

NARRATIVE OF A WALK FROM GALVESTON ISLAND  
TO THE WEST TEXAS TOWN OF MARFA

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On November 10th, having just returned to the States from a year in Germany, with time on my hands and without a job or anywhere to call home, I set out on foot from my birthplace on Galveston Island, heading to the West Texas town where Lynn Xu and I will build a house and settle down after many years of moving around. St. Mary's, the hospital where I was born, no longer exists. In its place on 8th Street now stands the Rebecca Sealy Psychiatric Hospital. Thinking of time's furious sense of humor, I left from there at noon toward my destination, an empty lot on West Galveston Street in Marfa. It was Sunday and my parents had the day off, so they came along to walk the first few miles with me. Earlier that morning we'd driven from their home on Clear Lake Shores, where our family moved after we left Galveston when I was five. I spent my first seventeen years on those two coastal islands, and ever since, they and other islands where I've lived or visited will often rise up from the past, sometimes with attending images or memories, often merely as the ghostly sensation of being surrounded by unfamiliar water.

Hispaniola, Iceland, Manhattan,  
Great Britain, Bainbridge, Saint John,  
Rishiri, Culebra, Alcatraz

Fifteen minutes into the walk we passed a carriage house on 17th Street that was our first home as a family, then zig-zagged through faintly familiar places before arriving at 1 o'clock at our second address, where I lived from 1980 until 1983, where I became best friends with Brendan, had a birthday party on the porch, saw three ghosts of different colors, where a dog bit me, where we had finches in a wooden cage until my parents set them free. Our apartment was the second floor of a Victorian building that once faced 36th Street on the grounds of Grace Episcopal Church. Sometime in the past ten years it

was moved fifty meters and rotated to face Avenue K. Again I stood wondering about the replacements and erasures of the past, which it seemed did not fade as much as gather obstructions. After ten minutes of reminiscing with my parents and taking photographs, I continued alone in the direction of the Gulf of Mexico. Once there I turned right and walked along the sidewalk atop the seawall, a 10-mile long barrier built with the promise of safety and permanence after six thousand islanders died in the Hurricane of 1900. As I traveled westward, to one side were beaches where friends and family had spent countless hours, on the other were hotels, bars, surf shops, and strip malls. Memories of roman candles and the smell of a certain type of soap arrived as fragments. I had to concentrate hard to find context. Already on that first day I felt my attention tested by quiet and solitude. Occasionally I sang to myself. A couple of hours passed before I arrived at the place where the wall abruptly ends, where the island begins to taper off and the assurances of land cede to the impulses of the ocean. I walked on the sand for a few hours more and made it to a campground by the beach just before sunset, having covered only half the length of the barrier island where I was born.

Because I went to sleep not long after sunset, I was up at 5 o'clock on Monday. I left before dawn and by late morning I'd made it to the westernmost point of Galveston, where I crossed over a bridge at San Luis Pass onto a peninsula, oddly called Follet's Island. I rested for an hour at a bait shop, then continued down the beach, the winter sun in its low path across the sky slowly burning the left half of my face. Most of the day I walked barefoot because the new shoes I thought would last me the entire trip rubbed painfully against my heels. For a while the wet sand felt good, but after a few hours the weight of what I carried seemed to press my arches flat. In my pack I had a bivy sack, ground cover, sleeping bag, first aid kit, clothes, food, water, and a couple of books. To distract myself from the pain, I meditated on the utility of these items, read Shakespeare's sonnets, and composed short poems in my head.

As the sun moved across an autumn  
Sky, I walked along the beach  
Thinking of colder days before me

At one point I came across a mass of tackle tangled around a fish. It was barely alive, gasping for air, the end of a lure in its mouth with the barb coming out of an eye. I tried for several minutes to pry the hook out and free it, but I only managed to do more

damage and gave up.

With a few ceremonious words  
I placed the dying catfish  
On a bed of trash in a steel drum

At about 4 o'clock I arrived at Surfside, where my route changed direction. I got a room at an inn by the beach. From the window I could see waves breaking on the beach to the south and a high bridge that would take me inland to the north. I'd walked 27 miles that day. Exhausted, feet raw, face sunburned, I felt like a suburb of myself. After a hot bath I climbed into the cloud-like bed.

