

## RECOLLECTIONS

CHITINA - MCCARTHY

1963 - 1987

Curtis Green

## PART ONE

### FRESNO--VALDEZ--CHITINA

1963--67

We were grumbling and grouching again, Loy and I, bitching and moaning, carping and complaining, singing those low-down, down and out California blues.

Ah yes, California...promised land of the fifties, golden state of dreams, the American Eden, had just surpassed New York as the most populous state in the union. The governor, with appropriate fanfare, had proudly made the announcement. Proudly! Oh sure. In those days bigger was better, the more the merrier. We did not share the governor's enthusiasm. For us it was the final straw, the unmistakable signal that it was time to get the hell out, move on, pull up stakes and head for the next frontier...the Great American tradition.

"So why don't you guys go to Alaska if you're so unhappy here." asked our long-suffering sister. Martha.

Here was Fresno, California. It was the beginning of 1963. The country slumbered still in that pre-Vietnam era that America likes to think of as its Age of Innocence--as if a country that practiced slavery and genocide from its very beginning ever had an Age of Innocence.

It was a time when there was a niche for everyone and everyone was in their niche. So: JFK was in the White House; women in the kitchen; Negroes(as we called those people that we now call African-Americans)in the ghetto; Indians(Native-Americans)on the reservation; queers(gays)in the closet; Tammy was in love, and God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. Right? Well, not quite. All sorts of pressures were building up beneath the placid surface, getting ready to erupt and engulf the land in a riot of sex drugs and Rock and Roll.

I had completed my tour in the navy the previous summer and had come to Fresno where Loy was living at the time, with the intention of going to college. Then in Sept, Martha, recently divorced, had come up from San Diego, with her two young daughters, Kathy and Jeannie, eight and nine, respectively. We were living in a small two bedroom apartment without, believe it or not, a kitchen range, or refrigerator. We cooked in an electric skillet and kept perishables in a small ice-chest.

I had indeed enrolled at Fresno St College in the fall, and Martha, suddenly faced with supporting two kids, entered a business school hoping to enhance her job skills. Loy was "employed" in yet another selling job--commission only--from which he earned precious little in the way of commissions. Some how we got by.

World-weary at 23, I was desperate not to lead that life of quiet desperation that Thoreau claimed most men lead. Yes, I was full of Thoreau, as well as Whitman, Emerson, that whole mid-19th century transcendentalist crowd, and I clearly heard the sage of Concord chanting his message to Simplify, Simplify. Visions of a cabin in the woods, a plot of soil to garden, freedom from what seemed to me an oppressive social-order, i.e. rat-race, and time to "Loaf and invite(one's)soul;" what more could one want?

But of course we had none of that; so in that winter of our discontent when discontent was the currency of our discourse, Martha's sudden suggestion--serious or not--dawned like the sun on a clear, cloudless morning. Why of course. Why hadn't we thought of that?

We must have looked at one another in wonderment and said something like why not, why the hell not?

We began immediate and very real plans. Loy quit diddling around trying to sell whatever and got a real job in order to get up some money. I checked books out of the library and began reading up on our great big new state. We began accumulating basic food stuffs—rice, beans, flour—and other gear—an army surplus tent, coleman lantern and camp cooking stove, ax and a two-man cross-cut saw with which in our romantic simplicity we envisioned cutting the logs for our cabin as well as our firewood. Loy traded his Chrysler New Yorker straight across for a 56 blue Ford panel truck...and we waited for spring.

At the end of the school year Martha sent Kathy and Jeannie back to S.D. to stay with their grandmother while she stayed to finish her schooling, before returning to S.D. to launch a very brief secretarial career prior to her second and present marriage.

In mid-June we bid Martha farewell and set forth on "The Open Road"(what is now, of course, I Five)bound for Alaska and the unknown. The blue panel, "old Blue," was well stocked, we imagined, for any eventually, as well as books books books—for this was to be not merely an adventure into the Alaska wilderness, but an adventure of the mind, a continuing education, a quest for that "something far more deeply interfused," of which Wordsworth wrote.

It was a leisurely trip, camping out all the way. In 1963 it was still possible, even in Calif. to pull off the highway and find a spot to set up camp.

Of course we weren't exactly setting forth with a fat wad of bills either. The Canadians required a minimum amount of money for Americans bound for Alaska(200 dollars, I think)and we had just barely that amount.

We crossed the border into Alaska, appropriately enough, on July 4th.

Shortly after entering the state, we stopped at a highway roadhouse for coffee where we spotted a poster advertising Valdez, "The Switzerland of Alaska," That had a ring to it, so at the junction of the Richardson and Glenn highways, we took the Richardson to Valdez—surely one of those major crossroads we all come to many times in life. Impossible to imagine how different everything would have been had we stayed on the Glenn and wound up in Anchorage. Suffice it to say that over the years I have known many folks that made the Alaska trip seeking essentially what we were who went first to Anchorage, then spent years trying to get out. Some never did.

It was a brilliant late Sunday afternoon. We were about 10 miles out from Valdez. I noticed a man off to the side of the highway struggling to free his vehicle—a Scout—from the mud, and suggested we stop to offer our help. He had a chain, so we hooked up old blue, I pushed and we got him free. To show his appreciation he invited us to stay for dinner. Dick Dunning and his wife, recent arrivals to Alaska, were living in a trailer up on the hillside on a five acre homesite they had filed on. He encouraged us to stay in the area and look for property; and suggested an abandoned shack on a small dirt road about a mile or so on toward Valdez where we could stay in the meantime. We pitched the tent and spent the night there. Next morning, as we were breaking camp, Dick glanced in the back of the truck and remarked, "looks like you guys aren't looking for a homesite so much as a monastery."

The shack turned out to be just that—a shack. It had been a ski shack for a ski lift that had operated some years ago. But it had four walls, the roof was sound and the weather was fine and warm and clear. It seemed we had found a good spot. Certainly Valdez was as quaint and charming a town as one could wish for. Most of the buildings dated to the

early part of the century, the roads were all dirt and it sat on a lovely bay surrounded by soaring snow capped peaks. The Switzerland of Alaska indeed.

The weather stayed nice for nearly a week and together with Dick we began combing the hillsides for a suitable spot for a homesite. The idea was to file for five acres rather than the 160 acres available under the homestead act, as that entailed a lot of clearing and eventually proving up through agriculture. We were not there to farm. But my God what vegetation—like hacking one's way through a jungle. We began to have misgivings; and then the rains came and Valdez revealed its true colors.

We spent the remainder of July holed up in the shack and it soon became clear that the Valdez area was not going to make it.

With the coming of the rainy weather it turned chilly and the shack had no stove. Then one day Dick came over to say that he had found a stove for us. So we were off to the Valdez dump, where, with the aid of the winch on his Scout, we liberated a small, but serviceable stove. Well, at least we were warm and dry. But by the first of Aug our cash supply had dwindled to absolute zero. We had taken advantage of a rare break in the weather to walk into Valdez and see about the possibility of work and spent our last few cents on candy bars. They were heavenly.

Fall was approaching, we knew we couldn't stay there, but had no money to go some where else. Then, just as the future looked grim, good old Dick Dunning showed up to inform us of a job opportunity at the Valdez cold storage.—and two days later we were off to Cordova to rendezvous with the "Valiant Maid," and encounter our first real Alaska character, Ed Bilderback, her owner and captain.

I remember Ed as wild and free, full of laughter and good humor who made a nearly intolerable job tolerable. What was the job? Blood and guts, my friends, blood and guts.

The "Valiant Maid" was anchored off the coast of Cordova in the Copper River Flats, one of the great salmon fishing areas in the world—a treasure trove of King salmon in the spring, red in the summer and silver in the fall. Fishermen would bring their catch to be off-loaded on the "Valiant Maid" and our job was to immediately gill and clean them, leaving the heads on, as these salmon were not for canning, but to be quick frozen in the "Valiant Maids' refrigerated hold, then transported to Valdez cold storage for eventual transport to Seattle. Loy, myself and a kid of 19 or 20 manned the cleaning tables, though ~~it~~ sometimes when the fish were arriving hot and heavy and we were falling behind, Ed would grab a cleaning knife and cheerfully pitch in.

It was piece work and we were making something ridiculous like two cents per fish, so I assure you we quickly learned to gut and gill a salmon in jig time.

By the end of the month the job was over and we returned to the shack with about 600 dollars between us but still had no plan for the winter.

Dick Dunning to the rescue. "You guys should go check out Chitina, I think it might be what you are looking for." He gave us directions and we drove down for a look see the following morning.

It was early Sept and the weather was cloudy. Driving down the Edgerton cutoff, a 35 mile stretch of dirt road off the Richardson highway, we were favorably impressed by the look of the land. Gone was the lush overgrown vegetation of Valdez. It was a sparser, sparser country that reminded us somewhat of our native Colorado; then, as we pulled into Chitina and the first building we saw was a weathered old structure with a ghost figure painted on its side, we knew we had found our winter refuge.

We checked into the Chitina hotel for the night and next morning began making inquiries about the possibility of renting a cabin for the winter. It was suggested that the



Newell place, an old two-story log cabin located just up the hill from the hotel, might be available. Vern and Nancy Newell lived in Valdez, so we returned to Valdez, made arrangements to rent the cabin for 15 dollars a month, picked up our gear at the shack and returned to Chitina for one more night at the hotel.

Next morning Howard Knutson, who basically ran Chitina, asked us if we would be interested in working for a couple of weeks. Well sure. After all we weren't all that flush.

600 dollars, even in those days, wasn't a lot of money to go into a long, unknown winter.

So that very afternoon we took off from One Mile Lake, on floats, Howard at the controls, to land at Tebay Lake, where a small gnome-like rheumy-eyed old man waited to escort us to Spirit Mt.

"Fellows, meet Neil Finnesand," Howard said as he tied up the plane and we began unloading supplies. He chatted with Neil for a few minutes, saying he would be back next morning with the rest of the crew, and took off.

Neil Finnesand, at 80, was the still very active prospector whose nickel/silver claim at the base of Spirit Mt was our destination. He had arrived in the Chitina area from his native Norway as a young man in 1905 before there even was a Chitina. Invariably of good cheer, I never heard him say a negative word about anybody during the 25 years I knew him, for he lived to the age of 105. At one time he had supplied Chitina with fire wood which he cut by hand with a "Swede" saw, or bow saw and hauled with a team of horses. He had also at one time delivered mail to McCarthy via dog team. In his fifties he had married, for the first time, a much younger Native girl and fathered three daughters and two sons. He lived alone now in the old house down by Town Lake that I suppose he had lived in since the beginning.

It was about a three mile hike, half of it up a steep grade, then down to the small valley where the camp was located. We loaded up our packs, as everything had to be packed in, and started up. Neil, by the way, stuffed his pack full, not about to be outdone by a couple of young cheechakos. "You fellows go on ahead, I'll catch up with you," he said. We set off at a brisk pace, up the steep and winding trail, full of boundless energy; but on reaching the top, stopped, panting and out of breath, shucked our packs and sat down to rest. And sure enough, here came Neil, slow and steady, plodding along. we went on down together and entered camp to find Neil's partner, Art Nelson from Anchorage, busy setting up tents.

Next morning the rest of the crew, out of Edmonton, Alberta, arrived. George(I don't recall his last name)the geologist and the only true Canadian of the three; Walter Filipec, immigrant from Czechoslovakia, promoter; and Tex, immigrant, as you might expect, from Texas, the bankroller of the operation.

