

TO SUBMIT AS A NOTE TO THE JOURNAL *METAPHYSICS*

When you plug your computer  
into another computer,  
    your computer asks you:  
“Do you trust this computer?”

Then each computer stares at you  
with its knowing eye  
    until you say:  
“With my life.”

## A CHILDHOOD IN SUBURBIA

I studied squirrels, measured teeth marks  
in fallen acorns, incisors  $\frac{1}{4}$  wide –  
they'd take a couple of bites and let the nut drop,  
grab another plump seed from the branches –  
*scrape scrape drop scrape scrape drop* –  
so much I learned it's natural to waste.

I observed the weather by leaving a Folger's  
coffee can on the roof, dipped a ruler in  
after summer rain, after snow. I recorded  
air temperature and took a tape measure  
to the distance between parked cars.  
I learned the depth and length of boredom.

Sometimes, giving up science, I tried to catch  
oak leaves in their autumnal, jagged plummet –  
it was hard and fun chasing those things!  
Winter, I rolled snow into gentlemen,  
awkward fatsos with good hearts,  
and in summer burned ants alive with glass  
suited to the purpose, not sure who I was  
or what I would become.

Spring was always the most difficult time,  
the world bursting out of itself again –  
too many grass blades to count,  
bees, wasps, and birds – blue jays and sparrows  
was all –  
building nests as if nothing else mattered.

## IN MY FAMILY

In my family, there were three Rs in the word “oil”  
And we used the spent, bruise-colored lubricant  
Bled from the Chevy’s engine  
To kill the weeds that multiplied  
In the driveway and along the curb  
And to kill, inadvertently,  
The last wildlife in the marsh and bay.

In my family, the youngest peeled the potatoes,  
Twenty a night like a miniature soldier on KP  
And you ate your rations of mashed potatoes  
Or had your face pushed and rubbed into the plate  
And were made to sit at the table into the thoughtless night  
To contemplate hungry children in other countries  
And to listen, carefully,  
To canned laughter echoing through the house.

In my family, the oldest girl ripped away at fifteen,  
Leaving a fistful of hair in the mother’s hands,  
Met us around the corner with Chips Ahoy! cookies  
And never came closer until five years later,  
Married and pregnant, and therefore forgiven.

In my family, the father was stationed in his easy chair  
So he could watch the east part of his narrow lot  
And down the block, the people coming and cars,  
And he bolted a big rig’s side view mirror to the house  
So he could see to the west as well.

In my family, before Vatican II, every Friday  
We had fish sticks for dinner and the parents,  
Leaving the kitchen bulbs blaring, would light  
Long white candles  
At each end of the eight-elbowed table because  
Our family had class, they said, because we had class.

## AFTER PARKING AT A TRAILHEAD IN CALIFORNIA

To fend off mountain lions  
sing loudly  
from the get go  
and if you see one of those last big cats  
wave and clap your hands high  
and calmly, as if nothing is happening;  
keep singing and clapping  
like the wings of a butterfly  
disappearing.

Prevent the tick by wearing long sleeves  
and socks pulled over light-colored pants  
and a hat covering your ears and neck  
like a conquistador's helmet;  
if an arachnid digs into skin  
the signs say: burn.

Watch out for rattlers who slither on the ground  
in brown meadows  
and climb tree trunks to limbs  
crossing slanted redwood paths;  
you can never tell from where  
a snake will attack;  
they are most human.

For the Golden Grizzly Bear, play dead;  
they already are.

And the rainbow trout  
don't worry about  
until they are gone, gone, gone.

MARTINEZ, CALIFORNIA

*“Discover the Charm”*

The quiet streets of Martinez  
in morning before 8 a.m. –

the quaint café is out of business  
but Starbucks is full  
of attorneys and cops,  
a baker’s dozen of each  
officer of the law ordering  
coffee drinks and pastries so sweet  
they should be illegal.

I’m part of a system that oppresses,  
I know. I know it better than ever  
in the little town of Martinez  
heading to court at daybreak  
past Whisky Lane’s door  
swung wide to the dim lit counter,  
where the McDonald’s, too, is open,  
catering to hobos and obese moms,

and the Sheriff at the gate  
of the marble courthouse  
lets lawyers  
pass around the metal detector  
with the flash of a Bar card  
and matching suit and tie,  
though we could be armed  
to the gullet  
with justice.

But we’re not. It’s just a  
Case Management Conference  
in a routine toxic tort class action.

I bill my time at \$350 an hour and then  
stroll down Main Street  
past five family law offices,  
two criminal defense firms,  
and the new MMA gym,  
poke around in an antique store  
squeezed between two bail bonds  
which outnumber all business 3 to 1.

I buy some Gold Rush relics for a steal:  
pick, shovel, pan,  
a lump of fool's gold.