slice - that the chip that it makes is - if our work is jumping up and down and we have to tie it down while we're working on it then something is really wrong here because it should be easy and the tool should be sliding and there should be kind of a nice hissing noise as the tool slices through the stock and ...

BM: No power.

KB: Well yeah, that's one of the immediate things that brings forth then is no power, which means production work, which means making the same thing over and over, but it is known in good carpentry that a skilled workman with sharp tools that knows his work and knows his tools is competitive and always has been competitive and always will be competitive - that if you're making something only once, the hand tool is faster than the power tool.

BM: Although you'd think the opposite, if you didn't think about it. It takes a long time to plug something in. (laugh)

KB: To set it up. - the set up and making test cuts all the time. (laughter)

BM: And having the thing go out of control while you're cutting.

KB: Sure. You've got to use 3 times the stock just to make one piece.

BM: And hurting yourself in the process.

KB: Watch out for your fingers! It's a different kind of work and it's a kind of work that very few people understand.

BM: This comes back to the whole idea of poetry - the act of making and in our time I don't know if people creatively make much for themselves. I think we miss the pleasure of that whether it be writing a poem or ...

KB: Growing a tomato in tin can.

BM There was the occasion of the *Storm Warning Anthology* edited by Al Purdy which brought a lot of younger poets together in 1971. Your books would have been at that time, *Fireweed* and *The Post Electric Caveman*.

KB: Ya, that was 71. *Fireweed* was 67.

BM: And then for the group of writers we knew at least in the west, Purdy more or less somehow saw our work and put us in the *Storm Warning Anthology*. Not too long after that Margaret Atwood showed some interest in publishing a book of your work with Oxford, - but it seemed to me that you had already decided, if not to be as public, not concerned with publication at all. Did that have something to do with being in the north?

KB: Even in my teens I was already then leaving the city for periods of time and they gradually became longer and longer and longer until finally I didn't return really for some time, so I think that's sort of where it went and where it is - just longer steps or longer pacing between the times. The moving away from the city was already well in place by that time and there was a choice to not write or publish so much for a few years - a conscious choice, for a period of about 10 years I think. I didn't feel I had any problem with writing versus not writing or anything like that. I just chose not to, mostly because I didn't feel comfortable with a lot of the writing that was being written, I suppose, and I felt conflicted in that in my mind some of the people that I liked to have in mind when I wrote something, were not the same people that some of my colleagues might have in mind and I think that double bind eventually evolved into consciously knowing that I really didn't care very much what some of my rural colleagues might think of my writing. I saw that writing was, in Canada, was geographical as much as anything else and that if you didn't live

in the city, you simply didn't publish. You're too far away to go to readings or to be invited to go to readings or to give a reading, and that figured a great deal in publishing and writing.

BM: Your recent writing is still much concerned with the things I see in your earlier writing. If you go back to *Fireweed*, at least in my mind, there are the references to - not poetry about being in the woods, - that would be too simple, it's not nature poetry but it's poetry that gets its energy and resonance from being engaged in the woods and the mountains and the ecological concerns if we can call them that. Now, maybe with the latest work, *Holding Land*, those concerns are more articulate for you.

KB: A real breakthrough for me. I felt good about it. I think it was ok at the time. I felt good about it because I was finally saying things that I just wanted to say that I was withholding, and it fully represented a real break through for me on a personal level - finally being myself, being very clear about what I was having to say and what I wanted to say and how I wanted to say it.

BM: Then extending from that book is the last group of poems that you wrote for the Caitlin anthology *Four Realities* edited by Don Precosky - which from your experience here in Blackwater, deals with in a very current way what's happening to this landscape. There's a lot of traffic coming through here. Those poems are expressing the fear that you're involved in a great change. The values and the anger, expressed in some of the poems go beyond the lyric and the pastoral. The work embraces activity on various levels; for instance, the bureaucracies' relationship to land. That's not easy to write about without getting angry.

KB: It was very difficult for me to write about. A lot of it, as a matter of fact, was difficult to write about and I think part of it is that, that I want to write about those things that make me most - that I'm most uncomfortable about - subjects that are most frightening or that I'm most confused about and that I need in the poem to find some way out of a double bind - some way out that allows me to leave it behind and maybe to put an issue to rest. Resource development, whatever the hell that is and the anger that our culture seems to feel about the land as just a place to vacuum energy from for new homes and new money. - it's something that most poets don't really write about . I wonder why they don't.

BM: They maybe don't see it. The further you are away from places like this the harder it is to see those forces. I was surprised 3 days ago to see those planes arrive un announced.

KB: A helicopter and a 206.

BM: That gave me a clearer idea about your last group of poems - how a place like Blackwater might look isolated when you look at it on a map, but when you actually come up and see, that without any notice, bureaucrats on every level drop in to either make a demand, or make a query. They want something. People in the city might think about land claims but here we actually see the process - the urgency of it, these people looking at maps and territories. What you are seeing and expressing is a big change. You seem right in the middle of it.

KB: Ya. Right in the middle. Smack dab in the middle. We think of it not as a - it's not really land claims, it's a first nations treaty and unfortunately there are about, it looks like about 7 different machines at work that seem to have an idea of what this treaty will amount to. There's the federal government, there's the native government, there is the provincial government, there's the enforcement people then there are the resource people, and there are people like myself that work in renewable or what we call non-consumptive resource. But I'm not just sure how that ties into the writing right now except that I know that very few writers want to write about it or write from it or write with it, to have it at hand when they write. It seems that most thinking that I read in verse that has to do with the land sees it as, I think, as a European might see it - as a place that they never go to, that they know very little about but assume that it is idyllic somehow. It's a strange kind of polarised view of this earth that I think that the European mind has that the city is the place of light and noise and evil and that the land is the place of solitude and hope - and I think I have a real problem with that opinion or that feeling and so I don't feel comfortable about that and I don't feel comfortable about a lot of language that I read that assumes that that is how it is. It might be that some of that is changing. I think it is and I think it will in time change - in our lifetime I think it will change, and I think that with it so will our understanding of writers that had something to do with it. I think the writer won't any longer be an underpaid sort of victim of our culture. That bothers me too - that the writer has always been someone who has to wade through so much despair and pain in order to be an artist. I think that's a very awful way of treating our artists.

BM: I think poetry is, if it has any function, first of all puts the writer in touch and then perhaps put other people in touch with whatever the poem discloses.

KB: I think so. I think it has always been a kind of prophecy for me to write something . It has always birthed me into a better world somehow. Each piece of writing, especially in the last few years, the writing that I've been able to do is - I'm thinking of the word reverberations and some of the celestial harmonies that seem to, in my mind, reaffirm themselves when I write as much as perhaps a bird might hear some earthly rhythm migrating from one continent to another, or a great salmon in their hundreds of miles offshore coming to the streams. They must surely have some kind of a grid or something that they're reckoning from.

BM: I think your poetry also deals with the loss of that sensibility.