Now then, if your mind begins to conjure up an image of a ten gallon hat, cowboy boots and a southern drawl laced with howdy and y'all, stop it; don't let it lead you down that primrose path to clichéville. After all, not all Texans are loud-mouthed yahoos--most maybe--but not all, and this Texan, other than being (apparently) well-heeled--and all Texans, as everybody knows, are rich--was about as far from the stereotype as one could imagine. He had systematically--he even admitted this--rooted out all traces of his roots, and adopted, quite convincingly, the dress, speech and mannerisms of an English aristocrat. Actually, I'm surprised he didn't sport a monocle--but I guess that would have been a bit too much, even for him. George, a plain speaking down to earth type considered him a pretentious ass(which of course he was)and even told him so on at least one occasion that I

can recall. But he was articulate, well-read and amusing, all of which I aspired to be, so we developed a rapport of sorts.

"Ah the Yankee flag is flying," George remarked, upon entering the cook tent and smelling the coffee; then, after introductions, turned to Loy and I and said, which one of you is going to be the cook?

That came as a surprise and since we both lacked any experience, other than opening a can or frying a egg, we were at a loss. Finally <sup>LOV</sup>suggested we flip a coin and he won...or lost, well anyway he was to be the cook--fortunately, I suppose. As a boy, he had spent much time at Summitville, a gold mining camp near our home town of Monte Vista Colorado, observing our father, a cook and baker ply his trade and something must have seeped in that he was able to draw on. I don't remember what he cooked for his first meal, except for the gravy--a rich, tasty cream gravy that inspired George, that crusty old geologist to exclaim, "By God we got ourselves a cook."

It was an exploratory drilling operation, the object being to drill with a diamond drill and take core samples to determine if the deposit merited further development.

I was general flunky and pack mule. The actual drilling was done by Walter, Art(a much younger man than Neil)and George. I don't recall working very hard, and neither did anyone else. I don't think they were really very serious--except maybe Neil and Art. Perhaps it was a tax write-off. At any rate nothing ever came of it.

The evenings were chilly and it was an after dinner ritual to have a hot buttered rum made with 101 proof Lemon Hart rum. Tex and I would usually linger and talk, discussing Literature, Philosophy, with perhaps a smattering of politics--though Tex did most of the talking. It was on one such occasion that George expressed his feelings. We had lingered a bit longer than usual, perhaps had one too many rums. Tex was droning on, expounding and expostulating. Suddenly from his tent adjacent the cook tent, George bellowed, "Shut up you pompous ass and go to bed so that a working man can get some sleep.

At the end of the month we broke camp and headed back to Chitina. After a sumptuous farewell dinner at the Chitina hotel, the Canadians returned to Edmonton, Art to Anchorage, and Loy and I began the process of moving in to the cabin and getting to know Chitina.

I was thrilled beyond measure to find myself living in a remote, nearly forgotten "ghost town." There was little traffic into Chitina in those days. In the first place it wasn't all that easy to get there. The final five miles of the Edgerton cutoff was a tortuous one lane affair that wound its hazardous way, with many a blind curves, from the airstrip to deadend at the Copper River a mile beyond town. In the second place, what was the attraction? Well for those in the know, there was the salmon fishing in the Copper River, which accounted for most of the summer traffic, mostly folks from Fairbanks who had fished the Copper for years. Then in the fall hunters stopped over ~~on~~ on their way in to the Wrangell Mts to hunt Dall sheep.

Ironically, however, there was more going on in town than is now the case. The Chitina hotel was fully operational, with complete home cooked meals available. The Chitina cash store was open, as was the saloon, located in the small building in back of the hotel. Movies were shown there, free, on Friday nights. There was a post office and even a school--one room, one teacher, grades one to eight.

The whole shebang(except the school) was owned by Merle, "Smitty," Smith, also known as "Mudhole," of Cordova, owner of Cordova Airlines. The nickname,"Mudhole," (which no one ever used in his presence) was the result of an incident in his youth when he landed his plane in a mudhole.

Howard Knutson and his wife Adena ran the operation. Adena was post mistress and ran the hotel, including all the cooking. She had the reputation of being a hard worker and it was asserted that when it came to hard physical labor, she could outwork any two normal men. Howard was the mail pilot and flew the mail once a week from Cordova to Chitina, Long Lake, McCarthy, May Creek and Chisana. He also flew hunters in during the season and handled all the nitty gritty mechanical stuff.

So in what sense then was Chitina a ghost town, since it was certainly a functional town, home to some 25 odd-very odd-individuals? Well, I suppose one could say that it was a ghost of its former being when it had been, according to local legend, virtually the hub of Alaska. "Why folks used to come from Anchorage, a mere tent city, to shop here" they said. Well, perhaps. At any rate it had been a thriving railroad town during its glory days when the Kennecott mine was in operation, circa 1910 to 1939, situated at the midway point between Cordova and Kennecott. It had supported two hotels, the current one and the much larger massive two-story log structure across the street now known as Spooks Nook, in honor of the many ghost figures that frolicked on its side walls. Apparently, Chitina had been a rather staid and proper town, unlike its sister town, McCarthy, a bawdy, sporting town whose primary function was to relieve the miners from Kennecott of their hard-earned cash by catering to their carnal desires.

Then, with the closing of the mine, Chitina, along with McCarthy and Kennecott, "died."

Some time after the closing of the mine, an enterprising fellow by the name of O.A. Nelson acquired possession of the business concerns and built a private empire, which he operated from his headquarters in the drug store building. The art work, incidentally, that adorned the old abandoned buildings was the creation of his niece.

Then after his passing, around 1960, Smitty acquired the property. There was some chicanery involved here, as O.A. and Smitty were mortal enemies and the last person on Earth that O.A. would have wanted his empire to pass to was "Mudhole" Smith.

It was an old old story of greed, deception and the blindness of a lonely old man. A young woman, so the story goes, secretly in cahoots with Smith, had wooed and married the old man when he was in his dotage, and you can guess the rest.

There was other low-level third dimensional manipulations going on involving the Knutsons and the Newells. Nancy Newell had been post mistress during the O.A. years, and apparently Adena maneuvered herself into the job via some underhanded machination. I really wasn't much interested in all that—it was ancient history—I only mention it as background material.

Other townfolk at the time included: Ray Stalder, part time surveyor and full time drunk, his wife Shirley and their three young sons. They rented the cabin next door, just up the hill. Mark Goodman, prospector, college football hero and a drinking man. Paddy King, his sister, Suzy Brickle and Tom Bell, elderly Copper River natives. The school teacher, Ann Bohmer and her husband, Joe. The extensive Billum clan, also natives. Johnny Billum maintained the road, summer and winter from Lower Tonsina to Chitina. Henry Schultz, an old prospector based in McCarthy, who was temporarily tending the cash store. And Neil, of course, who was sometime bartender. The state required a minimum of eight children to fund a school, so I guess there were that many. The two Knutson girls, three Stalder boys and, I guess three Billum kids.

There was no one at all between Chitina and Long Lake, with the exception of Sam Moore and Ray Vroble, two trappers based at Strelna. They also had the only two snow mobiles in the whole country.

It had been many years since the cabin had been occupied and a thick layer of dust lay over everything. There was a grand old Majestic wood cook stove in the kitchen, but no heating stove. Howard, however, supplied us, gratis, with a 100 gallon barrel stove, the only one such I have ever seen. He also proposed that in exchange for helping salvage stringers from the old O'Brien creek bridge, we could have all the firewood we would need. He also set up an ancient circular power saw on the lot across the street, thus alleviating the need, thank God and all his saints and bodhisattvas, of relying on the cross-cut...what a joke that would have been.

My goodness, it sounds like Howard was the soul of generosity, doesn't it. well...perhaps. But here is a far more likely scenario:

Howard and Adena are sitting around enjoying an after dinner whiskey.

Adena: So, what do you think of the fellows who moved into the bitch's cabin?

Howard: The Green boys? Ha. They're green all right, about the greenest cheechakos I have seen yet. Why they actually plan to get their wood in with a cross cut saw. Can you imagine? They'll freeze their Calif asses off.

Adena: Well at least they're young and able bodied. We could put them to work. God knows there's no one else around here you can count on.

Howard: Well there's old Mark Goodman.

Adena: Sure, a hard working son of a bitch when he's sober.

Howard: Yeah, you're right. You know, I've been meaning to salvage the wood from O'Brien creek trestle, this would be a good time to do it. Wouldn't cost anything. Offer them all the wood they need and get old Paddy to cat skin, he'd probably do it for a couple bottles of Seagrams Seven. I'll set up the old saw down in the shop for them, might as well try and keep them around.

Three miles south of town, toward Cordova, the O'Brien creek bridge had been part of the Copper River railroad system that had served the Kennecott operation. The stringers were massive and required the use of a cat to free them and drag them back to town. They were full of spikes, which had to be cut around, but they were certainly well seasoned and made excellent firewood. After a week we had our wood in and just in time too, for by the middle of the month the snow began to fall.

Ray Stalder suggested we run an extension cord up to their house for electricity so that we wouldn't have to listen to that Coleman hiss all winter long--another blessing. I don't see how anyone could listen to one of those things for any length of time and retain any kind of sanity. So, everything fell into place, miraculously it seemed, and we settled in for our first Alaska winter, an experience no one will ever forget.

A few highlights of the winter:

In Nov, after the Copper froze over, a crew from Seattle arrived, set up camp down on the river bank and began removing the rails from the old railroad bed between Chitina and McCarthy, thus setting the stage for future developments. Intended for sale to Japan for scrap iron, the salvaged rails were shipped to Valdez for storage until spring. But the Good Friday earthquake of 64, with the resulting tidal wave that struck and wiped out Valdez, dumped them into the bay...the best laid plans O' mice and men.

Lew McFerrin blew into town and announced that he had just bought McCarthy for 600 bucks. That didn't mean much to me at the time. About all I knew of McCarthy was that it was a remote and inaccessible relic from the mining days some 60 miles east across the bridgeless Copper River. What he had actually bought was the defunct McCarthy lodge, a tumbling derelict saloon--the Golden-- and what we later came to know as the Hollywood house and the Johnson house. Lew had been kicking around the state, I guess,



just about forever, prospecting a little here, speculating a little there. He was well known around town. In fact, Alaska, in those days, was sort of a large extended family—everyone seemed to know, or know of everyone else.

In March, Howard hired us to cut a number of small trees suitable for a cabin he intended to build. We were cutting on the other side of the Copper using a bow saw, or "Swede" saw as the old-timers called them. A much more practical saw than the cumbersome cross-cut, it wasn't bad work at all, especially as the weather was bright, clear and warmish, as is usually the case in March. But, the earthquake once again played its spoiler role, taking out the ice prematurely and Howard was not able to get over and get the logs that we cut. And he never did. They sat there until they returned to earth.

Speaking of the earthquake, it was quite an experience. It shook things and people up but did little damage, except for weakening the foundations under the hotel, the cash store and the drug store. This resulted in Howard hiring us, along with Mark Goodman and Freddy John, a young native from Mentasta, to jack up the building and shore up the foundations.

Thus did our first year in Alaska come to its conclusion.

After a brief stint in Anchorage working at Anchorage Natural Gas Co., installing gas services in the Fall, we returned to Chitina and settled in for the winter.

On an evening in February 1965, as we were finishing dinner, Mark Goodman came up all excited to tell us about the new couple that had just arrived in town. He was particularly struck by the woman, as well he should be. Beatniks, he called them, not in any sense with condemnation, but simply as he saw them. Well, I was intrigued. I had never met any beatniks—there was a dearth of beatniks in Fresno—although in a sense I suppose I was one myself. But I didn't think of myself as such. After all, I was clean-cut and crew-cut; I had never smoked marijuana; I had tried to read On the Road, the beatnik bible, and found it utterly boring, I dug Hindu philosoppy, but Zen was as incomprehensible as...well, as the sound of one hand clapping. On the other hand, I had rejected middle-class American values, and was living, for God's sake, in a remote ghost town deep in the Alaska bush, contemplating my navel, so to speak. And how about my mentor, Henry David? What was he if not a 19th century beatnik, and how about shaggy old Walt Whitman, "sounding (his) barbaric yawp over the rooftops of the world"? Well, I was eager to meet them.

