

# KOKORO

Brooks Jensen Arts Special Edition ~ One-Picture Stories





Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:

The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, 'the heart of things.'

In this special edition of *Kokoro*, you'll find gathered together in this one PDF the first 8 years of "One-Picture Stories."

These started as experiments combining text and a single image. The text may be fictional or not, epistolary or prose, verse, advertising copy, instructions — whatever seems fun and useful. The intent is that the image and text need each other — the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. A playground for imagination, for image and idea.

# Basketball Rocks

A One-Picture Story

In 1940, my father was starting his college life at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, where I was born 14 years later. Dad loved basketball. I mean, he *really* loved it. And in 1943 he was a member of the men's basketball team that won the National Championship that year. It was the highlight of his sports life and quite an accomplishment for a guy who started – well, I suppose I should tell his story from the beginning.

On the family farm in Bear Lake, Idaho, he wanted so desperately to learn the game and hone his skills. There was no basketball court in his school, no coach, no chance for him to learn. Nonetheless, he did what he could. Decades later during a family reunion at the farm, he took my brother and me out back and showed us where he'd hung a loop of wire on the side of barn to simulate a basketball hoop. He "shot" rocks as though they were basketballs and used the barn as the backboard. He wore a hole in the barn wood that was still there, forty years later.

Dad died in 1990, but three years later my brother and I attended, in his place, the 50th Anniversary celebration of the University's national basketball victory. I still have the commemorative coin and the memories of my rock-shooting father.



# Dirt Roads

A One-Picture Story

“Just keep going until you hit the dirt road. All the good stuff is there. You might even be able to make a picture or two.”

He was right about the “good stuff.” He was also right about the photography. I’ve never yet driven down a dirt road that didn’t show me something, teach me something, ask me something, or lead me somewhere I didn’t know I wanted to go.



# Dreams of Ryoanji

A One-Picture Story

For forty years I had dreamt of the rock garden at Ryoanji — envisioning an afternoon of quiet Zen contemplation and tea.

At last, I was there with those stones and that raked gravel . . . and all the *other* tourists. That's why they are called *dreams*.