KB: Ya, it talks about loss in the big picture and part of that probably is the loss of the integrity of the land and what concerns me about that is the arrogance and the anger of so many of our citizens who use it up and throw it away, and I think that disturbs me a little bit. It's not something that I lose a whole lot of sleep about but I assume this is so - assume it's there in the writing. I'm not upset about it - it's a given to me - it's a given that I know that the bulldozers are coming, the helicopters are just over the hill, the police are looking for the desperado, and I can remember a case of something like ten years ago being alone out here in the mountains and suddenly in the distance I heard a chain saw - a strange sound. Obviously a mining company had dropped a couple of geologists off in the mountains. I don't even know if I like the concept of a wilderness too much, and I think I would rather see people living and working in the landscape than just to have large zones that no one is allowed to enter and that we somehow think we should protect. I would rather see something that we can work with and live in and be involved in, and have our hands on it in one way or another. I think my poems are somehow - they're part of the old growth in a way. In my mind when I'm writing they have a sense of being kind of a component of the living breathing community. There is something of that order that informs my sense of language and speaking - and words, usage of words that I have in mind when I am writing - that is somehow organic and some are lying on the floor of the forest. But it seems that it's ok to have a river running through a poem somehow (laugh). Jack Gilbert said something about it's ok or it should have some very strong other current or energy of some kind going right through the poem despite our driven intention. I like to read poems that allow that to occur. I think it was in one of Jack Gilbert's poems where he is going along and talking and says "you must change your life" and then goes back into the rest of the poem. He seems to bring something like that in, an opportunity to allow something else to come into the language, and so I don't feel very good about writing these controlled - whether it is language poetry or narrative or whatever the hell it is - it feels as though the writer is not letting something else come in, then I think this is too much an apparatus, too much a seamless construction and I like to write poems that maybe some of the pilots I know would read or could read or feel ok about and some of the back country people that I know could read and at least in part feel ok about.

BM: The last line in Robert Creeley's book *Hello* is interesting. After you've been writing for a long time, you've gone through the stages of exploration and technique, and then you get Creeley at the age of 50 at the end of his book saying, "here comes the sun, lets do it lets do it, lets have some fun." (laugh). Poetry can take in a huge range, from, as you say the political voice to ... where else could you write about love but in a poem.

KB: Especially today when we're beginning to understand maybe finally a little bit more about what love really is. Finally it seems that our culture is beginning to know. Don't you think it's finally beginning to learn something about, really, how to love and whom to love and if its exists at all.

BM: A good question. Does it exist at all?

KB: Well, I'm not so sure that our culture has known love or that any culture on this earth, for that matter, has really known love. I think it, in my mind, we have not known what love can be or is and that virtually most all of our marriages are to the very worst person that we could choose to live with (laugh) - our polar opposites, our poisonous polar opposites.

BM: Energy which might lead to love or hate.

KB: What we call love is actually a form of hate, I think (laugh) - it seems to me. But I think we are learning in this world and I think we are learning it here in B.C. in the mountains and on the B.C. coast I think we are. This is one of those places where we really are learning something about love in a way that the rest of this world isn't. Something special is happening here; it's one of those places where these new ways of living and thinking about love itself is ...

BM: Happening quickly.

KB: I think so. We'll have the men and women living together as they always have, but somehow now we are going to know, commonly we will know, men and women will know what to look for and what to be aware of and we'll know something about the nature of addictions

BM: That's hopeful Ken.

KB: I think it's going to happen. Too hopeful do you think? I think not. What else finally. The new poems will really be working with understanding that. That kind of worldly understanding will be more common in the children in times to come. We will know more not just about love, but we'll become more psychologically in tune once we examine the family and hopefully re build the family.

BM: The family is certainly under the microscope now.

KB: Good, I would think. I don't have much respect for the Western family that I can think of - not a whole lot of opportunities left are there when we have the addictive obsessive messed up

families that we have, poisonous families. And then we have the alternative to that - each of us living alone, each of us having our own apartment which is pretty environmentally and substantially a great drain on this earth - each of us having our own living quarters.

BM: No hope in that. (laugh)

KB: So I think we're going to learn something. I think the young will learn in the next few generations. Poetry is a way of making my life substantial somehow or making - it's not a way, it has been the way to do that. It has been the single greatest connection to real family that I have known. It has opened up the world to me made me aware of great people and provided me with a sense of connectedness that nothing else ever has. It was the first thing that did it and it still is there, and so I think I like to write poems for that reason, and I like to read them. We've been reading Stonehouse lately, getting a few laughs out of it - "the king of nothing," he says. All of these things could not be said were it not for poetry. What world this would be, what kind of a world would this be if it wasn't for it, or without it? None of that would be happening, none of that would be said.

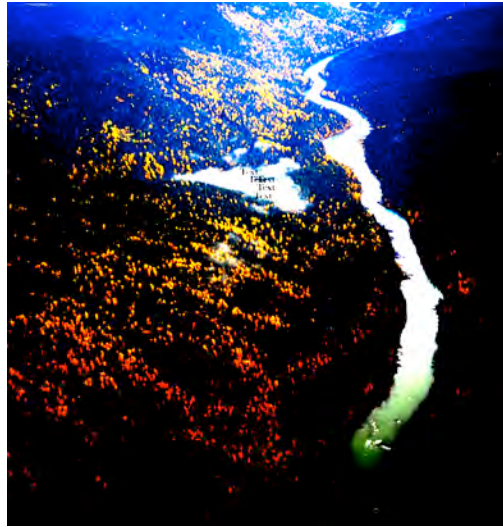
... The clouds are really coming down tonight aren't they? I can see the spruce trees on the horizon ...



Wrestling the Alligator: A Trip to the Headwaters of the Naas

by

Barry McKinnon



Wrestling the Alligator:

A Trip to the Headwaters of the Naas.

I'm not a big fan of travelling by Greyhound even though bus travel has improved since my regular bus sojourns in the 1960's. In those days there was always one smoking and drinking rowdy who kept everyone wide awake with loud questions about how long until the next rest stop, or why the girl across the aisle wouldn't marry him.

The bus I took in September from Prince George to Smithers*, to visit my old friends Ken and Alice Belford at their wilderness fishing camp in northern British Columbia, was a much different experience. This bus was "comfort controlled," complete with a full-length movie that took my eyes from the autumn reds and yellows swishing by. I'd rather watch the leaves and the quiet reflection they inspire, but the *Uncle Buck* movie kept sneaking into my periphery. I started to feel a little bus sick with all the conflicting motion of the Hound whizzing along Highway 16 West, and the mini TV screens placed overhead every six feet. I wished that the driver would turn the screens off so I could read a book, or think about Blackwater Lake and the experience ahead of me.

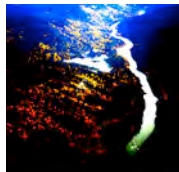
After the supper stop at the Taste Freeze in Burns lake, I didn't feel much better. My Tasteburger looked just like the one in the menu picture (usually a bad sign) and the french fries had an anemic watery consistency that begged the question: are these real potatoes or some kind of junk food concoction invented for astronauts? I couldn't wait for Alice's real down to earth camp kitchen cooking.

