

NOBODY BETTER,  
BETTER THAN  
NOBODY

IAN FRAZIER

**PICADOR**

*NOBODY  
BETTER,  
BETTER THAN  
NOBODY*



IAN FRAZIER

PICADOR  
FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX  
NEW YORK

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*To my grandmother*

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## *Preface*

I began work on the first piece in this book in 1975, when I was about half as old as I am now. All the pieces in this book were written between 1975 and 1986. A lot has happened since. Writing nonfiction is like writing on the side of a moving object: your subject is in the real world, and the real world changes. If luck is not with you, sometimes change comes so fast that what you have described slides out from under what you have written before it can see print. And of course, you, the author, are moving, too. Sometimes the subject holds still but you move away from it, physically or otherwise, and it slips from view. Each of the pieces in this book is just a brief moment of alignment between the subjects and certain circumstances in their lives and between the subjects and me. Each of those moments is now long gone, buried forever under others.

At the end of the second piece in the book, the profile of fishing maven Jim Deren, the italicized postscript that notes his death in 1983 and the closing of his tackle store could have been paragraphs long. That profile first appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1981. (All the pieces in this book first appeared in *The New Yorker*.) William Shawn, then editor of *The New Yorker*, did not want me to write about Deren or about fishing in any form. I bugged him for years to let me, and for years he said no. Shawn hated hooks. Once he went into some detail about his objections to fishing, explaining that *The New Yorker* was “a vegetarian magazine,” and adding, “Fishing, in itself, is fine—but then you have the fish, and the fish is hooked, and ...” He lowered his eyelids, looked away, and made a small, helpless gesture with his hand. That gesture, that Shawnian swoon of overwhelmed helplessness at the idea of hooks, was what I remembered in the paragraph I wrote for the magazine’s long tribute to him in 1992 when he died.

As for the profile, Shawn eventually gave in to my requests. He did ask, as a sort of favor, that I try to avoid mentioning hooks. (The careful reader will note that only once in the piece do I hook a fish, and then only “lightly.”) Deren, for his part, was surprised and delighted when the profile finally came out; I had by then been hanging out in his shop for years, and he probably had begun to doubt that I would ever write anything about him. He was in failing health when the piece appeared, and it really perked him up. He thought that now we would become closer, that now he would let me in on the real secrets of the sport, and he seemed disappointed when I stopped coming around. Writers are fickle; I was on to my next subject, and the year after the piece was published I moved to Montana. I worried from time to time that he was angry with me. Around Christmas, 1982, my brother-in-law went to his shop to buy something, and they got to talking, and Deren told my brother-in-law he had a message for me. My brother-in-law asked what it was, and Deren said, “Tell him, ‘Don’t drown.’” The next October, I heard Deren had died.

Over time, any nonfiction piece will grow a postscript like that. I could do one for every piece in this book, and for the book itself as well. It was published first ten years ago, and I thank Nick Lyons of Lyons & Burford for reissuing it today and extending its life. As I reread these pieces, what strikes me is how much the world of writing that produced them has changed. Back then, the writer was more in charge. Magazines regularly ran long nonfiction pieces, ambitious in style and content, that originated in the thoughts of individual writers, in their experiences and sensibilities, and in what they believed was important to say. Many long works of nonfiction made their biggest noise as magazine articles, echoing widely among a readership well before they reappeared in book form. I’m not sure why this emphasis on writers took hold. Maybe it had to do with the fact that in those years America had recently and unexpectedly come unglued; perhaps people suspected that a writer out walking

around in the midst of it would know more of what was going on than an editor behind a desk in New York.

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Neither do I know why that writers' era should disappear. But it pretty much has, in magazines at any rate. Magazines now are about Stuff—stuff you should know about, stuff you should be, and (always) stuff you should buy. The writing in catalogs and the writing in magazines move close toward each other every day. Good writing must make its way through all that, and thanks to its persistence and the continued aid of a number of undeterred editors, it still does. In general, though, the magazine writer is on a shorter tether than formerly, and topics generally come to the writer as directives over the telephone rather than as ideas from inside. Some magazine editors now think of themselves as producers, in the Hollywood sense: tell them that you liked a particular magazine piece and they may reply, "I produced that piece." I stopped writing for *The New Yorker* a while ago, but I still write for magazines, and I still enjoy it. But that I should today begin any magazine piece in the relaxed, circumlocutory way I begin the pieces collected here, that I should pursue a subject of my own interest for thousands and thousands of words—well, as they say in the service, "Never happen."

I see now how buoyed I was by that former world of writing, and how inspired I was by old writers like E. B. White and Truman Capote and Joseph Mitchell and John McPhee, and how much help I got from *New Yorker* colleagues like Tony Hiss and George Trow and Rick Hertzberg and Marjorie Singer and Judy Mellecker and Bill Whitworth and Nancy Franklin and Alec Wilkinson and Jonathan Schell and Veronica Geng and Craig Seligman and Chip McGrath and Hal Espen and Pat Crow, and plenty more. These pieces remind me, too, how great it was to have an office for many years across the hall from Jamaica Kincaid, and how much fun it was to work with her, to read something she had just written and to run back to my office and try, unsuccessfully, to top it. And I remember the encouragement of readers, distant and nearer to me, who are now gone—my grandmother (to whom this book is dedicated), and my parents, and friends in the Ohio town I grew up in. Most of all, the pieces make me think of William Shawn, to whom in those years I considered myself apprenticed, and at whom each of these pieces was most specifically aimed. The description of my apprenticeship angling with Jim Deren is also sort of a metaphor for the time I spent working with, and for, Shawn. I see better now how well Shawn and Deren both wished me, how generously they taught. I can never thank them enough for directing me into the living world, and for the farewell, "Don't drown."

—Ian Frazier, Fall 1995

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## *Authentic Accounts of Massacres*

The town of Oberlin, Kansas, is in the northwest corner of the state, eighty-three miles east of the Kansas–Colorado state line and a hundred and seven miles west of the geographical center of the continental United States. Oberlin has a population of twenty-five hundred and a town whistle that blows five times a day—at seven in the morning, at noon, at one in the afternoon, at six in the evening, and at ten at night—and it is the county seat of Decatur County. It was named after the town of Oberlin, Ohio. In 1878, it changed its name from its original one—Westfield—because a man named John Rodehaver gave the town some land on the condition that the name be changed to that of the town he and his family had come from in Ohio. I myself am from Ohio, and so this fact, like the fact that for many years the World’s Largest Vase made its home in Zanesville, Ohio, or the fact that the first concrete pavement in America was laid in Bellefontaine, Ohio, or the fact that the comedian Bo Hope owns a share in the Cleveland Indians baseball team, is probably more interesting to me than it would be to somebody from another state. Many cities and towns in Ohio are named after places in other states or other countries (Norwalk, New Philadelphia, Versailles), but it is rare to find a place named after a place in Ohio. The reason for this is probably that people who leave Ohio do not like to be reminded of their native state, but I am sure that if there were a town anywhere named New Akron or New Lorain I would not be the only Ohioan eager to visit it. The Ohio town from which Oberlin, Kansas, gets its name has a strong humanistic tradition: it was a station on the Underground Railroad and it is well known as the home of Oberlin College, the first coeducational college in America and a college that over the years has won many international friends as a result of its participation in the Congregational missions overseas, particularly in China. The town of Oberlin, Kansas, has a strong tradition, too, but “humanistic” is not the first word I would think of to describe it. It is as if the traditions of the Ohio Oberlin were so jolted and banged up by the thousand-mile journey across the prairie that they just didn’t work the same as they had before. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many Ohioans went West and, by exaggerating certain of their personality traits, found violence and fame (among them the border raider William Quantrill, scourge of Lawrence, Kansas; the abolitionist John Brown, scourge of Pottawatomie, Kansas Territory; and George Custer). Oberlin, Kansas, reminds me of a whole town that did that. From the beginning, Oberlin, Kansas, has had about it something daring, something careening, something here-goes-hope-I-don’t-get-shot, to a degree that is rare even for Western towns. Big, exciting, calamitous events have come snapping down on the prairie around Oberlin like the bars of giant mousetraps, especially during the town’s early years.