Fred and Dolly Potts had spent the past few years traveling around the Near East—Tangiers, where they had hobnobbed, so they claimed, with the likes of William Burroughs and Paul Bowles; Lebanon, Afghanistan and India. Fred was the black sheep son of a wealthy and prominent L.A. family. His grandfather had been chancellor of UCLA. He received a monthly stipend, with the condition, I suppose, that he stay away and not embarrass the family. Now they had come to Alaska to take advantage of the free land available under the homestead act and had found their way to Chitina after a brief stay in Cooper's Landing. They rented a small cabin from Adena that was located about a quarter mile out of town toward One Mile Lake. (It burned down a couple of years later.)

With his long unkempt hair and full shaggy beard, he certainly looked like everyone's idea of a beatnik. A year or so later and he would have been called a hippie. As for Dolly, well, she was something else, and I am going to leave it at that. I'm afraid it's beyond my capacity to describe her.

Fred claimed to be a cellist, and while he did possess a cello, I never heard him play it. He spent his days making bullets for his 44 Magnum pistol, to the accompaniment of



Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, first and second movements only, played over and over and over, all day long. I never knew him to turn the record over and listen to the third and fourth movements. By late afternoon, he would have enough bullets to go out for target practice. Dolly, by the way, was no slouch, but held her own when it came to marksmanship. If we happened to be there Fred would invite us to participate.

The word lame, by which he meant square, occurred frequently in Fred's conversation, and I soon began to realize that just about everybody was lame, with the exception of himself.

He also claimed to be working on a critique of "Classical Music", the thesis of which was that the high water mark of all western "Serious" music (and Fred was interested only in Serious Music), if not all of Western Culture, had been reached in Beethoven's late quartets, specifically the C Sharp Minor and the slow movements of the A Minor. He contemptuously dismissed just about everything else as beneath him. Mozart? Frivolous. Bach? An over-rated boor.

It's out of sequence, but I must note here that the last time I saw Fred, in the Spring of 1976, after he and Dolly had divorced and he was living in a cabin on Mirror Lake, outside of Anchorage. He was listening to Bach, all day long, while working on a novel and a manual for bush pilots. No doubt about about it—in terms of pretension and putting on airs, Fred Potts outdid Tex, hands down. <sup>it was</sup>

Dolly, however, did not have a pretentious bone in her body. Bizarre? Yes. Unique? Certainly. Colorful and exotic? By all means, but never anything other than just what she was.

If it sounds like I didn't like Fred (and he was not a likeable sort of guy), that is not quite the case. I am merely reporting, as objectively as possible, what I observed. He was certainly one of the most eccentric individuals I have ever known, and I haven't even scratched the surface. I could tell stories...and perhaps I will in the proper place.

The Potts remained in Chitina until the snow melted in May, at which time they flew in to Spruce Point to file on a homestead. Never mind that they had no intention of proving up on it—Fred was after the land.

The Stalders also moved out of town in May, and we returned to Anchorage to work for the summer, once again at the Anchorage Natural Gas Co.

In December of that year I made a trip outside, to San Diego, to visit Martha and her family. When I returned in February 1966, I found Fred and Dolly living in the cabin next door previously occupied by the Stalders. They had also been outside that Fall and Fred had attended flight school, got his pilot's license, and returned with a brand new Super Cub. They were waiting for Spring to return to Spruce Point, where Fred intended to start an air taxi service. About like starting a restaurant in the middle of the Sahara Desert. I mean, Spruce Point was totally remote. Where were the customers going to come from? Well, of course, he wasn't really serious. I'm sure it had something to do with the family, perhaps part of the price for the Super Cub, or maybe a gesture to make it look as though he were finally coming around and getting into business, carrying on in the family tradition.

One more summer in Anchorage at the gas company, one more winter in Chitina. Then, in March 1967, Gordon Burdick of McCarthy had paid us a visit, and in the course of a long rambling conversation, had, in his round-about way, suggested that we might want to consider spending the summer in McCarthy. He and his wife Frieda were engaged in putting in a road up to the Nicolai, a copper claim, and without actually promising anything, not even wages for our help, he nevertheless conveyed the distinct possibility of,

if not striking it rich, at least making a tidy sum. Well, what the hell? The prospect of another summer in Anchorage installing gas services was not all that appealing. Gordon seemed an affable, laid-back sort with a taste, as he made clear, for marijuana. So, in May we locked up the Chitina house and flew into McCarthy.



PART TWO  
McCarthy--Kennecott--Chitina

We landed early in the morning at the small airstrip above McCarthy, courtesy Fepco (Fred E Potts) Aviation. We had left Chitina at first light, when the air is calm, the only time Fred would fly. He often referred to himself, with mock humility, as just a taxi driver. Yes, but a taxi driver who taxied when it suited him, not the customer.

Walking down from the airstrip, I was totally awed by the scene that I beheld. Truly rugged, majestic peaks--dominated by 16,000 ft plus Mt Blackburn--towered like mighty sentinels over the little cluster of early 20th century frame structures that huddled forlorn, forsaken and forgotten in their formidable shadow.

It was one of those glorious crystalline mornings that inspires poets to wax poetic and more prosaic folk to exclaim, emphatically, "my, isn't it a beautiful morning?" The sky was a deep shade of blue no longer to be seen anywhere--the envelope of scum that now enwraps the planet hadn't developed to the extent now extant. If America the Beautiful were to be written now, it would have to be called America the ~~Beautiful~~ and might begin like so: Oh sorrowful for smoggy skies, for showers of acid rain. A shopping-centered travesty across the asphalt plain. America, America God shed her grace on thee, but greed and lust have left a husk from sea to oil-slick sea. POLLYTEC

The winters' snow had melted, but just barely, and all of nature tattered on the cusp of spring. The swallows were returning and darted about, swooping and soaring gracefully.

If I had thought Chitina remote, what can I say about McCarthy except that it was more so and truly so, for there was no vehicular traffic at all; and it was quiet, oh so quiet--unlike Chitina, which was never quiet, thanks to the generator (the Whittey) that ran 24 hours a day, putt putt putting incessantly.

We moved into the little house across the railroad tracks from the Burdick's place. It belonged to an old-timer, Mezznerini, now living in Valdez, but Gordon assured us that it was okay to move in.

In addition to Gordon and Frieda, other residents at the time of our arrival were: The Edwards family--Jim, Maxine and their two young children, Steve and Shelley; and Tom and Molly Gilmore. And that was it--the total population.

Surely, one might think, a hand full of people living in such a beautiful peaceful setting, far removed from the pressures of 'civilization' would be able to co-exist in at least relative harmony. Well, if so, one would think wrong. In no sense was McCarthy a community--it was more or less an anti-community, in that everyone was at odds with everyone else. Seems that the feud was as much a part of the bush scene as the bush pilot or the Blazo box. (note: Blazo, a prime fuel in those days for lanterns and cook stoves, used to come in two five gallon cans packaged in a sturdy wooden box. The boxes were valuable and highly prized, as they served a multitude of purposes from bookcases to kitchen cabinets. Blazo Box decor was definitely de rigueur.)

We established right away that we were not interested in taking sides in any on-going feuds, so we got to know and became friends with the Edwards. Isolated, as they were, they responded eagerly to our friendship. Jim was a notorious tightwad (he boasted that he

could get 15 cups of tea out of one teabag) and had a rather quirky personality that tended to turn many people off, but once you got beyond that, he was an interesting, even ingenious fellow. Maxine was simply a sweet, gentle and loving person.

Our relationship with the Gilmores was cordial, but not close. We had little in common and they were much older. Molly had been born and raised at Kennecott during its heyday. Tom, along with Bud Bowen—who lived out on the May Creek road—worked for the state highway commission, and had the 'job' of maintaining the McCarthy-May Creek road. This, of course, was a monumental joke, because what they were maintaining, in effect, was a road that nobody used that went nowhere. You couldn't even drive all the way to May Creek, but only as far as the Nizina River, about 10 miles, where you could sit and contemplate the washed out bridge and view May Creek, an airstrip and old roadhouse, now closed, off in the distance. Nevertheless, every morning, Bud would drive to town in the orange highway commission truck, pick up Tom, overall clad, lunch pail in hand, and they would solemnly set forth to work. What did they do all day? Well, we speculated endlessly about that, with out ever coming to any conclusion other than that it was no doubt the best maintained stretch of dirt road in the country.

Speaking of May Creek, Tess Holmes, who, along with her late husband, Walter, had run the May Creek Roadhouse for many years back in the old mining days when Chititu was in operation, was still there, but preparing to move out, having sold the property to Al and Fran Gagnon. According to Molly, who had no use for Tess, it had been a bit more than a mere roadhouse and she left you to draw the obvious conclusion. Tess spent a brief spell in McCarthy that summer after leaving May Creek, so I had the pleasure of meeting her. An imperious Grande Dame in her eighties, I could well imagine her in the role Molly implied she filled.

Shortly after our arrival, the Heglands—Les, Flo and nine year old Janet—who had recently bought the house in back of the hardware store, moved in. Then, in short order Henry Schultz and Archie Poulin, another old timer, arrived for their annual sojourn. In keeping with what seemed to be McCarthy tradition, they were not on speaking terms, so they were always careful to arrive at least a week apart so that they would not have to share the same mail flight. Don't ask me how they determined that. Henry had been a prospector for many years, but was now content, unlike Neil Finnesand, to sit of a summer in his small neat house in McCarthy and dream of days gone by. Archie had been a saloon keeper and gambler. Sitting in front of his cabin on Chisana Ave, McCarthy's main drag, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes, one could still see the shrewd old gambler peeking out from his eyes, sizing you up as you stopped to chat on a summer's afternoon.

So, on to the Burdicks and our summer "employment." Ah yes, the Burdicks. What a couple, what a pair. Frieda, an acid-tongued red-head was around fifty, which made her somewhat older than Gordon, in his early forties. Of good solid old fashioned German stock from North Dakota, how she ever wound up with a lazy dope smoking manipulative--shall I say con artist--like Gordon, is beyond comprehension. It would be hard to imagine a more mis-matched pair. Frieda had kicked around Anchorage for years--she could remember when the downtown streets were unpaved--working hard, as was her nature, and had set aside a small nest egg. Then, somehow she got involved with Gordon (do you suppose the nest egg had anything to do with it?), and now here she was seeking Eldorado in the Wrangell Mountains. Well, whatever held them together, it certainly wasn't love. But, then, their relationship was not unusual in that respect. Love may be the glue that hold the universe together--gravity is love, said Einstein--but it is not necessarily the foundation stone of matrimony. Anyway, every time Gordon was out of earshot, Frieda



would rake him over the coals unmercifully. According to her he was the laziest no-account son-of-a bitch ever to draw breath. She could go on and on, soaring to heights of vituperative eloquence, working herself into a splenetic frenzy, which I suspect she thoroughly enjoyed. I sometimes thought, in fact, that our real reason for being there was to listen to Frieda vent and thus release some of the frustration of living and working with Gordon. Gordon, however, never spoke ill of Frieda. He would merely say that we had to keep in mind that she was of the old school and didn't see things the way we did, meaning us "hip folk."