Up again before sunrise on the 12th. I was amazed at how much my legs and feet had been healed by sleep. After scarfing down a big breakfast of eggs and hash browns at the inn's adjoining restaurant, I left Surfside and the sound of waves at 9 o'clock with a cool wind in my face. An hour later I was met by my father, who was driving out to the Hill Country. Although we only visited for a few minutes, my spirits were boosted immensely. Later in the day I came across an appalling historical marker with a perfunctory description of the slaughter of Karankawas by the Texas Army in 1824 at the Battle of Jones Creek: "Attack at dawn found Indians ready with spears. Jones' guns got 15 Indians, dispersed the rest." It would be the first of many such markers I would see, which provided a clear view of the frivolities and dispensations of my life against the warped, dark backdrop of history. A little while later, as I was passing a farm prison on Highway 36, a guard in a watchtower saw me take a photograph and yelled something unintelligible. I waved, crossed over to the far side of the road, and kept walking. A few minutes later two prison officials in a truck caught up to me, asked what I was doing, checked my driver's license, and told me to stay off the grass because it was prison property. The fields were worked by prisoners, they said, who could be dangerous. With the feeling of the guards' eyes on me I continued, following their instructions as a sort of meditation, my busted feet feeling each step on the hard asphalt, only inches from the liminal edge where the field and the road encroach on one another, where equations of softness and flatness can be negotiated for some comfort. The prison fields seemed to stretch on endlessly in every direction, but really only lasted a mile or two. After a couple more hours of walking I reached Brazoria, ate some bad food, and decided to push on another ten miles to West Columbia. I got to a motel two hours after dark, just

as the temperature started to drop. It'd been another 30-mile day and my feet hurt badly. I was out like a light when my head hit the pillow at 9.

Up at 7:30 on Wednesday the 13th, I ate and rested a bit, then left for Needville at 10:45. It was a tedious, stressful day with lots of traffic and more than a few menacing dogs. I thought only of my family and the pain in my feet for hours. I counted steps. On the outskirts of my destination I stopped at a fantastic Mexican restaurant for an early dinner, which I washed down with cold beer. If there is such a thing as a heavenly fish taco, I'm sure it's located at the end of a daylong walk. The sky was dark when I arrived in the center of town. Not knowing where to camp, I asked a sheriff for advice. He pointed me in the direction of the nearby Knights of Columbus property, and there I set up my bivy. The night was colder than the ones before.

In a tent between barbecue pits  
I awoke in the middle  
Of the night to the hooting of owls

The 14th began with coffee and breakfast in a restaurant, its walls covered in neon signs, deer heads, and cowboy paintings. I walked some hours along busy roads, then had a long stretch of quiet during which I read several of Basho's travel sketches. Late that afternoon I got to East Bernard, had another meal of chicken, beans, and rice, then headed to Holy Cross Catholic Church, where Lynn had arranged for me to camp in the churchyard. I arrived as a service was beginning. After stowing my bag in the sacristy I took a seat among the believers. It was a memorial for deceased parishioners and reminded me of a particularly moving passage I'd read earlier in the day, wherein Basho describes an encounter with "a great number of tombstones scattered among the trees." He continues, "It was a depressing sight indeed, for young or old, loved or loving, we must all go to such a place at the end of our lives." I watched as the pious strangers went forth in ones and twos to light candles for their dead, and I remembered funerals and memorials for my own loved ones. Death always seems a distant horizon, I thought, until someone you know passes away, and then it seems like nothing else at all. After the service, the priest greeted me. He said the church was unlocked and I was welcome to stay in the choir room if I'd like. Happy to stay inside, I slept well despite my displeasure at the brevity of life.

I woke at midnight in the quiet  
Church still filled with the sadness  
And camaraderie of strangers

Just as Friday's early morning mass was getting underway, I left. On a quiet country road I read Basho and Wallace Stevens for a couple of hours. I saw a giant flock of birds, then several falcons. I passed many small farms and only once was approached by curious dogs, when two followed barking halfheartedly. They lost interest when I tossed a handful of jerky on the road. My heels hurt a lot but it was only 17 miles to Eagle Lake. I arrived in time for a late lunch at a steak and seafood joint, then checked in at a motel, iced my feet, and watched television. Before dinner, I spoke with the motel's owner. He told me that he and his family had immigrated to California from India thirteen years ago. After eight years of working as a manager for a corporation in San Luis Obispo, he and his wife bought the motel and moved to Texas. The key, he said, is to be your own boss. Their two grown sons had stayed out west. He was clearly proud of them. I thought of Lynn and was filled with nostalgia for our years in the Golden State, where at that moment she was preparing to read at the Berkeley Art Museum. Later that night, as she was reading, I drank beer at an ice house in a large metal shed, missing my wife. I thought about the home that we would build and wondered how we'd pull it off, then wandered back to my room, where I spent the rest of the evening watching basketball with my feet up.