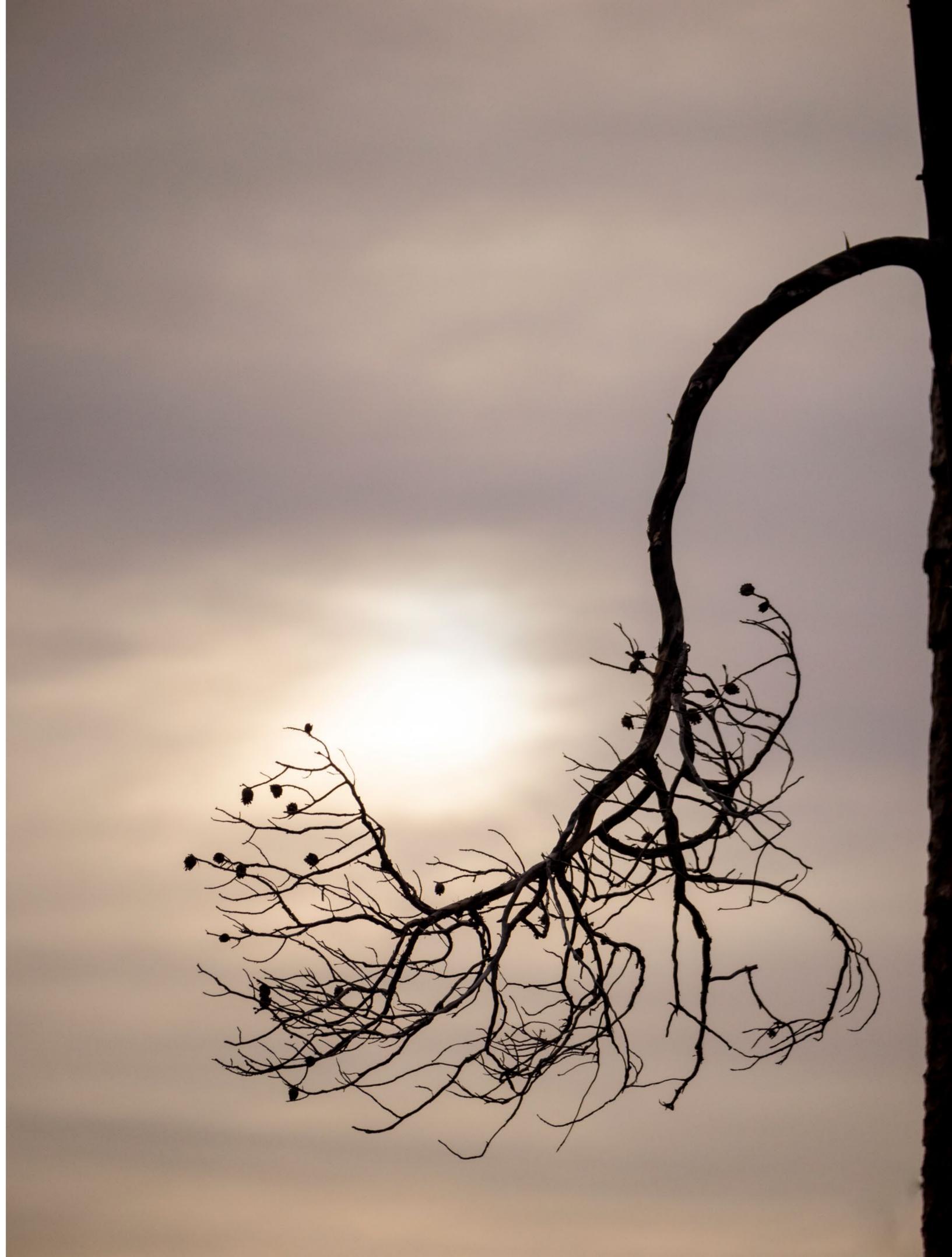


# First Glimpse of the Sun

A One-Picture Story

All afternoon, all night, all the next day, waiting in my cramped tent for the storm to pass. Incessant drip, ever present damp, discouraging dark gray skies. I keep thinking, "This too shall pass," but more rain and more rain. I don't fear drowning, but have some concern that I might simply dissolve in the damp and disappear into a puddle in the bottom of my tent.

Day three. Lighter skies. The first evidence that the sun still exists above the clouds. At long last, a drying warmth is on the way. The sun, the sun, the sun!



# Flying, Eventually

A One-Picture Story

When I was a boy, no doubt influenced by the superheroes of my boyish fictions, I dreamt of flying. I remember quite clearly an afternoon one mid-summer day when I tied one of my mother's dish towels around my neck to form a cape. So prepared, I leapt off the backyard deck with arms outstretched into the grassy lawn below, over and over again, thinking, feeling, *believing* that if I willed it with sufficient ardor that I might fly, that I *would* fly if only my faith was sufficient. It was a difficult lesson for a young boy to learn that the immutable laws of physics – *gravity* – could not be overcome by even the most fervent dreams and wishes of fanciful youth. I know, there are balloons and airplanes and helicopters – but I wanted *wings*.



# Generations

A One-Picture Story

I am now the same age as my father when he died. In some ways, I have come to realize how wise he was; in other ways he was so naive and childlike. How I wish it were possible to bring him back for an hour or two and have a conversation with him at this same age, comparing our lives and our understanding.

How sad I am that in my arrogant youth I didn't have more respect for his wisdom or compassion for his failings.



# Ghosts in Broad Daylight

A One-Picture Story

In 1600, Chinese sage Huanchu Daoren wrote, "If the mind is illumined, there is clear blue sky in a dark room. If the thoughts are muddled, there are malevolent ghosts in broad daylight." Master Daoren has no advice for spiders in the crawl space under the house . . . nor does he address the evils of leaficide.



Greg

A One-Picture Story



The doctor said the tumor in his kidney was the size of a football. Fortunately, it was whole and had not yet burst. There was at least some hope. The operation was successful, but the toll on his body was too great.

That last night, we sat in his TV room and didn't talk. He watched reruns of cowboy movies and smoked his final cigarette. We'd been brothers for 64 years but didn't have anything to say to one another.

In the early morning hours, he died in his bed. I keep thinking how fragile life is and how precious are the moments we share. Why can't I think of something I wish I had said to him in those final cowboy-filled hours?

# Greg 2

A One-Picture Story



Our mother was distracted with her bridge club. My brother talked me into sneaking down to the canal where we were strictly forbidden by our parents.

I was only six years old, but my brother taught me two lessons that day — how to thread a grasshopper onto a fishhook, and that sometimes you can disobey authority and get away with it. Looking back, now that he's gone, I realize this was a major theme in his life. Even in his final weeks, he refused to take his medications and continued to smoke. I never understood what made him so rebellious. He was my only sibling — and stubborn and loyal and an enigmatic stranger to the end.

# Greg 3

A One-Picture Story



We were both born in Wyoming, but that's just about the only sibling bond we had. He was six years old than me — which was a lifetime when we were growing up. He had a flattop and wore shirts with collars and buttons; being younger, I had a crewcut and wore T-shirts. Later, in high school, he smoked and drank and got into all kinds of trouble; I was president of the math club. He was a bartender and a carpenter; I'm an artist and don't drink. Neither of us were jealous, but we knew we were different.