The daily routine was soon established. We would head over to the Burdicks for coffee at around ten A.M. For two hours or so we would drink coffee and listen to Gordon rap, as he loved to talk. Frieda would be bustling about, making lunch, in and out of the kitchen, pushing Gordon--Action Jackson, as she often sarcastically called him--to get a move on. The harder she pushed, the more he stalled. If he happened to have any marijuana on hand he would have a joint to get going, as he claimed he worked better on grass. Loy and I would decline, as it definitely did not motivate us. Finally, around one P.M. Gordon would begin to get ready to head up McCarthy creek, and eventually we would all pile into the little red jeep and drive up to wherever we had left off the day before. By the time we got there it would be time for lunch, so by the time Gordon fired up his little D-2 cat and began to push dirt around it would likely be after three O'clock. But no matter. The days were long, and as Gordon said, better to work in the cool of the evening than in the 'heat' of the day.

If Tom and Bud were building a road that went nowhere, then Gordon was building a road to an ore body that existed only in his mind.

We didn't realize it yet, but Gordon had never actually been to the claim up Nicolai Butte. Originally filed by Henry Schultz, it had even been drilled back in the fifties and determined that it was not worth developing. Gordon had to know that, but it did not prevent him from convincing himself--and apparently Frieda, as well as Joe Boothby, a supposedly astute Seattle business man--that a great deposit of high grade copper lay concealed there.

Actually, he wasn't so much building a road as re-opening an old wagon road that had connected McCarthy to the Green Butte mine that had operated briefly back in the twenties. The biggest part of the job was the construction of several bridges over McCarthy creek. By the time we joined on, the bridge at five mile was nearing completion, so that is where we began. We would work four hours or so, then head back to McCarthy for dinner, more coffee and conversation. Likely as not, Gordon would pass a joint around. I won't claim, like a certain politician of some repute, that I didn't inhale, but I will say that I did not share Gordon's enthusiasm for the weed, nor, I think did Loy or Frieda.

The sixties were in full swing of course, and Gordon, a pot smoker from way back, no doubt saw himself as something of an elder statesman of the burgeoning counter culture/anti-war movement; thus our conversations by the light of the endless summer day often took on a revolutionary tone. But, Frieda, with characteristic candor, put it all into perspective, dismissing us as arm chair revolutionaries.

By the end of July we had reached Nicolai creek (named after Chief Nicolai, legendary chief of the Copper River tribe) about seven miles up McCarthy creek. Gordon suggested, quite sensibly, that we take a hike up and take a look at where we were headed. Once there, after an arduous two day hike, he soon determined, after digging around a bit with his geologists hammer, that the vein of ore 'pinched out,' and really wasn't worth much.

He was uncharacteristically silent and withdrawn that evening as we sat around the campfire; but by morning his spirits had revived. He had set his sights on a new goal—the fabled Green Butte. We broke camp and began the trip down.

The Green Butte is located another five miles up McCarthy creek beyond Nicolai creek. As I mentioned, it had been a producing mine previously, so on what Gordon based his new Bonanza dream, I have no idea. Certainly on nothing tangible. Probably, like all prospectors and mineral seekers, for whom the quest, often, is more important than the finding, on the need to have an Eldorado on the horizon. Or, maybe, on a vision glimpsed in the haze of marijuana smoke—a pipe dream, that is.

Well, at least he had actually been there and described the scene in glowing terms, suggesting that Loy and I might want to hike in and check it out as a possible winter retreat.

We did so and discovered a fine old two-story log house in mint condition and determined on the spot to spend the winter there.

But we were not ready to jump on Gordon's new bandwagon. It promised to be a formidable task to put the road on into the Green Butte, and while it had been a great experience and a fun summer, we had not made one thin dime and obviously were not going to working with Gordon and Frieda.

As it happened, a mining exploration project was starting up over at Glacier creek and they needed a cook....so Loy was off to Glacier creek for several weeks where he got to know the old hermit/pro prospector Martin Radoven.

In November, after McCarthy creek froze over, we began putting a snow machine trail in to the Green Butte. I should mention that Loy had purchased a brand new Ski Doo Alpine, a double tracked tank of a snow machine in the fall of 66. We had been able to get it in during the summer thanks to our old benefactor Howard Knutson. Along with a couple of Anchorage dentists, Howard had formed a consortium called Consolidated Wrangell and acquired the surface rights to Kennecott. They had hired a flying boxcar and spent the summer flying ore out from the tailing pile, hoping thereby to get rich. Well, they didn't. After expenses, they probably just about broke even. But on one of the return trips we were able to get the snow machine in, as well as a massive Heathkit stereo and a small portable generator.

We had our first Thanksgiving at the Edwards, along with the Heglands. Tom and Molly were back in Cordova for the winter, and Henry and Archie long gone to their winter haunts.

By early December we were moved into the Green Butte to begin what was to be one of the best winters I have experienced—my first winter in near solitude, as I saw no one at all, other than Loy. The cabin had been the executive residence. (there was a large crumbling bunkhouse nearby, and at the top of the butte, at the actual mine site, another bunkhouse.) The upstairs was one large beautifully wood-paneled room and we fixed it up as a music/meditation room. Every evening after dinner, Loy would fire up the generator and we would retire to the Upper Room and listen to music, with the understanding that since there was room for only One, Loy and Curtis would stay below. They didn't always co-operate—occasionally one or both would try to sneak in, but since there was little or no conversation, for the most part they stayed where they belonged. It was there, that winter, that Loy began to paint.

Well, of course all good things—and bad things too—must end; and by late April, breakup was upon us and it was time to return to McCarthy.

We had not forgotten, by the way, our intention to file on a homesite--it had merely been on hold. The homestead act was due to expire at the end of May 68, so all applications had to be in by then. It was time to make a move. We had settled on a lovely little meadow eight miles up McCarthy creek, just the other side of the second tunnel, a site Gordon dad suggested. We completed the paper work and Loy gave it to Gordon, who was on his way in to Anchorage, to mail. When he returned, after the end of May, he handed the envelope back to Loy, saying he forgot to mail it. Did he forget on purpose? Probably, at least we always thought so. But why? After all, he suggested the site. Well, we will never know. Gordon was devious and complicated and according to Frieda, who was in a position to know, 'so crooked he had to screw his pants on in the morning.'

The Glacier creek operation started up again, so Loy returned to cook until the latter part of June, at which time I spelled him and had my first professional cooking experience. I was only there about two weeks, as the project suddenly aborted and closed down. For some reason that I don't remember, Martin Radoven was not there during my tenure, so that old prospector that Loy thought so highly of remained unknown to me.

Meanwhile, back in Chitina, big changes were underway. Under contract from the state, Green (no relation) Construction began putting in a new section of road from the airstrip, bypassing the old winding one entirely in favor of a widened straight thoroughfare. Plans were afoot to build a bridge across the Copper and it would not have been possible to get equipment in over the old road. They leveled Spooks Nook, that marvelous old building, and set up camp on the site it had occupied. With literally acres of suitable campsites in the vicinity, why they felt it necessary to destroy that old relic, I have no idea. Probably a manifestation of a certain mentality that was rampant at the time--tear down the old in favor of the new. It was happening all over Anchorage, obsessively, as though 'they' couldn't wait to look like Seattle.

Jim and Rita Hatch (and Jim's 15 yr old son, Mike) from Valdez moved in and took over operation of the hotel. They had an eye on the future, anticipating the opening up of the country. Howard and Adena had other irons in the fire, and Howard no longer flew the mail run, though Adena retained her post a post mistress--and as far as I know, she still does.

Back in McCarthy, as the summer began to wind down, Alex Jones and Lew Green, geologists out of the Vancouver B.C. office of Hanna Mining Co. along with helicopter pilot Joe Piper, arrived to begin the first phase of an extensive exploration project. Since Kennecott had been the richest body of high grade copper ever discovered, it was thought that another large deposit might well be existant in the area and with the latest equipment, could possible be found. They rented the house next door to Archie's place and hired Loy and I to cook--Loy one day, myself the next. Thus began a three year association that not only supplied our summer employment, but occasioned some great memories, I can hardly speak highly enough of Alex and Lew. It was a ball working for them if work it could be called. Near the end of October they closed down for the winter and Loy and I, with a little extra money on hand, for a change, took a trip outside to visit the family in San Diego. Loy returned after Thanksgiving and wintered at the Green Butte, while I spent the winter in S.D. But that is another story.

I returned in May (69) to find big changes in the making. Winston Darkow and his wife Barbara, had bought out Lew McFerrin for a reputed six thousand and were in the

process of reovating the lodge with the intention of opening for business as soon as possible. The Hatchs had purchases the Mezzerini house and applied for the area liquor license. Construction of the Copper River bridge was underway and the entrepreneurs were on the move. The visionaries at the state highway department foresaw a highway running all the way from Cordova thru Chitina to McCarthy and beyond thru the Chittistone canyon and over Skolai pass to eventually hook up with the Alcan. A forminable engineering feat indeed, thru some of the most spectacular and rugged country on this or any other continent. But no matter, development must go forward, progress is the name of the game.

Endowed, as we all are, with an intuitive sense, I am sure 'Winnie' and I immediately recognised one another as natural antagonists. A short, powerfully built dark-haired man of early middle-age, I saw him as one of those loud and aggressive types that the anonymous author of The Desiderata, that 17th century piece of wisdom that was so popular in certain circles at the time, advised one to avoid as being vexatious to the spirit.

But not merely vexatious--something more sinister than that. A money-grubbing devotee of Mammon come to despoil Shangri-la and shape its future in his own image; one for whom the sweetest sound in all creation was the ring of his cash register opening its' maw to receive yet another green-backed Yankee dollar from the fat wallet of one of the endless tourists that would soon be passing thru his portals. And not just in the summer time either. No, for in 'Winnie World' even the winters would no longer be sancrosanct ,for our quiet little village was to become a Mecca for recreational snow mobilers racing unobstructed throughout the country side, shattering the primeval silence with a ratcheting snarl of nerve-numbing noise from the netherworld.

But we smiled at one aonther and observed the social amenities.

Since the Hatch's had purchases the Mezzerini house as the base of operations for their eventual liquor store--they were not living there--Loy had set up camp in the old hardware store, and that is where we spent the summer.

Early in June Lew and Alex returned, along with a new helicopter pilot, Duke, and three college student helpers: Warren McCoullah, Cris Anderson and Glenn ?, otherwise known as the 'Cold Ghost,' so named by Steve and Shelley Edwards. A very light complexioned, blonde California lad, he seemed always to be shivering in our comfortably cool climate. They rented Tony Zak's place, and Loy and I resumed our cooking duties.

....And McCarthy settled in to its summer routine, little effected, so it seemed, by the opening of the lodge...with the exception of Gordon. Though he and Frieda continued to push on toward the Green Butte, whenever they were in town, he couldn;t resist stopping in for a bit o 'the ol nasty. In addition to a taste for grass, he also hankered for booze.

In October, after Lew and Alex had shut down for the season, Howard Knutson dropped by to propose that we spend the winter at Kennecott in the capacity of caretakers. As representative of Consolidated Wrangell, which still retained surface rights, he was concerned that Darkow would avail himself of the earliest opportunity to ransack Kennecott for its still existing treasures. When the mine had closed down, it was supposed to be only temporary and folks had literally left everything in place, expecting to return shortly. Over the years a good deal had 'disappeared,' but there was still a lot of stuff there. Well, this was a fortunate development, as it would have been a real bitch, to say the least, to try and heat that drafty uninsulated old hardware store. So we moved in to the first house in Kennecott as one enters the property.



Summer 1970: Another season of fun and games with Alax and Lew and company. Work continued on the Copper River bridge; and over at Spruce Point a 'hippie commune' developed, flourished briefly and died. I have no idea what inspired Fred to initiate that particular endeavor, as I can hardly imagine anyone less likely to succeed at such an undertaking. Well, anyway, a small band of long-haired, long-bearded, granny glassed, pigtailed back to nature 'freaks' under the leadership of a prophetic type who called himself Loping Bear, moved in and set up camp. Naturally it was short-lived. Even under the best of circumstances, the commune trip was (is) a tough row to hoe, especially for us spoiled individualistic, egomaniacal Americans; and with Fred Potts hosting, failure was a foregone conclusion.

