

Literary Map of the Olympic Peninsula

by Matthew Stadler

Poet **STEVEN JESSE BERNSTEIN** slit his throat in Neah Bay and died.



For the true story of Forks, read **LEROY SMITH's** *Pioneers of the Olympic Peninsula*. From 1915 to 1977, Smith lived as a hand logger and gadabout in the undeveloped West End, where his daughter, Forks native Dorothy Burr, grew up. In the 1970s she transcribed LeRoy's spoken recollections in a first-person voice as distinctive as Huck Finn's, then organized it all into a story. And what a story. A land of disastrous weather and massive trees dominated by men carrying iron stoves filled with flour up flooded creeks into the rain forest. This is the peninsula, in all its crude, broken strangeness.

Best known for his Seattle and Montana poems, **RICHARD HUGO** also wrote superbly about the peninsula. Some of the finest poems are collected in a 1975 chapbook called *Rain Five Days and I Love It*. They're bleak, vivid, and funny, as you'd expect, applying Hugo's mordant humor and grim optimism to the towns, beaches, and rivers of the peninsula.

The grime and violence of Aberdeen during the boom years of WWII form the backdrop of **MURRAY MORGAN's** 1949 novel, *The Viewless Winds*. Morgan's alter ego here is Gale Seward, a newspaper editor investigating the brutal murder of a union boss's wife. In life, Morgan was managing editor of the nearby *Gray's Harbor Washingtonian* in the late 1930s. In rich, sometimes purple prose, Morgan dwells on the area's resolute people and ravaged landscapes.

In 1937, a waitress at remote Lake Crescent Lodge was murdered and her weighted body tossed into the 600-foot-deep lake. It floated up years later, turned to soap by the pressure and the alkalinity. The soap corpse is now at the Mutter Museum of Medical Oddities in Philadelphia; the full story is told in Port An-gelino **MAVIS AMUNDSON's** admirable true-crime book *The Lady of the Lake*.

In Port Townsend, **RAYMOND CARVER** and Montana writer **JIM CRUMLEY** shared "a huge mound of cocaine" in a cabin at the 1980 Centrum Writers' Conference. "We had a very cordial and easy cocaine relationship," Crumley recalled. "Whereas dope and drinking made Ray depressed, cocaine made him happy."

Seattle writer **BETTY MacDONALD's** 1945 hit, *The Egg and I*, was the best-selling North-west novel ever—a million copies in its first year alone. A domestic comedy about post-WWII back-to-the-landers raising chickens on a dank farm near Port Townsend, it gave us Ma and Pa Kettle, and a hit movie starring Fred MacMurray. You can visit the former site of the MacDonalds' chicken farm by driving up Egg and I Road, into the woods south of Chimacum.

In 1963, **THEODORE ROETHKE** died drunk in a rich friend's swimming pool on Bainbridge Island. The pool has since been filled with smooth white stones. The grounds are now a public tree museum called the Bloedel Reserve. Visit and pay your respects to the dead, drunk poet.

A gay San Francisco poet published by City Lights and Ugly Duckling Presse, **CEDAR SIGO** might seem remote from our flinty subject. But he was born and raised on the Suquamish reservation, near Port Madison, and often writes about the throwaway landscapes of his logged-out home. Sigo's peninsula is a postindustrial, postromantic land of afterthoughts. *Stranger in Town*, his newest collection, opens vivid windows onto the contemporary reality of this cultural and economic ground zero.

Soul Catcher (1972) is *Dune*-author **FRANK HERBERT's** only non-sci fi novel. It tracks a crazy/activist Native American and the 13-year-old white boy he kidnaps on a trek into the rugged interior of the Olympic Mountains. Katsuk, the radical, plans to kill the kid as a redress for historical atrocities—basically, a gripping white liberal fantasy. I read it when I was 14 and loved the drama, the haunting landscapes, and the awkward sex scene.

Painting by Aaron Bagley

Canada

Seattle

Olympia

