

0.v.v: resemblance

Doin' it - realization of one of my daydreams. An odyssey to experience in person those mysterious, intimate highlands of Arizona, to see if the photos of their sylvan lushness I've imbibed, which so contrast the typical view of Arizona as nothing more than desert land, prove true. They've allured me for so long. A quick stop in the Hualapais, many days in the Whites, then a day, a morning, an evening on the Colorado Plateau near Flagstaff at a reservoir rumored to house two of my daydream fishes - walleye and, better, northern pike. And then a quick stop in the mountains of my youth, those cradling Arrowhead.

With so much death of late - my blood mother, my foster-mother, one of my best friends, (a real brother), another brother's mother, a good buddy from Arrowhead days - and my own failing health, time for attempting all potential, all desire, has to be now. Too, with so much wasted in my own bloodlines, fuck, I gotta try to elevate that genetic quagmire to something more than stagnation and resignation and tragedy. And that little fire I have burning, insatiable, seemingly unique in my bloodlines, that refuses to allow me to genuflect to life's disappointments and failures by drowning myself in booze and pills or losing myself in distractions, delusions, monotony, routine. I still don't know how that flame's fueled. And, of course, the chance of transcendence, which I experience nearly exclusively by water in coniferous mountains. That I can never get enough of.

I felt a few moments of that *something*, that expansion into another dimension, yesterday. Got here, the Hualapais, later than planned, late afternoon, little light left to bag the main peak, but if I hauled ass, I'd a chance to complete the loop before nightfall. *Go for it*. So I quickly laced boots and donned pack and blasted up-trail. More strenuous than I thought (and what the map showed), and the exertion, I so welcomed it, its quieting of my mind's cacophony. Trail was steeper than expected because, a too-common occurrence when my vertigo's bad, I took the wrong fuckin' turn. Nevertheless, I topped a peak, Hayden, only 25 feet lower than the Main Girl, and given its distance from my camp was shorter than to the Main Girl, I had enough light left on my return to slow my pace, to better absorb. And then a few times - resonance. When the wind played the aspen leaves just so, when I stood still at the edge of a fecund pond, montane twilight settling, that ineffable stillness when dusk settles on coniferous mountains, and the place and I became one and then more.

Quite the contrast to the campground. It sure is domesticated - \$20 for my lone night here, plastic shitter right by my slot, burly picnic table I write this on, obnoxiously loud neighbor replete with barking dog - as Kristen Hersch sings, "*...I said a nightmare, complete with barking dogs and coke machines...*" Reminds me of the last "camp" with my old man, Chris, in the Mammoth area, over 20 years ago, right before I killed that relationship. Fuckin' guy brought the entire kitchen, big box of pancake mix and rolls of paper towels and just a silly amount of utensils, Isuzu Trooper stuffed to the ceiling, and that for only a few days. Typical American camping, especially when a thunderstorm hit so we opted to dine in - at Carl's Jr, of all places, which Chris was ecstatic about. That easy-food travesty had an ad campaign touting that eating its fuckin' food was what real men did. Chris did, but wasn't.

The flow, the recurrence. In coniferous mountains again, but different ones, so recurrence, nah, not really - resemblance. Seeing one tree is absolutely not seeing 'em all, *duh*. And while this range, the White Mountains, shares shape and composition with so many others of my past, of course they ain't the same. Yeah, the ponder pines here I've seen in so many other coniferous mountains, but never Englemann spruce or subalpine fir. My Dark-eyed Juncos at home in northern California don't look like these here, either, just like I don't look much like my younger self or, even more, ever more, like my old man or any other relatives. But some inherent, inherited similarities, of course.