After the smoke cleared, however, one person remained--a long-legged young 'hippie chick,' whom Fred affectionately called 'Belphy,' short for Belphegore, a supernatural entity of Islamic mythology. Taking a cue from the Arab World, which had had a considerable influence on his thinking, Fred seemed to be thinking along the lines of beginning a harem. Women's Liberation may have been a fledgling movement at the time, but that meant nothing to Fred, the ultimate male chauvinist. Women were meant to serve. He often boasted that he had running water over a Spruce Point as long as Dolly kept running hardy har har. Speaking of water, he didn't trust the water at Spruce Point, so he hauled drinking water all the way from Anchorage, some 250 miles, in five gallon jugs. Dolly, however, was not about to become wife number two, and split the scene not long after the other members of the would be commune did.

In October, the Copper River bridge was completed, and now only the twin forks of the Kennicott River held the juggernaut of 'inevitable progress' at bay. McCarthy appeared to be doomed. Unbeknownst to me, however, even as the ribbon was being cut at the bridges' opening ceremony, the forces of opposition were gathering in a classroom at the University of California Santa Cruz.

In the spring of 71, Loy and I spent a week or so at the Green Butte, visiting Gordon and Frieda, who were living there off and on. Returning to McCarthy--Gordon and Frieda also--in early May, we found a large tent pitched in the lot across from the Edwards' place and the music of Crosby Stills and Nash blanketing the usual quietude. The Raven had arrived--along with his girl friend, Linda and several hundred baby marijuana plants.

A young man named Jim Ryan had inherited the lot from his grandfather, and subsequently come into some money via an insurance settlement. He had big plans for the property. His friend and partner Ron Cole--the Raven, as he called himself--was there in advance to establish a presence and lay the foundation.

That evening, after our return to McCarthy, Gordon, Loy and I sat in the tent while Raven passed around fat joints and unfolded his--and Jim's--vision: A large two story lodge with full basement equipped with grow lights for the year around cultivation of top quality marijuana. The bridge at Chitina was completed now and it was only a matter of time till the Kennicott was bridged, McCarthy would be accessible by road and they would be there to serve a new clientele, a hip well-heeled clientele that desired a bit more than the usual fare. Another entrepreneur had arrived. Never mind that pot was illegal...it wouldn't be much longer. (We all believed that in those days. Speculation about imminent legalization was a staple of what passed for conversation as the joint or pipe made its rounds and before everyone slipped off into a drug/music trance, at which time the conversation would likely degenerate to grunts of approval for the quality of the 'dope,' or the grooviness of the music.) And in the meantime? Well, after all, this was McCarthy, the nearest cop was



eighty miles away, as the crow flies, in Glennallen. Not only that, McCarthy had a long history of operating outside the law. During prohibition, the saloons of McCarthy had operated freely, without fear of the law. It was very simple. If a revenuer happened to be aboard an incoming train, the engineer would sound the whistle in a certain pattern and by the time the law arrived, everyone would be innocently drinking soda pop.

Gordon, needless to say, was captivated and volunteered, after a bit of prodding from Raven, to dig the foundation hole with his cat. I, however, had misgivings, sensing a not very deeply buried violence in the man. At 36 Raven appeared to have lived a hard life and suffered his share of hard knocks. He was certainly not a peace, love and brotherhood flower child, although he could and did mouth the words; but his eyes, body movements and the 44 magnum revolver he carried everywhere, albeit with a peace symbol conspicuously displayed on its holster, spoke otherwise.

Over the next few days, Gordon began digging the foundation--and Raven, wearing his big black hat (symbol of his namesake) strutted around town as though he owned it, his 44 magnum at his hip, his childlike 'ol lady' at his side. The tension in the air was palpable. Jim and Maxine looked at me with worried questioning eyes. I tried to tell them everything would be okay, but doubt that I convinced them, since I didn't believe it myself. Frieda was less than enthusiastic and the Heglands were openly hostile. Winnie, for the moment, wore his smily face. Raven had paid him to fly his pot plants in with a hundred dollar bill ostentatiously, I surmise, peeled from a fat wad of hundred dollar bills. Of course they were two of a kind; the chief difference being their choice of drugs. Ironically, even though Darkow's drug of choice was legal, he was selling it illegally, as he didn't have a liquor license.

One morning we arrived in town to find Gary Gunkle, the state trooper from Glennallen (there was only one at that time) along with a couple of plain clothed cop types, busily taking pictures of the tent and campsite. Then several days later the harrassment began. Two police officers (they must have come to town and hung around, waiting for the opportunity) stopped Raven as he was driving his truck down from the airstrip and arrested him for an expired license. They took him out, in handcuffs, to spend the night in jail at Glennallen. Then after his return, but before many days passed, Gary Gunkle flew in with a warrant for his arrest for several unpaid parking tickets from years past when Raven had lived in Cordova. Out he went again in handcuffs for a night or two in jail.

By now the foundation hole was completed, but suddenly Raven's foundation collapsed. Jim Ryan decided to take his money and head for South America, leaving Raven holding the bag and sitting on a huge hole--to be known thenceforth as the 'hippie hole'--and no money to put anything on it. The smile faded, abruptly, from Winnie's face and the lines of confrontation formed. Raven broke camp and moved in to the hardware store. At that time, the hardware store was owned by friends of Frieda's--Sid and Vera of Anchorage. Gordon and Frieda were up the creek, at the Green Butte, but Raven assuming that since Gordon was such a good 'friend,' there would be no problem. Well, as a matter of fact, when they returned to town, they were not overjoyed, especially Frieda, who had no use for Raven at all, but what could they do. The marijuana plants were planted in a rich plot of ground in back of the Gilmore residence. Tom and Molly were not there that summer, having pretty much settled permanently in Cordova. McCarthy settled in to an uneasy, watchful truce, so to speak.

Lew and Alex, by the way, had abandoned their Wrangell Mountain project, having failed to find the big bonanza, but they were back in the state for an excursion in to the

Brooks Range, and hired Loy to go along as cook, so I was left to hold down the fort and witness the unfolding drama.

In mid summer, Jim Edwards, who was now flying the mail run, informed me of a group of college students from California that he had flown in to Chittistone canyon. He thought I might be interested, seems there was some connection with the Sierra Club. The very mention of the Sierra Club was anathema in certain circles, but I greeted the news with interest and expressed a desire to meet them. A couple of days later I got my chance to do so when I encountered a contingent of the group when I was on my way down to McCarthy on Loy's Honda trail bike: Greg Wheatland, Jim Gaw and Lisa ?. I invited them up to spend some time at Kennecott, and over the next few days, we laid out the very beginnings of a plan of opposition to the construction of the McCarthy hyway. I was thrilled to learn that there might be an alternative to 'inevitable progress.' Before they left to return to their camp at Chittistone Canyon, Greg suggested that I fly in with Jim on his next supply run, which I did and thus had my first glimpse of some of the vast, spectacular country that lay in the Wrangell Mts beyond the little pocket of human habitation in the McCarthy area. The rest of the group consisted of Ben Shaine, leader and co-ordinator, his girl friend, Chris and David Graves, all students out of the environmental studies program at the University of Calif at Santa Cruz. Under auspices of the Sierra Club, they were there to do an environmental study of the area with a view to making recommendations to congress in upcoming legislation dealing with the Native Claims Settlement Act. After several days, which included a trip over Skolai Pass, I returned to the pressure cooker that McCarthy had become.

Late in August, Raven's 14 year old daughter from a previous marriage arrived for a visit. Then, in early September it all came to a head. On a rainy, soggy afternoon the cops arrived and this time they meant business--no more petty harrassment. A young fellow working at the lodge but sympathetic to Raven, scurried down to the hardware store to sound the warning. Grabbing his 44 and a portable radio, he and his daughter slipped out a side window and took to the woods, leaving Linda behind, by choice, to take the rap. A tiny, frail, barely five foot tall pigtailed 'child.' she was hauled out in handcuffs, along with the marijuana plants. Absurd? Of course--but absurdities are as common as double talking politicians here on this planet that Paramahansa Yogananda referred to (reputedly) as the insane asylum of the universe.

A vigilante committee promptly formed, spearheaded by none other than--you guessed it--Winston Darkow, who, with the blessing of Magistrate Sprecker of Glennallen, put out the word to shoot on site. After all, an armed dangerous felon was at large in the woods. Fear and loathing stalked the streets; folks huddled, curtains drawn, behind locked doors. Raven and his daughter managed to get to the Green Butte and sought refuge with Gordon and Frieda. Frieda must have been delighted. Living up at Kennecott, I missed most of the hysteria.

Early one morning, as I sat drinking my morning coffee, a young man who had been hanging around town for a couple of weeks, showed up at my door with a message that Raven wanted me to meet him at a certain location in back of the Burdick place. I rode the Honda to town and found them at the designated spot. He wanted me to catch the mail plane to Glennallen the following day, drive his station wagon, which was parked at the airstrip there, to Anchorage and arrange for an airplane to fly in and evacuate them. He gave me enough money to cover expenses and I promised to do my best. A friend of mine,

Don Miller, had a Super Cub and I thought there was a possibility he might be willing to undertake the project.

While I was in Anchorage--and it took several days--Loy returned from up north and Gordon and Frieda came down from the Green Butte, so they spent several nail-biting days, harboring the fugitives and not knowing when or if I would succeed in getting back with an airplane. I wonder if the mandate to shoot on sight included his daughter. Well, if it had come to that she could easily have been caught in the cross fire; but fortunately it didn't come to that. Don agreed, reluctantly--after I greased his palm with one of the last of Raven's 100 dollar bills; and very early on a Sunday morning, he made a silent landing at the small airstrip, the two refugees from justice slipped out from their hiding place and they all took off without incident. We all breathed a great sigh of relief.

That wasn't quite the end of the Raven story, however. Barely a month later, fool that he was, he attempted to drive back to McCarthy to retrieve his goods. Having been tipped off, the cops were waiting for him at the Lacanaw and arrested him. He spent a month in jail.

While I was in Anchorage setting up the Great Escape, I had run in to Dolly, who had hooked up with a character named Leland, a scientologist. They were on their way down to Kodiak with the intention of opening a health food store. Dolly invited me down to visit and /or work; so after Raven was safely out of the country, I decided to take her up on the invitation. I spent most of the summer in the balmy environs of Kodiak, eventually working as a cook for a live aboard cannery crew. The health food store, however, never developed. Leland was entirely too weird and Dolly developed a drinking problem. She returned to Anchorage, where she met and married her current husband.

Early in the spring of 72, Raven showed up in Chitina and hung around for a while. Rumors floated in that he was making threats to seek revenge on Darkow and Les Hegland. The vigilante committee reformed and for a while Darkow and his minions kept a close eye on the crossing at the Kennicott, intercepting all traffic in to town. But Raven never showed up in McCarthy again. Several years later he survived a mauling by a grizzly bear down on the Kenai Peninsula, only to be shot and killed not long after in a cocaine deal gone bad. And so, finally, ended the Raven story.

In April, we received a letter from the lawyer representing Consolidated Wrangell, informing us that our services as caretakers was no longer necessary and we had thirty days to vacate the premises. Howard and Winnie had become friends, recognising one another as allies against the environmentalist/hippie/Commie threat, of which we were now obviously a part, that sought to take over the country.