My favorite of all the Western museums I have ever been to is in Oberlin, and it is called the Lawrence Indian Raid in Kansas Museum. It commemorates the biggest thing ever to happen in or near the town—a raid by a group of Cheyennes that took place on September 30 and October 1, 1878, in which about forty settlers and at least two Indians died. The museum has exhibits, paintings, and books about the Indian raid and manuscripts of firsthand accounts of the Indian raid. It also has other exhibits about the history of the area, and it occupies five buildings, one of which is a sod house. The first time I visited the museum, in 1975, I asked the curator, Mrs. Kathleen Claar, about some of the recent photographs in the Indian-raid exhibit. One of the photographs was of a survivor of the raid, Charles Janousek, who as a baby was wounded in the head, and later cared for, by the Indians, and who then was almost a hundred years old. Another was a picture of a big Indian in a T-shirt and a cowboy hat standing with his wife and his grandson, a little boy wearing a headdress with buffalo horns. Mr.



Claar said that since about 1956 there had been a celebration at the museum on the anniversary of the Indian raid; that every year for many years a number of the survivors had come to the celebration; and that Charles Janousek was the only one left. She said that the Indian was named Little Wolf and his grandson was also named Little Wolf; that they were the grandson and the great-great-grandson of the famous Cheyenne chief who was the leader of the Indians in the raid; that they had come to the museum when they were in the area on their way to join the rodeo circuit; that descendants of the Cheyennes had come to the museum several times in the past; and that several times Cheyennes had been invited to the celebration on the anniversary of the raid.

Late in the summer of 1978, remembering that the centennial of the Last Indian Raid in Kansas was approaching, I called Mrs. Claar and asked her if they were planning a big celebration and if the Indians were coming, and she said yes, they were planning a big celebration, and forty or fifty Northern Cheyennes were going to attend. Since the idea of descendants of the Indians and descendants of the settlers sitting around and talking seemed to me like a mirror image of heaven, I made a rental-car reservation, took money out of the bank, flew to Chicago, changed planes, flew to Omaha (I had a long layover in Omaha, so I walked to the city from the airport and had a few beers at the bar of the Omaha Hilton, where a real-estate salesmen's convention was taking place, and then I decided that I wanted to take a close look at the Missouri River, so I got a taxi and asked the driver to take me to the best place to look at the river, and he said he would, and he started telling me that he was separated from his wife and was from New York City, and then he dropped me off at the airport and said that the airport observation deck was the best place to see the river, but that wasn't what I had in mind at all, so I walked along the fence around the runway, scared up a covey of quail, climbed the levee, walked through a field, scared up a couple rabbits, walked through some woods, and finally got to the black-mud, smelly banks of the Missouri—the river that drains a vast area of the West, the river that the Niobrara, the Yellowstone, the Big Sioux, the Knife, the Milk, the Heart, the Bad, the Cannonball, and the Teton all run into eventually, the river that was the main way West when the first white men came, the river that many trappers went up to be killed by Blackfoot Indians, the river that sometimes used to be full of drowned buffalo, the river on which the steamboat *Far West* brought the news on July 4, 1876, of Custer's defeat—and then I walked back to the airport), took a plane to McCook, Nebraska, reached McCook after stops in Columbus, Lincoln, Grand Island, Hastings, and Kearney, picked up my rental car, drove to Oberlin, and checked in at a motel.

The whole time I was in Kansas, I never heard an adult use a swearword. A lot of people asked me if I was married, and one man asked me if I was a Christian. In the evenings, I had either pork-tenderloin sandwiches and French fries at Lindy's, a café a block up from the Indian Raid museum, or ham with mashed potatoes, gravy, noodles, rolls, string beans, three-bean salad, pickled beets, corn relish, apple pie, ice cream, and milk at the 5th Wheel, a restaurant outside of Oberlin, on Highway 36.

One evening at sunset, I went for a drive in my rented Volaré and listened to the million radio stations you can get on the Great Plains. I came over a ridge and saw the red sun sitting on the lip of the prairie and the aerodynamically shaped shadows in the washes and gullies just as a really good song ("Rocky Top") came on the radio. I passed the feedlot north of Oberlin, with its many thousands of cattle. One of every nine cows sold for beef in America in 1977 was sold to McDonald's Restaurants.

One night, I watched TV in my motel room and after all the stations signed off I went for a drive. There were few cars on the road and no lights on in town and no people anywhere except for a man at a gas station who was ignoring a man with no teeth who was telling about a sow and her piglets he had seen walking down the highway some distance to the west. I drove on dirt roads until I couldn't see any lights, and then I got out of the car. The prairie just kept on going and going in the night, under the faraway, random stars. I felt like a drop of water on a hot plate. I did not get so far from the car, with

its engine running and its headlights on, that I could not hear the radio through the closed door.

I had been in Kansas only a short time when I found out the Indians were not going to show up for the centennial celebration.

Mrs. Kathleen Claar, curator for the past twenty years of the Last Indian Raid in Kansas Museum, called me at her museum two days before the centennial weekend:

“The Northern Cheyennes are coming. They have made a commitment to attend, and they have chartered a bus that seats forty-nine, so that will be quite a group. It will be senior citizens and junior and senior-high students. The older Indians will stay at the Frontier Motel, and the younger ones will camp on the museum grounds. And I just had the best news! I went out and bowled this afternoon to try and get away from all these preparations, and Rick Salem, who owns the bowling alley, told me that if the Indians want to they can bowl for free. Wasn’t that nice of him?”

“We’re going to have all kinds of demonstrations here at the museum on Saturday, September 30. We’re going to have wood carving, spinning, grain grinding, soapmaking, butter churning, glass staining, wheat weaving, bulletmaking, needlepoint, china painting, tatting—that’s like macramé, only you use fine thread—and crewelwork. We’re going to have a quilt that was made a hundred years ago by a ten-year-old girl, and the biggest piece of cloth in that quilt is no more than one inch square. At the highschool cafeteria, the Oberlin Music Club is sponsoring a fashion show and salad luncheon with new fashions and also ‘Fashions from the Good Ole Days,’ dating back to the turn of the century. There’s going to be a horse show at the Saddle Club arena, at the fairgrounds, both Saturday and Sunday. The Oberlin Commercial Club is having a mini-tractor pull at the corner of Commercial Street and Penn Avenue on Saturday afternoon (those are the little fuel-powered toy tractors, you know), and then that night the bunch from Topeka—oh, they’re wild, the Starlighters Chorus—are going to put on a medicine show here at the museum. It’s called *Dr. Femur’s La-Ka-Ha-Na-Klee* and I’m in it—I play a madam. It’s so bad it’s funny. Then after that there’s going to be a street dance in front of the museum, and right before the dance we’re going to judge the winners in the beard-and-mustache contest. Then on Sunday there’s the memorial service at the Oberlin Cemetery at one o’clock, and then Fred and Wilma Wallsmith, of the High Plains Preservation of History Commission, are going to lead a fifty-mile tour of the massacre sites along the Beaver and Sappa Creeks.

“I really don’t know what the Indians are going to do. They say they want to do their dances. I guess they’ll just provide music and dancing and be up and down the street here to answer questions and talk to people. I’ve tried to take everything out of the museum that might offend the Indians. This exhibit here used to be the bones of an Indian woman who lived supposedly about twelve hundred to two thousand years ago. I’ve covered that up, but I’m scared to death that some little kid is going to say when the Indians can hear him, ‘Oh, Miz Claar, where’s the bones of that Indian woman that used to be here?’ And I’ve taken the word ‘ravished’ out of all the descriptions of the massacre, even though the Indians did ravish at least nine women, and some of the babies that were born later were brought up in the community and you can still see the Indian blood in the families to this day. And I’ve kind of pushed this exhibit about Sol Rees out of the way—he was quite an Indian fighter, and he lived with the Delawares for a while, and he had a wife who was a Delaware. I don’t know whether they were legally married or not. The story goes that he finally traded his Indian wife for a pony. I did an article for the Oberlin *Herald* about him once, and I had to watch what I said, because his daughter was a friend of mine. I said, ‘He was as cruel and hard as the times in which he lived’—that was how I got around most of it.”