The old man and coniferous mountains. He'd an affinity for 'em, akin to my blood mother's affection for big redwoods, though certainly not to the extent that I have. The old man wouldn't've lived by Arrowhead, which required a long commute to work, had he not dug 'em. He harbored some fire to explore by foot and wheel - to his credit, he cajoled me into bagging Mt. Whitney in a day, and he boldly rumbled down some gnarly dirt mountain roads in his low-slung '77 Honda Accord. We went on several car-camping trips to coniferous mountains - Whiney Portal, Big Sur, the South Fork Kern, Mammoth, the Twenty Lakes Basin, the latter three my ideas. But very domesticated camping - he relished the "camping" at Big Sur, the showers at Whitney Portal, the fuckin' Carl's Jr. in Mammoth. Too, Gawd, the volume of shit we took with us - streamline materials to their minimum for living he - and his second hoarding wife who stuffed the car - did not do. No fisher or hunter desire existed in his blood - he couldn't fathom fish as food, had zero talent for catching 'em, and so usually just sat on shore and read a book while I casted away. Although I feel that he might've felt a release by shedding the unnecessary, maybe even an awakening, he was so submissive and scared that he just genuflected to his second wife, so resigned and scared that he slaved most of his waking life at his dull, predictable market job from adolescence 'til the end of his working life. He had a little fire, an inherent desire, but he seemed not to realize it or feed it - took self-awareness and self-integration, and he was real deficient in both.

He could've blazed so many more trails, bagged so many more peaks than the popular one, for sure. He didn't, so I will.

Dawn, little campfire blazin', and a good day yesterday. Hiked very well - the new, lighter gear, replacement for my stolen stuff, so far maybe proving the burglary a boon. That event, nearly a year ago, certainly a pivot point, a change in course, a momentum I'm still swept up by. Harbinger of big changes, for sure.

One - I'm not quite the fisher I once was. A major goal this trip has been Apache trout, another expression of the cold-water little bug-eater. With good water at hand and plenty of light left in day after my hike, I rigged the rod and tried. I caught 'em, getting to hand about six fish. But I was so sloppy - many errant casts, many snags, and, my biggest bane, many lost fish, and those that hit my hand didn't stay pegged long enough to photo. Poor precision, slow reaction time - it's mainly because of my balance problems. If ya can't do something well, that's a sign - ain't for you. But I'm a fisher, and I always will be, and even through the self-frustrations of yesterday, that fact pushed me 'til dusk with the desire for a fish that would stay hooked long enough for the camera. So what to do? Move more towards open water where precision is less important, and maybe more towards bait-fishing. Bigger water. Besides, my history shows I've performed so

very well in small water. Maybe replacing the slow hardbait rods with faster ones - I didn't stick, let alone land, any stripers that thumped the little rattlebait during the last Suisun session.

I awake with the birds, just like I do at home in Davis, and while not home, in a way, better - in place. I think of starlight glowing blue eyes and how She came to me so kindly, so giving, in my dreams when I needed her most in Denver while cleaning my mother's sloppy death. I default so easily to traits of a stunted man - cowardice, routine, paranoia, stolidness, conceitedness, distraction, delusion - but when I think of Her, just Her ideal gives me the strength to rise above those flaws of me, those flaws of him.

On a new waterway, the Black, but still in the Whites. It's such an inviting creek. Many grassy little velvety floodplains, some dry and solid enough for camping, perfect for lounging. Bountiful glittering brown trout to enrapture and feed - I caught many in my search for Apaches. Lovely, fecund meadows, so lush, such a banquet for my loves the robins. Stately firs and spruces and pines, framing the composition, the creek wide enough to rarely ford dryly and so more amenable to nymph-drifting and jig-swinging.

Not so the upper portion that flows through a vast meadow ensconced in a prairie, losing tribs and thus water going upstream, losing width and depth, thereby winnowing from creek to brook. I hightailed it to that section quickly after landing four consecutive browns in the creek downstream of the dam - gratifying, but not who I came for. The brook was advertised as being Apache-only. And in a continuation, an exacerbation of Tuesday, a worsening - fuck, I fished so bad. Many errant casts. But worse - I had good approaches, proved by so many strikes, but only about five stuck, and only two came to hand. I frequently had no idea where my jig was; I'd a tough time discerning snag from bite, and therefore was tardy when setting the hook. The barbless hook was largely to blame for losing the stuck fish; the disgraceful hooking percentage - that was me.

