





THE  
NAME  
OF THE  
WEST



*For Phil and Dalys  
who showed me the West*

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Epigraph:

*What is the name of the West?*

*When we can look at civilization and see humanity, when we can go to work and work hard without complaint, when we can love the land not for the crude oil that is under it but for the beauty that is across it, when we can see a rainbow without wishing for a pot of gold, when we can stop worrying about what comes next and start experiencing what is now, when we can see beauty in a desert and majesty in a pheasant, when we can taste clean air and fresh water...then we will know the name of the West.*





# ELEMENTS OF THE WEST

I have no experience outside my own.



## Loss

Oh rider  
You love your horse  
so much  
I know  
you hate riding  
in your wheelchair

# In an Evening on the Porch

An equine yodel  
answered by a child's call  
provides a symmetry  
of nature's music

## Covey

A bobbin of quail  
peck at frozen grass  
gleaning forgotten seeds  
while a majestic plume  
on the crown of each masked bandit  
waves triumph at every conquest

## Worms

My ritually writhing sacrifice  
will catch no fish today

## Walking in the Gulch

This walk  
along a dry creek bed  
makes me the river  
the only thing raging  
in the space between winter and fall  
along the parched shade  
of the sheer gulch walls

## Night Walking

The phantom of stillness walks with me  
in the darkness of earth-shadow  
surrounded by  
sleeping nature



## Silent Night, Holy Fire

A leather hat leans into a pulsing heat as  
A flickering face, stares away from the dark

## Encroaching at Night

City stars shimmer across the valley floor  
like dew trapped sun caught in a dark silk net  
hiding the black  
widow

—

*A low haze  
hangs  
in a rough depression  
while an acne of houses  
spreads across the face of the West*

## Day Rash

*City stars shimmer across the valley floor  
like dew trapped sun caught in a dark silk net  
hiding the black  
widow*

—

A low haze  
hangs  
in a rough depression  
while an acne of houses  
spreads across the face of the West

## Oil Fields

Steel giants  
working the fields  
bowing to the dirt  
sucking filthy sludge to make  
twenty silver coins

## Motto

If it doesn't fit  
get a bigger hammer

## Petroglyphs

Illegible figures  
perhaps  
sun-chief  
fast-horse

Who's to say?

—

just  
ghosts of ghosts  
on stone walls  
broken  
like a people forgotten

# Retro-Glyphs

New blood  
sprayed  
on ancient stone  
showing images of a new west  
waiting to age

## West-ern-s

In the West things are seen  
often black and white  
on a silver screen



## Delicate Arch

Regal stone stands like a bow legged orator  
on the brim of  
a bloody Greek amphitheater  
spreading republic  
to the ghosts  
hoodoos and cliffs  
and the council of tourists  
...  
the most delicate arch  
is a man  
straining to pet a horse  
over a high electric fence

# The Eye of a Dark Bay Mare

Black disk  
endless and starless night sky  
dark mirror  
showing me myself

## Peace

Four horses  
light bay, piebald, chestnut, gray  
graze in a soft wind

# Watching the Union Pacific "Big Boy" Train Pull Out From the Station

one-point-two  
million pounds of steam and steel envelope me  
in a cacophony of battle between train and track

# Beauty

The white coat rides  
stark  
against  
the sleek black horse

## Rabbit brush

In the high mountain desert called Utah  
In the time of year called fall  
There's a burning bush called rabbit brush  
Bright orange—beautiful

## Water Chimes

Walking unshod upstream  
water chimes off my naked sole





# TRIBUTE

Some people deserve a nod

# Cottonwood

So much depends  
Upon

A colorful cotton-  
wood

Glazed with all  
Colors

Beside the bright  
Sun

## In a Field of the West

The jolt of flight through thirty startled quail:  
Wind gusting through the plump, gold wheat.



# FALL

Midas was God and touched the world.



## Fall Ecstasy

The leaf  
grows  
    falls  
        lands  
imperceptible  
    and dies  
with a crunch

## Fall Air

The tide of air washes over me  
like a chill ocean  
sans  
salt  
sans  
sand  
sans  
water



# Fall Beauty

Colors

vibrant-ly

dance

## Fall Change

Orange fades green  
light becomes shade  
The sun sets on a fall tree

## Fall Fruit

Christ said  
I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until  
fall  
when, ruddy orange, it's spiced with nutmeg

## Fall Night

Folded paper leaves  
like origami cranes  
flap and fall  
unseen  
under crisp heavens

—  
god-light  
piercing  
wintery  
blackberry  
marble  
skys

## Fall Prayer

Dear God

Bless this  
our gluttony

Amen

## Fall Sundays

Lazy  
like a warm scent  
drifting on a chill fall breeze







# GRANDPA

A good man, a kind man, a hard working man...a real man.