From his hospital bed a month before he died, out of nowhere and without elaboration he said, "I wish things had been different between us." A minute later — and for the first time in our lives — he added, "You know I love you." I believe he did.

# I Dreamt I Was a Bird

A One-Picture Story

I dreamt I was a bird who  
flew to the moon.

I dreamt I was a tree who  
flew to a bird.

I dreamt I was the moon who  
dreamt it was a tree.

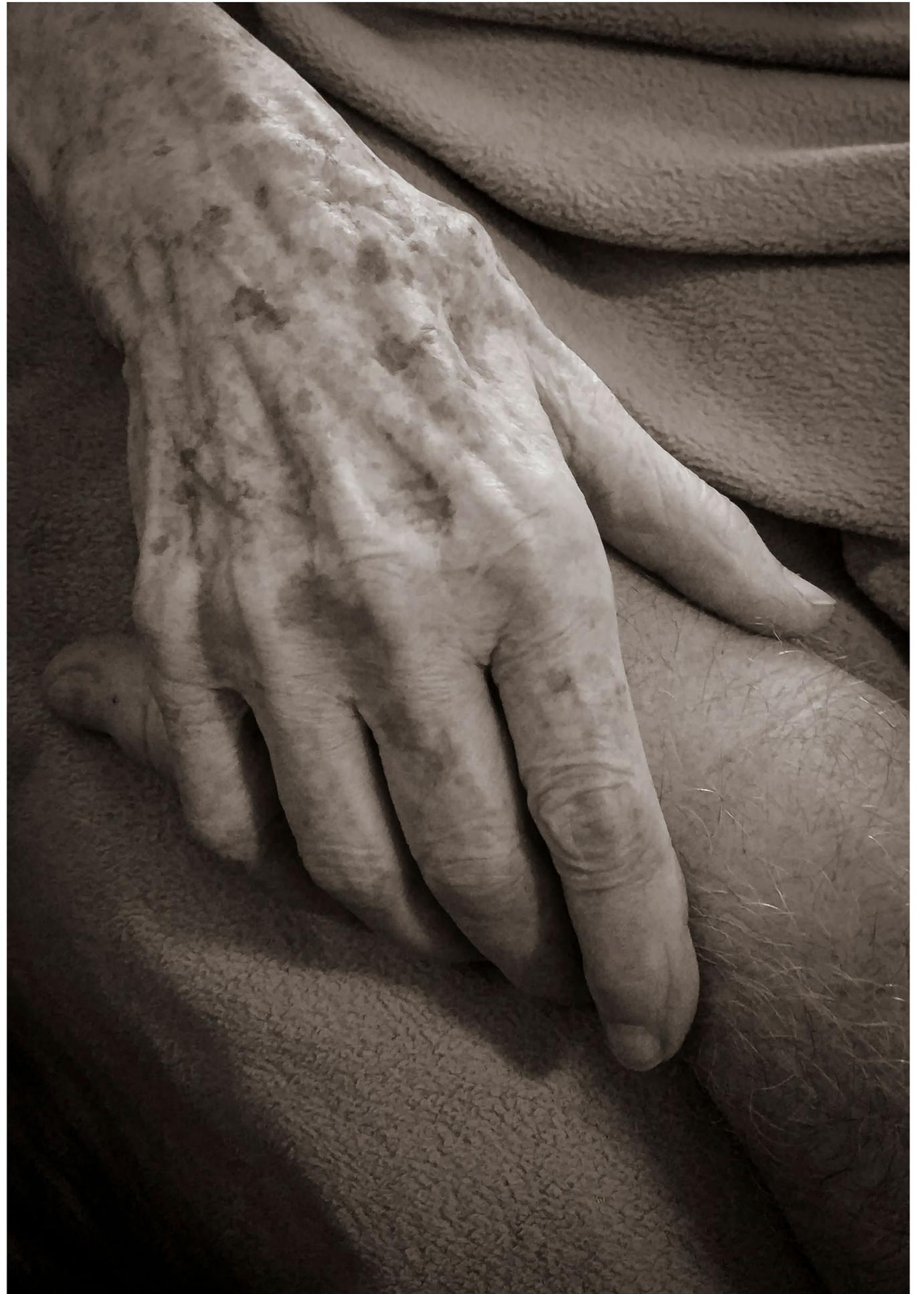
I dreamt I was all three,  
only to see they were *all me*.