Afternoon aging and disappointment mounting, and, fuck, I felt such despair. I am a fisher, but I felt I just couldn't fish brooks well anymore - I felt hopeless. Frustrated, and the desire to smash the rod into a million pieces certainly bubbled forth. The old man so quickly flung wrenches when so frequently frustrated by fiddling with cars. But I rather easily quelled it, in part by recalling I have fished beautifully a few times this year, with the surfperches and at Berryessa with sunnies and green basses, big water, mainly with soft stuff. Too, I've actually been quite effective with stripers - again with soft stuff.

I left the rod in my ride after the brook failures even though I backpacked along the creek and knew I'd be perched along sexy water. I remembered my lesson - if it ain't live-or-die, take a little time to assess and adapt. With the desire for an Apache well-shot still burning, I realized I had to go to braid - I'd been fishing straight mono the entire trip. Too, I had to break the rules and fish a single barbed hook 'til getting the One, legal consequences be damned.

Resurgence. *Return of the King* - *king* is me - in honor and in spite of my old man. Today's his birthday, and he loved that children's author Tolkien. Yesterday, I returned to the creek I was at two days previous where I'd caught Apache trout. This time, though - contrary, or maybe consistently, with my aging - adaptation and then evolution...Lamarck wasn't totally wrong.

With the West Fork Black River being a zoo in the morning already yesterday, I was anxious that my creek would be likewise, and that I'd have to compete for a campsite and untouched water. My anxiety was quickly quelled, though, when finding only a few cars parked at the trailhead, and the people I saw - none were fisherpeople, let alone fishers. Absence of fisherpeople really not a surprise because they're, in general, a lazy lot: a trail between a waterway and parking lot scares so many away. So I hoofed upstream hopefully, found the campsites likewise empty, and scored the best of so many wonderful temporary outdoor homes: on a grassy floodplain, away from the trail, singing creek at my side, plentiful firewood, fire ring, and a perfect fallen log for a bench. Threw up camp, reduced my pack to the bone for a fish hunt, took a deep breath, and pined for the place's energy to add to the fire I'd need to catch well a surprisingly fussy fish, as well as putting into practice the changes I felt were needed to improve hook-ups and landings: braid and outlaw barbed single hook.

It worked. I wasn't perfect - often I had to dig my lure out of snags, and I wasn't always weasel-like when sifting through the willows and deadfall. But most snags were acceptable in that they occurred from an accurate, precise cast to likely holding water that was opaque and so veiled from vision obstructions below. And though I wavered here and there, tottering like a toddler, not once did I fall - quite the accomplishment given my vertigo. And I caught fish. Five hit hard enough to stick, and four of those hit my hand, including the King Apache Trout, who might've hit a foot - huge for this barely-creek. And he was the best fish I've caught all year. He was buried in a deep, teardrop pool ringed with willow roots, sine-curve shape to the bed with the trough at the little falls at pool's beginning and the crest near the tailout. Much rubble grading to cobbles serving as little pockets for fish and fish-food bugs alike. I'd a good approach - slow, smooth, concealed by thicker willows. Accurate, precise flips of the jig, and though no strikes, I felt a good fish had to be there, so I dissected the damn thing. And I was right - a good fish, too good not to utilize every option, chased my jig, but wouldn't commit to connection - just a breath away, far too far away. I varied the jig's action from jerky to bouncy to smooth, but none would quite get him to breathe that last breath. I needed another option. I'd blown off many grasshoppers, the typical yellow-and-black, it was afternoon, and it was blowin' - concurrences that render such a trout morsel a reasonable occurrence to land on the creek. So I pulled out my black-yellow spinner, flipped it to the tail, and out of the depths rose my fish, closing, closer and closer to my lure, and finally - he took that last breath that included my hook. And he stuck, and he stayed stuck 'til his icy body was in my hand for a photo shoot to celebrate both his glory - like so many fishes, virtually none exist of Apaches showing fully the beauty of the fish held by a respectful fisher - and documentation of my return.

So fuck me - still, *I am fisher*.

He swam vigorously out of my hands.