A dark-skinned young man with dark hair and eyes and an embroidered white shirtfront came in. “Hello, Mrs. Claar, my name is Jesus Epimito, and I am staying with Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Larson.”

am an International Foreign Youth Exchange student from the Philippines, and I was wondering if you have anything in your museum from the Philippines.”

Mrs. Claar produced some beads that she thought were from the Philippines but that turned out to be from Puerto Rico.

“Some people think this museum is only about the Indian raid, but we have things here from every period in the history of this area. I shouldn’t brag on myself, but I have one of the best collections of bob wire in the state of Kansas. This is the exhibit—‘The History of the Plains Told in Bob Wire.’ This wire here is called Glidden’s Twisted Oval. It’s from the early eighteen-seventies. This piece is called Harbaugh Torn Ribbon—it’s just like a ribbon of metal with little tears in it. This wire with the big square pieces of tin on it is called Briggs Obvious. It came out in 1882. It’s called ‘obvious’ because the cattle were supposed to see it and it wouldn’t cut them up.”

“Oh, what funny names these Indians have. Little ... Wolf. Dull ... Knife,” said the Filipino student who was looking at one of the Indian-raid exhibits.

“This wire here is a get-well gift sent to me when I was in the hospital from the isle of Tahiti by a friend of mine who got it from a Dutch artist. This wire here is handmade bob wire from the white cliffs of Dover. This wire here is from Jerusalem.”

Dr. R. G. Young, a chiropractor whose office is next door to the museum, came in. He was wearing a terry-cloth shirt that zipped to the throat, and had his hands in the pockets of his blue pants. “Hey Kathleen, when’re the Indians coming? Remember the time the Indians came—oh, ten years ago—arrived and set up their tepees in the yard and wouldn’t stay at the motel? They wouldn’t eat at the restaurant. They brought their own food and cooked it right out there!”

“This bob wire was on the Johnny Carson show. Not this exact wire—wire like this. It’s called Tyler G. Lord. It was strung on a fence and Johnny had to put a splice in it in a certain amount of time, and he was pretty good at it, too.”

A farmer came in. His lips were spotted and turned back into his mouth from chewing tobacco. “We’ve only had sixteen-hundredths of an inch of rain in this county since the beginning of September,” he said. “We had a downpour a couple of weeks ago, but then the sun came out and the wind started to blow and it evaporated quicker than it come. I hope it rains for this centennial. That would do more good than anything.”

“This wire is called Hodges Parallel Rowel. See the rowel in there, like the rowel in a spur, between the two strands? This wire is called Stover Corsicana Clip. This wire is called Kennedy Barb. You can put the barbs on this wire wherever you want.”

Glenn Gavin, of the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, came in. He began to talk about getting Mrs. Claar a grant, and she was not sure what she would have to do for it. “Have you had a consulting historian involved in this?” he asked.

“Let’s look at this interesting mirror over here. It’s made of a piece of what was left of the mirror behind a bar in Norcatur, Kansas, after Carry Nation went in and smashed the place up. The frame of the mirror is made from a piece of the molding of the bar. When we started this museum, people brought us things from every town around here.”

“An overall public humanities program can coordinate specialists in pioneer history,” Glenn Gavin said.

“Let’s look at this desk. It’s called a Wooten Desk. Its full name is Wooton’s Wonderful Patent Secretary, and it was known as the King of Desks. President Ulysses S. Grant had one, John D. Rockefeller had one, and Oberlin’s leading citizen at the turn of the century owned this one. His name was Otis L. Benton, and he was warm and outgoing, but his wife was definitely the first lady of the town, and she used to give command performances, like the queen. Her name was Maude. When she came back from her trip to Europe, she had this book of her impressions privately printed. It’s called

*Maude Abroad*. Some people thought that should be three words instead of two, with a comma after Maude.

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“This is a picture of the only Negro ever to live in Oberlin. Well, he wasn’t the only one. He had a wife. He lived in the town for many years and was loved and respected by all who knew him.

“This is a map of Oberlin done by a man with a wooden leg.

“These are books that were written about the Indian raid—*Cheyenne Autumn*, by Mari Sandoz, and *The Brass Command*, by Clay Fisher. *Cheyenne Autumn* was made into a movie.

“This is a fossil skeleton of a prehistoric shark which was found on the Smoky Hill River near Sharon Springs by a man who was an alcoholic and liked to look for arrowheads and fossils. Some of that arrowhead collection from forty-nine of the fifty states was his, too.

“This is a collection of buttons—shell buttons, glass buttons, buttons from Europe, all kinds of buttons—worth over three thousand dollars.

“This is an arrow recovered from the stomach of a cow belonging to James A. Gaumer after the Indian raid.

“This is a cigar made by an Oberlin woman who once worked in a cigar factory in New York City.

“This is a stuffed cobra with electrical tape around it where it broke. A serviceman who was married to a local girl gave it to the museum.

“These books—*A History of the Indians of the United States*, by Angie Debo, and *Crimson Prairie*, by S. L. A. Marshall—were in a house that my assistant, Esther Kump, and her husband rented to some people who had kids and the kids got into the books and shot them up. Used them for target practice.”

There was a phone call for Mrs. Claar. “Maybe it’s the Indians,” she said.

Writings having to do with the Indian raid:

*Authentic Accounts of Massacre of Indians, Rawlins County, Kansas, 1875, and Cheyenne Indian Raid in Western Kansas, September 30, 1878*, a booklet compiled by George Nellans, contains a copy of the official report submitted by Second Lieutenant Austin Henely, of the 6th United States Cavalry, on an attack he led on Cheyenne Indians camped on the Sappa Creek, in Rawlins County (the county next to Decatur County, where Oberlin is). Henely says that on April 19, 1875, he took forty men and pursued a band of Indians for four days until he met up with some buffalo hunters who showed him where the Indians were. He found the camp and attacked it at daylight, and killed nineteen men (including two chiefs, a medicine man, and a brave who attempted unsuccessfully to escape with “peculiar side-long leaps”) and eight women and children. He burned all the lodges, destroyed or took all the arms and ammunition, and captured all the ponies. He lost only two men himself. The booklet also contains a copy of the official report filed on October 26, 1878, by Captain William C. Wedemeyer, of the 16th United States Infantry, on the lives lost and the property destroyed and stolen in the Indian raid in Decatur and Rawlins Counties along the Solomon, the Prairie Dog, the Beaver, and the Sappa Creeks on September 30 and October 1. The men killed were homesteaders, cowboys, Czechoslovakian immigrants, men hunting land, young men of no family and no fixed address, and a traveling preacher. The lost property was cattle, horses, mules, hogs, chickens, patent medicine, carpenter’s tools, eight hundred pounds of flour, coffee, molasses, sugar, bacon, men’s clothing, women’s clothing, children’s clothing, clocks, books, pictures, jewelry, a telegraph sounder and keys, guns, dishes, feather beds, blankets, quilts, and cash. The report says that prairie fires burned through the area soon after the Indians left, and that many of the survivors went back East within ten days after the raid. The booklet also contains an article written for the Kansas Historical Society by the late William D. Street, who lived in Oberlin, who suggests that there was some connection between the

massacre of Indians on the Sappa in 1875 and the massacre of settlers along the same creek and in the same area three years later.