It was already hot when I headed out on the 16th to Columbus, an easy 16 miles away on small roads. As the town receded behind me, I regretted not taking time to visit its eponymous lake. At one point I saw several beautiful, colorful birds that I couldn't identify. My feet were in bad shape and when I called Lynn something she said gave me the idea to cut my shoes' collars down to the quarters, which relieved the pressure on my heels and helped immensely. Still, I badly needed new shoes. Toward the end of the day I found myself crawling under two fences to take a shortcut through a gully, then for the first time I crossed over the Colorado River, which my path would stay close to until I arrived in Austin. My mother visited me when I arrived in Columbus. She brought me snacks and other supplies, and we had a nice dinner, then she headed back to Clear Lake Shores and I went back to the inn. I still wasn't all that far from the coast, a sobering fact. After reading for a while I looked at maps.

From Columbus it was 27 miles to La Grange, and on Sunday the 17th I was up at 6 and started to walk at 8:30. My pack felt light and the weather was good. After half an hour I crossed over the Colorado for the second time. State Highway 71 had a fair amount of traffic but there was a wide shoulder for most of the way.

Where I've lived or where I've visited  
In a memory of sun  
Cutting through clouds over some ocean

After about five hours I made it to the tiny town of Ellinger, where I stopped for drinks and snacks, and had a brief conversation about health care with a cashier at the convenience store. I thought of that thing people say about how all we have is our health. Although the rest of the day was mostly spent in a daze, I was occasionally startled to attention by things I came across, like a decapitated deer. Next to the deer was a pizza box. This juxtaposition struck me as an evil take on Lautréamont's sewing machine and umbrella. It bummed me out for a while. At 6, body hurting and floating in exhaustion, I checked in to a nice motel on the outskirts of La Grange.

The 18th was the start of a new week and I headed out at 7:30, tired but full of confidence. I had kept pace with my plans. The morning was cool.

The fog became mist became fog, then  
Mist again, as oak trees lost  
Their leaves and the planet slowly turned

I passed through a town called Plum, then one called West Point. The day was a draft of mindlessness. I arrived at Buescher State Park at 4:30 and set up camp in a screened-in shelter overlooking a small lake. All the other sites in my section of the park were unoccupied. I took a shower, walked around a bit, and saw the first rabbit I'd seen in ages. Just as I arrived back at my camp, an owl swooped over the shelter in silence and looked down at me from its perch in a tree. The sounds of the forest gathered into an ambient din more comforting than silence. It was good to be away from cars and domesticated animals. I fell asleep not long after sunset, enjoying a perfect specimen of what Robert Musil referred to as "the soft night" in "Der Erweckte" ("The Awakened"), an essay written another November many years ago, collected in the section

"Bilder" ("Pictures") of *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten (Posthumous Papers of a Living Author)*.