So, with Jim Hatch's blessing, we moved back into the Mezznerini house. Hatch was an old line labor movement radical and had no use at all for either Knutson or Darkow, so I suspect his motive in offering us the use of what was now his house, owed something to a desire on his part to make a statement. He probably had second thoughts before the summer was over, given the role I was to play vis a vis the road.

So, we were back in beautiful downtown McCarthy, right in the thick of things as the wild and crazy summer of 72 unfolded.

Everybody, it seemed, was suddenly interested in our quiet little backwater: The Sierra Club, Congress, the U.S. Park Service, various and sundry entrepreneurs, developers, environmentalists, anti-environmentalists, Alaskans for Alaska and, of course, the State Hyway Commission, which proposed to widen and upgrade the narrow rutted existing road

and put in bridges over the Kennicott. At stake was not only the future of McCarthy, but the vast untouched wilderness that lay beyond, and it all centered around the question of access.

Ben Shaine and a new batch of students arrived to continue their research and set up headquarters in the hardware store. I must confess that I don't recall the names of all the students of that second wave. After all, that was nearly thirty years ago; and besides, memory is a tricky beast--just because you remember something doesn't mean it happened; or just because you don't, doesn't mean it didn't. When asked what are the chief hindrances to the realization of Reality, the renowned Sage and proponent of Advaita (non-duality) replied, "Memory, chiefly, plus habits of thought and accumulated tendencies." Jaluddin Rumi: "A naked man jumped into the water to escape the sting of hornets. The hornets circle around him; when he shows his head, they do not let him go. The water is God's remembrance, and right now the hornets are the remembrance of this woman and that man. Hold your breath in the water of remembrance and be patient so that you may be freed of old thoughts and inward whisperings. After that, you will gain the nature of the pure water from head to foot."

Well, we all have a memory problem--we have forgotten who or what we are.

So, the summer of 72--hard to get a handle on it, there was so much going on. It is as if we were catapulted overnight from obscurity on to the front lines of the environmentalist battlefield. Why most of the folks around there had never even heard the words environmentalist or ecologist only a year or so previously.

Both airstrips were a buzz with the coming and going of airplanes, large and small, bearing their burdens of "prestigious persons," including: John Milton, a writer for The National Geographic Society (and the first of a number of writers and reporters that put in an appearance over the next few years); A high official (actually, the President, I think) of the Sierra Club, along with Santa Cruz professor, Dick Cooley and Jack Hessian, Sierra Club rep for the state of Alaska; and Rogers Morton (or was it Morton Rogers?) Secretary of the Interior, who, in the course of a fly over reconnaissance of the Wrangell Mountains, stopped in for lunch.

A couple of snapshots of that memorable afternoon:

Tall, blonde Summner Putman--irreverant, hippieish, weekend Fireweed Mountain homesteader--wearing a Super Man tee shirt, peddling up to meet the great man's Leer jet and offering him a ride to town on his bicycle; then, later, putting the finishing touch to the afternoon with a stunning display of aerial acrobatics in his outrageously painted psychedelic Super Cub, while Winnie Darkow shook his fist at the heavens and roared imprecations at that "show-off hippie son of a bitch," and somebody, somewhere in the crowd turned up the volume on a tape deck playing Peter Paul and Mary singing "If I Had a Hammer." The very least one can say about those days is that there was a colorfulness to them that is almost totally lacking in our increasing virtual reality.

Secretary Morton, white haired and avuncular, perched majestically atop the lodge jeep, surrounded by a bevy of buxom blonds--who graciously dispensed box lunches, courtesy of Uncle Sam, to the hoi polloi--puffing on a huge cigar, as if he thought he really was somebody.

But that 's the name of the game, isn't it? Everybody wants to be somebody and not just anybody either, but Somebody Important...so we set forth to make something of ourselves, make our mark on the world (poor world), we become early birds and go-getters, getting and spending, and never pause long enough to consider who or what we are: Pure



Consciousness, Simple Being, Sat Chit Ananda, That Which Is, the timeless, spaceless, birthless, deathless, nameless principle that upholds, enfolds, enwraps, interpenetrates, interfuses and yet transcends all being—taking it for granted that we are a somebody named so and so that was born such and when. Ah, but were you born? How do you know? Do you remember? No, somebody told you and you believed them. Pure hearsay.

To quote Nobel Laureate Erwin Schrodinger (and incidentally lend an aura of scientific respectability to this ancient mystical "fancy") : "It is not possible that this unity of knowledge, feeling and choice which you call your own should have sprung into being from nothingness at a given moment not so long ago; but rather this knowledge, feeling and choice are essentially eternal and unchangeable and numerically one in all men, nay in all sentient beings. But not in this sense—that you are a part, a piece of an eternal, infinite being, an aspect or modification of it, as in Spinoza's pantheism. For then we would have the same baffling question: which part, which aspect are you. No, but inconcievable as it seems to ordinary reason, you—and all conscious beings as such—are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole; only this whole is so constituted that it cannot be surveyed in a single glance...eternally and always there is only now, one and the same now; the present is the only thing that has no end." (from "My View of the World," and/or "Quantum Questions," neither of which I have read. I encountered it, more than once, in the course of other readings. It is a popular quotation, presenting as it does, one of the big guns of 20th century science sounding like a 20th century B.C. Vedic sage.)

So. Sat Chit Ananda: Existence Consciousness Bliss. What could be more obvious? You exist, furthermore you know you exist, but not—and this is the key—as this or that (neti neti) and in the release from the educated sense of being a somebody, an isolated individual cast will-nilly into a hostile universe, there is bliss—liberation. Why every shit-eating fly buzzes in bliss—Isness—knowing not that it was born or that it will die. But humankind, blessed with the capacity to be consciously conscious of consciousness, has chosen to make of life a burden grievous to be borne, creating for itself, according to Aldous Huxley..."a home made universe scooped out of the immense non-human cosmos which surrounds it, and without which neither he or it could exist. Within this private catacomb we build for ourselves a little world of our own, constructed of a strange assortment of materials—interests, and "ideals," words and technologies, cravings and day-dreams, artifacts and institutions, imaginary gods and demons. Here, amongst the magnified projections of our own personalities, we perform our curious antics and perpetrate our crimes and lunacies, we think the thoughts and feel the emotions appropriate to our-man made environments, we cherish the crazy ambitions that alone make sense in a madhouse. But all the time, in spite of the radio noises and the neon tubes, night and the stars are there—just beyond the last bus stop, just beyond the illuminated canopy of smoke. This is a fact which the inhabitants of the human catacomb find it all too easy to forget; but whether they forget or remember, a fact it always remains. Night and the stars are always there; the other non-human world, of which the stars and the night are but symbols, persists and is the real world." (from the essay *Man and Reality*, which was written in the forties)

And there we have the human condition, the human tragi/comic melodrama; and horrified by the atrocities that follow as a consequence of our own ignorance and misconceptions, we have the audacity, on the one hand to blame God (how can God allow such things, we ask) and on the other expect S/He/It to rescue us from our own folly.



And what does God say? Wake up, oh wayfaring stranger, and come home to me, your very own Self, for I so loved the world that I gave my only begotten Self thereunto and spread before you out of sheer inexhaustible infinitude, a banquet of pure delight. Surrender your limited concepts of mortality, race, gender, birth and death, indeed all of your concepts whatsoever, and come dance naked with me amongst the galaxies, remembering that before the big bang was—that explosion of manifestation that you have chosen to call good and evil—I Am; and because I Am, you are; or looking at it from another point of view, because I (the Absolute) Am, you (the relative) aren't.

If Descartes had been a buddhist he would have said, "I think not, therefor, I ain't."

Bodhidharma on the nature of reality: vast emptiness, nothing holy, nothing sacred.

The Beatles on the nature of reality: Nothing is real, nothing to get hung about, strawberry fields forever.

Shankara on the nature of reality: This entire universe of which we speak and think is nothing but Brahman. Brahman dwells beyond the range of maya. There is nothing else. Are jars, pots and vessels distinct from the clay of which they are made? Man drinks the wine of maya, becomes deluded and begins to see things as separate from each other, so he talks of "you and I."

Ramana Maharshi on the nature of reality: There is neither creation nor destruction, neither destiny nor free will, neither path nor achievement. This is the final truth.

Teilhard de Chardin on the nature of reality: We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual being having a human experience.

The man on the street on the nature of reality: If you can't see it or feel it, it isn't real.

A mystic on the nature of reality: If you can see it or feel it, it isn't real.

Clinton on the nature of reality: Well, I've been giving that a lot of thought, and I think the American people deserve an answer to that question, so I'm asking congress to look into that and blah blah blah.

George W. Shrub on the nature of reality: Duh. (our next president? Shudder)

Graffiti slogan on the nature of reality: Reality sucks.

Rover on the nature of reality: If you can't eat it or screw it, piss on it.

I am reminded of that popular song from the thirties: "Oh you can go to the east, go to the west, someday you'll come, weary at heart back where you started from. You'll find your hapiness lies right under your eyes, back in your own back yard."

Or, as Jesus put it: The kingdom is neither lo here or lo there, for behold, the kingdom of Heaven is within ye.

But, of course, he also said, He who would save his life will lose it and he who would lose his life will save, for as Eckhart tells us, "The kingdom of God belongs only to the thoroughly dead."

The "spiritual path" isn't about gaining, its about losing—"don't seek the truth, merely cease to cherish opinions"—losing the self that you think you are, in order to be the Self that you really are. So, its no wonder that this wisdom has not exactly been a big hit in the western world. In the first place it isn't especially good for business (and the business of America is business, said Calvin Coolidge), and then not so long ago you could get fried for dabbling around in such heresy. And now the whole world is burning in the fire of consumerism—everybody wants to share in the American lifestyle. It bodes ill for Mother Earth with six billion people frantically pursuing the American lifestyle. Do I exaggerate? Yes, of course, I exaggerate. I love to exaggerate. We all love to exaggerate.

Well, I see that I've gone off on a tangent--off the deep end? Around the bend? Over the hill? Out on a limb? Oh well, its all just entertainment, just a vaudeville act--so give me that old soft shoe, I said that old soft shoe, a one, a two, a doodily doodily doo.

Back to McCarthy, summer of 72. There was one student I particularly remember--Roger (Conner?), a fiery young student of environmental law, who inspired me to launch my very brief career as an activist in founding the Chitina Valley Residents Assoc. Together we drafted a petition stating our opposition to the road and circulated it throughout the valley, and beyond to property owners in Anchorage and Fairbanks. As you can imagine, it meet with mixed reviews. Here is how it stacked up:

Anti-road signees: The entire Long Lake community. They perceived, correctly, that the road could only detract from, if not destroy their life style. In McCarthy: Loy and I and Jim and Maxine, and various absentee property owners.

Pro-road non-signees: In Chitina the Hatchs. In McCarthy: the Darkows; newcomer Ron Anderson, proprietor of McCarthy Fuel Co. (no surprise) and staunch Darkow ally; Fres and Helen Seltenreich, long time property owners and recent retirees, various absentee property owners; and sad to say, Les and Flo Hegland...in their hearts, I fell sure, they were against the road, but good, but timid folk that they were, they were, to put it bluntly, afraid of Darkow.

Henry and Archie were no longer spending summers in McCarthy, nor were the Gilmores.

And that brings us to our old friend, Gordon. As a would be mining magnate, he had to be all for the road, but as a dope-smoking, self appointed elder statesman of the counter culture, he wanted to be in the good graces of the young, "with it" crowd. However, if you think he lay awake at night torn by divided loyalties, think again. I am sure he relished playing the double agent, (I will mention, for the sake of you astrology buffs, whoever you are, that he was a Gemini) privy to both the whiskey fueled war councils around the backroom table at the lodge, and the herb tea sipping conferances at the hardware store. However, when I presented him with the petition, he waltzed verbally around the old mulberry bush, but did not sign, as I knew he would't. I don't remember Frieda's reaction, but I imagine she dismissed it with an obscenity.

