

then flush, disappearing into a gully. We leave Kalipani and start up the faint trail, crossing a few patches of steep snow and treacherous scree. Pemba, the head Sherpa, uses his knife to cut steps in the hard snow of the gullies. I gasp in the thin air, my mind fuzzy, walking in a mental and literal fog that hangs in the passes and drifts down the trail. After about an hour, I seem to get a second wind. My mind slowly clears. By 16,000 feet I feel great, like a bull yak, striding with ease up toward a bench below the pass. Above, the grasses disappear and a landscape of scree and bedrock closes in on all horizons. On the steep path approaching 17,000 feet, I wonder how old Ed would have fared here. He felt weak (he was low on blood) on his last trips to our beloved Cabeza Prieta desert the winter before he died. He knew that with esophageal varices he was living under a death sentence (the medical book said: "Esophageal varices are a grave prognostic sign; about 60% succumb to death within a year"), and he thought "one's death should mean something." By the time Abbey died he had the clearest eyes I ever encountered—an image that still haunts me.

I saw then that being willing to die, prepared to die, was not the same as being prepared for death. Death is no stranger to me; I lost many a comrade on the road that brought me here. For over three decades, I had flirted with death, even courted it. I lived on the edge in Vietnam and later for more than a decade with grizzlies, on snow-covered mountains and raging rivers or, as often as I could, among polar bears, jaguars, and tigers. Yet, I think somehow Ed's death is the closest I may get, until my own turn comes around. With Ed, I walked a long way into death. I saw in those eyes another universe; he died so well. Living among a people for whom death often arrives as an unexpected surprise, his dying was the bravest and finest of all the gifts he gave me.

High above, an Egyptian vulture soars over the glacial valley. I hold my binoculars on the bird and, for a minute, fly with the white buzzard, up through the monsoon clouds, above the great glaciers and snowfields across the world toward the topography of my own days, a desert island in the Sea of Cortez.

A cool morning breeze from Tiburón Island raced across the saltwater strait known as the Infernillo, "The Little Hell." I wondered if the weather might be changing. Winter in northern Mexico tended to pass in large blocks of sunshine interrupted by three-day blows that rattled the soul. Ahead, a line of brown pelicans rode a crest of wave passing across the bow of our open boat. In the gray distance, I could see big cardon and organ pipe cactus on uninhabited Isla Tiburón. Two hundred miles to the north a friend was dying in Tucson, where I had left two children and an unhappy wife. I knew that didn't sound good but I couldn't help myself.

The friend was of course Edward Abbey, a well-known writer in this part of the country. He agreed this potentially marriage-wrecking trip was worth the risk. Coming here to Tiburón Island was an idea the two of us had dreamed up long ago around a desert campfire, the night we charted our greatest unfulfilled wild adventures in a place called the Cabeza Prieta. Now I was going without him.

The soul also needs nourishing. Like Abbey and other friends, I was one of those who could not live without wild country. Even today, the wilderness experience remains a timeless way of seeking and, for some, a true and modern addiction.

To the east, rising out of the foothills of the Sierra Madre, the desert sun broke free of thin morning clouds. From the boat, it was hard to remember this was one of the driest regions in North America. The sea was still relatively calm; later, around midday, the winter chop would kick up. We motored up the coast past Isla Alcatraz, a local landmark on the mid-eastern seaboard of the Sea of Cortez. The open panga snaked into a belt of surf at the opening of the strait where strong tides from the narrows collided with ocean breakers.

I was traveling with three friends and their two children who had flown out from central California. This island off the Sonoran

Coast of Mexico's Gulf of California was the wildest spot I could visit without taking a complete powder on my responsibilities.

But the trip to Tiburón was impossible to pass up—it was not only as wild as I could get, it was also as far as I felt I could comfortably range at the time, since Abbey's health had dramatically declined: I was afraid he might die before I got back to Tucson, and I had promised to be there at the end.

We turned west into the strait, passing a gray whale and her calf halfway through the Infernillo. Far ahead the channel narrowed around Punta Chueca and Estero Santa Rosa, one of Abbey's favorite camping areas on the mainland Sonoran coast. Mine too. In the two decades Ed and I had known each other, we had gazed at Tiburón countless times, looking west across the straits of the Infernillo, itching to explore its untrammelled hills and valleys, its giant cactus forests and exotic plants and animals. The island remained one place we never had time to see.