# I Remember . . . Sue

A One-Picture Story

My mother-in-law lived with us for the final years of her life. Blind but of keen mind, we spent many evenings tapping our toes to the big band music of her youth. She needed help navigating, and for years whenever I'd approach to lead her somewhere, I'd say in my best baritone Boris Karloff imitation, "*Come with meeeeeee.*" She giggled every time. Now that she's gone, I sometimes say out loud to the empty room, "Come with meeeeeeee." I can still hear her giggle.



# Inhospitable Earth

A One-Picture Story

For countless generations before airplanes, we humans walked across the surface of our inhospitable Earth. From 30,000 feet, we can only image their footprints. I sip my beverage, close my eyes, and try in vain to imagine their existance.



# Inseam

A One-Picture Story



My father was 100% Swedish, so I always considered myself at least half-Swedish. It wasn't until I was in my fifties that I realized my 26" inseam comes from my maternal Armenian grandfather.

I was reading about the Armenian genocide of 1906 when it occurred to me that my grandfather had not "come to America" but had *escaped* to America, without his family, without any marketable skills, without any money. He was nine — or perhaps six, he could never remember. Looking at the photos of those starving, suffering Armenians, I realize they were my people — my short, stocky people.

John Bolton

A One-Picture Story

Kingsley Catholic Cemetery  
Donate 6-25-1989 by  
Remi, Jessie Ronneau

Mrs Bridget J. Bolton  
Erect this monument  
To the memory  
of her family.

John Bolton

A native of  
County Clau Ireland

DIED

Oct. 3, 1891

AGED. 63.

May they Rest in Peace.

*And 46,739 days later,  
he still rests under a summer moon  
with an eternal view of Mt. Hood.  
Well done, Mr. & Mrs. Bolton, well done.*



# Lao-tzu and the Cataract

A One-Picture Story

Confucius and a few of his disciples were walking in the forest. Suddenly, they saw an old man fall into the top of a cataract and plunge over the edge. “Poor fellow,” said Confucius.

A moment later, they saw the man hop out of the water at the bottom of the falls, no worse for the experience. When they caught up with him, they discovered it was Lao-tzu himself, unharmed and quite jovial. “How is it that you did not perish?” asked Confucius. “Oh it was simple,” Lao-tzu replied, “I just followed the Great Tao and abandoned myself to the currents of the water. I went in with the swirl and came out with the curl.”



# Lost Sister

A One-Picture Story



If I had a sister, I wonder how different my life would have been – but, there was a miscarriage.

It wasn't the end, but looking back on it, I can now see that it was the beginning of the end. Mom was never the same again. None of us were.

# Only Karma Remains

A One-Picture Story



He said, “ You will leave evidence of your existence. Some will remember you, at least for a while. With time, the dust will blow away and all that will be left is the consequence of your *karma*.” Forty years have passed and there has been nothing to make me think he was wrong. Long gone, he is remembered, but the winds of time are blowing and the evidence is fading.

# Our Hour Upon the Stage

A One-Picture Story



Just this one life . . .  
our total allocation.

Strutting and fretting our hour  
upon the stage, and then  
heard no more.

But what a glorious hour! —  
playing our parts, 'til the lights  
fade and the play is over.

# Our Last Beach

A One-Picture Story

A year after she was gone, I returned to the last beach we'd walked on. The waves rolled in as they had always done; the gulls flew overhead as they'd always done. Everything was the same, except she was missing. I added my tears to the ocean and remembered the touch of her hand.



# Over, Forever

A One-Picture Story

It was opening day — Braves versus Cubs — and my father and I watched the TV as they introduced the players from both clubs. Suddenly, I realized that every player on both teams was younger than I was. I was too old for a major league career.

Devastated.

I never played baseball and never wanted to. But now it was too late — my opportunity to be a professional baseball player was over, forever. And my father was dying of cancer.



# Piano Days

A One-Picture Story



Perhaps it was because my father was a coach that my mother felt compelled to provide a counterbalance for all of that family testosterone. She insisted I take piano lessons. For 2 years I struggled through the scales and that dreaded *Thompson's* book until I could finally play a jerky version of *Greensleeves* with most of the notes in the right places. It was about then that I was voted captain of the football team — the end of my piano days.

# Picasso and the Girlfriend

A One-Picture Story

A soldier visited Picasso and said, "I don't understand your paintings. Why do you make people appear so different than what they look like?" Picasso replied, "Do you have a girlfriend? Can I see her picture?"

The soldier reached into his wallet and pulled out a photo of her, handing it to Picasso. "Amazing!" he said, "Is she so small as *this*?"