My last touch with the modern world was a little run down room for \$37.00 at the Twin Valley Motel next to the bus depot in Smithers. I turned on the TV set and chose one of the fifteen channels hoping to miss the one that might be playing *Uncle Buck*. I got Larry King interviewing Latoya Jackson about her life with brother Michael. "Would you like to give the name again of your exercise video?" Larry asks. "Y'ess Larry, I'm really very very excited by my new exercise video that you can get for \$29.95 right now if you call the toll-free number on the screen," she says in a sexy, throaty whisper. A good promotional trade off: gossip about Michael, just what the world *really* wants to hear, for Latoya's increased sales of a moonouncing weight-loss video.

Soon I'd be chopping wood. But for now, bus-weary, I fall asleep on the saggy motel bed, and dream about Latoya and I making a weight-loss video up at Blackwater Lake - all sweated up and clutching our crotches in a tribal moondance around an axe hopelessly stuck in a pine knot.

Morning, September 18: Everything in Smithers is brilliant, a town glazed by sunrise and autumn frost. I wait in the parking lot for Hannah, Ken and Alice's eighteen-year-old daughter and expediter, who will drive us to the lake and the waiting Cessna 185. Hannah pulls up in an old faded green van and introduces me to Jim and Norm, two serious steelheaders from Denver - nice sixtyish guys colour coordinated from socks to hats like two male models in an L.L. Bean catalogue, and geared-up to climb the north face of K 2 or Anas Purna. By contrast, I'm in my fifteen-year-old hiking boots, well-worn jeans, a Pioneer grease-stained jacket, a ratty ball cap my kid lent me, a mummy bag good for plus 5 C., and a packsack full of beer - a college teacher who gets outdoors only every ten years or so - the guy who always looks a bit altitude sick at base camp.

Jim says, "Hannahs bin tellin us a feew good stories about you n' Ken."
"I was hoping no one would find out! You boys from the South?" I ask - a question that could include any place from 100 Mile House, to the tip of South America and beyond. But I figured small talk about origins and nationality is a good place to start when you meet



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strangers. "You sound Texan," I say to Jim.

"Well hell yaas, I wauuz pretty much born & raised there, but weee've bin in Denver ever since but Norm here's originallly from Neew Yeork."

"Hell", I say, "I love Manhattan, but the fishings fousy". A little warm-up laughter as we drive to the lake.

I get scared shitless on small bush planes. Ken's stories about pilots and their fate aren't far-fetched tales told around campfires or a beer table, and not at all funny. These brave men who fly become friends to the guides they serve, and that makes their deaths all the harder to take. My friend Bill, an experienced northern outdoorsman, gave me a simple warning before I left Prince George: "if the pontoons are below water, she's overloaded. *Don't get on the goddamn plane!*"

But I began to feel confident with Joe, our pilot. Joe tells us it's an old plane, but well maintained. He's in his fifties and assures us he wants to live a little longer. He ain't the young daredevil type who's going to take any chances. I glance at the pontoons, a good few inches above water, and believe him, and then thank Bacchus and Al Purdy (or whoever the god of beer is) that my forty pounds of Black Label doesn't have to be jettisoned as non-essential weight.

Now I'm happy as we plow against the gravity of lake and air. Then Swoosh, we're airborne, suspended in the clear blue mountain sky, headed N.W. for the next hour and fifteen minutes to Blackwater Lake. Jim adjusts the ear phones and speaker volume and begins to chatter to the pilot as the Bulkley valley disappears behind us. It turns out he's a pilot too. "Joe You know I crashed wunnove these baabies once!" he says. Why do pilots talk about flying and crashing when they're flying? I think about my wife and kids and my untimely but spectacular romantic ending. *Headline: College teacher dies in small plane on way to fishing camp ... American passengers found alive...survived on beer... ate college instructor...etc.*

But Joe safely and skillfully manuevers the plane through the pockets of mountain turbulence and glides us smoothly down to the lake right on schedule. Ken is on the dock to greet us, looking like a mountain guide should. Big. Six feet, two-hundred pounds, bear-like, dressed more like me than L.L. Bean. He's a man who exudes a solid confidence about his outdoor knowledge and abilities. He's been out in all kinds of weather. Ken and I embrace in a bear hug. We've been friends for twenty-five years bound in a long conversation about poetry, sex, chainsaw repair, fly cast technique, ecology, the fate of 20th century man, health, exercise and vitamin dosages, the complexities and follies of human behaviour, and just about anything under the sun. Compulsive talkers. And what stories! I've snorted beer out my nose laughing about the characters he's known like old trapper Ron and his famous no-vegetable stew - the whole damn moose boiling away for months - a stinking pot full of breakfast, lunch, and supper, complete with tufts of hair, guts, lips and eyes. It's a good story around the supper table while we dig into our third and fourth helpings of Alice's great grub.

Alice, unlike Ron the trapper, *is* a great cook, but she isn't always trapped in the kitchen. The mix of duties in camp aren't carried out in terms of the old male/ female role structures. Over the week Ken and I sweep, do dishes, laundry - a range of camp chores, while Alice fires up the generators, chops wood, or canoes down to the river to guide the fishermen. Ken and Alice share an equality you don't often find. These two wilderness caretakers in their long thirty year partnership, are intelligent and sensitive to the world around them. And they've made a happy place in a crazy world that can reduce most people to idiocy. At Blackwater you can't click through forty TV channels, or mindlessly drool on yourself while

peddling a stationary bike, or flabbily bound around out of breath to Latoya's moondance video. At Blackwater it's a life of natural health and balance that tunes into the pleasures, rhythms, and lessons of mother nature.

Catching fish is one of the ancient pleasures, and why most people come to Blackwater. Norm and Jim, however, serious members of the steelheader brotherhood, got skunked in the next six days of dawn till dusk fishing. They caught salmon, dolly's, and trout, *but only one steelhead* - so they looked a bit sad-assed around camp, failures of sorts in this obsessive brotherhood. I'm not as serious about fishing, but like the rest of the camp, hoped for a good heavy rain so the river would rise enough so the steelhead could swim the holes and migration channels to their breeding grounds and journey's end.

"Ken, thar aint no daamn steelhead in thaat daamn river," exclaim the Yankee clients who've paid a good few thousand bucks to come here. It's a statement that gets us into much talk around the kitchen table about wilderness ecology, weather, and "fishermans' luck". Questions about dwindling fish stocks in the northern river systems are thick in the air without clear answers. One thing is clear: there aren't as many of the big steelhead anymore which might partly explain the number of interest groups, biologists and bureaucrats who are descending almost daily on camps like Blackwater. They are Hi Tech and serious. Some kind of big trouble going on - the depleting fish as measure of serious change and much of the change, seemingly, man made.