It was love of the wilderness—and the need to protect it—that had brought the two of us together twenty years before. We had become friends, shared jobs, camped out, and traveled together. Ed, who was fifteen years older, became a guide in my own life, though experience cut both ways. The wild was what we held in common.

Riding in the bow of the panga, it suddenly occurred to me, and with startling lucidity, that Ed Abbey was really going to die this time. Until that moment, I hadn't quite believed it. He had been sick a long time, nearly five years, but in the past month he had seemed increasingly resigned, alternately cranky and peaceful with a raw humor, which I believed meant he was ready to go.

Pods of bottle-nosed and common dolphin snorkeled by and sea lions fed all around us. We went by a little island that looked like a porcupine covered with quills of giant cardon cactus, arriving off the southern tip of Tiburón at midday of February 18th.

Ed Abbey considered Tiburón ("shark" in Spanish) one of the last great wild places in all of cactus country; the fact that it is an

island in one of the richest regions of the Sea of Cortez and that this island, though now abandoned, had been occupied by the Seri Indians and their prehistoric ancestors for some eight thousand years, just added to its mystery and allure. He yearned to explore the jagged Sierra Kunkaak, or the peaks of the Sierra Menor, with the great interior valley lying between the two—a broad bajada studded with cardon and pitaya, home to the densest population of mule deer remaining in the cactus forests of Sonora and Arizona.

This valley was also home to the last Seri band to come in from the wilderness, the last group of holdouts, who fiercely resisted the Spanish and the Mexican Army, refusing to come in to the missions and towns to accept the questionable advantages of Christianity and agriculture (facts that were not lost on Ed Abbey). To him, the Seris were the embodiment of wild resistance, their desert island a last refuge of freedom.

I jumped off the bow of the panga and helped beach the boat. Within minutes we had unloaded our gear and made camp in a cove at the bottom of a sandy wash dumping into the sea from the desert above. I trudged a hundred yards back up the wash to pitch my tent, away from the others. The Mexican fisherman we had hired to ferry us out started back to Old Kino Bay; he would return for us in six days. I walked down the coarse winter beach to grab a bit of solitude. I wanted very much to believe that a kind of ancient wisdom resided in the land itself, especially in places like Tiburón, haunted with the ghosts of generations of hunters and warriors.

Tiburón was unlike the other gulf islands, botanically complex and unfamiliar, different from the everyday cactus forest country of Arizona. It felt non-Western, as strange as Mars in its historical tribal cultural affiliations, its archeology unknown. Largest of the gulf islands in terms of area, Tiburón had drinking water, which made it habitable, though some years it might not rain at all. The average was probably four or five inches annually, and came mostly during summer monsoons and occasional tropical chubascos. Still, more

than three hundred species of vascular plants grew there, and the island had a large number of big mammals, especially deer, which might account for the eight thousand years of human occupation.

The next morning, from the headland above our camp, I watched spouts of fin whales far out in the morning calm. I began my exploration of the island by looping east along the coast, then back up the Arroyo Sauzal where it was rumored there was permanent water. The bottoms of the washes, brushy with wolfberry, ironwood, and acacia thorn bushes, swarmed with songbirds. Bright cardinals and pyrrhuloxias perched in ocotillo and mockingbirds mimicked a small songbird, probably a yellow-green vireo, which sang a repetitious song of bird life, echoed every several seconds from a nearby roost in a thicket of palo verde.

I climbed up the wash through granodiorite boulders to a low saddle. At the pass, I sat down on a round rock and looked back; a wedge of blue ocean shimmered beyond the desert valley. I could still hear the vireo singing away, expending energy far in excess of any function or reward I could imagine; the optimism of this pocket-sized, Sisyphian insect-eater was a definitive refutation of bird suicide.

Abbey and I were having our last big squabble over this very issue. Just before I left Tucson to come down here, we had a nasty quarrel over a .357 Magnum pistol. It was a serious disagreement, and I wasn't sure I was doing the right thing. The gun was Ed's. He had brought the pistol and a pair of muddy boots over to my house one day when I wasn't around and hid them in my garage. The boots and gun had been involved in some sort of monkey wrenching. Although I didn't need or want to know exactly what, I would expect it had something to do with the developer's heavy equipment that was clear-cutting the desert behind Ed's house. That Ed would hide felonious incriminating evidence at my place sounds worse than it really was. The fact that he was actively engaging in mischief right up to the end was something I

approved of and supported. The row—our fight—was over the .357; last month, I had appropriated the gun and sent it away. Other guns were available but he wanted this one and was justly angry. It was our last big argument and the only time in our friendship I ever passed judgment and went against his wishes.