Mari Sandoz, the author of *Cheyenne Autumn*, talked to many Cheyennes in doing research for her book, which is more about their long struggle with the Army and the Indian Agency than it is specifically about the Last Indian Raid. Mari Sandoz says that the Indians who took part in the raid were part of a band of 284 Cheyennes led by Chiefs Little Wolf and Dull Knife who had escaped from the reservation at Bent's Fort, in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and were heading north across the state of Kansas, trying to get back to their old homeland in the Yellowstone country or rejoin their allies the Sioux at the Red Cloud Indian Agency, in northwestern Nebraska. She says that most of the band were Northern Cheyennes who had been sent to the reservation of the Southern Cheyennes in 1877. She says that the Northern Cheyennes caught malaria and starved in the south but that the Indian Agent and the Army would not let them leave, so on a night in early September 1878, they sneaked away from the camp, leaving their fires burning, and headed north—men, women, old people, and children. She says that they escaped many times from the cavalry that was sent after them, and they held off the cavalry in several engagements, and they raided in northwestern Kansas, and they crossed into Nebraska where they camped on the banks of the Republican River, and then they split into two groups, and one group was captured and taken to Fort Robinson, in Nebraska, and when they found they were to be sent south again they escaped from the fort and were again captured and many of them were killed, and several of the men were taken back to Kansas to stand trial for murder but were acquitted for lack of evidence, and finally they and the others who remained of the Fort Robinson group were allowed to go to the Red Cloud Agency, where they had wanted to go in the first place, while the second group avoided capture longer, and then the Army caught up with them, and finally they, too, were allowed to stay in the north, on land that is now the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, in southeastern Montana. She says that about a third of the original band did not survive the trip. She says that some of the band were Southern Cheyennes, who came at least part of the way, and that it was probably the Southern Cheyennes who were mostly responsible for the killings in Kansas, since the Indians who had been attacked along the banks of the Sappa three years before were Southern Cheyennes and not Northern Cheyennes. She says that one member of the original band was an artist named Little Fing Nail, who recorded his and his tribe's exploits in colored pencil in a canvas-bound ledger book, and that he wore this book on his body and it was pierced by two .45-70 rifle bullets when he was killed after the escape from Fort Robinson, and that the book is now on display at the American Museum of Natural History. She says that some members of the band were men named Hog, Left Hand, Tang Hair, Noisy Walker, Woodenthigh, Thin Elk, Black Coyote, Porcupine, and Black Crane and women named Short Woman, Comes in Sight, Singing Cloud, Pawnee Woman, and Buffalo Calf Road. She says that although the Cheyennes lost many women and children when they were attacked on Sappa Creek in Colorado in 1864, on the Washita in 1868, and on the Sappa Creek in 1875, the Cheyennes themselves never killed women or children.

The Indians were supposed to arrive Friday evening of the centennial weekend. On Friday afternoon Esther Kump, Mrs. Claar's assistant, got a telephone call from someone at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, in Busby, Montana, saying that the Indians' bus had broken down and they would not be able to make it.

All weekend long, the loud screen door of the museum banged, the floor creaked, children's feet scuffed, the phone rang, the air-conditioner turned off and on, mothers told children to behave, and

women in pioneer bonnets and hoopskirts talked to each other at the butter-churning, china-painting, quiltmaking, and other booths. On the street, vendors sold vases, lamps, bookends, lawn sprinklers, and clothes. Saturday afternoon, a high-pitched, bratty engine noise could be heard all over town. The toy tractors tried to pull a toy trailer loaded with lead weights the length of a sixteen-foot wooden table in the mini-tractor pull. That evening, the senior citizens' group from Topeka put on the medicine show, a collection of songs, skits, and jokes (Sample joke: Man: "Little girl, is your mother at home?" Girl: "Oh, she's 'round in the rear." Man: "I know *that*. I asked you is she at home!"), in the museum's large metal prefab auxiliary building, and the stage was set up in such a way that the latecomers in the audience had to enter across the stage, through the same entrance that the actors used. The people who were sitting and watching edited from the action onstage the occasional passage of relatives, friends, or neighbors as easily as the eye edits ghosts from a television picture. On Saturday night there was a street dance, with the museum's four-piece band and a square-dance call performing on top of a truck, and a group of ten semi-professional square dancers. The dance was held on South Penn Avenue, right before the avenue crosses the railroad tracks and becomes a dirt road under mercury street lamps, which threw light of silvery green and electric blue on the dancers and the bystanders and the steep-shadowed grain elevators in the background. The street was as wide as a New York City avenue, made of reddish bricks, and slightly canted. While I was watching, only the ten semi-professional dancers danced, and on the street's breadth, under the harsh mercury light, the weaving, unweaving, crossing, recrossing, exchanging, promenading, short-petticoat rustling, and boot-heel clicking seemed like an inexplicable organic structure on a microscope slide. Around the part of the street set aside for dancing, cars pulled up, facing toward the center with their lights on, and under the square-dance music you could hear the many different-sounding engines idling in unison.

The biggest event of the centennial weekend was the tour of the sites of the Last Indian Raid, sponsored by the High Plains Preservation of History Commission. It was on Sunday. The sky was CinemaScope blue, and the weather was so dry you could strike a match on the inside of your nose. After a short memorial service at the Oberlin Cemetery, people got into their cars and formed a long column heading for the first of ten stops on the tour. The sixty-seven cars, vans, pickup trucks, motor homes, and Land-Rovers quickly left the asphalt highway for dirt roads, following the tour leader Mr. and Mrs. Fred Wallsmith (ranchers and amateur historians from Levant, Kansas), and the dust became so thick that sometimes you could see nothing of the car ahead except a small piece of light on the chrome of the rear-window molding. At other times, the wind came up, and you could see the vehicles ahead, all with tails of dust exactly the same size and blown in the same shape. When the head of the column turned off to the right or the left, people in the cars at the back of the column could see the dust of the head cars miles across the prairie. Most of the stops on the tour were along the Beaver and Sappa Creeks—spring-fed creeks that used to have water in even the most severe drought but now are sometimes completely dry, because deep-drilling for irrigation has lowered the water table. The cottonwood trees along the creeks were a dusty green, and some of the aspens had already turned yellow. Big, testy pheasants looked at the caravan from the burnt buffalo grass.

Two hundred and fourteen people signed a register on a clipboard that was passed around at the early stops; some of them signed "Mr. and Mrs. and Family," so there must have been more than that. Many of the people on the tour were blond and blue-eyed and tanned. Many of the children were blond; their hair was almost white. There was one Spanish-speaking family, who never got out of the car but seemed to be having a fine time. There were three graduate students with long hair; when they got out of their car, they locked it. At each stop, the children would play, and the teenagers would s

on the hoods of the cars and lean against the cars, and the parents and old people would stand holding babies and listen as Fred Wallsmith read from his paper about the Indian raid into a battery-powered loudspeaker and pointed out where the Indians rode from and where the settlers were killed a hundred years ago.

At one of the stops, Mrs. Keith Hall (maiden name Fern Anthony), a daughter of an eyewitness of the raid, made a speech on a hill overlooking the place where her family's farmhouse used to be:

"My grandfather was a contractor and builder in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and he hurt himself—he fell through a building and broke his ribs. So in 1873 Grandfather and Grandmother and the children came West in a covered wagon, and that was when my father, Henry Anthony, was born, in California, Missouri, on Christmas Day, 1873. They came to Decatur County in February of 1874 and started a home three miles south of Oberlin, but then a man named Ireland came along and said that the land they were on was his. The neighbors said Ireland hadn't ever done anything with it, but Grandfather said no, there was plenty of land for everybody, so they moved nine miles up the Sappa from Oberlin and built a dugout from native limestone.

"In April of 1876, Grandfather had gone for supplies to Buffalo Station, which was the largest town near here with the supplies that one would need, and he got caught in a snowstorm. It became real bad, real fast and Grandfather became snow-blind, so he let the horses have their heads and he tied the lines around the wagon brake and the horses found their way to the Kaus place. Grandfather had blisters on his eyeballs, so Mrs. Kaus scraped seed potatoes and put the raw scrapings on his eyes, and after a few days he could see well enough to get home. But he was never well after that, and he died in February of 1877, leaving Grandmother, who was twenty-eight years of age, nine miles from Oberlin, with five young children.