One morning the lake resembled a wilderness version of O Hare airport. The normal silence of the lake, occasionally pierced by a loon's cry, or a fish flop, or a flock of mergansers dancing the waves, was displaced by a helicopter and a Beaver loaded with a menagerie of outsiders hired to study, map, and measure. Alice wisely disappeared while Ken answered questions about aboriginal trails in the territory, the number of fish in the river, and, "what the hell do you think we can do about all this Ken?" Ken, like everyone else, has his theories; he and Alice have read, studied on their hands and knees first-hand, and written clear intelligent lobbies with the thesis: *protect and take care of these dwindling places and the wildlife that inhabits them*. One agent at the table that morning, a spokesman for the intense but quiet young native leader with him, felt that a special university to train native people in the skills they've lost might provide one "solution" for these lost tribes. He thought Ken, for instance, an experienced white outdoors man, could become an important part of this process and help to teach these old age survival skills. The young native, maybe sensing the overall irony, stayed mysteriously quiet, smoked half a pack of Players and let the hired pro do the talking. The biologist with a three hundred page report full of graphs, tables, line charts, and statistical numbers with more decimal points than the fish in the last salmon run, asked us the questions that you'd hope his ongoing study might someday answer: *where* are the salmon and steelhead, *how* many are there and *what* natural or unnatural conditions have affected their complex cycle?

Too much coffee, too much talk, too much abstraction and a too-intense barrage of details I can't or don't have the energy to understand. This high-level confab reminded me of the junior college - an institutional world of stress and tension I'm trying to escape for a few days. I take a walk up the path behind the cabin to my wall tent, sweep the floor, and as a distraction from the morning's activity, invent more ways to keep two summer nylon bags stuck on top of each other so that I don't freeze another night. I think about Velcro, safety pins, bed straps, or keeping a steadier night vigil on the stove fire, until an answer finally hits me: put one bag *inside* the other, dumbbo! Maybe some of the ecological solutions will come to us this way if we're fast enough, smart enough, and cold enough.

When the pros and experts leave, the camp returns to a normal routine: breakfast at 8:30, and table talk - the wish for better luck on the river over last cups of hot coffee. By 10:00, James, Ken's young talented guide, loads the canoe and paddles the length of the lake to the

river. It's quiet except for the static chatter over the radio phone: *how are you? over, squawk. real goood! squawk.* Ken and Alice and I wash and dry dishes and talk until we exhaust ourselves with conversation; it's quiet again. Time to go chop some wood, or canoe over to the creek to catch fish for supper, or watch a local grizzly amble along the west shore, or count eagles and otters, or listen to a far off moose in rut - these wonderful aspects of Blackwater - this multitude of species living in an ecological soup that inspires a sense of contemplation and questions about one's own place in it. You don't really come here to just fish. It's more about ritual and activity that, like poetry, can give a sense of the mysterious whole if you're open to it. It's an experience that humbles you. I'm thankful for a chance to be within this bounty of natural elements.

Ken and I like to log for firewood, another way to experience the elements, the woods and weather, and sweat a little. The forest is dark, full of fresh smells; the air has a texture; the ancient trees groan in the upper breeze. We pick out the right tree, and Ken makes the cut. "Do you know what a widow-maker is?" Ken calmly asks, then tells me about a couple of his friends who have been killed logging like this, and then goes on to explain the physics of our tree hopelessly hung up against another spruce.

These are some great outdoor tools: chainsaw, peavey, and come-a-long winch. What's that old line? Give me a lever and I'll move the world. I'm about as scared of falling a big tree as I am flying when pilots tell their crash stories, but Ken is careful, methodical and he knows how to winch and shift these hangup tons. I trust him. Concerned for my safety, he tells me to take cover behind another tree ten yards away. A half hour later and the monster crashes to the ground *Wwwwhtuumpphhhh*. We cut and stack our load into the twelve-foot aluminum boat until she sinks to the gunnels, perch masthead dog Heidi on top of the bolts, start the trusty Honda 12, and head back to the dock.

Having to haul fifty pound chunks of wood up a greasy path to a woodshed might have inspired an engineer at Honda to design a motorized cart with rubber tank treads - a machine that will go anywhere and travel over any THING, including the driver if not careful. After my experience with Ken's cart, I named it "the alligator" - a good description of the way it moved and also of its temperament.

Ken gave me the job of hauling our cord up the trail in this innocent looking all-terrain, an experience that got me thinking about two good safety rules for desk-bound college teachers too old to moondance: never give them a chainsaw, and never let them wrestle with alligators. The Honda cart is a marvel, no doubt, that some have tamed and mastered with correct technique: hold the left brake lever down and the right tread turns on itself so you turn left - or is it right? No time, however, to figure out these mechanics as I chug near the cliff-edge of the path, (sweating more from fear than exertion), frantically pulling every lever in sight until I find the right combination that will tame and re-direct this slow toppling ton. But now the alligator is on the edge, wobbling like a tight rope walker with baskets on his feet. I pull right and it goes left! I pull left and it goes right! I'd let out a sport fanatic's *YEEEEES!* and pull a clenched arm down in triumphant exclamation, but my own fear and diffidence won't let me. I know if I let go for a second I might end up as a graphic example in a first aid text, or an obituary about a sudden passing: college teacher runs over self ... crushed by load of wood ... eaten by cart ... etc.

Instead, I give a quick pheeew of relief, keep both hands on the controls, and I get back on the path - sweating now from fear *and* physical exertion, but with only one big hump in the path ahead of me. The grinding rubber treads eat their way to the crest and begin to climb, pointing up almost 90 degrees until the weight of the load topples the cart back and jams the levers into the dirt. I find REVERSE, pull GAS and start to move hopelessly backward to the cliff I just escaped. Going forward is difficult, but *now* I must figure out the lever action in reverse order. My foot's over the cliff. *Holeeeee Jeeeesus!* I grab the FORWARD

gear just in time and seesaw back up the trail to the crest I just backed away from, and get hung up again in *exactly* the same way. I think it was then that I heard the alligator whisper something in Japanese: "give up Charley boy ... turn this sucker off before you kill yourself." I leave the cart stalled, pointed skyward, and happily head for my stash of Black Label, sensing defeat and disgrace - the whole camp laughing while I tremble and gulp a can of beer.

Soon the magical days at Blackwater have come and gone. It's our last day, clouds drifting thick above the lake. Jim, Norm and myself begin packing up, our chatter mixed with the radio phone in the backdrop: *What's the ceiling? Will we get out today? Jeez, I slept warm like a baby last night. Gotta be in Frisco for a meeting. Hello, Burns Lake, come in. Pilots on his way - a little clearer over here. Ok. will the taxi be there? squawk. over and out.*