In the night I woke once to the hooting of owls, but wasn't up long and slept nearly 11 hours. At 9:30 on Tuesday I started walking, thrilled to hike the park's soft, shaded trails for the first few miles. They led to a quiet park road that ran seven or eight more miles, much of it in the neighboring wilderness of Bastrop State Park. For a good deal of this stretch I was surrounded charred loblolly pines, oaks, and junipers, burned during the Bastrop County Complex fire in September and October 2011. It was the most destructive wildfire in Texas history, fueled by the state's worst drought and spread with the help of winds from a tropical storm. Although the temperature was only about 70 degrees, there was of course no cover from the sun and I had forgotten to fill up my extra water containers, so I had to ration it and was thirsty for most of the day. Heartening as it was to see bits of new growth here and there, distress seemed an appropriate state in which to traverse the decimated landscape. At about 3 o'clock I arrived in the town of Bastrop, where I ate tacos and rested for an hour. Onward I walked, over a bridge with a beautiful view of the Colorado, along Highway 71 for three hours, and about an hour after dark I finally reached a place called the Hobo Camp. The groundskeeper showed me around. There was a 54-inch big screen television in a cabinet in the middle of a field, perhaps one of the reasons why it was such a popular place. Most of the overnights were in RVs, and I was led to an area set apart from the vehicles. There was one tent already there. Its occupant, an instantly likable guy from Tennessee named Israel, crawled out and greeted me with his friendly dog, Daisy. He added a few logs to a smoldering fire, and we sat around drinking and talking. His truck's gearbox had broken while he was in Austin for Formula 1 races, and he was stuck in the area until it was fixed. He delivered motorcycles for a living and drove thousands of miles each month. He was also an avid long-distance motorcyclist and a great storyteller, a combination which made for terrific tales about adventures all over the world. At about 11 I set up camp in the dark and quickly fell asleep. The next day Lynn would fly in and we would walk the next 100 miles together, then spend Thanksgiving with family in Kerrville.

We had decided to stay at an airport hotel on Wednesday night and walk the remaining 8 miles to downtown Austin the next day. My camp was 17 miles from the airport and I headed out at 9:30, pushed the pace, and only took one brief break so I could get there at the same time Lynn's plane would land. I arrived at 3, exhausted and filthy. I had the

chance to take a long bath, which felt like one of the pure lands I'd read about in the sutras. Time moved slowly, the darkness like a room packed with flowers. When Lynn arrived, it was clear that paradise was this other person. A new season had arrived to change the light on everything. The weight of how much I'd missed her hadn't been apparent, perhaps because we frequently spoke on the phone and I spent much of my time remembering scenes from our life together. She brought sandwiches and wine, and we ate and drank as we watched television and laughed.

The lamp swings open shadow  
After shadow after shadow

*by Lynn*

We woke early and stayed at the hotel until noon on the 21st, when my sister Megan graciously ferried our bags so Lynn and I could walk without weight for the day. It was only a two and a half hour stroll to the condo where she and her husband, Giulio, lived, high up in a tower in downtown Austin. Upon arrival, taking in the view, gazing out at the horizon, I couldn't help but try to calculate the distance of faraway hills and how long it would take to reach them on foot. Megan's a great cook, and she and Giulio made us a wonderful dinner. The four of us talked for a couple of hours, then Lynn and I went to bed early. I fell asleep comforted by the knowledge that tomorrow we'd be reading and stocking up on supplies instead of walking. Finally a break.

Dreaming suddenly I forget  
The dream—  
Ah!  
I imagine: chollas tickling the moonlight

*by Lynn*

After our day off, during which we did a remote presentation for our friends in Stuttgart and bought supplies (including a much-needed pair of shoes and a jogging stroller to help carry extra water during the second half of the walk), Lynn and I headed out into a cold late morning. It was November 23rd, what would have been the great poet Paul Celan's 93rd birthday.

Frustrating modesty of the wind!  
I wail: Aaaaaaaeuuuuuoooooooook  
Aaaaaaaeuuuuuuuooooooooook

*by Lynn*

It'd only be five days and four nights until we'd arrive in Kerrville for the holiday, and since we'd be staying with friends and in motels we didn't need to pack much. My parents would visit my sister in the next day or two and ferry the car and other heavy things to Kerrville. It took nearly two hours to get out of Austin. After stopping on the outskirts of town for lunch, we walked along the feeder and the highway for a few hours, then headed up a country road until we arrived just before dusk at the home of family friends, Leslie and Alex, in Dripping Springs. We ate dinner with them and their daughter, who later sat by the fireplace with us after Leslie and Alex left for a party. It's rare that Lynn or I get a chance to talk with someone in high school, and it was refreshing to speak about social groups, about the weekly ritual of guys who bring their lawn chairs to campus. Lynn and I were exhausted by 9 and went to bed to rest up for the next day's long walk, which we knew would be difficult, with sleet and rain in the morning forecast.