I do remember taking it to Darkow, in the spirit of honoring one's adversary, and being surprised at the equanimity with which he said, as he handed it back, "Well, that looks like the death knell for the road."

Another snapshot from my picture gallery: Ben, testifying before the Land Use Planning Commission in Anchorage that fall, and recommending that the Whole Enchilada be set aside, to be administered by the park service: In effect locking it up--thus confirming the anti-environmentalists accusations and worst fears (Let Them Freeze in the Dark, shouted an angry bumper sticker); and Gordon, passionate advocate of a multiple use plan, stalking out in anger.

Ben invited us to Santa Cruz to visit come winter, so several days before Christmas, with the temperature at 20 below, we pulled out from Chitina to begin the long drive. By the time we reached the desolate, ice-fog bound "moonscape" of Burwash Landing, Yukon Territory, it was minus 50. We didn't dare shut off the car and drove all night, bundled up in parkas and mukluks, untill we finally got far enough south for temperature to warm up to 20 below.

Santa Cruz 73: Charming, laid back progressive "little town." The Laurel Street house: Robert, Blue and a bright attractive young college student, Marci Thurston. Dinners with Greg Wheatland, Jim Gaw, Barry Hecht. Then, hitchhiking (just me, not Loy, God forbid) down to Santa Barbara to visit Kathy, all grown up and attending the university. Thence on to San Diego.

When we returned around the first of March, Martha decided to take the opportunity to see Alaska, and accompanied us...

Backtracking a moment...Hatches had sold out, liquor license and all, back in the autumn to Slim Lancaster of Valdez. Slim had worked at Kennecott back in the old days and nurtured a life long dream to retire in McCarthy. We had received word at the time of the sale that we were welcome to stay there until he and his wife came in in the spring, which we assumed would be May, at the earliest. But, we had not been back much more than a week, when Slim and Peg Lancaster arrived unexpectedly one morning, expecting immediate occupancy. Suddenly, we were homeless, out in the street.. There was still several feet of snow on the ground, it could still get down to 20 below at that time of year, though it might be spring by the calendar. Well, Martha got a real taste of living on the edge. Slim was a very pleasant, easy-going fellow, but his wife, Peg, who obviously wore the pants, was another story altogether.

So, we moved into Tony Zak's place. Here is how that came about: Fred and Belpy had left Spruce Point--perhaps Fred got tired of hauling tap water from Anchorage--and sold the air taxi permit. The FAA would license only one air taxi permit for an area so sparsely populated (as the liquor control board would allow only one liquor license) so the air taxi permit was a valuable item. The new owners relocated to McCarthy and changed the name to McCarthy Air Service. However, Howard and Winnie, now happily married, were scheming to wrest the permit from the new owners--who ever they were--so it was necessary that they have a pilot on hand at all times, or the opposition could claim that the populous was not being adequately served. Fairbanks pilot, John Boles, representing the new owners had arrived about the same time we did and rented Tony Zak's place...so taking pity, I suppose on the sudden orphans, he invited us to share his digs. I also think he was attracted to Martha, who, at 42, was still quite an attractive woman. Jim Edwards even told her that if he were not married and she was single, he would ask her to marry him.

So, tension was still thick in the air. Now in addition to the ongoing road battle, an air taxi war was raging. I clearly remember John Bole's wry comment on the scene: "I thought folks living in the country were supposed to be mellow, but everyone around here is wound up tighter than the E string on a violin." Yes indeed. It was a bubbling cauldron of controversy, conflict and intrigue, in to which Peg Lancaster stepped as delightedly as a suburban matron stepping into a hot tub, wherein she soaked in happy harmony with the unholy trinity of Darkow, Knutson and Anderson.

But there was no way that that fancy lady was going to live in the little hovel that her unassuming husband had bought; so with dizzying speed they (i.e. she) bought out the Edwards and moved into their place.

Jim and Maxine had for some time toyed with the idea of selling out and building over on Swift creek on the other side of the Kennicott River where they had 160 acres, but they must have been stunned at the abruptness with which that future arrived. Since Jim had assumed mail pilot status, Maxine and the kids had wintered in Chitina, where the mail

run originated, so they were not out in the cold. Maxine merely had to make a quick trip to McCarthy and box up personal items.

So in one of those delicious ironies that Life so obviously loves, teetotaler Jim Edwards' house became, for a while, the McCarthy Bar and Liquor Store. But Slim didn't stick around long to enjoy it. He died of a heart attack within a year of moving in. At least he realized his dream, however briefly. May he rest in peace, he certainly deserves it.

Some time around middle to late April, Loy and Martha pulled out of McCarthy, spent some time with the Edwards in Chitina and wound up briefly in Valdez squeezing herring roe. Loy must have been broke indeed to stoop to such unseemly work, but why Martha would choose to besmirch her pampered housewifely hands in such fashion, I don't know. Maybe it was all just a part of the Alaska adventure for her...Martha's husband, Maury flew to Anchorage and the two of them did the tourist routine and returned to San Diego...Loy secured summer employment as a cook with Texas-Gulf for another exploration project at the little native village of Ambler up north.

I pitched our old army surplus tent in the woods in back of the Burdick place and camped out for a couple of weeks. Then, leaving McCarthy to the wolves, headed down to Kodiak to seek work. I wound up at the remote Aleut village of Old Harbor working at a cannery that wasn't canning—it was undergoing renovation. The crew, with the collusion of the crew chief, drug its collective feet puttering around renovating for most of the summer. Hey it's a lot more pleasant to renovate than process smelly fish. I was happy to go along, figuring that I had fulfilled my fish processing karma on the Valient Maid—and I guess I really had, for just as the big shots from Seattle showed up, demanding to know, "what the fuck is going on here, and why isn't that line working, the gods of karma, with exquisite timing, sent a boat to rescue me. A sea-going cannery pulled in and they needed a cook. Their cook had gone on a drunk and failed to return. Seems he was a real grease monkey anyway and the crew was thoroughly disgusted with his cuisine. I was greeted with a chorus of Hallelujah after my first meal. I stayed aboard until the boat returned to Kodiak (the city), then returned to Anchorage.

In Oct, Loy and I drove south to once again spend the winter in California.

Returning in March, we took up residence in Chitina, renting two small cabins from Neil Finnesand. Then, at mid-summer, Vern and Nancy Newell visited Chitina and were appalled at the deteriorating condition of their house, so they asked us to move back in, rent free and maintain it. So we came full circle.

As though hoping to get it done while they thought no one was looking, the state hastily threw up wooden bridges across the two channels of the Kennicott River. Thus, as the summer season opened, McCarthy, for the first time in its history, was accessible by road. But before the season had run its full course, that unpredictable and capricious river wiped out one of them as easily and thoughtlessly as a petulant child kicking over a tinker toy house, and so damaged the other one, that it would never be any thing more than a foot bridge. And McCarthy returned to its normal isolated status.

Frieda finally had her fill of unfilled dreams, dumped Gordon and left McCarthy with nary a backward glance.

Darkow, amazingly, sold out. Jerry and Joann Miller, a more compatible McCarthy couple bought it for (I think) \$60,000. I have to wonder what it is going for now, given



the factor of ten every time it changes hands. By my calculations, if you want to buy it today, it will cost you in the neighborhood of 600 million, at least. Eat your heart out Lew McFerrin, wherever you are.

Construction of the pipeline began that summer and money lust gripped the state from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. It was the boom to end all booms, and as big oil money poured into the state, so did every manner of fortune seeker. Cocaine was everywhere, including up the collective nose of the legislature in Juneau. It was said that they took regular coke breaks instead, or in addition, to coffee breaks.

A version of the madness that swept the state invaded Chitina in the embodiment of a gang of coke snorting outlaw/entrepreneurs who took over operation of the hotel, cash store and saloon. Oh they had BIG PLANS that encompassed the entire valley from Chitina to the Green Butte—for Gordon, anchorless and adrift, harkened to their siren song as though it were the fugue of the Divine Beatitudes. They wove together their visions of grandeur, and buoyed by the high octane kick of cocaine, with the effluvium of pure bullshit billowing their sails, cast off for a fabulous port of call somewhere WAY over the rainbow.

At the height of the summer they staged a rock concert, importing rock bands from Anchorage; and for one wild weekend Chitina rocked and rolled, snorted and smoked. I watched it all with a sceptical eye and waited for the inevitable fall, which came as predictably as the first autumn snow fall.

Gordon, by the way, captured a new partner. It was surely a match made in heaven, from Gordon's point of view, for Danny Hester not only bought Gordon's bullshit in its entirety, but he continued to buy it by supporting it with the money he made as a tile setter. Not only that, Danny loved to drink (beer mostly), so they could and did sit around in McCarthy or at the Green Butte cabin, and in the absence of Frieda's sober sensibility, entertain Mr Barleycorn freely and build castles in the air, dreaming of that fabulous ore body that lay concealed in the bowels of the Green Butte that they would one day mine and become rich as Croesus. "Have you built your castle in the air" asked Thoreau, "good, that is where it should be. Now put the foundation under it." Well, Gordon wasn't much of a foundation man. Indeed, the only foundation work I ever knew him to do was to dig the foundation hole for somebody else's air castle.

I ran into Frieda in Anchorage that summer and asked her if she had any further plans for the Green Butte. With typical bluntness, she said, "As far as I am concerned, Gordon can stick the Green Butte up his ass and use that Danny Hester for a plug."

Danny was a likable guy—everybody liked Danny—I liked Danny and we were good friends for many years—but he was easily influenced and manipulated, often to his own detriment.

But the most important event of the year was the coming of B.J. Solomon, an erstwhile suburban housewife, and now self-described "hippie grandmother," who was to become one of my very dearest friends.

With her children grown and making children of their own, she bid adieu to her philandering husband—"Custer the Luster"—shouldered her back pack and hitchhiked to Alaska. She worked for a brief spell at the Eureka Lodge, where someone pointed her in the direction of Chitina. She arrived in October and settled into a one-room sod-roofed old prospector's cabin three miles out of town across the river on the bluff overlooking the confluence of the Copper and Kotsina Rivers, looking to spend the winter in solitude.

But, it was not to be. With a heart bigger than the state of Texas, from whence she had come--though not originally, I had better add, as she certainly did not consider herself a Texan--she could not resist taking in a stray young man who had wandered into the country, when he knocked on her door seeking shelter on a cold December night. That night stretched into all winter.

Well, that idealistic young preacher's son, Phil Shappland, repaid her many times over in the years to come for the open-heartedness with which she had sheltered him that first winter of their Alaska residency, quoting scripture as he pressed some gift or another on her--"Hungry ye fed me, homeless ye sheltered me."

In the spring of '75 the Ivy Sect moved in in force to begin making preparations for the coming end of the world in April of '76. Vern Ivy and his wife and a few followers had been an on-again off-again presence in Chitina for ten years or so. They owned a large house at the top of the hill above our cabin and several other properties around town.

They purchased the Chitina Cash Store, renamed it the Light House Mission, and a dozen or so true believers settled in to await Armageddon. Ivy Lieutenant Lynn Davis constructed a large two-storey log house on the hillside property directly opposite the Ivy place. Windowless, but for narrow slits near the top, just big enough to accomodate the barrel of a rifle, they were thus strategically situated to hold the entire town in the crosshairs of their sights. I guess they thought the Almighty was going to need the help of Mssrs. Smith and Wesson to usher in his kingdom. Praise the Lord, but, by all means, pass the ammunition.