Airborne: Blackwater Lake begins to disappear. Ken, Alice, and James - dots on the dock, wave farewell. The wings wave back. Minutes after the climb, the engine drone becomes steady and familiar. The old Cessna scoots S.E. along forest valleys, around mountains and glaciers and through the northern air. Rectangular blockcuts, clearcuts and denuded lakeshores forty-five minutes south signal the raw and brutal commerce of the outer world. The pilot wonders out loud: "I don't understand why the forest companies couldn't leave ten feet of trees between the cut and the lakeshore." Is the simple answer in profit and loss economics versus the aesthetics of a mountain lake? I wonder too: how long before the logging and mining spreads up the valleys to the places we just hiked and fished? For some, territories like Blackwater may be no more than a resource on a map, or a pristine reserve for silly outdoor indulgences - a place that exists only for its potential as "resource development". Does that make those who want to protect and sensitively manage the animals, rivers and forests out of touch specious dreamers, negative thinkers out to wreck the economy? I think about Alcan's Kemano Completion Project, and how it represents the corporate ethos that supports progress and profit at any social and ecological cost. I think about the euphemism "completion" and its other meanings: *finished, the end, over*. If the project isn't stopped, according to the brave and outspoken biologists who haven't been muzzled, and the other hard fighting lay people and experts alike who form the coalition to save the river, the proposed massive flow reductions and altered water temperatures will destroy one of the world's most important salmon runs, and adversely affect *all* aspects of life along the river. I hate to believe that the Nechako River I walk along daily is at stake for beer cans, (and God knows, I've snapped my share), electrical power, and more drained off profit. These activities in the name of progress, are part of the continuing sad story and legacy of the North and its diminishing resources. But the urgent question doesn't change: can these giant corporate powers, their shareholders, the government, and the diverse interest groups - natives, foresters, miners, farmers, ranchers, commercial and sport fishers, guides, and outfitters - also with much at stake, negotiate and compromise within these extremes of attitude, approach, and investment? The alligator is large and complex. My thoughts are in a seesaw as the plane descends.

The pontoons hit and soon I'm on the Greyhound for home. I've left Blackwater with a sense of renewal, but also worry about *our* fate as a species. Where are we going? Are we already there?

My hope is that the Blackwater territory will *always* be a place *and* a measure, untouched - that little cabin on a lake with my friends Ken and Alice or the next generation of Ken and Alices, guiding in the largest sense by loving and caring for the place they inhabit, and by resisting the forces and processes that could change or destroy it.

Tonight, the movie screens on the bus are blank overhead. I should be tired and sleeping, but I'm wide awake. The Hound heads east in the dark.

* Prince George is in the centre of B.C. Smithers is 371 km to the N.W. The Belford camp, accessed only by float plane or helicopter, is an hour and one half N.W. of Smithers toward the headwaters of the Nass River

Post Script

This piece was written for a guide magazine Ken Belford was editing. I hardly ever write journalism and had never written a travel piece, but took on the task at Ken's request to see if I could write the specifics of my experience in Ken and Alice's camp, and to say something about environmental issues that affect the north and the province of British Columbia as a whole. I wanted to ask a few questions clichéd or not, that swim around in most northerners' heads. Ken gave up the editing job that year and the essay was never published in that magazine. It was subsequently published by Dr. Lynne Van Laven in her anthology *Going Places*.

I've felt more successful as a poet when writing about the social world. Poetry cannot prove anything, but it can peel away at the thin veils that often keep us from seeing or caring about the reality about us. In 1969 when I got to Prince George, the veil was thick with a common ethos: progress and prosperity. The nauseous and toxic pulp stink was locally described as "the smell of gold". End of discourse and analysis. Recently one of the wealthy old-time mill owners who wanted to build a fibre board plant within the city limits, bragged at a council meeting that PCB emissions wouldn't be a danger to the air quality or the population: he'd lived here all his life and lookit him - 70 years old and healthy as a moose - living medical proof! The scant studies, however, relating overall health to the polluted air in Prince George, prove him wrong.

What has changed is a more informed public willing to confront social and environmental issues if their livelihoods, families, or lands are threatened. This process takes place within a complex spectrum: loggers and logging companies want to survive and will fight the tree-huggers and/or government stumpage policies that threaten the industry. Residents along the Nechako river who might ordinarily support industrial progress, flocked to the Kemano Completion Project* public hearings held in 1995, and made a convincing case to stop it; likewise, high-level lawyers, biologists, company officials and managers countered these folks with a boatload of technical data and euphemistic assurances to argue that progress, in both the short and long run, is for the betterment of all.

But the Kemano Completion Project, according to its critics, was mostly a grab for profitable electrical power. They rightly claimed that the project would create very few jobs; fish would disappear; water levels would rise and fall based primarily on the needs of the company and not the fish or the communities flooded or dried-out down below. The Cheslatta Indians who were flooded-out and evacuated with only hours of notice in 1952, have a deep and bitter understanding of the company that displaced them, and their story acts as a dark measure of unbelievable corporate ruthlessness.

Mike Harcourt's NDP government was legally hog-tied by near-sighted contracts signed with Alcan from the 50's and into the 80's. But after all of the evidence was in, the disasterous dimensions of this project became too obvious. The NDP government cancelled the Kemano project in January of 1995 and began negotiating a compensation package to stop the half-finished 1.3 billion dollars project.

The alligator appears pinned for now: Alive. Resting.

* Bev Christensen's book *Too Good to be True* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1995) gives an excellent critical account of Alcan's history in the North West. As the book blurb says: "This book is must reading for those who wish to remain informed on the question of who is to control North America's vital water and power resources in the 21st Century".

What is Belford talking about? Is the mist a mirage?

from Al Purdy's notes for *Storm Warning*, McClelland and Stewart
Toronto/Montreal
1971



Notes

Most of the teachers I've met have either tried to complicate or simplify poetry, depending on their knowledge of it or their pretensions to knowledge. Well, here I don't wish to do either one, complicate or simplify. Basically, I think the explication of poetry removes something from it, tries to touch an intangible, or make solid what is immaterial. Therefore, I prefer to regard the questions etc., in this section as speculation – I know certain answers will be indicated by the phraseology of the questions, and I can't help that. I am required to write a section of notes: and this is it. I hereby weasel out of any responsibility for the answers that teachers or students might come up with. They and I are speculating about intangibles.

Earle Birney once said something to the effect that the poet will genially go along with any interpretation of his poem that seems valid. He can't help doing that anyhow, once the poem is printed and out of his own hands. Besides, poets have an unconscious way of writing that enables more meaning to be implicit in a poem than they consciously placed there. This doesn't mean they're stupid or irrational (tho, perhaps un-rational), only that they are more concerned with expressing the most subconscious vision in their heads than in packing in meanings for other people to explicate.

I am trying here to explain a basic disagreement I have with myself. On the one hand, poems should not be explicated at all. On the other hand, of course they should. Few teachers will sympathize with that first attitude, tho perhaps some students will. In defense of it, no actual teacher in my lifetime ever taught me a damn thing about poetry. I learned myself from reading. But some of the reading was criticism and reviews, and to read poems is like learning to talk: after you learn to talk you don't want anybody else telling you what to say. And I don't want to tell either teacher or student what to say: for I disagree with both principle and result of doing that.

So the reader is warned.

Ken Belford

Erasure

i

It is hard to tell how far away
The mountains really are. They seem closer,
But they must be fifteen miles, maybe more.

And what is between is like an August haze.
Only it is not. It is February and cold.
My eyes travelling to that edge again.

To what is a thickening mist.
Both sheltering and raging
Against what I can half see.

ii

I know how thin the crust is in parts.
I know that mist as fear. Behind it is the avalanche.
My poems are small cries: nothing more.