The issue was, of course, the right to an end. Thinking about suicide is not the same as being on the trail of the real thing. Ed was clear-minded on the subject, valuing the notion of suicide apart from the collateral damage the actual deed inflicts on survivors. Contemplating ending one's life can be beneficial, providing a sense of control over a life-threatening disease; a new lease on the future. He thought that "like sex and alcohol, the ready availability of suicide was one of life's basic consolations."

When our friend (my best friends at that time were both named Ed) Ed Gage cured his pain with a shotgun, I was too young to know how deep the darkness of depression could get. I looked for scapegoats and excuses: those bastard primal scream therapists in Santa Monica who had him on 300 mg of Thorazine per day; Gage's break up with a long-term girlfriend. Gage conned me with a phone call saying he was doing great, but I've never forgotten that I didn't make a call back to him that day he decided to buy the shotgun and shells. His suicide note, found ten days later with his body in the back of his camper, said he was sorry for his friends but he just couldn't stand the pain anymore. I thought then there must have been more to it. But I was wrong.

Gage killed himself because the incomprehensible pain of his depression was so hopeless that oblivion was his only way out. Abbey had had his own bouts with "melancholia" throughout his adult life, the depths of which I would later discover on a weeklong walk across the Cabeza Prieta. It would take me a quarter of a century to admit that the cluster of symptoms, which I attributed to a mere winter seasonal affliction (the onset of which I date from the Tet Offensive), were mostly a matter of ordinary depression.

The notion of being able to take one's own life had been important in my own world; I wrote a book about grizzly bears in part to disclose why I had declined to slip out life's back door. Since Vietnam, suicide had traveled with me like a spare canteen. But after the birth of my daughter, I knew I couldn't drink from it. For courage, I flippantly formulated that you might take a bad man with you. That is, if you knew you were going to die, or if life became so unsatisfactory you didn't care to go on, why not do something wonderfully bold, courageous, or reckless like taking out the dictator, executioner, or Nazi of your choosing. Ed Abbey looked forward to the day "when somebody with a terminal disease (such as life) is going to strap a load of TNT around his waist and go down into the bowels of Glen Canyon dam and blow that ugly thing to smithereens. That would be a good way to go."

Yet in the end, my friends and acquaintances who had opted for suicide were so defeated by the lives they were leaving behind that they no longer cared about doing worldly good.

It's uncanny when in a relationship—a friendship between two men in this case—the brotherhood experiences a growth spurt and surges to a deeper or more mature plane. There had always been a paternalistic edge to our friendship; Ed was 15 years older and for years I seemed arrested in lingering adolescence, all of which encouraged the imbalance. But on the note sounded over the Magnum pistol, the paternalism began to rapidly erode.

The reason I wouldn't give the gun back had to do with our four children, my boy and girl and Ed's most recent son and daughter, who were all about the same age and close friends. It had been a coincidence that both of us would start families at the same time, my first and for Ed, the wife and children who would finally provide the domestic tranquility he had never quite managed to enjoy. I knew we all had reason to want to hang around. I also knew that Ed had been bleeding and was low on blood, that this had affected his judgment. Medically, his case wasn't hope-

less, though Ed was too stubborn to seriously entertain high-tech surgical intervention. I was worried about the kids, about inflicting lasting damage. At the same time, I considered my act of precluding Ed's only simple alternative to a potentially miserable and vile death just steps away from unforgivable cruelty.

That evening I returned to camp and settled in with my companions. It was great to have children along. It had been a mistake not to bring my own son and daughter. I had thought them too young, and now realized they would have loved it, and would have helped anchor my attention. As it was, I tried to be a decent companion but my mind was somewhere else. These friends were leaders of the American conservation movement—Rick Ridgeway, a world-famous mountaineer, and Yvon Chouinard, the owner of an international outdoor clothing company—and among the most important people to me outside my immediate family, yet I wasn't quite there. My life was so buried in transition that I felt incapable of living in the present, the only authenticity I had ever coveted. These trips were supposed to bring out the best in me, but this time, in the beginning, it wasn't working.