I fished about three-quarters of a mile of creek, and then I was back at my camp, late afternoon, four fish in hand, and four - unlike my younger years - were enough. Stinky and dirty after four wild days, and with a high sun still streaming heat down, I pined for a little cleansing baptism, but the wind - eh, an icy gale. But fuck it. I stripped and submerged in the icicle water, scrubbed down, then dashed out, and laid as flat as I could in the grass and underneath the wind. It worked, and I dried and warmed quickly, and aside from my dunk rendering me more presentable

for my brief pause in domesticity later this morning, I got closer to Apache trout - I'd been in their water. A real bath relative to the dislocation of Big Sur's and Whitney Portal's shower stalls.

I'm here to experience this place's expression of coniferous mountains. Across the arc of such places I've dived into, this one differs the most because the ocean's so far away. The temperature swings are far greater - ain't been a morning that I've woken to not find frozen ground (or frozen water-bottle cap). And the aridity. Was a wet year here, like in California, so the waterways are comparatively big for themselves and yet still very small. The Black "River" is a smallish creek. The East Fork Little Colorado is a brook. The West Fork Little Colorado is borderline between brook and creek. And in dry years, they all shrinking to brook or rill - very little space for a fish, and that space cluttered with lots of wood - a maze. And shallow enough for birds to hunt. I shockingly blew off several Great Blue Herons - never seen 'em in high-elevation coniferous mountains. And the Apache trout reflected this. Deeper-bodied than other trouts - 'bows, browns, goldies - giving them a better ability to maneuver through the maze of deadfall and rootstock. And damn, they, more than any other trout I've fished, refused to leave the wood. And timing. Twice I fished the mornings, and both times I had one follow and no strikes. Just as I began fishing yesterday, the water was so cold on my foot it pained within only 30 seconds. But near the end of my session, I mostly waded, the water still cold but bearable. And during both sessions, it was mid-afternoon when the water went from ice to cold that the Apache trout got frisky. That's generally not the case in waters closer to the coast where morning can not only be good but the best time to wet a line. Much value exists in that contrast, and I'm a better fisher because of it.

Some day that was, the old man's day. Made it more my day.

Clambered out of the Wild that'd been my home for the last five days, having nice conversations with two cats on the march out - one a fisher about trout, other a birder about birds. My departure timing couldn't've been better - I'd largely had the little place to myself, but as I hiked out at mid-morning, a zoo had erupted. All, though, as usual in the Wild, were warm, friendly. And having achieved, experienced all I desired, I could only toast that giving little area of Momma Earth with a slug of good bourbon. Good morning, and goodbye.

After shoveling in a gluttonous greasy-spoon slop of flapjacks and biscuits and gravy in Eager, stomach nearly bursting, I drove to my next goal - a peak. Two ways up - one real easy, smaller elevation change, purported to be popular, well-delineated, and the other more obscure, bigger elevation change. Being a Saturday and wanting the connection between Momma Earth and I unadulterated, I of course chose the tougher trail. It was tougher than tough, though, since the trail really wasn't one - USFS map was epically inaccurate (*FUCK the government!*), with both mileage to trailhead and path of trail. I diligently followed their narrative yet found myself nearing the northern foot of the peak - map showed trail ascending the southwest aspect. Desperately wanting this peak, and with clear skies and relatively open country (from a wildfire a dozen years ago) and so landmarks and sky-marks prominent, I blew off the trail and headed cross country. I barely made it. The deadfall maze I had to navigate was the lesser obstacle - the incredibly dense thickets of sucker aspen I had to battle through was the biggest war. Close in combat, though, was steep sections of sun-exposed blasted lava rock. I had to scramble - and *scramble*, not hike - to hit the ridge and the popular trail. Nearly felt my hammies were gonna snap, that I'd not enough juice

to top the ridge then the peak, although that was now the easier way out than retracing my steps. But I imagined She, voluptuous, so alive, beckoning me to the top with promise of lust to love realized. And I fuckin' made it, ascending the peak, exulting, and I thanked Her.