OMEGA, by Ken Belford, page 28.

Ken Belford has lived as a trapper and hunter in northern B.C., near Hazelton, a land of snow-capped mountains, rushing rivers, the home of the Tsimsyan Indians. One might think a writer living that kind of life would be a simple soul, but Belford is not. What do you think of that business of making his own law, and then breaking it? Is that a fairly common human trait? Why was the ice 'surrealistic'? What is the significance of 'bitter aloe'?

STILL SHOTS ECHO, by Ken Belford, page 29.

How would you describe Belford's mental attitude in these first two poems, as one of bravado, superstition, fear, or calm logic? Why would he wonder if a law had been broken? If so, what kind of law? What other kind of eye is he referring to in the fourth verse?

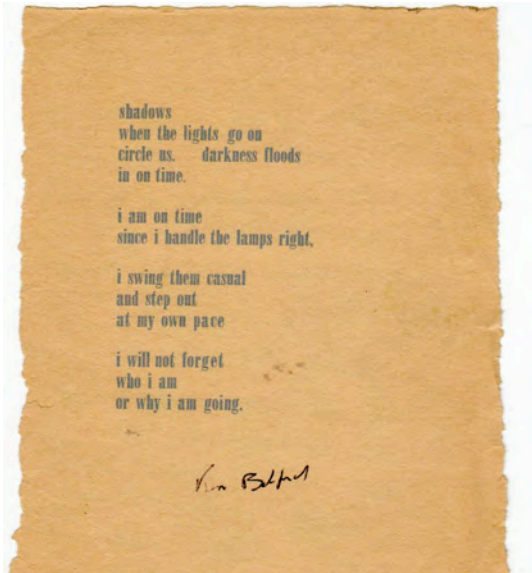
ODD HORSES, by Ken Belford, page 30.

What sort of person would Donna be, since she thinks there's something wrong with a horse if she can't get near it? What sort of friends has Belford, how would you describe them? There are implications here that would stand some discussion.

ERASURE, by Ken Belford, page 31.

What is Belford talking about? Is the mist a mirage? Why should it be both sheltering and raging? In what sense would Belford's poems be 'small cries'?

*from The Caledonia Writing Series:
a note on Ken Belford's poem shadows*



In my years of printing and publishing, I didn't use more than one current account deposit book. As a business, the operation never broke even. Most of the work was given away. Ultimately, I decided to let Bill Hoffer, the infamous West Coast bookseller and self-declared antennae of Canadian literature, settle the question of value and price. He bought copies of everything we printed and skillfully hunted down bits of information and gossip about books and broadsides for his catalogues. He seemed to know everything because of his countless hours of coffee and talk with almost every B.C. and Canadian writer - like turning over a big literary rock. I printed a broadside ("Shadows" by Ken Belford) and got so tired of typesetting that I ran the poem without typesetting Ken's name. I signed each copy "Ken Belford" in my own handwriting. Hoffer must have checked out Ken's signature somewhere in the back room archive, compared it with the signed copies, and rightfully reported in his catalogue that the signature was a fake; he probably upped the price because the hoax had become part of the artifact's value.

shadows

when the lights go on
circle us. darkness floods
in on time.

i am on time
since i handle the lamps right.

i swing them casual
and step out
at my own pace

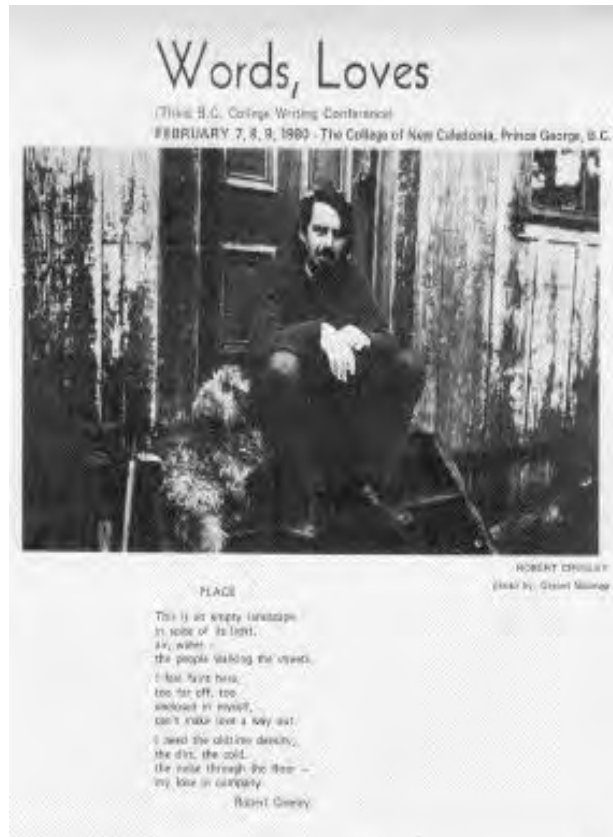
i will not forget
who i am
or why i am going

Words, Loves

Third B.C. College Writing Conference
February 7, 8, 9, 1980
The College of New Caledonia, Prince George B.C.

featuring

Robert Creeley



Robert Creeley arrived in Prince George by a connecting plane from Vancouver about noon on Thursday for the first event that evening. I remember an intense winter sun, clear sharp crisp air (no pulp mill pollution that day) - and my fecund and *intense* anticipation. *This was it!*: Bob Creeley in Prince George - the first day of the conference becoming a reality: students, teachers, and writers began to arrive by plane; some drove the winter highways, others took the train or bus, and my dear friend Ken Belford - one of the featured readers - hitchhiked 250 miles down from Smithers BC with his wife Alice and two friends. The gathering of poets began to take shape or similarly, as Ken once said to me at the Kispiox rodeo, that a rodeo was a good place for all the animals to get together.

I drove Bob to the Yellowhead Hotel on the bypass close to the college where most registrants stayed – yakking like crazy all the way in a kind of conversation, as the many we had that are hard to describe - more a jagged weave of thoughts, anecdote, and story. Creeley’s voice - intense, honest, with its syntactical surprise that always said to me: this man is intelligent, alive, and knows. His language and voice for my ear, projects a complicated experience and vice versa verbal patterns of heart / mind joined in a curious urgency, as if speech offered a solution of sorts. I believe it does. For the next 3 days I got to listen to Bob Creeley talk at length and close-up.

I helped Bob with his suitcase and shoulder bag up to his room. We agreed to hit the bar for a beer but first he meticulously unpacked his clothes and hung them on hangers. This was an era of being spiffy: button down shirts, v neck sweaters, slacks or blue jeans, tie and tweed or corduroy sports jacket and maybe a hat, and in the north winter a heavy outer coat (Bob’s a bulky and worn heavy duck canvas) – the dress of professor poets in standard college fare.