When the world did not end as scheduled, the clan members gradually faded away. Brother Ivy and his wife remained and eventually opened a small grocery store/gas station on the edge of town...and Brother Ivy developed a bizarre, nay grotesque, physical condition. Testicular elephantiasis? Goiter of the gonads? Who knows? He never had it diagnosed, as he would have nothing to do with doctors--I can't knock him for that, but there is a limit--claiming that the Lord would heal him. Now, that's faith--even after the Lord failed to end the world when He was supposed to, Brother Ivy still believed. His balls grew to truly gargantuan proportions, so that he could no longer wear trousers, wearing instead a long robe that reached to his feet. When you would come into the store, he would waddle out from the living area (his wife was a recluse and never waited on customers), you could not help but notice this massive bulge that reached to his knees, swaying ponderously beneath the folds of his robe as he walked. I am not exaggerating, nor do I wish to poke fun at his unfortunate condition, that is simply the way it was. Actually, I kind of liked Brother Ivy, he mellowed out and I will have to say that he never once tried to push his religion. But his balls were famous statewide and for awhile were Chitina's biggest tourist attraction. Folks from the cities would go to his store just to get a glimpse, naturally buying something in the process. They must have made him a tidy profit. It occurs to me, however, that perhaps a simple ancient operation could have solved his problem. But, then, maybe he feared that somehow such an operation would doom him to an eternity of singing soprano in the Heavenly Choir, where he presumably is now, big balls and all, happily singing bass, having left this earthly scene sometime in the latter '80's.

Over on the McCarthy-Kennecott end of the valley, Consolidated Wrangell transformed itself into the Great Kennecott Land Co., and began selling off individual lots at Kennecott. A new breed of settler began to trickle into the area, a hardy type attracted

to the inaccessability and hoping to keep it that way, as they went about building a lifestyle that did not depend on being able to drive to their front doors.

The Widow Lancaster sold out to the Millers, and, so, finally the McCarthy Lodge could sell alcohol legally.

While the Iviites were preparing for the end of the world, John Denver was doing his best to save it, and journeyed to Alaska to film one of his environmental documentaries. In September, he and his crew arrived in McCarthy to do a segment on the Wrangells and spent nearly a week at the lodge. So there were several giddy evenings at the lodge, when, after the evening meal, he would break out his guitar and treat the local populous to a free concert. For all his celebrity status, he seemed a decent, genuine person who simply loved what he was doing and had the good fortune to be richly rewarded for doing it. After he pulled out, so did JoAnn Miller, who ran off with Dolon, a hired hand.

Al Gagnon of May Creek offered us an escape from the nut farm of Chitina by asking us to care-take May Creek while he went off to work on the north slope and make mega bucks as a crane operator. We were happy to so so, and agreed to be there by late October. In the meantime, Ben and Marci Thurston, now an item, were desirous of spending a winter in the area, so they accompanied us to Anchorage to make arrangements with Fred Potts—who, you will recall, was busy listening to Bach and working on the Great Alaska Novel—to stay at Spruce Point. And so it was that on an evening in October, Ben introduced us to a vivacious young lady with striking red hair and an ebullient open-hearted demeanor, who was to become a dear friend and a major influence in McCarthy in the coming years. Sally Gibert greeted us wearing a warm smile and a flowered kimono-like housecoat and welcomed us into her small 15th Street apartment, which was to be a home away from home for the next couple of years.

And now the McCarthy Hardware Store makes another appearance in our narrative and this time at center stage. It is a large false-fronted two-storey frame structure of the old west school of architecture built early in McCarthy's history. The upper storey is divided into perhaps a dozen small rooms suggesting that at some time it also served as a hotel or rooming house. The bottom storey is divided into a large room that had been the store proper and a room that now served as a kitchen/dining room. In short, a building with a lot of potential. After Frieda pulled out, her Anchorage friends sold the property to Bill Tracy, also of Anchorage. He had big plans, but never quite got around to doing anything more ~~more~~ than to spend an occasional weekend and talk about his big plans. So, Loy suggested to Sally that she consider buying it. Yes, the foundation was rotten, but, he assured her, that given our foundation expertise garnered in the post earthquake Chitina era, it could be salvaged. So, she concluded a deal with Bill Tracy, and in the summer of '77, with typical energy and enthusiasm, organized a labor force of Santa Cruz college student volunteers eager to spend the summer in fabled McCarthy rooting around in the muck with pick and shovel beneath the bulk of an ancient crumbling leviathan of a building that was already old when their parents were young. It certainly was not what one usually thinks of a spleasant work, yet the enthusiasm and dedication with which they—none of whom was getting a penny in the way of material remunerations—tackled the task was truly amazing. You would have thought we were raising the Taj Mahal, not a sagging old hardware store. but, of course it was more than that. A symbol, even perhaps a monument, and certainly a focus for the youthful aspirations of those boys and girls of affluence who saw McCarthy, in particular, and Alaska, in general, "The Last Frontier", a

hope for a better future, a chance to get it right, and not go down that beaten path of exploitation and over-development.

By Labor Day, the main room floor was solid enough to dance on, so Sally threw the first of her famous Labor Day Dances. But, I was not there to enjoy it. Several days prior to the event, Al Gagnon whisked me off to May Creek to care-take while he returned to the North Slope.

Well, it's about time to bring this recollection to a close with a quick summary of the next few years.

Loy constructed a dwelling up McCarthy Creek a mile beyond the Green Butte, using materials from the old bunkhouse. I resurrected an ancient shack just down the road a piece and spent several fine winters there.

The Wrangell-St Elias National Park was established, but McCarthy, sitting at its very doorstep, maintained its bridgeless status, until several years ago, when, I am given to understand, the State finally constructed foot bridges, so if you want to visit McCarthy be prepared to hoof it for a mile or so.

The Chitina house burned down on Christmas Eve 1982. I was up McCarthy Creek, having sublet it, as it were, to a couple from Fairbanks who had come to town looking for a place to winter. Vern Newell died that same day. Weird.

McCarthy, finally, in the early eighties, entered a period of harmony. But, it was short-lived. I have known since I started this whatever it is that eventually I would have to deal with the events of March 1, 1983. Well, some mention must be made, but as those who lived through it need no reminder, I will deal with it very briefly for those who didn't, but don't need to know all the gory details.

The prior summer, Lew Hasting from Anchorage bought one of the Kennecott houses, and spent the summer and fall industriously fixing it up and getting it insulated for the winter. He seemed a quiet, soft-spoken sort (seems like they always are). Then on the first mail day of the month, a brilliant, crisp, clear day, he skied down to McCarthy, entered the Hegland residence, which served as the Post Office (note: the Heglands had sold their McCarthy house and relocated just off the large airstrip) and shot Les and Flo and Maxine Edwards, then as he approached on his snow machine, long-time Long Lake resident, Harley King, and as they approached from Kennecott, Tim and Amy Nash, newly wedded. Gary Green, a local pilot, was working on his plane at the far end of the airstrip and immediately went aloft and warned off the mail plane even as it approached for a landing. Apparently it had been his plan to kill everybody in McCarthy and then hi-jack the mail plane and crash-land it into the pipeline, thus ending his own life, a Kamikaze environmental terrorist. When he saw that wasn't going to work, he jumped on Harley King's snow machine and attempted to make his escape, heading toward Chitina. He was arrested just the other side of Long Lake and in due course sentenced to life imprisonment.

Martha and Maury had moved to Ashland, Oregon in 1980. I visited and spent the winter of '84-'85 and fell in love with the, at that time, lovely artsy little town nestled cosily in the foothills of the Siskiyou Mountains. Then, in the spring of '87, feeling a need for a change, I moved down to begin a new chapter of Life.



## POST SCRIPT -- FEBRUARY 2000

The years have slipped by, as years do, and that idealistic downy-cheeked youth who journeyed to Alaska has become a cynical grizzled geezer, deposited by vicissitudes of fortune ("Do you think I know what I'm doing? That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself? As much as the pen knows what its writing or the ball know where its going next." -Rumi) in a small log cabin in, of all the unlikely places, the wilds of Northern Idaho, as isolated as ever he was in Alaska. So, he sits and watches the endless snow and makes believe that he is the Sage of Northern Idaho. No great claim, that. Donald—or better yet, Daffy—Duck could fill the position. Minimum requirement: I.Q. of at least 50.

He takes survey of the world as it enters the new millennium (technically the final year of the the 20th century—ah, but it's all arbitrary anyway so who cares), and notes that, having survived the Y2K crisis (as he know it would), it still hovers, as always, on the brink of disaster, of one sort or another. The threat of nuclear annihilation, that grand apocalyptic nightmare with which we delighted in terrifying ourselves for so many years seems to have faded to the background, leaving the probability of mere environmental degradation and/or self-strangulation in over-population. In that regard, he heard just this morning on NPR Radio that the Pope, that paragon of enlightened thought, is urging Italians (Italy is experiencing a population decrease) to do their duty to God and country and have more babies. Hearing that, he enjoys a cynical cackle as he addresses Christ's infallible spokesman here on Earth, "Say, what, Baby Cakes, are you still peddling that multiply and replenish the earth routine? Six billion and counting and you're still not satisfied? The College of Cardinals must have been out to recess, maybe even lunch, when they elected you."

So, he's not only a cynical old geezer, he's a blasphemous cynical old geezer—the very worst (or best) sort. Send him off the the old geezer's home, give him a pig's food and a bottle of beer and let him spend his days counting his toes:

This little piggy went to market  
This little piggy stayed home.  
This little piggy got schnockerred,  
This little piggy chanted OM.  
This little piggy ate escargot,  
This little piggy went to the prom,  
This little piggy went on-line

as This Little Piggy Dot Com (and made a fortune in sow bellies and bought a villa on the Riviera and threw wild extravagant pig-outs for rich and famous little piggies, went broke, lost the villa, and wound up in a pig-sty.

This little piggy made a sow's ear out of a purse,  
and this little piggy got tired of being a piggy, so she joined the fitness center and worked out day and night, lived on lettuce (organically grown) and went from being a plum little piggy to a skinny little piggy and all of her friends laughed at her and said she didn't even look like a reall piggy, she looked like a guinea pig ha ha ha, so broken-hearted she tried

to resume normal eating, but found she was anorexic, so she went into therapy and discovered that as a piglet she was the one that always wound up sucking hind tit, and as a consequence suffered from low self-esteem, so she had to learn to accept and love herself as she was. Piggies are supposed to be fat, or at least pleasantly plump. Whoever heard of a slender, svelte piggy? Probably watching too much television. So, in a classic case of transference, she fell in love with her therapist and they got married and had lots of little piggies and she was so happy she thought she had died and gone to hog-heaven.

And the last little piggy? Well, he really did die and go to hog-heaven and they made bacon out of him.

And now we start over again, this little piggy went to heaven, this little piggy went to hell...

O.K., O.K., that's enough for now, old-timer, time for our medicine and then we'll have a nice little nappy, off you go now, there, that's a good little geezer.

And the snow continues to fall, softly, continuing to accrue; there is a good three feet on the ground now, as it has been snowing a lot since New Years...finally, as the afternoon wanes the snow tapers off, the clouds begin to break up, and the camp robbers come out, chattering softly, begging, expecting to be fed, and as the sunlight fades, a nearly full moon peeks out from the thinning clouds. In the distance a dog barks briefly, then silence...and it occurs to me that I might as well be back in Alaska, and in a sense I am, for what is Alaska but a state of mind? Even when I was in Alaska, I wasn't so much in Alaska as Alaska was in "me," that is, "my" consciousness, even as now "you" are in "my" consciousness, as "I" am in "your" consciousness and "consciousness is a singular, of which the plural is unknown." (-Schrodinger) And so it was, is and will be...peace and amen.

But now it is time to light the lamps and see about rustling up something for the geezer to eat, he is beginning to stir, and like the camp robbers, expects to be fed.