# Please Don't Fail Me Now

A One-Picture Story

I love my electric bicycle.  
It can easily take me so  
much farther than I could  
ever walk.

I was 22 miles down this  
dirt road before I needed  
to change batteries. And  
then it dawned on me  
how easy it was to rely  
on *mechanical success* for  
the return trip — and how  
much trouble I'd be in if it  
broke down or my spare  
battery was discharged.



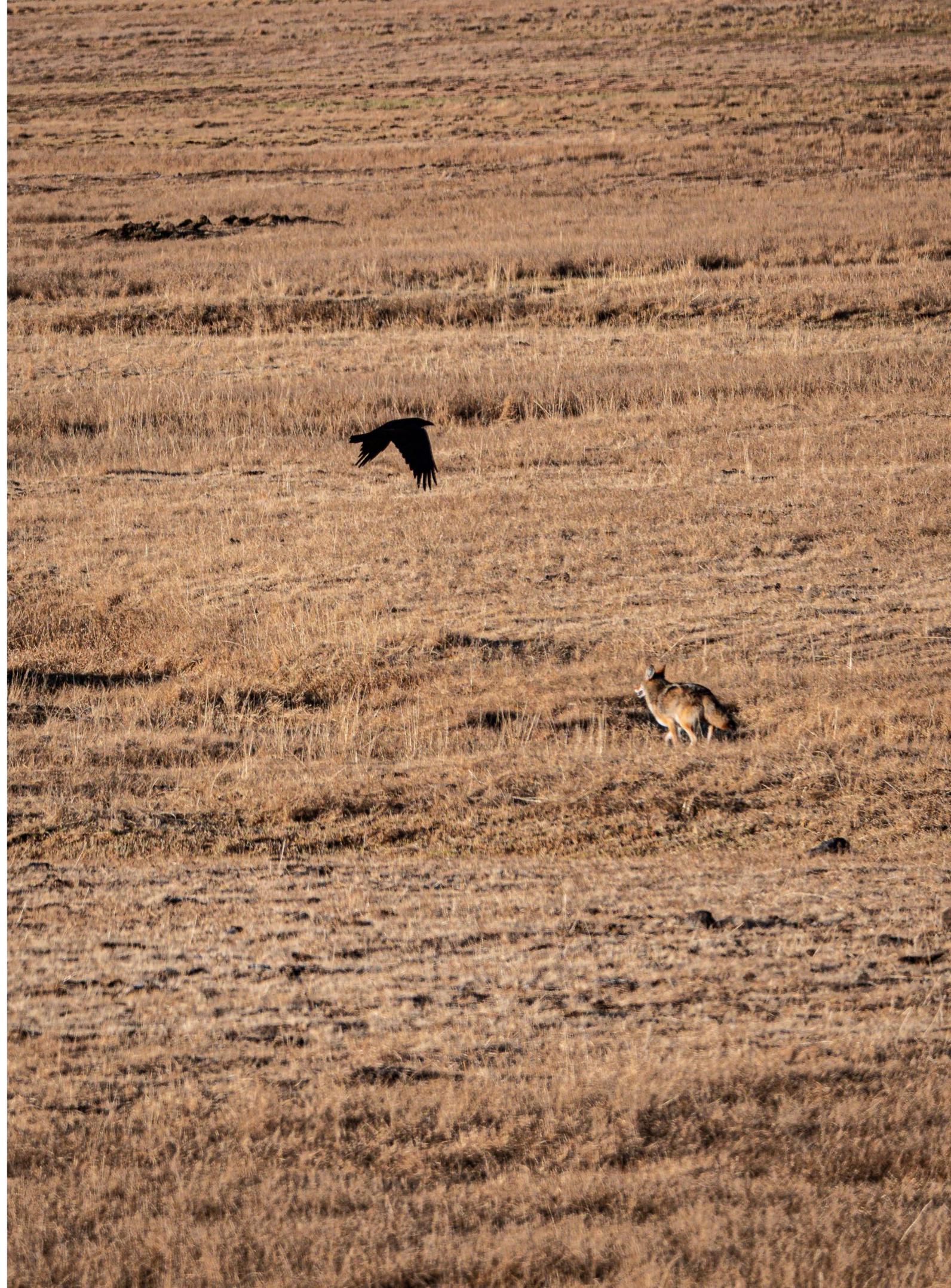
# Porch Stories — The Coyote Caller

A One-Picture Story

I don't know if my Uncle Ray would have considered himself a master storyteller, but he certainly was. After dinner, we would all just naturally migrate to the porch for no other purpose than being together and hoping to hear the words, "I remember that time. . ."