"In September of 1878, there was a rumor of Indians. Papa's oldest brother, Harry, was thirteen, and he ran to the house about nine o'clock one morning and said that he had seen some Indians shoot our neighbors, Mr. Smith and Mr. Hudson. A man named Lynch who was running his cattle in the area and a sixteen-year-old boy who was helping him were at our place that morning, and Grandmother was making breakfast for them. They went and called the children to the house.

"Papa was four years old. He would be five years old that Christmas. He came running to the house but then he stopped on the hillside above the house—the dugout was built down in the hillside—and he sat down and started picking the cactus out of his feet. And he saw Mr. Laing and his son William going down the creek road that ran in front of our place in their wagon, taking the Van Cleve girls, Mary and Eliza, to school. He saw the Indians ride up to them, shake hands with them, and shoot them. The Indians cut the harnesses off the horses and took the horses, and they took the Van Cleve girls too, but then they let the girls go.

"Papa's sister, Belle, ran up and picked him up and took him in the house, and the Indians came to the house and tried to get in and Mr. Lynch killed one of them when the Indian stuck his head in the window. Then the Indians went on up the Sappa and they did the same thing to the other people they found. They'd ride up to them, shake hands with them, and shoot them, and then cut the harnesses off the horses.

"Later on in the day, Mrs. Laing came to our place from their farm, about three miles up the creek. She said, 'I suppose my husband and son are killed,' and Grandmother said yes. That evening, eight bodies in all were taken from the North Sappa back to Oberlin, and coffins were built for them, and they were buried by their friends and family.

"The soldiers who were supposed to stop the Indians were always behind, and the settlers thought that the soldiers sympathized with the Indians. But really the Indians were not to be blamed for a lot of the things that they did. After all, this was their land. I know we would fight if someone came and tried to take our land.

“Papa grew up and stayed there on the farm, and he built a house on top of the old dugout, and that where he brought his bride—my mother, Alice Gilmore. And that is where I was born, eighty years ago this April 5.”

Mrs. Hall received the only loud and spontaneous applause of the whole tour. Later, she said to me “You know, I’m just as glad the Indians couldn’t come.”

After the tour, Mr. and Mrs. Wallsmith took the three graduate students and me to see Cheyenne Hole where the Cheyennes were killed in 1875. The graduate students had looked for it once before but hadn’t been able to find it, but Mr. Wallsmith knew where it was, because in 1975 he was at a memorial service that the High Plains Preservation of History Commission held at the site. Cheyenne Hole is on the Middle Sappa Creek, about thirteen miles south of the town of Atwood, Kansas, on land now owned by a wheat-and-cattle farmer named Larry Curtin. We stopped at his farmhouse, and he and his wife and his children and his dog came out and got into a pickup truck, and we followed them for a short distance and stopped on a ridge. The sites where the settlers were killed, which we had visited earlier in the day, had all seemed like random X’s on the prairie, but Cheyenne Hole was different. Cheyenne Hole was a ruin. Lacking crumbling temples and broken obelisks, it still had a strong spirit of place-time in residence, the way all ruins do. It was once, and for a long time, as real a place to Indians as Peachtree Center, in Atlanta, is to us. For centuries up to 1875, it was a great campsite. The creek, which did not use to be dry, makes a wide oxbow between two ridges. There are plenty of trees and cover. The land along the creek is level, and the ridges on either side protect against the Great Plains wind.

“My daddy owned this land before me,” said Larry Curtin, “and when I was little it wasn’t nothing to find an arrowhead or a piece of pottery or some beads. They were just lying all over the ground. After the 1875 massacre, I’m told, they buried twenty-seven Indians right over there, about halfway between here and the creek bed, under that soapweed. They buried the chief in a cave up there.” He pointed to the ridge opposite. “See—even with that silo.”

The sun had just set. Fred and Wilma Wallsmith, Larry Curtin’s wife, the graduate students, and I were all kind of bunched together and sighted along Larry Curtin’s arm to see where he was pointing, and then he turned away and started talking and joking with Fred Wallsmith. The rest of us were still peering in the direction of the cave when a falling star dropped perpendicular to the horizon right where we were looking, like a heavenly visual aid. The star started out white and turned pale green as it entered the lighter sky near the horizon. It was really an amazing thing to happen, but Fred Wallsmith and Larry Curtin did not see it, and the rest of us did not know each other well enough to comment on it.



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## *An Angler at Heart*

Often during the past seven years, I have taken a walk from the offices of *The New Yorker* along Forty-third Street—across Fifth Avenue, across Madison Avenue, across Vanderbilt Avenue—then through Grand Central Terminal, across Lexington Avenue, up to Forty-fourth Street, into the elevator at 141 East Forty-fourth Street, up to the third floor, and through the belled door of a small fishing-tackle shop called the Angler's Roost, whose sole proprietor is a man named Jim Deren. Since I've been taking this walk, the Biltmore Men's Bar, which I used to pass at the corner of Madison and Forty-third, changed to the Biltmore Bar, which then became a different bar, named the Café Fanny, which was replaced by a computer store called Digital's, which moved (along with a lot of other stores on the block) after the Biltmore Hotel closed and disappeared under renovators' scaffolding. Once, on this walk, I had to detour around some barricades inside Grand Central, because a film crew was working on the movie *Superman*. Valerie Perrine and Gene Hackman were supposedly there, but I did not see them. Since then, I have seen the movie in a theater, and have noted the part that the crew must have been working on when I passed by. During these seven years, the huge Kodak display in the station near the Lexington Avenue wall, which people say ruins the station's interior light and makes it difficult to distinguish the beautiful Venetian-summer-night starscape on the ceiling, has featured photographs of water-skiers behind motorboats, a Bicentennial celebration with men dressed as Continental soldiers, the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (by night, lighted), the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, the Great Wall of China, and, one spring, a closeup shot of a robin, which looked frightening at that size. One time, I came in through the door on Forty-third Street and there before me, across the echoing well of the concourse, was a view of a rocky, cluttered desert, barn-red under a pink sky, with a little piece of the foot of a space probe visible in the foreground—Mars, photographed by Viking 2.

A fisherman can look at some sections of any trout stream clean enough for fish to live in, and say with confidence, A large fish lives there. The water should be deep, and it should be well aerated; that is, it should be free-flowing, rich in oxygen, and not stagnant. There should be a source of food: a grassy bank with beetles, grasshoppers, field mice, and frogs; or a little tributary creek with minnow chubs, dace, and sculpins; or an upstream section with a silt bottom for large, burrowing mayfly nymphs. There should be cover—downed logs, overhanging tree branches, undercut banks. When these conditions are found, the chances are very good that at least one large fish will be found as well. Such sections of a river are called good lies. A good lie will usually have a good fish lying in wait, gently finning, looking upstream for whatever the current may bring him.

I have always thought that, as lies go, it would be hard to find a better one than Grand Central Terminal. It is deep—water that deep would be a dark blue. Aerated streams of humanity cascade down the escalators from the Pan Am Building, and flow from the rest of midtown, the rest of the city, the rest of the world, through trains and subways and airport buses and taxis, into its deep pool and on again, and the volume of this flow makes it rich in the important nutrient called capital. Well, in this good lie the big fish of the fishing-tackle business is Jim Deren, of the Angler's Roost. For over forty years, he has had a shop in the area—a shop that has outlasted changes in fishing fashions, changes in the economy, competitors who gave their shops names intentionally similar to his, and finally even Abercrombie & Fitch, his biggest local competitor, which closed in 1977. All this time, Deren has remained in his good lie, gently finning behind the counter in his shop, consulting with fishermen

from just about every place where there's water, selling every kind of angling supply imaginably taking in cash and checks as gracefully as a big brown trout sips mayflies from the surface of Catskill stream.