## Code

The cowboy code  
is to help  
when it's unpleasant  
cold  
    windy  
        heavy  
            hard  
even if you're just helping  
a cow

# Anticipation

Awake

—

Waiting  
for a grandson  
to be born

—

work  
will keep  
the wait  
at bay

## Morning

February sky fire  
cracks the chill night  
to bring a windy dawn

## Boots

The leather boots  
slumped by the door  
will walk  
as far as the worker  
today

## A Noble Death

A lone calf  
stands forgotten  
lilting into the wind  
that tipped the cattle chute  
and killed the cowboy

# Born

Two-hundred-and-eight miles away  
from the dead cowboy  
a newborn  
grandson  
cries

# Broken

What storyteller can describe  
the joy of a new grandson  
coupled  
with the pain  
of losing a husband







# MY WESTERN HERITAGE

I know what I've been told...not what happened

## Great Grandfather's Mine

My great grandfather  
had the wanderlust  
or so my grandma tells me  
While my grandpa's dad was busy  
losing his ranch in a poker game  
my grandma's dad was spending  
every dime he had on a silver mine  
that never did produce silver  
In that way  
it was as much a gold mine  
as it was  
a silver mine  
"you'll never find  
what you're looking for  
in that hole"  
my grandma told him  
and he never did

My great grandmother  
understood the beauty in the world  
While her husband was busy  
digging a hole in Nevada  
she was doing well  
with a flower shop  
where he would eventually retire from his wanderlust  
to sell roses with his wife  
and sometimes help her cater weddings

# My Banjo, Thor

When I was a boy  
I wanted to learn the drums  
Rhythms  
    beats

        tempos  
pulsing like an arrhythmic heart  
giving life to music

my mom wanted me to learn the piano  
before I could choose something else

Then one day she said  
“I really want  
someone  
in the family  
to learn the banjo.”

I don't know why  
I guess she really liked the banjo

I told her that I wanted to learn the banjo  
so that she would let me learn the drums

I don't know why  
I just wanted to play the drums

The two great American instruments are  
    the banjo  
        and the kazoo

## White Truck, Frozen lake

Once  
when the world was blue  
before I was born  
my grandma was with her husband  
pushing cows through the wild Wyoming waste  
made more wild but also tamed  
by the ice  
which covered the world  
My grandpa rode a horse  
My grandma had a white truck  
and two small children  
As the sun set low  
taking its warmth for another place and another time  
my grandpa took the cattle around the edge of the reservoir  
several hours around  
My grandma was left alone  
with two small children  
and a white truck  
and not enough fuel  
to drive around the lake  
and not enough warmth  
to survive the night

The frozen lake had held their weight  
as they drove across early in the chill morning  
but the warmth giving sun  
had been at work all day  
My grandma knew the ice  
was not thick enough  
to hold the weight of the white truck  
holding two children  
But they would freeze for sure or  
maybe make it across  
And so  
with a prayer to God  
she drove  
as fast as she could  
across the frozen lake  
listening as the ice broke up behind them

on the other side she stopped to look back at the lake  
now a chunky soup of ice and water  
and to say a prayer  
of thanks

# Of Mice and Women

My grandpa  
dropped a live mouse  
in my grandma's bath  
She screamed and dropped the phone with its long curly cord  
into the water  
where the mouse  
was drowning  
in froth

My grandma saw a mouse  
jump out of the hay  
in the field  
She had no shoes  
but she stepped on it anyway  
so it wouldn't eat their crop  
    The field-hand screamed  
            and may have fainted  
He hadn't been toughened  
by the ranch



# Rocky Mountain Oysters

There were three troubled youth  
who worked one summer  
on my grandparent's ranch  
At dinner one night they had meat-  
ball soup  
The boys loved the meat-  
balls  
As they were fighting over the last one  
my great uncle  
laughed  
and told these three boys from the city  
"I'm glad you enjoy  
the rocky mountain oysters  
so much"  
That's when these three youth became troubled  
And when my great uncle got the last meat-  
ball



WEST

A roaming dream I dreamed last night  
I rode the canyon rim  
And wore a hat with downturned brim,  
looked up and had to squint  
into the clear air sun cut light  
while heart (hoof) beats beat within

And hoof (heart) beats drew forth puffs of dust as  
my horse with hooves steel shod,  
tripped nimbly over nature's road,  
beat prayer to desert god  
whose wind winds howls in moaning gusts as  
land and sky erode.

“Go west young man” my mama said  
So I rode towards setting sun,  
And wondered when I got there  
Where the West had first begun.  
I was looking for a place  
where the land would speak to me  
not in parcels, but in valleys,  
vistas, forests, cliffs, and streams.

