

for Roy

Was Eight

was eight

An edition of 50
printed at the
Banff Centre
December 1998

for friends and
family of

freddy wak
Gung Wey Fa choy
freddy

Thanks to Xerxes Irani for his "When I

was Eight" font

198

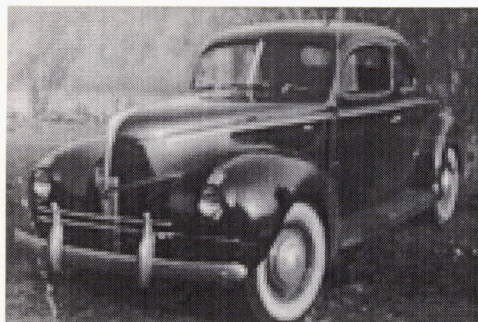
When I was *eight* my aunty Lil took me to a hockey game between the Nelson Maple Leafs and the Trail Smoke Eaters and on the way to the game she turned around to me holding her just-lit lipsticked cigarette between her long painted fingernails and after blowing a *cloud* of smoke up to the ceiling of the car said If you want to be a Smoke Eater

when you grow up don't ever
let me catch you smoking



er

A few years before I was eight
my *uncle* showed me the
German Luger he'd taken from
a prisoner both the material
and its language then severed
from potential into legend



When I was eight we had a
black 1940 Ford two-door
coupe with whitewalls and a
radio

About a month after my eighth birthday some big kid tried to beat up Ernie in the middle of the road on Third avenue but I *punched* him in the chin then he grabbed me and we landed on the hard snow of the road and rolled around until Ernie shouted watch out here comes the bus up the hill



In April when I was eight my
brush with greatness was that
Frenchy D'Amour became
famous for winning the
Briar Curling championship and
one Sunday after the victory
parade downtown my dad had
a drink of whiskey with him in
their house next door and
from our porch I could see
them through the kitchen
window

When I was eight and a *half*
we drove to Fruitvale to get
strawberries so that must be
why they have always been
different

In the summer of 1947 we
parked under a big
cottonwood by the river and
roasted wieners and drank
lemonade then my mom
cleaned up the food put it in
the trunk of the car while my
dad took his shoes off
stretched out on a blanket on
the grass and fell asleep while
we looked for fish in the water
and threw rocks

After the war the universal became part of my identity as if I was penetrated by a constitutive lack though who would have wanted to be different certainly not the *chinese* or even the Italians up the Gulch



When he was eight he nearly *drowned* because he slipped on the rocks into the Columbia River but then his dad grabbed him by his underpants and it's worth mentioning how "just in time" was inscribed onto the surface of his body

I felt sure when I was eight others were six, five, babies, older cousins and so on but I didn't know I was involved in these temporal paradoxes and that I had to lose that perspective in order to account for my own becoming since I was eight and I was being me and that was the same later when I was *nine* being who I always was

Just before I was eight I got a hockey stick for christmas we measured it up to my nose cut it and *burnt* my name into it with the wood-burning set then taped a black knob on the butt

That year I would walk down-
town over the bridge and drag
a stick along a metal railing past
houses under maple trees and
apartment buildings overlook-
ing the river past the high
school the music store the
Savoy Hotel and across the
street from the bus depot into
the Elite where I'd have *brown*
gravy on bread



When I was eight I could skate
on the ice my dad made in the
back yard of our house across
the street from the river under
the grey sky of the smelter up
on the hill breathing the skiff of
snow Ernie'd *sweep* early on
the shape of the thread be-
tween person and object self-
amplified generously and un-
conditionally into brothers of
the neighborhood





When I was eight mom was thirty-one and when she was twenty-one I was plus zero but I didn't know where any of her came from except Saskatchewan and after supper there'd be crime doesn't *pay* Dick Tracy or she'd read her Book-of-the-month Pearl Buck and I thought what a strange Chinese name

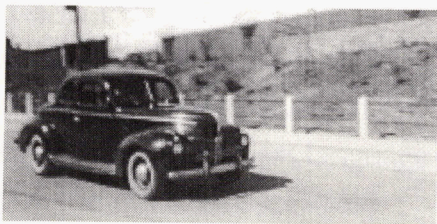
When I was eight who would have thought that the sheer material factualness of my body would be borrowed to lend the world I was being constructed inside of the aura of “realness” and “certainty” but then who was organizing their thinking around the disruption of *difference* certainly not famous people far away like Mackenzie King or Just Mary

When I was eight Mickey got
hit by a car and in the morning
Ernie and I walked to the next
block and lifted his cold *stiff*
body into a wagon and took
him home crying

When he was eight he
practiced how to *kiss* with
his cousin Lily at his birthday
party and Ernie's dog Mickey
ate Ernie's ice cream

When I was eight the river
came over the bridge or could
be I was nine and language was
already *aging* into a
palimpsest that illuminates the
power of spring flood

That spring a baseball came
over the *fence* on Sunday
afternoon at Butler Ball Park
bounced across the road down
the bank and into the river



One day that summer we
drove all the way to Nelson
and back on gravel roads
caught the last *ferry* at
Castlegar the Columbia quiet
black and flowing down to Trail
just like we were but even
further

In a pee-wee pool game I got hit in the eye blood'n stitches by the big red-headed kid on the Rossland team who raised the *puck* right at me

When I was eight my dad took me to the Crown Royal after a hockey game and we had potatoes lyonnaise which he said was a *foreign* language but the cook was Chinese

At eight the social formation of my gender didn't know biology as discourse and it was only within the post-war bourgeois capitalist order that my sexuality emerged as a separate discursive reality and I became interested in *girls*

In grade two I fell in love with a blond named Elizabeth who lived in Sunningdale near Sandy Beach where I was lying on my towel on the grass drying off when she and her friends from *that part* of town walked by with ice cream cones

When *You* were eight we
lived sixty-four miles apart



The war was over but not for us kids in east Trail cuz we had dug big holes in the sand up on Sandy Mountain that we could hide in until each successive "we" became *lost* went home maybe missing in action

When you were eight you
picked up a broken bottle and
as you were walking along
accidentally gouged your right
thigh where you now have a
phantom scar that expresses
nostalgia for your body's prior
unity and wholeness just as
it etches a kind of "soul" or
interiority but could also iden-
tify your body should it be
found

When I was eight there was no
question I would smoke