Sunday the 24th we were up at 7:30 and headed out at 9, passing by, as we left the property, one of Leslie's galvanized steel sculptures. It seemed to impart strength and resolve, which we would need. As predicted, sleet fell on us for an hour, followed by cold rain for another. It was windy, the road was hilly, and walking was tough but better than the day before because there were few cars and we were surrounded by trees. After five hours we arrived at a creek. We took off our shoes and waded through the cold water, which seemed the most perfect of earthly pleasures. After about an hour we passed the entrance to Pedernales Falls State Park, where my family regularly went to camp and hike, and where Lynn had her first experience swimming in a stream earlier in the year. The falls themselves are gradual, the river drops fifty feet in the span of a half-mile. Usually the water is tame as it passes through the massive limestone formation, splits and rejoins, speeds up through sieves, and gathers in eddies, but after a hard rain it can become a massive span of rapids. We had thought of camping in the park, but in order to make it to Kerrville by Thanksgiving we had to go farther, and farther we went. By late afternoon Lynn was stressed. We were both tired. We spoke very little. Instead we focused on the road ahead, walking fast in an attempt to reach the next town before dark.

What causes one to cry?  
Extreme exhaustion

*by Lynn*

Shame  
Trying to catch up  
I fall  
Almost . . . and crying lose feeling in my face

We couldn't beat the sun and spent the final hour in darkness. At a little past 7 we arrived in Johnson City. Over dinner we talked about the difficulties of the day we'd just endured as well as those to come, about our past travels and the appeal of domesticity, about how subtle life's changes seem until they ask a question, about single days that feel like small epitomes of all our years together.

On the 25th we only had 16 miles to walk. We got up late and ate lunch as a cold rain fell. Our wishes were answered as the sun came out just as we were finishing, and we started walking at half past noon. This was Lyndon B. Johnson territory. The city we left from took its name from the large ranch founded by his ancestors, and our destination, the town of Stonewall, is known for its peaches and as the place where the 36th President was born and died. In late afternoon we passed by the state park that bears his name. Not long after that we arrived at Stonewall's eponymous motel and feasted on catfish and okra at a nearby restaurant.

At one point the body opens  
It is all interior

*by Lynn*

Back at the motel, the proprietor showed us photos of her home in East Texas, which she'd designed herself. She left because it was too big for her alone, and was now trying to sell the place. It looked nice in the photos, especially in contrast to the shabby motel, which seemed to have gone 30 years without an improvement. Outside the office were portable shelves of video cassettes. Since there was no cable, we watched *Cocktail* on an old television and fell asleep to the echo of Tom Cruise's voice, which always communicates, merely in its striving tenor, the message that with enough willpower anyone can succeed at anything.

Cold, overcast, and snowing lightly the morning of the 26th. We couldn't control the weather but we could eat at a cafe inside a gas station and wait it out for a spell.

A deer head presides  
Over breakfast, while outside  
Snow precedes winter

The morning made a strong impression on both of us.

Eating a taco at the Chevron in Stonewall  
I observe: stretches of idleness

*by Lynn*

We left just as the flurries stopped. After passing by farms and vineyards for a few hours, we came across the home and sculpture park of Jóhann Eyfells, an Icelandic artist who retired in the Hill Country. Many of his large works, visible from the road, are forged from metal and evoke organic forms. I thought of the brief stopover trip Lynn and I took to the otherworldly country where the artist was born. I remembered meeting, during another visit to Iceland, a man who had walked the 400 miles across the island by himself. I fantasized about the fabled healing waters of the Blue Lagoon. Its steam drifted over the lava fields of Reykjanes Peninsula in my mind while Lynn and I continued trudging through central Texas. What was Eyfells thinking as he held the blowtorch and sculpted? What had the man in Iceland thought about as he walked? One of love's great virtues is its telepathic development, but did I really know what my wife thought, and if I asked her would she tell me truly and in a way that I could understand?

Walking: where the body . . . like a giant  
Piece of sandpaper  
Struggles to free itself from the alphabet of the trees

*by Lynn*

After a couple of hours, a close family friend, a sculptor named John, drove out to meet us on the road, bearing cups of hot cider. Our spirits were lifted by the warm drink and the nearness of our lodging in Fredericksburg, a casita adjoining the studio and home of John and his wife, Cathy, both incredibly warm and genuine people. The rest of the walk was uneventful. We made good time and arrived downtown in early afternoon. Fredericksburg was settled by Germans not long after the Republic of Texas became part of the United States at the end of 1845. It defines itself by this history and its lifeblood is tourism. Among its many German restaurants, one named The Ausländer called out to us. We spent a leisurely lunch reminiscing about our year in Stuttgart, devouring

sauerkraut and potatoes between sips of heavy beer. I thought of Fort D. A. Russell in Marfa, which served as a prison for captured German soldiers during WWII and is now a famous home to art. After lunch we went to John and Cathy's house. We cleaned up and rested for a few hours, then looked at John's beautifully-crafted Western-themed sculpture in his studio. We had dinner and went to bed early.