I strode the popular trail back down, then hiked another three miles on dirt roads back to my ride. Surprisingly, soothingly for me, the place was nearly deserted save a fat woman and a younger, slender man - American Indian or Hispanic - that I passed on the trail. That kind of woman I love seeing on such a trail, and though she was near breathless, she was still cheerful even though she and the fella still had a ways to the peak. I hope they made it, too.

Evening when I reached my ride, dinner time and desirous of an epic camp, I drove upslope to a promontory, a little flat, that provided an expansive, uninterrupted view of the White Mountains, and serendipitously by a little pond fit for dishwashing. As evening flowed across the threshold of sunset into dusk, I was bathed in a sky light I don't think I've ever experienced. Billowing streams of clouds from the southwest, canary then tangerine then lavender to mauve, all while the sky hued from a baby blue to a glowing violet. Magic, enrapturing, eternal, and feelingly something more than just a vibrantly colorful, dynamic sky.

My last Arizona day. All goes as planned, I'll be in Arrowhead this afternoon, and then Wednesday back in Davis domesticity.

I've definitely shifted towards domesticity the last two days after leaving the Wild. Struck west to Flagstaff, and just outside of Flag, Upper Mary Reservoir, arriving early Sunday afternoon. Mary certainly grades from wild to domesticated, wavering around cultivated - though surrounded by stately ponderosa pines, wild groundsel and Indian paintbrush, wild fish swimming within, she also has fuckin' developed campgrounds (with showers!), big parking lots, and a city just down the road, and, regrettably, the typical disrespectful trash all over - fuckin' discarded snarls of fishing line, Styrofoam worm containers, the slew of plastic bottles and aluminum cans. And packed. Boaters, fisherpeople, dog-walkers, all over. Vexing in that I'd have to compete to get a clear run with my lure, but, as always, these people are better that they're out doing something - if only they'd clean up after themselves. But I've a feeling they treat the Wild kinda like they treat themselves - use and abuse. Serenity like the White Mountains I would not find, but hopefully some growth of me as fisher.

But I'd little time for lamenting or harmonizing with the people. Following the pattern of fish being most active at dawn and dusk, I'd two dawns and two dusks to get it on with fish that obviously get pummeled with baits and lures. But the timing of dawn and dusk shifts with light: the sun's angle (*i.e.*, season), aerial turbidity (cloudy, clear?), aquatic turbidity. Mary - and I knew this going in - is one muddy joint. Why? Very shallow, and, as I discovered and fought with, the nearly never-ending wind having access to roiling all that sediment into suspension. Nearly Suisun Marsh muddy. So mid-afternoon, Mary's dusk, offered more promise than in a typical clear-water situation, although, with Suisun stripers as a template, water-column presentations were likely to be futile - it'd have to be swimbaits and rattlebaits on the bottom, and slow, noisy topwater at terrestrial dusk and dawn. And location - shallow, and by cover - pike are littoral fish.

So I tied on a Big Hammer and focused on shallow rock and wood at points and corners. And, to my astonishment, quickly hooked up, not with a pike but with the other: walleye. At around a foot and a half, a Hell of a way to pop that cherry. Ecstatic with the by-catch, laughing,

I ripped off a few frames and kept fishing, hope soaring given that if walleye, a crepuscular critter, are on the eat in afternoon, then the more-visual pike definitely should be.

Snaked up-reservoir as afternoon shifted to evening, and more promise, albeit with a tinge of deflation - I got popped twice but didn't recognize 'til too late - once on a point, once by a jumble of rock and wood in a cove. By now, another obstacle than the wind surfaced - fuckin' hair algae, which coated the 1/2-oz Big Hammer nearly every cast. (Would switch to a 3/8-oz head to mitigate that, and it helped though didn't fish as enticingly as the 1/2.) I switched to a jointed weedless swimbait, the Sebile, which so often excels in clean up, given it's erratic and can be worked so slow, plus its shape allows it to move cleanly through vegetation. Amazingly, though, in re-fishing the spots where I'd strikes, nothing on the Sebile.