The Yellow Head bar was a huge cavern fitting the style of bars those days - small round wobbly tables with red terry cloth covers, square glass ashtrays that fill to the brim fast. Most of us in those days were chain smokers, including Bob who had a constant wheeze and cough followed by varying statements loathing the habit, but an admission of being too weak & unwilling to quit. I had cold-turkeyed a few years earlier and remember telling Bob the details. On my 3rd pack one day, I was reading an article by William Burroughs who argued that kicking nicotine was harder than kicking heroin. If you can quit smoking, you can do *anything*, including as he said, leave your wife! I had no intention of that but did get curious to see the extent of the withdrawal. It was hell, only relieved for a while by puffing on weak home grown pot. Listening to Creeley give a taped Naropa lecture (July 4, 1986) in a wonderful weave of anecdote, lecture and reading, he bums cigarettes from the students in the room. ¹ I don’t know if he ever completely quit the habit and wonder, because of his cough later into life, if cigarettes didn’t do him irreparable damage that led to his end.

We drank more than one beer that afternoon and probably didn’t eat. I felt comfortable enough with Bob to jokingly chide him about drinking too much 5% alcohol Canadian beer, but I could see that he was a confident drinker who enjoyed the barroom context – a place to tell his endless stories rich in detail and humor. But as the bar began to fill with many other conference folks, and other friends who joined us, it was harder and harder in the rising din to hear Bob talk. I was

missing words and sentences in the distinctive Bob Creeley cadence, and had to lean into the table. I was getting bits and pieces that day about his teaching gig in Guatemala on a coffee finca – how within minutes of arriving and exhausted in the tropical heat was immediately given the task at hand – to teach and tutor the plantation owner’s kids – similar, as he told me, to the day he arrived at Black Mountain College and though tired after a long drive in his old truck, was immediately escorted to a classroom by the giant man in all ways – the 6 ‘ 5” rector Charles Olson. While he told these stories he also constantly dabbed the bottom corner of his eye socket with a handkerchief - preferring to do that, as he said, than to wear a glass eye or sport a hip but “pretentious” eye patch as he did as a young man

The Thursday Night Reading

The Thursday night reading was scheduled for 7 p.m. in the “Log Cabin” – a log structure built by students in the log-building course and occupied as a classroom/lounge by the forestry students. It was the right intimate size for the first event – wood fire crackling, a beer and wine bar and an eager audience of 50 – 80 people who had come to hear the first readers: Ken Belford, David Phillips, Sid Marty and Brian Fawcett. Note: It’s obvious that the conference line up is mostly male but not by intention. I’d invited Margaret Atwood, Betty Lambert, and Alice Munro who declined for “various good reasons”. Audrey Thomas did accept the invitation as a headliner. My students seemed an equal gender mix and participated in the open readings and workshops.

One of my intentions was to get my writer friends I grew up with in the 60’s and 70’s to read with Bob Creeley in the same room. Belford and Phillips in particular, followed Creeley’s work, admired it, and admired him more so than the other living poet/mentors young poets might be tempted to follow. For all of us, the task was to read everything we could get our hands on and build a working library/to create a poetic/a prosody. For the most part, we read the same books – mostly modern Canadian and American poetry, including the germinal *New American Poetry: 1945 -1960*, edited by Donald Allen.² We all published in *Talon* magazine (Vancouver), edited by Jim Brown and David Robinson, and later had early books published by Talonbooks Press. We compiled growing shelves of small/underground press books. We did the same homework and shared a complex notion of poetry as the force we wanted to engage. We talked it incessantly and obsessively. We looked for authentic ways to write and progress in the art. *Serious!*

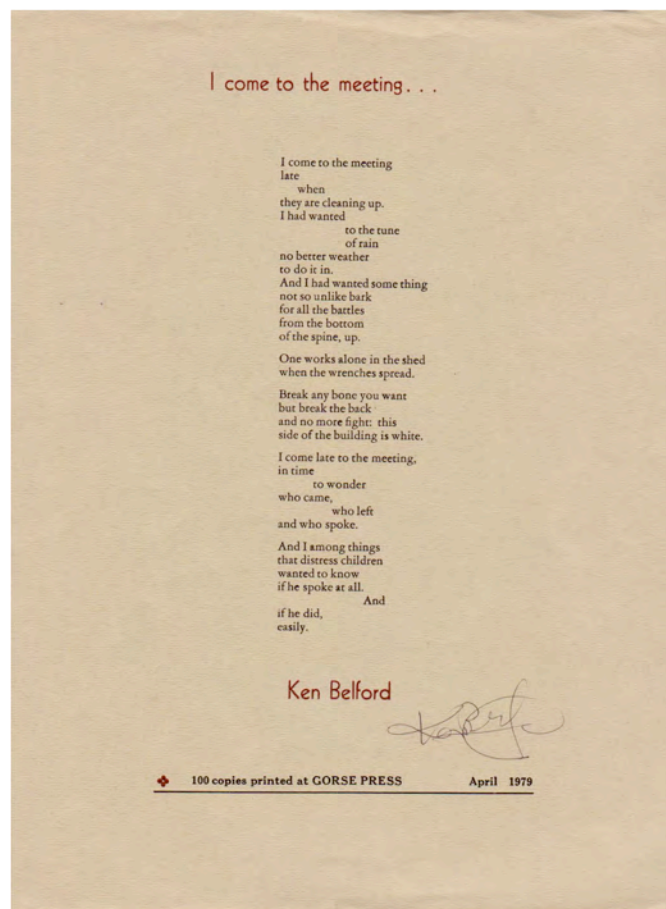
Ken Belford



Ken Belford read from *Sign Language*, a Caledonia Writing Series chapbook I printed on my Chandler Price letterpress in an edition of about 100 copies. I've written longer accounts of Ken's work (see "Invisible Ink", on the website *It's Still Winter*) expressing my huge admiration for it. Early on, like my writer friend Sid Marty, Ken might have appeared as a "mountain poet" – living as he did for many years in the coastal Hazelton Range, but his voice has, beyond the geographical and place references – a deep and musical knowledge that is transcendent. Here is an astute student's comment about Ken's reading that night:

"... even in a weekend full of highs Belford's reading stood out. He reads from a place that's informed by sheer terror, which far from paralyzing him, gives him access to the eventfulness of language itself. When Belford reads, words we all know and use everyday seem discovered for the first time."³

I know Bob was hearing and sensing this range and quality of these poets' work, but he was particularly moved by Ken Belford. After Ken's reading he quickly edged through the crowd, beer and cigarette in hand and said to Ken - exactly as I remember it: "I hear your music man!" All of the readings that night felt damn good – "full of highs" as we headed off into the snow and the few blocks back to the Yellowhead for more beer and talk long into one of the great nights.



I come to the meeting
late
 when
they are cleaning up.
I had wanted
 to the tune
 of rain
no better weather
to do it in.
And I had wanted something
not so unlike bark
for all the battles
from the bottom
of the spine, up.

One works alone in the shed
when the wrenches spread

Break any bone you want
but break the back
and no more fight: this
side of the building is white.

I come to the meeting
in time
 to wonder
who came
 who left
and who spoke.