There was the time he told us about his new "coyoto caller," a device he would blow into that made a sound like a wounded rabbit. Fully primed, he pulled the caller out of his pocket and blew a sorrowful, bleating call. I can still feel it in my bones. It wasn't long until all the dogs in the neighborhood were howling in a chorus with him.

He gave me that caller. I think of him every time I see a coyote.



Sherri

A One-Picture Story

Four of us. Day three of a 7-day backpack down the spine of the Cascade Mountains. Thirty miles to the nearest paved road. Cold in the mountains. A light but persistent drizzle at our camp near an unassuming tarn. It's been a much harder trek than any of us had anticipated. No one is talking — until Sherri breaks the silence.

"I'm done now, Jack," she matter-of-factly tells her new husband, "Take me home."

"What do you mean, *Take me home*? We're *four days* from the car."

"I don't care. Just take me home — NOW."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"I don't care. Get a helicopter or something."

She was exhausted, irrational, immovable. It was the day we all learned the healing powers of hot soup and an afternoon nap.



# The E-ticket

A One-Picture Story



When Maureen and I got married, we promised each other an E-ticket for life. Nine months later, our baby, *LensWork* magazine, was born.

We just celebrated our 10,000<sup>th</sup> day of marriage. It has, indeed, been an E-ticket.

# The BB Gun Free Throws

A One-Picture Story

One more story about my Dad and basketball.

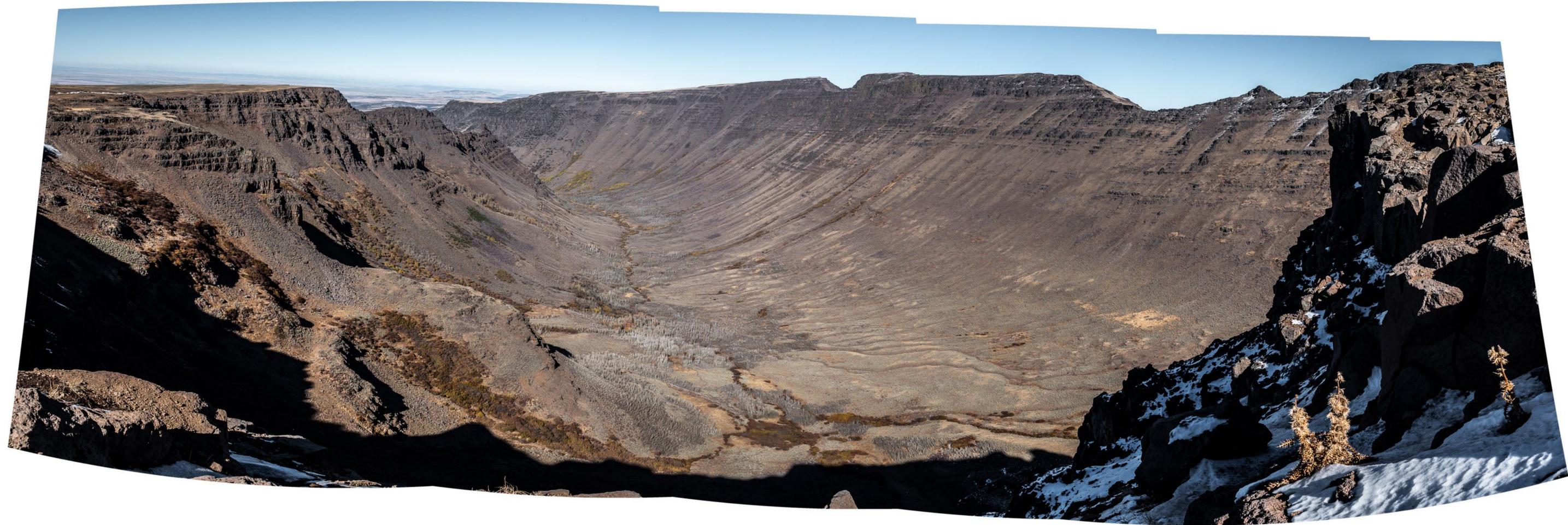
He was remarkably accurate at the free throw line. It was his claim to fame. Once, all of us went to a fair — it might have been the county fair in Laramie, or maybe it was the State Fair in Cheyenne, I've forgotten now — and they had a carnival booth where you could win prizes by making free throws. My older brother and I begged him to win the BB gun, but he resisted, explaining that the hoops were just a little smaller than regulation and the balls were over-inflated to make them harder so they would bounce off the rim. It wasn't really "rigged," but it wasn't regulation either. We didn't care. We wanted that BB gun.