We had all brought our daily catch to the fire: a couple dozen turban snails gathered from below the lowest low-tide mark, a factor important in how they taste; and half a dozen pound-sized spotted sea bass—superior food, my friends argued, to the trigger fish I had hooked from the rocks on orange marabou flies. We boiled up the turban snails while I prepared a sauce of lemon, olive oil, garlic, and fresh oregano. We pried off the operculum with our knives and dipped the escargot in the sauce.

My buddy Rick, who had been on the first American team to summit  $\kappa$ -2, had climbed the face of the granodiorite headland in the afternoon and paused halfway up when a peregrine falcon complained loudly above him. He looked back down; 30 yards out from the foot of the cliff was a big flat rock. On either side of the rock, two killer whales paused, facing in. From the ocean side, a

huge male orca rose out of the sea and landed on top of the flat rock, two-thirds of his giant body hanging out of the water, eyes rolling from side to side, looking for sea lions. My friend, one of the last great American adventurers, called the image quintessential.

Perhaps inspired by his vision, that night I dreamed a dangerously erotic dream (a reoccurring theme) of a female jaguar that left me with a strange openness. The same sort of vulnerability often surfaced after close encounters with grizzlies. I fed off danger, crisis, and tended to create disasters when domestic life was going well, becoming the kind of asshole for which there are modern psychiatric names. This addiction to risk could separate you from your own kind, even the people closest in your life.

Hostility, generally expecting the worst from people, had been my general approach to life since Vietnam. This attitude colored my friendship with Ed and was further complicated by his creation of the fictional personality of ex-Green Beret medic George Washington Hayduke, the hairy, beer-swilling main character of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, a comic hero belied by the extreme social and personal limitations of a damaged war veteran, a man loosely based on the younger Doug Peacock. There may be numerous ways to characterize a friendship of a volatile, unformed youth (a man who appeared to be an angry force of nature) with an older, successful, better educated and generally more sophisticated man, but I return to the paternalistic model because much of the friction was due to a father-son-like relationship. The anger of the son kept the friendship arrested in this imbalance and anchored in a limited machismo code.

Once Ed published *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in 1975 and it sold half a million copies, the character of Hayduke became famous in a lowbrow sort of way. "Hayduke Lives" was scribbled on bathroom walls in bars throughout the American West. This was hardly an endorsement of excellence, nor flattery of any variety; Hayduke, as a representation of Peacock, was a one-dimensional dolt. A

mutual acquaintance of both myself and Abbey once remarked, in reference to the modeling of Hayduke on Peacock: "Friends don't do that to each other," meaning that in some way Ed was abusing our friendship. This is correct, in that the portrayal of George Washington Hayduke reflected the adolescent, wayward son, not the maturing friend. To the extent I was seduced by the hype of George Washington Hayduke (and to a degree, I believe I was), I succumbed even more to the anger. I plead guilty to all charges.

On the other hand, Abbey probably did me a favor in creating a caricature of myself whose dim psyche I could penetrate when my own seemed off-limits; Ed painted the ex-Green Beret Hayduke, with precise brushstrokes, as caught in an emotional backwater, a backwater out of which I wanted to swim. The only thing worse than reading your own press was becoming someone else's fiction.

The next day I packed up for a full day of exploration. I climbed north over a low pass through giant cactus and elephant trees, then turned east through several miles of rolling hills, and I entered a broad valley that stretched down to the sea. It was dominated by an arroyo that reached back into the mountains and became a brushy canyon thick with thorny vegetation. That was where the water would be.

Wolfberry and catclaw acacia tugged at my clothes as I followed a deer trail into the valley bottom. The wash grew thick with canyon ragweed, desert lavender, bumelia trees, burro bush, dogbane, and many shrubs I didn't recognize. I passed several sets of deer antlers bleaching on the alluvial soil. I saw tracks of a small cat of 15 pounds or so. Most of the sets of mule deer antlers on Tiburón that I had seen were small. Mountain lions probably didn't live here, though I wasn't certain of this.

On a bench just above the big wash was a stone metate, a grinding bowl with the mono, or grinder, still in it. I looked around: piles of murex, turban snails and their operculum (the

same species we had eaten back at camp with the garlic and oregano sauce), glycymeris, and other clam and oyster shells lay in heaps everywhere; in between, broken and smaller chione shells littered the ground, along with flakes of dacite and obsidian and lots of broken pottery. It was a big archeological site, about a mile from the ocean, not far, no doubt, from fresh water just up the brushy canyon. I found more metates with the monos in them, ready to go, as if the people had planned on returning. These ancient sorts of grinding tools had been used for maybe six thousand years so it was impossible to tell how old they were. Amid the debris were occasional arrowpoints, egg-shell pottery, and thicker potsherds with red lines painted on them. I found several gaming disks of pottery and one turtle-like figurine. Finally, I found two iron arrowheads, triangular in shape and without stems, possibly hammered out of nails or barrel hoops.