Evening now, and I found myself at the dam, a typical earth-fill, riprap-faced dam - prime crawdad habitat. Pike, like so many other fishes (lake trout and stripers especially applicable), will eat 'dads, so I pulled out a craw rattlebait and began banging that rock. 'Bout a third down the dam face, and contact, the contact I'd pined for - a two-and-a-half-foot pike, which swayed and slashed and splashed and then - gone. Another lost fish, the fuckin' monkey on my back. But a sign that I was reading the environment right. Greater hope.

Yet another obstacle - throw in with the wind and algae some of the nastiest pumice-faced rock, all over, and then top off with the toxic brew of my fading sensitivity - snag, snag, snag. I lost that precious rattlebait just a few casts after losing the fish of daydreams. Then, just wanting to verify a water-column presentation being pointless, I tied on a Pointer and lost that lure after only a few casts. More disappointment, but with dusk approaching and the green light for topwater, the risk of lost lures declined dramatically.

With shadows on water now, I retraced my steps with the topwater, and, once again at the point - alignment. Big boil on the lure, but the fish didn't take or stick - couldn't tell either way. Cast again, and alignment again - a two-foot pike cartwheeled on the lure, back-set dorsal and spotted caudal fins clearly visible, yet, again - no stick. Threw a few more casts, but she wouldn't return, so I ran the swimbait back out there, the perfect clean up for a topwater miss - but nothing.

Kept walking the topwater, returning to the dam, light nearly gone - was having trouble noting where the lure was, and the wind, though abated from gale force it'd been blowing, was still fuckin' windy, chopping the water and hiding my lure. But I coaxed another boil, and, once again, no stick. Cast again, the fish took interest again, and, like stripers will do, motorboated behind the lure. I just kept my lure at the same pace, and the big fish - I could discern her torpedo shape - ate, stuck, and I landed her - but not a pike, a giant walleye! Had to rip off a few frames of that surprise, and, while the snags, wind, and lost fish sucked, the walleye soothed.

The next day, and my one full day as fisher. My eyes cracked just as dawn cracked open, and the wind - just a murmur, and an invitation to get on the water immediately. I fished topwater beautifully through dawn - nothing. Then switched to the swimbait once sun hit the water, and though another fine walleye came to hand - no pike, and, worse, I lost two more Big Hammers, leaving me only one, and the wind - fuck, back to gale.

Given the attention I'd received the day before - 2-for-5 - the 1-for-1 in the morning - perplexing. And the wind beat me down, so much so that I retreated to Flag domesticity for shelter and a greasy-spoon breakfast and reassessment. And to soften my disappointment - still no pike in hand. But some understanding surfaced about why I didn't get a fish 'til the sun and wind had

risen: oxygen. With loss of sun to spurn algae photosynthesis, and calming of wind and decrease in water turbulence, I'd little doubt the oxygen concentration fell to its nadir about dawn, slowing the fish to slumber.

Felt noonish fishing all through 'til night worthwhile, so I mustered myself again - this time, though, to the river-left side of the reservoir where I'd have to hoof several miles to hit two provocative points. It was recurrence of my embarrassing afternoon on the Black - a travesty. I had maybe one soft strike, I lost my last Big Hammer, and I lost a Sebile. For the Sebile, I needed less weight; the Big Hammer, fuck, that was with the lighter head. After I lost the Hammer, my frustration erupted, and I wailed, in despair, throwing a few rocks to diffuse my rage. I was failing miserably again.

And once again, I cowered to domesticity, to a bar shielding me from the wind and giving me a very welcome beer, the idea of abandoning my hope and just fucking renting a motel room brewing in my head. But I knew I couldn't - She would've been disgusted. So I rolled back to the dam, gales galing, ran the rattlebait in evening, Gunfish at dusk, and caught nothing. Failure. But I did fish well, not losing a lure, and, dusk nearly gone to night, did at least get a boil on the Gunny.