The first time I met Jim Deren, I was looking for a particular dry fly (a pattern called the Gold-Ribbon Hare's Ear, with a body that goes all the way back over the bend of the hook), which had worked well for me in Wyoming, and which I could not find anywhere. I came across the entry for the Angler's Roost in the Yellow Pages:

ANGLER'S ROOST  
FISHING TECHNICIANS  
Tackle, Salt & Fresh, Lures, Flies  
Fly Materials, Waders & Clothing  
Repairs, Books & Advertising Props  
JIM DEREN ADVISOR

That impressed me. I called the shop one Saturday afternoon around six o'clock, and was surprised to find Deren there. In later years, I have learned that he is in his shop at all hours: I have found him at seven-fifteen on a beautiful Sunday evening in June; I have found him in on all sorts of holiday when midtown is nothing but blowing papers. On that first Saturday, Deren told me that he was about to go home but that if I came in soon he would wait for me. I arrived at the shop half an hour later. I did not happen to have the exact fly I wanted, but he told me where to get it. We talked for a while and I left without buying anything—the only time that has ever happened.

A few months later, during a really warm April, I decided I had to go fishing, even though I had never been fishing in the East and knew nothing about it. I bought a fishing license at the Department of Environmental Conservation office on the sixty-first floor of the World Trade Center, and then I went to see Deren. He told me the book to buy—*New Streamside Guide to Naturals and Their Imitations*, by Art Flick. He said that, because it had been so warm, certain mayflies that would usually be on the stream later in the season might have already appeared. He sold me flies imitating those insects. He told me where to fish—in the Beaverkill, the Little Beaverkill, and Willowemoc Creek, near Roscoe, New York. He told me what bus to take. I left his shop, went back to my apartment, got my fly rod and sleeping bag, went to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, boarded a Shore Line bus, and rode for two and a half hours with Hassidic Jews going to Catskill resorts and women going to upstate ashrams. On the bus, I read the *Streamside Guide*, which says that mayflies live for several years underwater as swimming nymphs, hatch into winged insects, mate while hovering over the water, lay their eggs in the water, and die; that recently hatched mayflies, called duns, float along the surface and are easy for trout to catch, and so are the stage of the mayfly's life cycle most sensible for the angler to imitate with artificials; that different species of mayflies hatch at different times in the year, according to water temperature; and that the different species emerge every year in an order so invariable as to be the only completely predictable aspect of trout fishing. I got off the bus in Roscoe about four in the afternoon, walked to the Beaverkill, hid my sleeping bag in some willows, set up my fly rod, and walked up the river until I reached a spot with no fishermen. I noticed mayflies

the air, noticed dragonflies zipping back and forth eating the mayflies. I saw a dragonfly pick a mayfly out of the air so neatly that he took only the body, leaving the two wings to flutter down to the surface of the stream and float away. I caught a mayfly myself after a lot of effort, compared it with the pictures in my *Streamside Guide*, decided that it was the male of the *Ephemerella subvaria* (Deren had been right; according to the book, that insect wasn't due for about two weeks more), tied on an imitation (a pattern called the Red Quill, in size 14), made a short cast, caught a little trout, made a few more short casts, caught another little trout, and waited while a fat guy with a spinning rod who said he wasn't having much luck walked by me up the river. Then I made a good, long cast under a spruce bough to a patch of deep water ringed with lanes of current, like a piece of land in the middle of a circular freeway-access ramp. This patch of water had a smooth, tense surface marked with little tucks where eddying water was boiling up from underneath. My fly sat motionless on this water for a time that when I replay it in my mind seems really long. Then a fish struck so hard it was like a person punching up through the water with his fist. Water splashed several feet in the air, and there was a flash of fish belly of that particular shade of white—like the white of a horse's eye when it's scared or the white of the underside of poplar leaves blown by wind right before a storm—that often seems to accompany violence in nature. The fish ran downstream like crazy (I don't remember setting the hook), then he ran upstream, then he ran downstream again. He jumped several times—not arched and poised, as in the sporting pictures, but flapping back and forth so fast he was a blur. Line was rattling in my line guides; I was pulling it in and he was taking it out, until finally there was a big pile of line at my feet, and the fish, also, in the shallow water at my feet. He was a thirteen-inch brook trout, with a wild eye that was a circle of black set in a circle of gold. The speckles on his back reproduced the wormlike marks on the rocks on the stream bottom, and his sides were filled with colors—orange, red, silver, purple, midnight blue—and yet were the opposite of gaudy. I hardly touched him; he was lightly hooked. I released him, and after a short while he swam away. I stood for maybe ten minutes with my fly rod lying on the gray, softball-size rocks, and I stared at the trees on the other side of the river. The feeling was like having hundreds of gag hand-buzzers applied to my entire body.

Since that day I have always loved the Red Quill dry fly, and particularly the Red Quill that Deren sells, which is the most elegant I have ever seen. For me, the Red Quill is a shamanistic medicine bundle that called forth the strike, the flash of belly, the living palette of colors from that spring day, and, years later, even in situations where it is not remotely the right fly, I find myself tying it on just to see what will happen.

Also since that day I have believed that Jim Deren is a great man. He is the greatest man I know who will talk to just anybody off the street.

In appearance, Deren is piscine. He is stocky—probably about five feet ten inches tall. His hair is in a mouse-brown brush cut, about half an inch long. His forehead is corrugated with several distinct wrinkles, which run up and down, like marks of soil erosion on a hill. His eyes are weak and watery and blue, behind thick glasses with thick black frames. There is a large amount of what looks like electrical tape around the glasses at the bridge. His eyebrows are cinnamon-colored. His nose is thick and his lips are thick. He has a white mustache. His direct, point-blank regard can be unsettling. People who have fished their whole lives sometimes find themselves saying when they encounter the gaze that they don't know a thing about fishing, really. Deren has a style of garment which he loves and which he wears almost every single day in his shop. This garment is the jumpsuit. For a long time he wore either a charcoal-gray jumpsuit or an olive-green jumpsuit. One or both of the jumpsuits had a big ring on the zipper at the throat. Recently, Deren has introduced another jumpsuit into the repertoire. This is a sky-blue jumpsuit with a green-on-white emblem of a leaping bass on the left

breast pocket. Deren's voice is deep and gravelly. I can do a good imitation of him. The only sentence I can think of that might make his accent audible on paper (in the last word, anyway) is one I have heard him speak several times while he was talking on one of his unfavorite topics, the "flow children": "In late October, early November, when we're driving back from fishing out West, with the wind howling and huge dark snow clouds behind us, sometimes we pass these frail girls, these flow children, standing by the side of the road in *shawwwwwwwwwls*."

I say Deren is probably about five feet ten inches tall because even though he often says, "I've been running around all day. I'm exhausted," I have actually seen him standing up only a few times. Like a psychiatrist, Deren is usually seated. I have seen him outside his shop only once—when, as I was leaving, he came down in the elevator to pick up a delivery on the first floor. (Ambulant, he seemed to me surprisingly nimble.) It is appropriate for Deren to be seated all the time, because he has a tremendous repose. There is a lot of bad repose going around these days: the repose of someone watching a special Thursday-night edition of Monday Night Football; the repose of someone smoking a cigarette on a ten-minute break at work; the repose of driving; the repose of waiting in line at the bank. Deren is in his sixties. The fish he has caught, the troubles he has been through, the fishing tackle he has sold, the adventures he has had lend texture to his repose. On good days, his repose hums like a gyroscope.

Deren talking about the Angler's Roost while sitting in his shop on a slow afternoon in March: "It seems only natural that I would have gravitated to this business. I've been tying flies ever since I was in short pants. When I was in grade school in New Jersey, I used to go without lunch because I wanted to save my money and buy fishing tackle. I remember fashioning a fly from a jacket of mine when I was a kid just barely big enough to be let out of sight. I tied it out of a lumberjacket that my mother had made for me—"

The phone rings.

