

### Where I Now Stand: Five Postcards Home

Logan Canyon, off a seldom used exit of I-80 out of Salt Lake City, holds the last snow in the Wasatch Range. Snowmobiles make moguls of it in spring. With years of practice and a season of strength, I bounced and glided over the bumps and into the glistening pocket of winter. The sun drenched me, and I dreamed of college. My family would soon move to Virginia and I to Minnesota. This would be my last ski for a long time on Utah snow, and I relished it.

Years later, in another late spring, my friend, Ted, and I met at three hours past midnight – cool, wet, and sweet with humic earth. We worked quickly, took photos, and disappeared. A sapling basswood stood in our wake. On such a mutable college campus we experimented with permanence. No one seemed to mind. The next fall, I trimmed hail-damaged branches. The next spring, I removed its bamboo training pole. In time, in its silent way, it may be the only one to remember me at St. Olaf.

The same spring I planted the tree I stood at a urinal in the quiet bathroom between the library and the Cage, meditating after a morning library shift and before class. A man entered; I tensed. He strode up to the fixture next to mine. I glimpsed an elbow at eye-level. He said, “How’s your semester going?” I glanced up and responded generically. President Thomforde made good eye contact, openly friendly even here. I mentioned that I was finishing up as a senior and hoping to end on a high note. He told me he was trying to end well, too, and that, in fact, “The dean and I are going to have a meeting about that right now.” He picked up his briefcase and left. I again tried to relax. I had forced him to use the short urinal.

Skiing again. After four years of frozen mud, I was finally back on snow. A midwinter gale had blown down Gunflint Lake since the morning. After work, I went out to meet it at night. I skied upwind, my visor pressed to my face, gripping my lightweight poles and forcing forward my lightweight skis. What light lay between charcoal and black showed me the foggy face of the wind. I felt electrified; my act of living in this midnight storm seemed the greatest paradox. Years of practice and a season of strength kept me calm. I turned around and drifted back home.

I drove home to Montana from my brief St. Olaf visit, my arboreal curatorial duties fulfilled. The plains of North Dakota drifted endlessly, emptying me, cleansing me, simplifying my purpose. Just before Miles City, Montana, the odometer turned to 100,000. At two-thirds of that quantity, I had still been in high school. I glanced down again: 100,001 is such an odd number to see.