This site had been occupied for a long time, perhaps as far back as several thousand years, and certainly, as evidenced by the iron points, up until recent times. The entire history of a people lay here, including the story of European conquest, of great interest to Ed, who saw Tiburon Island as an archetypical homeland for tribal people. The way in which Spanish military had dealt with the Seris became the deadly model later transported north and put into practice by other European immigrants, our ancestors.

That the Seri Indians didn't currently live there wasn't important. It was the land that counted. The land could still share its tribal lessons, especially if you took the effort to learn its history and cultural affiliations. Abbey noted a magical quality about the place. I had counted on this.

The Seris were one of only two Mexican tribes who, at the time of the conquest, were hunters and gatherers instead of farmers. The Indians were initially friendly to the Spaniards and missionaries who visited their homeland; in 1748, however, the Spanish summarily deported the women of 80 Seri families to

Guatemala and elsewhere in New Spain where they were sold into slavery, or worse, and were never again seen by their families. The Seri men warned the missionaries, whom they did not want to harm, then, quite naturally went on the attack. The subsequent murderous response of the Spanish turned the Seri into marauding raiders, whose warlike reputation in this part of the world was equaled only by the Apaches. Seri Indians were hunted down and slaughtered, wherever the Spanish could find them, for the next century and a half. In return, the natives routinely ambushed parties traveling the road between Hermosillo and Guaymas and hunted cattle—known elsewhere to the Indian as “slow elk”—that grazed alongside the deer and rabbits, whenever the chance presented.

Ed Abbey admired these cow killers, these independent warrior people. In particular, he loved the stories of Seris burying their enemies up to their necks in anthills. He was also fond of the tales of cannibalism (though these were mostly bullshit), of Seris boiling missionaries in huge ollos then passing out the best pieces of meat according to an elaborate system based on kinship lines, a common distribution ethic among subsistence hunters of the desert (whereby your mother's brother's daughter's husband gets the first cut, a prime round of thigh of large Jesuit).

Of course, by the time of my sojourn on Tiburón the surviving Seri settled in villages and lived by selling ironwood carvings to tourists. To Abbey, however, these last Seris, merely by virtue of their survivorship, embodied the tribal resistance against the onslaught of industrial and agrarian technologies. He admired their spunk, as he had the Aborigines' when he visited Australia or the Tarahumara Indians of the great barrancas of the Sierra Madre. The wilderness is vanishing, he said, and the next to go will be the last primitive tribes, the traditional cultures. “Seri” means “the wild people.” It was amazing that people so different from us still lived that close to Tucson.

Days passed. I watched the sunrise over the Sea of Cortez, the islands of Datil and Esteban shape-shifting, seeming to float on the seamless surface of sky and ocean. Each day we explored this nearly uninhabited island and lived off fish and moon snails served with garlic and oregano sauces. In the evenings we gathered by the campfire and shared our various harvests.

I decided to pack up enough gear for an overnight trip into the interior. I wanted to bushwhack east across to the Infernillo channel, though there was a three-man detachment of soldiers on the coast south of there I'd have to sneak by. The three soldiers lived in a shack on the southern coast for the declared purpose of protecting Tiburón from Seri or Mexican deer poachers. The story was that these three poor soldiers had fallen asleep while guarding a bank in Mexico City and that bank robbers had slipped past them, making off with the loot while the boys were slumbering. Their punishment was this forlorn outpost in the blistering summer heat of Tiburón.

I knew that throughout the previous 300 years, the Seri had occupied Tiburón more or less continually. In the decades that followed the deportation of the Seri women in 1748, only Tiburón remained a haven for the tribe, and even this sanctuary was invaded in 1750 by an expedition of 75 Spanish soldiers and some 400 Upper Pimas who swept through the entire Seri territory, killing only a handful of Seris, mostly women. The great majority of Seri at that time retreated to the rugged stronghold of Cerro Prieta from which they continued to raid Spanish settlements. In 1753, the Seris offered to make peace with the Spanish if the white men would only return their women. But it was too late; the women were gone.