After breakfast with our hosts we left Fredericksburg, 25 miles away from the end of Lynn's journey and the halfway point of mine, my parents' house in Kerrville. It was a pleasant Wednesday.

Dust in the evening steps  
Into the sunflower's invisible face

*by Lynn*

We talked about the week's voyage and time flew by as we walked within sight of the Pedernales River and Wolf Creek for much of the day. Occasionally we saw deer leaping fences. It was obvious that Lynn was glad to be done, however sad she was that we'd soon be apart again. I was also worn out, ready for a break of a few days. At half past five, exhausted and happy, we arrived at the house. It felt like a century had ended.

On one hand, Thanksgiving and the five following days were relaxing enough to have been scored by Debussy. On the other, my aunts and uncles, cousins, and some family friends were there, and the past ten days had been so quiet that the company was overwhelming. It was great to eat without moving, to stuff myself. I gained back some of the pounds I'd shed. One by one people left: friends, extended family, my mom, then my dad and Lynn. Then I was alone. I mostly sat by a wood burning stove and waited. My friend Mike was catching a flight from Chicago to join me for a couple of days of walking. He arrived Tuesday afternoon and we headed out at 8 the next morning. It was relatively warm, in the 50s for most of the day. We walked along pleasant roads: few cars, rolling hills, picturesque. I was thrilled that he had come. Not only have we been best friends since elementary school, but he's also an ultramarathoner and capable at everything he does. I knew I'd gain confidence by walking with him before the stretch of high desert I'd have to cover alone. We swapped pushing the cart each hour. We remembered adventures we'd gone on when we were young and talked about people we knew. Saw lots of deer, some antelope, even a zebra and coyote on the property of an "exotic" ranch. Farther on, "There's really only the sky, ground, plants, and animals out

here," Mike said. This resonated for the rest of the trip, especially whenever I stopped to take a photograph. We walked more than 30 miles that day. A few minutes after one of the most incredible sunsets I've ever seen, we set up our tents in a hollow near the junction of I-10 and 290.

We woke in darkness and headed out before 7 on Thursday. It was a pleasant day of walking on solitary roads. A little after noon we came across a bend in the road that offered an amazing view of the Llano River valley. A historical marker said the place was called Cloud Point, and it was named not for the billows above, but for a Civil War veteran with a poetic last name. About 45 minutes later we encountered another historical marker: "The Oliver Pecan" was a giant tree that produced 800 pounds in 1906. At 2:30 we crossed a long, high bridge to arrive in Junction, which got its name from the confluence of the beautiful North and South Llano Rivers. We had lunch at a Mexican restaurant, passed by the "The Deer Horn Tree" (a 12-foot high pile of antlers), and I checked into a hotel. Mike's dad came to pick him up in late afternoon. Alone again, I watched television and found out that Nelson Mandela died. The world felt like a sad ruin that had just lost one of the few souls truly devoted to repairing it.

Because the Weather Channel reported stormy, freezing weather, I stayed in Junction on Friday. I rested, did laundry, ate until I was stuffed, read, rested some more. Then the morning of December 7th I headed out at 8. It was cold and windy, but much improved from the day before. The roads were very lonesome. I read the first two books of *The Odyssey*, which I'd bought in Kerrville. The great epic perched on the handles of the baby stroller I pushed made my trip seem absurd, and a few times I thought Don Quixote would have been a better companion than Odysseus. Early afternoon, in the tiny town of Roosevelt, I went into a market. A half-dozen men sat in the front room at a table with a deer head between them. They were measuring the span of its rack. Through a door in the back was a lunchroom. I had potato soup and cornbread, then pushed on. A couple hours later, after not seeing anyone on the road for a long time, a Parks and Wildlife official checked on me. I must have been in cornbread country, because he offered me some. I gratefully took it and finished eating before his car had disappeared over the next hill. The rest of the day I only saw two more vehicles. At dusk I found a great spot, protected and soft, near the road.