And I found it: it was called the West—  
a place of redrock sands,  
where rivers became rio grande  
to cut canyons in the land.  
And with war paint on his naked breast,  
there, too, I found a man.

He was a singer led by dreams  
a listener who hears the forest, the rocks and the sky  
a guardian, friend-of-the-land  
a brother of Raven and Otter  
an enemy of his tribe's foe  
a traveler, on his way to the sand hills.

In tribal bands he lived until  
an eastern man unsung  
with paper skin and silver tongue  
made promises among  
the singer's people—men and girls,  
while loading flintlock guns.

Then in a flint and fire flash  
the guardian was dead,  
his people falling under lead,  
white-spotted plague was spread  
through lodges now turned into ash  
and blood as singers bled.

I cried, "Who now will love the land?"  
as I saw the paper skins  
ravish earth with vile grins  
for greed they bore within.  
The more they got the more demanded  
from the West they thought to win.

But through this idolatry of greed  
a horseman came astride  
a quarter horse with ember eyes,  
broad chest and branded hide.  
The rider was a man of creed:  
a horseman born to ride.

He called himself gaucho, vaquero, cowboy, cowpoke.  
He chewed himself tobacco and he taught himself to smoke.  
He was rough as fir and raw as hide  
pushing cattle through the valley  
He wore silver spurs—rope by his side  
to tie hard and fast or dally.

But it takes a special kind of stock  
to do what cowboys do.  
I saw him wake at half past two  
to check in on the new-  
born calf, then stay out till the cock  
would crow, to wake his crew.

His tough would make him work all day  
but then I'd see him wipe his eyes  
when, though with soul and skill he tried,  
the new-born calf would die.  
Then he'd say a prayer in his own rough way:  
"God Damn," he'd sigh...and cry.

And then it was, I knew that faith  
would live on for this eden.  
That grass and sage would grow and even  
though the changing season  
would find Judas in the corporate pay  
to kiss the land with treason,  
men would never find the way  
nor gain the power nor the sway  
to make the Western spirit stay,  
as wild and free it gallops away.  
And creed and deed will keep it brave,  
that spirit of the West,  
to breed the men who live to say  
that land and love are best.

I woke in civilization's haze.

Now, where black horned buffalo used to graze  
people worked in civil hives  
and by empty years they took their lives  
in mass communal suicides...  
And saved the land for digging graves.

But somewhere far beyond the wall  
I felt the West, I heard her call.

I did not have a stiff brimmed hat  
nor chaps nor boots nor spurs.  
Yet, she is the West and she'll be mine  
when I will first be hers.





Afterward:

As I explored the West, while writing this collection, I came to several realizations: first, the West takes many forms. It is a place, that is true, but it is also a culture, a community, a philosophy, a concept, a creed, a way of life, a decoration, an entertainment, a tear for the past, and a hope for the future. It is a long walk at night. It is a boy learning to play “Ghost Riders” on the banjo. It is a poem, a song, a curse, and a profession of love. For some people, it is meaning. For me it is beauty. It is the simplicity of a purer life. It is the complexity of holding on to values that the world no longer believes in. It is a goal to the brave and a threat to the political. Much like this collection it is eclectic...but it is also a common prayer to the divine.

When I started writing this collection, I believed that I was an outsider to the West. Though I grew up in rural Utah with five acres of land and more varieties of animals than most children can name, I have lived a fairly urban-centric life. Truth be told, when I started this collection, I *was* an outsider. However, in the Book of the West we read: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you the West.” Appropriately irreverent, I found that the West cares little for upbringing. It didn’t check my credit score and there was no admittance fee. Many of the best cowboys were men from back east who got fed up with air that they couldn’t breathe and lives they couldn’t live. Perhaps this collection will help some reader find her place in the West in the same way that it helped this writer.

Rather than explaining the poetry in this volume (if the poems do not speak for themselves, then I have failed as a writer), I would like to finish with two last tributes in grand Western style. This time not to parody, but to parrot:

“Our knowledge has made us cynical. Our cleverness, hard and unkind. we think too much and we feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities life will be violent, and all will be lost.”

*Charles Spencer Chaplin*

I have, hitherto, resisted putting my name on this book. To place a name signifies ownership and if there is any final realization to which this exploration into the West has brought me, it is that nobody will ever own Her. As Buck Ramsey said:

“We knew the land would not be ours,  
That no one has the awful pow’rs  
To claim the vast and common nesting,  
To own the life that gave him birth,”

*Buck Ramsey*

So this is my prayer and the plea which goes with this book:

Cherish the West.