The Seris destroyed the Spanish mission at Guaymas and raided up and down the Sonoran frontier for another 20 years, emptying of residents the entire area between Hermosillo and Guaymas for fear of Seri wrath. By 1770, scarcity of food and weariness brought on by the extended state of siege caused the

Seri to disperse from Cerro Prieta. Many were rounded up and forced to live near Pitic. Those who didn't surrender lived on Tiburón and on the opposite coast along the Infernillo. In 1773, Father Chryrsotom founded the mission of Carrizal near the coast. Six months later, the mission was destroyed and the padre committed suicide. The former state of war again prevailed.

I made camp in the soft sands of the wash, stoking a tiny iron-wood fire late into the night, watching Orion and the Hyades drift across the sky.

During the night a great horned owl decided to perch in a nearby dying palo verde tree. I pulled the wool stocking cap over my face hoping the night predator wouldn't mistake my nose for a bulbous deer mouse. Twenty minutes later I was close to sleep and the owl was still there. Unprovoked attacks of horned owls on humans were probably unknown. Still, just before I drifted off, I threw an arm across my face, further covering my nose.

A few hours before dawn, the intense longing of dreamtime startled me awake. Orion loomed on the western horizon. I missed my children.

Once again, I had left my family and other domestic responsibilities behind because these trips, the kind of revitalization they came to embody, were necessary beyond the daily onus of making a living. My wife knew this and generally approved of my expeditions. Like essential tribal forays, I had to have them. Abbey pioneered this sort of life and after four marriages had finally found a balance. Though it was the collective opinion of our friends that I was incapable of domestic living, I actually looked to Abbey for guidance in solving this central structural problem of my life: how to reconcile a life in the wild with love of home and family—a hope prefigured by the belief that one can live a fully human life despite the inevitable baggage of war.

Tiburón would be my last trip for a while, and probably the last while Ed was still walking the earth. Despite the costs, I was content

to have come. Unlike our national parks or official wilderness areas, Tiburón had no trails or field and hiking guides facilitating easy travel. There were not even good topographical maps of the area. Exploration here necessitated both actual and metaphorical bushwhacking, the kind that stretched the mind. The plants were strange, and I didn't know what kinds of animals might live here. There could even have been wild Seris still hiding out in the barrancas of the Sierra Kunkaak. You came out here largely uninformed, with just an inkling of how to get around, and an even dimmer idea of what awaited you. It had always been my belief that the key to human evolution was the practice of hunting and, by going out to wild and unfamiliar places where dangerous animals also lived, I imagined myself honing my skills, cultivating the best qualities of the hunter: alertness, some courage, endurance, risk taking, solitude, patience, silence, and loyalty to the tribe.

Loyalty to the tribe was also the reason I had to leave this spirit-haunted desert island and return to Tucson. My nights on Tiburón had been visited by premonitions of some urgency: the jaguar dreams, for instance. I owed this loyalty to Ed, to our mutual friends and families, to his fans, to all the wilderness advocates and movements his books had spawned; I owed it to the clan. He had asked that I see to his burial, and I took the request seriously.

Ed Abbey had plans for his dying. He had a long time to think about it because the Western medical establishment had thoroughly fucked up his diagnosis and told him he had but six months to live five years before he actually died. During this time, he lived under the often-fluctuating certainty of a death sentence, and professional waffling as to whether anything might be done to modify the course of the disease—which probably was more important to me than to Ed. He carried this burden of misinformation with great dignity. I, however, with my usual animosity, deeply resented the medical profession's callous incompetence and cavalier stewardship of human life and carried this grudge all the way to Ed's grave.

Abbey was racing against the clock he knew was winding down fast, hurrying to flesh out his last work of fiction and a book of aphorisms before the end. He wanted to be buried simply, with dignity and some ceremony, in the desert by people who cared for him. Once I saw that he had entered his final days, this charge took precedence over everything else. It became a palpable trust every bit as solemn as lifeguarding a child or monkey wrenching a bulldozer.

Hidden among the logistics of death and burial were notions of duty that were tribal, based on respect, loyalty, and a shared belief in the value of wildness. This had more to do with Ed, who had thought these matters through, less with myself, who was merely carrying out the final wishes of an older, wiser brother. He had given me a mission. By the time of Tiburón, I no longer questioned this but simply signed on for the trip and rode out the consequences.