Beneath two small trees

I cleared a campsite in haste  
As the cold dark fell

I woke up before 5, too early to get out of bed, and lay shivering, in and out of sleep for a long time. Having hiked 27 miles the day before, there were 31 to go on Sunday in order to reach Sonora. I set out at 8 beneath clear skies. Frozen dew on the grass and trees, and my water bottles were frozen solid. An hour after dawn the sky was clear and the temperature rose above freezing.

The cows stare at me  
Like they've never seen a man  
Push a cart before

On and on. How could the road be so small in comparison to what surrounded it and yet seemingly continue endlessly? I arrived at a hotel next to a small airport in Sonora at around 5 and, since all the town's Mexican restaurants were closed, resorted to Pizza Hut for a sandwich and salad. Later that night I read *The Odyssey* and noticed that the translation's dedication, to Lynne. I thought about the word "dedicate," missed my wife, and wondered about the many ways to spell her one-syllable name.

Monday the 9th began with breakfast of biscuits and gravy, eggs and potatoes. A clear morning, a few degrees below freezing. I walked 29 miles on good roads, reading occasionally but mostly in a zone of pure motion. My leg hurt worse and worse all day. Late afternoon I arrived at a shabby motel eight miles east of Ozona. It was in an oasis of strangeness in the middle of nowhere. Across from the hotel, an RV park and a small car museum, both in oddly pristine condition, looked like enlarged dioramas of themselves. Looking for ice, I wandered into the covered center of the motel, and, much to my amazement, I found myself in a spacious and rundown atrium, complete with swimming pool, hot tub, and banana trees. It evoked tropical places, old friends, modern art, the early 1970s, and purgatory in equal measures.

Not far to go on Tuesday. I rested my legs and stayed in bed until noon. It took only two hours to get to downtown Ozona. After dropping my things at a motel I went to the town center. In the park there's a statue of Davy Crockett with an inscription: "Be sure you are right then go ahead."

Powerful leaders with leather shields  
How do their great cities fall?  
Are the pelts of their cattle too thin?

Thinking of Crockett's mandate, I decided to stay an extra 24 hours to recover.

During my day of rest I walked around town, read, visited the museum and library, and ate and slept as much as possible. On the 12th I was up early and the town was behind me by 8. I was learning to deal with the pain in my leg. The landscape was flat and without much change all morning, then about noon, hills and more dramatic features formed in the distance. I made good time. After getting on the main road at 4, with about 24 miles until Iraan, I made camp in a clean, spacious culvert beneath the road.

Halfway from one town  
To the next, I dreamed of friends  
And the warmth of home

Awoke early and read another chapter of *The Odyssey* before setting out on Friday. Clear skies in the morning, sun over my left shoulder, my shadow long across the road before me, air pleasantly cold. Very few cars passed all day. After about 18 miles the scenery changed. I climbed a ways, and near town I came to a glorious overlook with a picnic area. The plants were scrawnier and buttes were visible in the distance. The Pecos River snaked through the valley below, and I felt as if I'd only ever seen the profile of the earth, never its face. Another thirty minutes to Iraan, where I got a room in a new motel, probably constructed in anticipation of the southward movement of the natural gas industry. Although I was learning to deal with the intense pain now in both shins, I sensed I'd need another 24 hours of rest.

In the afternoon of my day off I was invited by the motel's owner to check out a promontory. Standing on the edge of a 500-foot cliff, enjoying another view of the Pecos River far below, geologic time enveloped the human experience, which momentarily seemed little more than a leaf pressed between the pages of a yearbook, a property dispute, a crop ruined by autumn frost. It became obvious that the secret to surviving the apocalypse is to live somewhere where it already happened. I read and watched

television the whole day long. Sunday the 15th I was awake at 5:30 and started to walk at 7. There were 60 miles to cover in two days to get to Fort Stockton. After that, three more days for the final stretch. Late morning I reached the frontage road along I-10. *The Odyssey* kept me occupied as quixotic windmills spun in the distance to the north. After almost 35 miles, paranoid of the border patrol and drones real or imagined, weary and in considerable pain, I found a clean tunnel and set up camp in the dark.

Up once in the night to take a leak, I marveled at the multitudinous stars, even though the West Texas sky wasn't nearly as clear as I'd often seen it. When I woke in the morning I felt warm and well-rested, and left before daybreak. The desolate frontage road went on and on in a direct line all day long.