And with that, the last segment of my relationship with Arizona Wild, completion and lessons. I still got it, but it ain't what it once was. I lost a ton of lures, lesson of which: main tackle bags need to be stuffed, with the wallets remaining sparse for shore-fishing - still gotta keep the stuff on my back as light as possible for my aging back and hips. Gotta go to faster rods for hardbaits. Gotta increase the proportion of time I use braid. Using bigger line whenever I can. Can't dismiss oxygen ever again. And while true that the gain in Apache trout and walleye exceeded the loss in lures and the maladroit fishing, the goal is to maximize those catches while minimizing the loss of stuff and the period of ineffectual fishing - elegance is the ideal, not implacably rolling through the same ol' fuckin' tracks when they muddy and then rut some more.

In Arrowhead, a logical layover from Arizona back to Davis, geographically, socially, wildly. The old, weathered, weighed-on San Bernardinos as the last highlands. Saw two of my tribe - a few beers, dinner, chit-chat, then goodbye. I worry about 'em, us, with all that's occurred recently. One less so - he's very sociable, and as long as he's an ear to bend and moderates boozin', he's okay. Wish he had his own bar where he could hold court. The other - more. He's led such a restricted life, always with his parents, same job as forever. I'd hope that his mother's death would free him, and he does seem to be opening - a little. But his plans seemed to be working the same job and living in the same house, the only change being his assuming ownership when his old man dies. Seems such a waste, so familiar. When his old man dies.

Dead mothers; dead brothers; surviving, permanently damaged fathers; and still some living sons, potential alive. Don't do it, my brother.

I'm back in lowly Davis, my daydream odyssey into the peculiar highlands of Arizona, the physical aspect, complete. Much to my surprise given the upheaval of the last year - my poor failing cars, my failing health, financial wars, and so much death. And actually, it was an odyssey with Arizona as a focus, but not the complete story. The ol' San Bernardinos, my old San Bernardinos, they were part of it, too. And the vestiges of my old man, he always a vestige, me as he.

Yesterday I woke in my bro's cozy little mountain apartment - man, if I could score one like that in my nearby mountains for a reasonable price, an increasingly unlikely scenario, I'd grab it. Weather still cool in this strangely cool year, and I chilled when I stepped outside to my ride and the final leg of this long journey. After snagging the needed cup of coffee, I weaved west down the mountain, circled little Lake Gregory, rolled through the town - most buildings still there but few playing the same role or donning the same name - and aimed for a wilder place than the little lake, the little creek that contained only wild rainbows, sleek and golden and so spooky. When still living in southern California, and with the arid Lancaster as the foundation of my life and me being a fisher, any rill, any arroyo, any cleavage that could possibly hold water swayed me with the hope that fish would be there, promise given by magazine pictures that'd mesmerized me. But nearly all those images were from wetter places that cradled real, big, actual rivers, not the maximum waterway size the arid native southern California could yield, which was a creek. Thus so many of those cleavages and rills, when I'd get down to 'em, they'd house nothing with fins save the occasional temporary tenant of the truck trout who'd be gleaned and cleaned by the fisherpeople after only a few days of freedom, if water was even flowing. But this little creek was an exception, and more - water always flowed, the tanker truck never dumped its load into her, few visited her, and even in the early days after the birthing of the relationship between Momma Earth and I, I'd go down there without the rod, straining for a connection beyond fishes to the rocks and water and trees and birds.

My old man, in a rare broaching of his innate drive to explore, dragged me to hike the creek upstream from a dirt-road crossing to its headwaters and beyond when I was around 14 years old. A long haul. Definitely was a summer day, hot, sticky, but lush, verdant, given the nestled canyon the creek flowed through, the luxurious pines and firs just above floodplain level and the alders on the floodplain. I stopped at a few pools, sleuthing up to 'em cougar-style with, I believe, a fly rod and a hopper pattern, and I actually caught a few trout, big for the creek - about eight inches. They were beautiful, so golden and tan, much resembling the Apache trout I connected with only a few days ago. I only fished briefly, with the goal of completing the hike primary, so up the creek we quickly continued, and then onto the asphalt road, and, though tired, sore, to my old man's credit - we'd done it. That may have been the best day we'd ever had together, and so it was one of his best days. If, for us, he'd only realized it.