At long last, we wore down his resistance and he stepped up to the line, paid for his ticket — and then sunk 27 free throws in a row. We had our BB gun. It wasn't a very good one, and it didn't shoot BBs more than about 20 feet, but Dad had won it for us and we treasured it like it was the best gun ever made.



# The Coyotes of Kiger Gorge

A One-Picture Story



Gazing on the open space of Kiger Gorge from 9,000 feet;  
a few remaining yellow aspens 2,000 feet below me.  
A warm, late-October breeze. I drink in the moment, trying not to  
breathe too loudly. From the depth of the gorge arrives  
the faint howl of a distant coyote, then a few more.

Closing my eyes, their voices softly echo in the canyon.

# The Family Gatherings

A One-Picture Story



My wife was one of seven siblings in her family. Gatherings of the clan were always a highlight of the year. We were married 28 years before cancer took her from me and in that time there were a dozen others in the extended family who were lost. I can still hear the echoes of their voices.

# The Fight That Never Was

A One-Picture Story



When I was in 7th grade, a bully threatened me for some reason I've now long forgotten. He boasted he would knock my teeth out. His friends were surprised when I accepted his challenge and agreed to fight him behind the school that afternoon. I'd never been so scared, but I showed up. He didn't. I'm now 65 years old, and I've still never been in a fight.

# The Great Wave

A One-Picture Story



## The Great Wave

We artists sweat bullets in our creative process. And someday, if we become famous and our artwork is recognized world-wide, we might find our creative vision used to promote a beverage. Success at last!

# The Japanese *Kappa*

A One-Picture Story

Japanese water monsters known as *kappa* have been blamed for drownings, and are often said to try to lure children into water and pull them in with their great skill at wrestling. They are sometimes said to take their victims for the purpose of drinking their blood, eating their livers, or gaining power by taking their *shirikodama*, a mythical ball said to contain the soul.

Some people say they are just a myth from an ancient superstition. I've seen them. I've *photographed* them. Do not let your children near the water. Trust me.



# The Never-ending Surf

A One-Picture Story



Wave after wave, everyday, every night, every season, never resting.

We are oblivious, except for those few moments when we stare,  
mesmerized at the constancy  
and imagine those eternal waves over the billions of years.

# The No-Mind Moon

A One-Picture Story



An old Zen story:

The sage is *mindless*; like the moon, he has no intention to cast his reflection, and like the water he has no mind to reflect it.

# The Richest Man in the Village

A One-Picture Story



We were told he was the richest man in the village and wanted us to pay him to make his portrait. My translator — thinking quickly — improvised a white lie: “He has come all the way from America to photograph you.”

He looked at me intently for a few moments and said, “Ok, but only if he buys a chicken.” We paid for the chicken and then conveniently forgot to take it with us. I had no doubt he was, indeed, the richest man in the village.



# The Smartest Person I Knew

A One-Picture Story



My father was born in land-locked Idaho; I was born in Wyoming. Neither of us were coastal people.

After we moved to Oregon when I was eight years old, I remember walking through the surf for the first time and asking him where the sand came from. "It comes from the stars," he said. "But how does it get *here*?" I pressed. "It's washed here by the waves." Using my best eight-year-old logic, "Out of the sky?" "I guess," he said, "Where do you think the rain comes from?" I remembering being amazed how smart my Dad was.

# Two Shoe

A One-Picture Story



Miles from the nearest paved road, someone left a message on the side of the barn. Was it a nickname? And why singular? “One-shoe” I could understand. “Three-shoes” would be odd, but *Two Shoe*? I finally concluded it was an anagram – *thoowes*, which is of course the plural of *thoow*.

# Vespers Fruit

A One-Picture Story



It was my second day photographing at this mountain monastery in Lishui, China. This monk was the only person I'd seen all morning and he spoke no English, but he did allow me to photograph and wander the temple grounds at will.

About 4pm, the other monks started to gather in their formal meditation robes for evening service — the Buddhist equivalent of vespers. I had an inkling what was about to happen, so I positioned myself just outside the main temple and started my audio recorder. Wanting to be respectful of their service, I assumed a standing Buddhist position and just listened, without photographing, during the 45-minute ceremony.

After the service was concluded, I noticed all the monks were given a large bag of fruit by the head monk and they wandered off to their dormitory. I turned to leave and was just heading down the steps when the head monk tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around to see him smiling at me with a bag of fruit extended toward me as a gift. I bowed, he bowed, I bowed again, he bowed again and handed me the bag. We said our goodbyes and I left the temple. Perhaps he just had an extra bag of fruit. Perhaps he might have thought I was hungry after spending all afternoon photographing the temple. Or perhaps it was a gesture of inclusion because I had participated, in my limited way, in their daily vespers ceremony. I'll never know for sure, but I also know I'll never forget his smiling face.