"Hello. Angler's Roost."

" . . . . ."

"Christ, I don't know a thing about Chinese trout fishing, Doc."

"Well, they gotta have trout fishing. The Japanese have trout fishing. Just the other day, I sold some stuff to Yasuo Yoshida, the Japanese zipper magnate. He's probably got more tackle than I got. He's got *kichi* about trout fishing. *kichi*—that's Japanese for nuts."

" . . . . ."

"Well, I think the Russians should open one or two of their rivers for salmon fishing, certainly. They just have to have terrific salmon fishing."

" . . . . ."

"Look at it this way—next time you'll know."

"Whatever you find out, Doc, let me know when you get back. Have a good time."

"Anyway, I had this blue-gray lumberjacket, and there was this little blue fly on the water. The goddam fish weren't considering anything but this fly. Well, between the lining and the thread of my jacket, I made a fly that looked something like the insect, and so, glory be, after some effort I caught a fish. The fish made a mistake, and that did it. This was on a little stream in Pennsylvania, a little tributary of the Lehigh. It was a day as miserable as this, but later in the year."

Deren picks up a package of Keebler Iced Oatmeal and Raisin Cookies, breaks it open in the middle and dumps all the contents into a white plastic quart bucket—the kind of bucket that ice cream comes in. He starts to eat the cookies.

"After that, I was really hooked. I collected all kinds of items for flytying. Cigarette and cig

wrappers, hairs from dogs. Christ, I cut hair off every goddam thing that was around. Picked up feathers in pet shops. I was always raiding chickens or ducks. I remember I tried to get some feathers from some geese and they ran me the hell out the county. Horse tails. Anything. It wasn't long before I was selling some of the flies I tied. As far as I know, I was the first commercial nymph-tier in the country. I was selling flies in New York, New Jersey, and fairly deep into Pennsylvania. Fishing was a great thing for me, now that I look back on it, because in a lot of the contact sports I was always busting my glasses. But row a boat—I had a pair of chest muscles, looked like a goddam weight lifter. I was very well coordinated. I had coordination and timing. That has something to do with fishing. I was a good wing shot.”

Deren reaches under the counter and produces a banana. With a table knife, he cuts the banana in half. He eats one half, and leaves the other half, in the skin, on top of a pile of papers. Later, the customer will find in the pile of papers a copy of a fishing magazine that he has been looking for. Deren will take it out from under the half banana and buy it.

“I spent all my time in high school fishing, and one day I noticed this guy was watching me. He had been watching me a few times before. He'd ask me questions. Well, it turned out this guy had a radio show about fishing and hunting. I think he called himself Bill the Fisherman. He started telling people about me—called me the Child Fisherman Prodigy. He told the proprietor of a fishing-tackle shop in the heart of Newark, right by Penn Station, and the man hired me, and eventually I became the youngest fishing-tackle buyer in the country. Not long after that, I was imported by an outfit in New York called Alex Taylor & Company, on Forty-second Street. I put them in the fishing-tackle business.”

The phone rings again.

“Angler's Roost.”

“ . . . . .”

“We've got all kinds of hook hones.”

“Fresh and salt, both.”

“Yes, some of them are grooved.”

“ . . . . .”

“Two different grooves.”

“ . . . . .”

“Each one comes in a plastic case.”

“Different lengths. I think two-inch and three-inch.”

“ . . . . .”

“What the hell do you mean, who makes it? It's a goddam hook hone! What the hell difference does it make who makes it?”

“Guy wants to know who makes the hook hone. Wants to know what *brand* it is. Christ. Anyway, after that I became a buyer and salesman for another house, called Kirtland Brothers, downtown. They're now extinct. I advised their clients on the technical aspects of fly-fishing. Mainly, I handled their flytying material. About this time, I began my mail-order business, selling flytying material through ads in different magazines. I was working all day for Kirtland Brothers, then staying up all night to handle my mail orders. Finally, it got unmanageable as a side business. I wasn't doing justice to either job. I finished my obligations to that firm, and then I opened up the first Angler's Roost, 207 East Forty-third, above where the Assembly Restaurant used to be. I dreamed up the name myself. You had the roost connotation because it was up off the street and you had guys that hung around all day with the eternal bull sessions. (I was thinking of selling coffee and cake there for a while.) Then you think of birds roosting, and, of course, a lot of what we sold was feathers. And a lot of the feathers were rooster feathers—capes and necks.”

Deren takes from the pocket of his jumpsuit a new pack of True Blue cigarettes. With a flytying bodkin, he makes a number of holes all the way through the pack. Then he takes out a cigarette and lights it.

“Since its inception, the Roost has been tops in its field. We’ve had every kind of customer, from the bloated bondholder to the lowliest form of human life. Frank Jay Gould, the son of the railroad magnate, once bought a boat over my telephone. Ted Williams used to stop by whenever the Red Sox were in town. He was a saltwater fisherman, but we infected him with the salmon bug. We’ve had boxers, bandleaders, diplomats, ambassadors. Benny Goodman used to come in all the time. I sold Artie Shaw his salmon outfit. So many notable people, I don’t even remember. Engelhard, Engelhard precious metals. Marilyn Monroe’s photographer, Milton Greene. Señor Wences—the ventriloquist who did the thing with the box. Bing Crosby. Tex Ritter. He was an uncle of mine by my first marriage; I got a lot of other customers in Nashville through him. We’ve had more than one President. Eisenhower came in once. He was a nice guy—didn’t have his nose too far up in the air. We’ve had three generations of people come in here, maybe four. We’ve had some of the very elite. A lot of them don’t want their names mentioned.”

Deren looks left, cocks his wrist as if he were throwing a dart, and flips the cigarette out of sight behind the counter.

“We had our own television show, which ran for twenty-six weeks on the old DuMont Television Network. It was called The Sportsman’s Guide. It was sponsored by Uhu Glue—a miracle glue, kind of like Krazy Glue. The announcer was a guy named Connie Evans. I did the lecturing—like on a spinning reel—and then when we did a fishing trip I did the fishing. That television show wasn’t over very long before people started calling me Uncle Jimmy. I don’t know how it got started, but it stuck. I was also a technical panelist on a radio show called The Rod and Gun Club of the Air. The other panelists and I shot the breeze amongst us every week.”

A blond woman in a beige knit ski cap comes in. She asks Deren if he has an eight-foot bamboo fishing rod. He says he doesn’t but he can order one for her. The woman says, “Oh, that’s great. I think he might marry me if I find him that rod.” She leaves.

“Did I tell you about our television show? The Sportsman’s Guide? Did I tell you about our heavy involvement in the advertising field? Over the years, we’ve acted as consultant on hundreds and hundreds of ads. Sooner or later, everybody uses a fishing ad. Also, the slogan ‘How’s your love life?’ started in the Roost. I used to ask my customers that when they came in, and then it became the slogan for a brand of toothpaste.

“We developed the first satisfactory big-game reel—the Penn 12/0 Senator. I guess there’s six or seven miles of those things now. We also helped develop the concept of R. and R.—Rest and Recuperation—for the military. The idea was to take these guys who’d been through the horrors of war, get them fishing, get them flytying, get their minds off their former troubles. Some of the stuff I wrote on flytying for the Navy was posted in battleships that are now in mothballs. We also supplied the cord that made Dracula’s wings move, for the Broadway show. We’ve always been an international business. Anglers come from India, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, Holland, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, Mexico, South Africa, South America—so many South Americans you’d think it was just next door, and they’re all loaded. Bolivia, Tierra del Fuego. Any guy who’s a nut about a fly comes to the Roost eventually. Anyplace a trout swims they know the Roost. Not only trout. Also bonefish, tarpon, sailfish, striped bass, salmon—”

The phone rings again.

“Angler’s Roost.”

“Hello, my little pigeon.”