Deer jumping fences  
I remembered the torii  
Of Miyajima

"The eye is the best of artists," wrote Emerson. Forms that evoked Robert Rauschenberg's work appeared everywhere: rocks, pieces of wood, trash, and the shifting horizon. It was one of those austere days when a picture is worth twenty well-placed words. Early afternoon, I carelessly pushed my cart over a thorn and a tire went flat. Fortunately the wheel still functioned okay. After arriving in Fort Stockton at 4, I checked in to the Deluxe Inn, repaired the tire, bought supplies, ate chicken at a steak house, went back to the motel and slept 12 hours, then stayed another 24 to heal before the final 90 miles. That extra day was mostly spent reading and watching television in bed.

I wrapped my swollen shins and ankles in tape and left Fort Stockton at sunup on December 18th. After an hour I was outside of town, surrounded by ranches and the occasional stretch of irrigated farmland. Another hour along, I came to a place where the way diverged. To the left was a dirt road. The pavement went right, passing by a prison visible in the distance en route to the main highway. I checked my maps and figured the left was shorter and more pleasant. It turned out to be the most remote of all the roads I'd traveled. Several times I felt like a compass and a bottle of water were all that separated me from oblivion. During 8 hours I passed only a few distant ranches and saw three or four cars. In the late afternoon my dad, on his way to Marfa from Kerrville,

brought me a sandwich and took the cart. I shouldered my pack, walked another hour until dusk, then took shelter for the night in a culvert where the dirt road meets US-67.

Broke camp at 7 as daybreak glowed on the horizon. The mind that attempts to pierce the landscape will eventually collapse, I thought as I began walking Thursday. That penultimate day turned out to be the hardest of them all. I walked about 19 miles alone, then my friend Tim drove out to say hello and drop off my dad, who walked the remaining 12 miles with me into Alpine. At one point Tim again drove all the way from Marfa, this time with our friend Caitlin so she could say hello. As the four of us stood by the side of the road I felt the nearness of home. My dad and I walked on for a few more hours. Shortly after twilight, lights of Alpine became visible as we came over a rolling hill. Two shooting stars crossed the sky within minutes of each other and a clear, beautiful moon presided. We arrived at our hotel on the eastern edge of town at 7:30.

December 20th, the day before winter solstice. Alone I began the final day. After walking a couple of miles across to the west side of Alpine, Tim and another friend, Ross, met me. The three of us walked together for about 17 miles, much of it on a dirt service road that ran alongside railroad tracks, through ranch land and a good distance from the highway. The quiet was cut only by the wind and our jokes, revelations, plans, and apocryphal tales. I remembered childhood friendships, tied as they were to the solitude of youth, and I was grateful to have these people with whom I share many ideas about living to guide me toward the end of the voyage. I was nostalgic. The weather was perfect in its cloudiness until 4 o'clock, when occasional drops of rain fell just before the path delivered us to what once was the Old Spanish Trail, now Route 90. Where it passes through Marfa, it's also San Antonio Street, and I was nearly there. When we reached 90 we saw heavy rain in the distance to the southwest, and a strange phenomena there, where a beam of light cut through the dark clouds in a spectacular manner, as in a painting by Frederic Edwin Church. The clouds advanced toward us as we walked in their direction, and another mile onward, just as we arrived at the viewing station for Marfa Lights, the sky opened and cold, heavy sheets of rain fell. My dad and several of our friends were waiting for us. We stood around shivering together for a quarter hour, then our friend Sam joined Tim, Ross, and myself for the final leg. Transformed by my reading of Homer, these three erudite, tall, eloquent, multitalented artist friends struck me as gods. Nonetheless, after two more miles, Tim and Ross had to bow out because they didn't have rain pants and were freezing. Sam and I, dry

everywhere that counted besides our feet, forged ahead. The rain kept falling. At one point I looked down and found a 20-dollar bill. The two of us walked together for two more hours before finally arriving at the Lost Horse Saloon in Marfa. Friends were waiting for us. Presents were given. A shot of mescal to celebrate. Then the adrenaline was gone and my legs were killing me. I called Lynn. I limped to a hotel where my dad and I checked in and ate dinner. When the rain stopped at around 10 I walked the few remaining blocks to our property and imagined what life would be like there.