# Visiting the 9/11 Memorial

A One-Picture Story

No words.

Just tears.



# Wynken, Blynken, and Bacon

A One-Picture Story

My brother-in-law, Tom, is retired and now spends his time as a “gentleman farmer.” When I was in China and saw these pigs, I remembered Tom’s adventure raising three turkeys: he named them Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Lucky. Hence, my title for this photograph: *Wynken, Blynken, and Bacon*. It takes all my will power to not put thought bubbles above these guys.



A photograph of three pigs in a muddy pen. The pig on the left is looking towards the camera. The pig in the middle is looking towards the right. The pig on the right is lying down with its head resting on the ground. Three thought bubbles are overlaid on the image, containing humorous text.

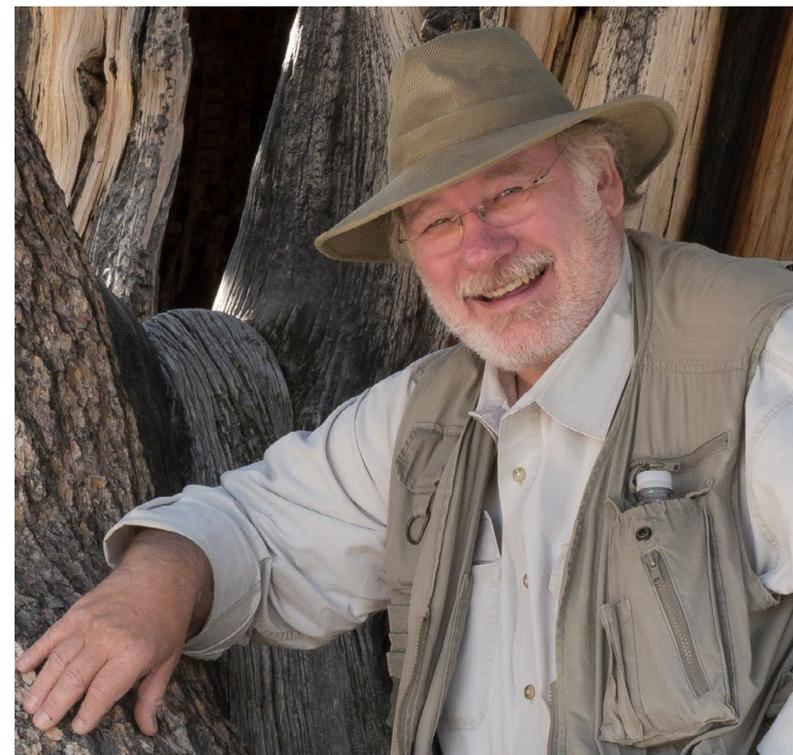
I'm Wynken. Really.  
I'm NOT BACON!

Do I look like Bacon?  
How ridiculous.  
He's Bacon, I'm Blynken.

Wake me when he's  
done with his  
stupid picture.

# Support the artist!

For over 40 years, Brooks has shared his photographic lessons, failures, inspiration, creative path — and more than a few laughs. If you've enjoyed his free *Kokoro* PDF publications, or been a long-time listener to his free audio commentaries (his weekly podcast *On Photography and the Creative Life*, or his daily *Here's a Thought* commentaries), here is your chance to tell him how much you appreciate his efforts. Support the artist!



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**Brooks Jensen** is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist books, and digital media publications.

He is the owner, co-founder (in 1993, with his late wife, Maureen), editor, and publisher of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 70 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly worldwide. His long-running weekly podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 1,490+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](https://www.lenswork.com), the LensWork members-only website. He also publishes a daily *Here's a Thought...* commentary with short inspiration for creative photographers. Again, all 2500+ are available to members of *LensWork Online*. Recent posts are available for free at [www.lenswork.com](https://www.lenswork.com)

LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with the *LensWork Tablet Edition*, and *LensWork Extended Computer Edition* — a PDF-based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of sixteen books about photography and creativity: *Photography, Art, & Media* (2016); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *Single Exposures* (3 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); *Looking at Images* (2014); *The Best of the LensWork Interviews* (2016); *Seeing in SIXES* (2016); *Seeing in SIXES* (2017); *Seeing in SIXES* (2018); *Seeing in SIXES* (2019); *Our Magnificent Planet* (2020 and 2021), *Trilogies* (2022), and *Light Glorious Light* (2023). He has also published two printed monographs of his photography, *Made of Steel* (2012), and *Dreams of Japan* (2021).

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