Sunrise. Waking to the descending notes of a canyon wren, I packed up and stashed my sleeping bag and heavier gear in a palo blanco tree, where it would be visible from surrounding hilltops when I tried to find it again on the way back. It was the day before we were to leave Tiburón. I was edgy and imagined receiving subliminal messages that not all was well at home: my marriage, Ed's health. I walked into the rising sun, weaving through small valleys and gentle hill country studded with columnar cactus and giant white-barked trees. A gray fox looked at me from a low saddle and slunk away. I reached the east coast of Tiburón sometime around mid-morning.

I climbed the summit of a little knoll populated by pitaya cactus and palo blanco trees, their long filament-like leaves reaching out from the stiff sea breeze blowing off the *Infernillo*. I listened to the rustle of those lovely trees and watched four buzzards cruise past the headlands. Frigate birds also soared overhead, and out above the strait an osprey made an abrupt dive, coming off with a

sierra-sized fish. The Infernillo channel between the Sonoran mainland and Tiburón was shallow enough to see the tides moving in rills and rips, merging and crosscutting in a mosaic of brilliant reflections of the morning sun. I glassed the deeper water for whale spouts and looked for the heads of sea turtles. The Seris hunted several species of turtle, of which the giant leatherback sea turtle was the most important, an animal that figured centrally in both Seri diet and cosmology.

Overlooking the Infernillo, I tried to imagine the great migration of leatherback turtles that used to pass through, sea turtles floating in with the rising tides on mats of eel grass; below on the shallow dunes behind the beach, Seri men and woman emerging from the open shade under their ocotillo-branch ramadas to step into the scalding heat, ocean humidity boiling off the searing Sonoran coast in mid-July.

Here was the value of Tiburón: the land was a chunk of the original landscape from which we evolved, the homeland whose fragments today we regard as wilderness. You could still see the people, all people, and they were us, are us. It was also a place a renegade could regroup for another battle. I had been on a single plateau of life for so long it had come to feel much like a rut. Of growth I was clueless; a little change would do for now. Sitting on that hill on Tiburón, it occurred to me that I didn't want to go back to the old life.

The next morning the fisherman came. We loaded our gear into the panga and climbed in.

The island now loomed below a menacing sky. A stiff breeze skimmed brine off the tops of whitecaps and threw it in our faces. It looked like a storm was on the way.

We beached at Old Kino. I packed the equipment into my truck. On the way to Hermosillo we passed a knot of Seri women selling carvings and necklaces of tiny sea shells. I dropped my friends at the airport and headed north to Tucson.

From Hermosillo, I blasted north along Mexican Highway Numero 15 in my not-so-environmentally-correct gas-guzzling Ford pickup at a cool 75 miles per hour, pausing once at the truck stop outside Benjamin Hill to fill up with Nova and wolf down a bowl of posole. I slowed in Santa Ana to look out the window at some elephants the traveling circus was watering in a vacant lot; nearby, along the late winter shade of a crumbling adobe wall, eight Bengal tigers twitched and wheeled inside cages mounted on the flatbed of a tractor trailer.

Just outside Magdalena, I felt a high-speed shimmy in the drivetrain. Leaning out the window, I heard the whine and rumble of something about to pop on the rear driveshaft. I pulled over and crawled under the pickup. The front universal joint was too hot to touch but I could tell by the play in the shaft it was getting ready to go. All the grease had burned off and the needle bearings were bone dry. The chance of getting a "U" joint that would work in Magdalena was not good, and I didn't have time to transplant one from the front driveshaft or to mess around with a busted-down vehicle. I could try to baby the truck back to Tucson or abandon the son of a bitch and hitch a ride to Nogales where I could have someone come pick me up. If I left the pickup in Mexico, the odds of returning a week later to a burned-out, engine-less, steel hulk propped up on blocks were excellent. But I had to get back; I was thinking about Abbey.

I squirted 40-weight motor oil on the joint, lubricating the sucker as best I could. I nursed the truck northward toward Magdalena, listening obsessively, an ancient habit acquired from a lifetime of driving beat-up old rigs that threatened to break down at any time and whose potential malfunction dominated every moment of driving.

In Magdalena I had the universal joint packed with lubricant. I took a cup of chassis grease with me, stowed in a Tecate can with the top cut off. I pulled over every 30 miles to repack the bearings.