“Just a few minutes. I’m leaving right now.”

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In Deren's shop, three customers can stand comfortably. You can stand and put your hands in your pockets, but there really isn't room to move around much. Four is tight. Five is crowded. Six is very crowded. When there are six customers in the shop, one of them has to hold on to somebody to keep from falling over backward into the knee-high wader bin. Except for the small space around the customers' feet, Deren's shop is 360 degrees of fishing equipment, camping equipment, books, and uncategorizable stuff. The shop is like a forest in that if you remain silent in either of them for a length of time you will hear something drop.

"What the hell was that?"

"I think it was a book."

"Don't worry about it. Leave it there."

"*Better Badminton*? Jim, how come you have a book called *Better Badminton*?"

"A lot of these things get shipped by mistake, and then it's too goddam much trouble to send them back."

In Deren's shop, he has tackle for the three different kinds of sportfishing—bait casting, spin fishing, and fly-fishing. Bait-casting outfits are the standard rod and reel that cartoonists usually give to fishermen. The reel has a movable spool, and both rod and reel are designed for bait or for lures heavy enough to be cast with their own weight. Spin-fishing rods and reels are also designed for lures heavy enough to be cast with their own weight, but because of refinements in the reel—a non-movable spool that allows the line to spiral off—spin-fishing rods cast farther with less weight. In fly-fishing the lure is usually nothing but feathers on a hook, so it does not have enough weight to be cast. Fly fishing equipment consists of longer, lighter rods and a thick, tapered line, which work together with a whipping action to cast the fly. All three of these kinds of fishing can be done in either fresh or salt water. The sea is bigger than the land; saltwater tackle is usually bigger and heavier than freshwater tackle. Deren sells saltwater rods as thick as mop handles, and freshwater fly rods like Seiji Ozawa's baton. They are made of bamboo, fiberglass, metal, or (recent developments) graphite or boron. He sells reels like boat winches, and palm-size reels that sound like Swiss watches when you crank them. He has thousands of miles of line—nylon monofilament or braided nylon or plastic or braided Dacron or silk or wire. He has hooks from size 28, which are small enough to fit about five on a fingertip, to size 16/0, which have a four-inch gap between the point of the hook and the shank.

Deren also has:

thousands of lures designed to imitate live game-fish prey, with names like Bass-Oreno, Original Spin-Oreno, Buzz'n Cobra, Chugger, Lucky 13, Crazy Crawler, Hopkins No-Eql, Goo-Goo Eyes, Hurricane Popper, Jitterbug, Devil's Horse, Creek Chub Wiggle Fish, Flatfish, Lazy Ike, Red Eye, Dardevil, Fluke Slayer, Ava Diamond Jig, Rapala, Dancing Doll Jig, Rebel, Darter, Mirrolure, Shyster, Abu Reflex, Swedish Wobbler, Hawaiian Wiggler, Golden-Eye Troublemaker, Hustler, Al's Goldfish, Pikie Minnow, Salty Shrimper, Williams Wobbler, Tiny Tad, Tiny Torpedo, Zara (named after Zarragossa Street, the former red-light district in Pensacola, Florida, because of its attractive wiggle)

countless trout flies that imitate mayflies at every stage of their life, with names like Quill Gordo, Hendrickson, March Brown, Red Quill, Grey Fox, Lady Beaverkill, Light Cahill, Grey Fox Variations, Dun Variant, Cream Variant, Blue-Winged Olive, Sulphur Dun, Brown Drake, Green Drake, Palmetto Evening Dun, Little White-Winged Black;

trout flies that imitate other insects—the Letort Hopper, Jassid, Black Ant, Red Ant, Cinnamon Ant, Black Gnat, Spider, Leaf Roller, Stonefly, Caddis, Case Caddis, Caddis Worm, Caddis Pupa, Dragonfly, Hellgrammite, Damselfly;

flies that imitate mice, frogs, and bats;

streamer flies—the Muddler Minnow, Spruce Fly, Spuddler, Professor, Supervisor, Black Ghost, Grey Ghost, Mickey Finn—which are probably meant to imitate minnows;

other flies—the Parmachenee Belle, Lord Baltimore, Yellow Sally, Adams, Rat-Faced McDougal, Woolly Worm, Hare's Ear, Humpy, Royal Coachman, Hair-Wing Royal Coachman, Lead-Wing Royal Coachman, Queen of the Waters, Black Prince, Red Ibis—of which it is hard to say just what they are supposed to imitate, and which are sometimes called attractor flies;

big, colorful salmon flies, with names like Nepisi-quit, Abbey, Thunder and Lightning, Amherst, Black Fairy, Orange Blossom, Silver Doctor, Dusty Miller, Hairy Mary, Lancelot, Jock Scott, Fair Duke, Durham Ranger, Marlodge, Fiery Brown, Night Hawk, Black Dose, Warden's Worry;

flies that he invented himself—Deren's Stonefly, Deren's Fox, Deren's Harlequin, The Fifth Degree, The Torpedo, The Black Beauty, Deren's Speckled Caddis, Deren's Cream Caddis, Deren's Cinnamon Caddis, Deren's Grey Caddis;

feathers for tying flies—rooster (domestic and foreign, winter plumage and summer plumage, dozens of shades), ostrich, goose, kingfisher, mallard, peacock, turkey, imitation jungle cock, imitation marabou, imitation wood duck;

fur—Alaskan seal, arctic fox, mink, beaver, weasel, imitation chinchilla, raccoon, ermine, rabbit, fitch, marten, gray fox, skunk, squirrel, civet cat—also for tying flies;

hair—deer, bear, antelope, moose, goat, elk, badger, calf—also for tying flies;

scissors, forceps, pliers, razors, vises, lamps, tweezers, bobbins, bodkins, floss, thread, chenille, tinsel, Mylar, lead wire, wax, yarn—also for tying flies;

chest waders, wader suspenders, wader belts, wader cleats, wader racks, wader patch kits, wading shoes, wading staffs, hip boots, boot dryers, inner boot soles, Hijack brand V-notch boot remover, insulated socks, fishing vests, bug-repellent fishing vests, rain pants, ponchos, head nets, long-billed caps, hunting jackets, thermal underwear, high-visibility gloves, fishing shirts;

ice augers, dried grasshoppers, minnow scoops, fish stringers, hook disgorgers, rubber casting weights, gigs, spears, car-top rod carriers, rubber insect legs, fish-tank aerators, English game bag, wicker creels, folding nets, hand gaffs, worm rigs, gasoline-motor starter cords, watercolor painting of the Miramichi River, sponge-rubber bug bodies, line straighteners, knot-tiers, snakebite kit, hatbands, leather laces, salmon eggs, plastic-squid molds, stuff you spray on your glasses so they won't fog up, duck and crow calls, waterproof match cases, lead split-shot, collapsible oars, bells that you hook up to your line so they ring when a fish takes your bait, Justrite electric head lanterns, dried mayfly nymphs, rescue whistles, canteens, butterfly nets, peccary bristles, porcupine quills, frog harnesses ...

The truth is, I have no idea of all the things Deren has in his shop. Just about every item he sells is appropriate to a particular angling situation. In addition to the part of the shop that the customer sees at the Angler's Roost fills a couple of large back rooms, a lot of space in an office on another floor of the same building, and space that Deren rents in a warehouse in New Jersey. I have not yet encountered, nor would I encounter in several lifetimes of angling, all the different situations for which the different items in his shop are intended.

Deren likes to recite certain fishing maxims over and over, and although he says his intent is purely educational (“We don't sell anybody. We advise, and then they do their own buying”) I have seen his maxims work on customers' wallets the way oyster knives work on oysters. One of these maxims is “Ninety percent of a trout's diet consists of food he finds underwater.” A customer who hears this often decides he has to have a couple dozen stone-fly nymphs—weighted flies that imitate the nymphal stage of the stone fly, an insect common in rocky streambeds. The stone fly that Deren sel



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