And I among things
that distress children
wanted to know
if he spoke at all.
 And
if he did,
easily

A poem I wrote shortly after the *Words/Loves* Conference.

for Ken Belford & Robert Creeley

It is

it is spring now, peculiar & northern.
the truck still smells new, the cutbanks seem to issue
smoke.

- all this talk of money when all I
feel is this sadness for all the world's animals

& that I have been let down, is another
reason:

the consequence of being surrounded
by strange people I know nothing about.

- old verities -

I long to talk with you. walk across town
with a bottle of whisky, and not to stop. be sad & happy
knowing the world has gone. let it go, or
let them have it,
whoever they are.



robert creeley & barry mckinnon, *words/loves* – 1981 prince george (photo: bev king)

The North:
3 Poems

by
Barry McKinnon
with Ken Belford in mind and
thought



The North
Sixty
A Few Thoughts

THE NORTH
for Ken Belford

somebodies walked the woods

•

in the air, the lines appear, as a grid
cut thru trees

possession is nine tenth's of the law
theft makes up the rest

what men have walked these
woods, carried chains
& instruments
of exactitude

•

to own nothing becomes
achievement

a kind of ownership
not to care

*for Ken Belford & the memory of
Robert Creeley*

Sixty:

no sense
of beginning - beginning sense of ends

thinking

the in between

memory gardens,

- a whole unfinished

.

45 years ago in spring
green, fecund on my way.
- the moment said, this is/
the moment's moment:

- as first site
of the milky breast in moonlight - river, trees - at the dead end
making out

to pleasure / to suspension / to being

.

my mother on the porch, smoking - held a Melmac cup,
was beauty to me

- the self emerging is known and given

.

I had no words

no answer

I was held in by meanies & punished all the more. I stopped speaking and refused Latin blackboard drills

.

in

defeat I thought I saw a way

- to embrace

the now surpass

explanation / rules

.

I stare out, the ticking clock. blinds part
drawn, rippled breeze in trees - script / scriven
contents of a given you cannot describe –

.

I'm drawn by a blank sensation

.

you have a very full life -

.

as any other measure as that caught in what it
thought - to say what?

life un
folding folds the equation
it attempts

the older I get

.

he's not afraid of anything

.

death -
say it. these days. life
is its condition elaborated in the face / nothingness in space

.

no place but context (sinewed time & body its memory -
the house on 15th I lived in gone. I drive on

.

my suspended head scary / revolves. I'm a
low number on a scale. the here & now of non resolve a
constant I now see? neutral blurs & shapes

.

& what thought
as fragment is pieces: to enter world / to leave the earth

I sense now the surfaces - a commingling wish to be no one
yet not separate from what seen

otherwise:

the corporate picture - we are small as a bug in / millennial ruins -
the last dash -
for ... energy transformed

.

I fear what dark reveals, yet this
revelry
of light. morning. some regret. failure no longer
matters as time crunches to its future diminished

.

the transition is happiness - illusions gone / to faith

- a zeroed consciousness less faked - wisps ...

out of breath father pissing in a parking lot: - an
old man

I do what I want.

.

in grade one over the Plastisene forest I saw the trees -
rustled leaves quiet in my anxious break when space of mind
sees space

.

time not memory but dream. places. dark
purples streaked low and east 50
years ago, last night or night before -

.
disappearance is weightless (all that was or is to a narrowed
horizon - the surprise of self enacted to know no more
need to its surprise

.
yet thought up the canyon - love increased by threat
of its loss - itself a season, its intensity increased by sense
of diminished time. mottled colour & leaves. the simplest/
most intense –

sensed myself
- a laconic embodiment neutral
in the neutral air. I sensed - words stripped, flesh of season/
reasons gone. what words?

.
at sixty

... a presence

that resembles nothing but itself -

by the condition of its source

to bare its thought

October 13, 2005

A FEW THOUGHTS

marking the students' scrawl - lists of
books they've compiled

I'm at a desk - want
to write a poem, afraid I feel nothing - or have felt
nothing for days.

 this burden not to care - not
the clarity of the war where they rout you out - up
against a wall to be shot ... for this thinking
that goes no where (as it should

 this is to forget, some part of the mind where the
bibliography is
 - better an image than a list of books

 (somewhere Ken Belford swats a blackfly and looks out
over the mountains and saw his heart turn to stone and
come alive again

 - this could be a horrible life but for
our unjustified faith, all the worse to know
even the tricks of that.

 tree and rock and the woman
breathing,
 these long years, the blessing to have
a wife

I'm not afraid of the depression - these hearts have had
practice and thus
 to know the world is vast

 - a campfire teaches, the sweet apple
our senses alive:

 so what do we do for days, in the daze
and this world of suspicion,
 where the pencil is of no use

 computer screens make me dizzy - a bit sick
to my stomach,

 the list of books out
of order
 is my punishment
and for each cheque I get, they seem to say *you should
be afraid*

John Harris looks out over his life with a major
faith,
 two clear acres in his mind; his is a large
mind
and they fear him

 treat this as a journey,
 a mistake to think
of winning anything - the hope of the lottery
treat this like an opening and a blessing
that the language seems free/
may show us where
to go



Endnotes



The collage on the Contents and Endnotes page (above) is from *Stamp Collection*, a series of visuals by Barry McKinnon, printed by bill bissett, blewointment press, vancouver, 1971. The background text is a typewritten letter from Ken Belford circa 1970.

The epigraph, *Love is a place ...* is a line from Robert Creeley's poem *Love*.

Search: Ken Belford: Invisible Ink, and *An Interview with Ken Belford*, first appeared in Don Precosky's website, *It's Still Winter*, no longer extant.

Wrestling the Alligator: A Trip to the Headwaters of the Naas, was written for a fishing magazine edited by Ken Belford, but never published. It subsequently appeared in the creative prose anthology *Going Some Place*, edited by Dr. Lynne Van Luuven, Cocteau Books, Fall, 2000.

Storm Warning, The New Canadian Poets, edited by Al Purdy, McLelland and Stewart, 1971. (with an accompanying pamphlet of study notes and questions unwillingly written by Al Purdy).

Comments on the poem *shadows* by Ken Belford is an account from *The Caledonia Writing Series: A Chronicle*, Barry McKinnon, CWS, 1984.

The *Words/Loves* section is from *Chairs in the Time Machine*, an unpublished memoir by Barry McKinnon. *Words/Loves*, also appears in the literary web journal, *Dispatches*.

The North: 3 Poems are from *The Centre: Poems 1970 – 2000*, Barry McKinnon, Talon books, 2004.



This version of my tribute and memory of Ken Belford is incomplete. There is a large part to the story that requires my attempt to speculate and write about what happened to end our long friendship when Ken announced to me he was “disengaging”.

Anyone at this point, however, curious about the ongoing literary and political intransigence in Prince George, may gain insight by reading the essays and reviews in *Dooney's Cafe* by John Harris, Graham Pearce, Brian Fawcett, Wally Hourback, and Paul Strickland. They write

under the heading, *The Prince George Poetry War* – a story replete with sad and disturbing events and details. Long and ongoing.