JENNIFER SINOR

Confluences

(for my father)

FOR THE FIRST 12 hours after my father returned—wearing clothes that were three days old, his body still wrinkled from time spent immersed in water—he faced investigation for the murder of his brother. I imagine it was only protocol for the rangers and the Fairbanks police; death in a national park requires the federal government to file a report, whether that death results from a grizzly, an avalanche, or a body that has just given out. Still, I wonder if there was a moment in the police station, days away from the last time he had slept, his brother's body on its way to a temporary morgue, when my father's thoughts turned to questions of intention—his own or his brother's—and the ease with which a body can leave this earth.

The headwaters of the Alatna River, along with those of the Killik and Nigu Rivers, gather in the Gates of the Arctic National Park in northern Alaska, high up in the Brooks Range. One of six rivers in the park dedicated "wild and scenic" and therefore federally protected, the Alatna begins as a trickle and eventually builds to class III rapids on its 83-mile journey to confluence with the Koyukuk. The park itself, over eight million acres of protected wildlife, roadless and therefore one of the most remote regions in the United States, is home to the Arrigetch Mountains whose granitic spires reach 6,000 feet in the air. On the river one might see caribou, moose, Dall sheep, eagles, grizzlies, and even the occasional seagull far from the shores of the Pacific.

Though the river snakes lazily across a valley floor, through an idyllic landscape of open tundra and boreal forests, the Alatna has earned its wild and scenic designation. At the headwaters, the river is no more than a large drainage basin pooling in barren Summit Lake. With little water in the river, adventurers beginning at Summit must drag their Avon rafts for miles over gravel bars and sand barriers. But the lack of water is deceiving. An atypically hot day or a little rain can cause a dramatic rise in the water level, as much as six feet at once, due to glacial melting or the refusal of the thick layer of permafrost to absorb the rainfall. Within minutes, the river becomes a series of chutes, some as narrow as a canoe, where water rages down the mountain. Every guidebook, map, and Web site surveying the region reminds potential visitors that these rivers are ultimately unmappable.

My son was conceived the night my uncle died. Curling his body and holding fast to the slender strands of willow growing nearby, my uncle left this world on a day with no night while the collection of cells that would become my son clung to the walls of my body, defying the odds and remaining viable. The following day, my uncle still dead and the cells still holding on and dividing, I whined in my journal about how quickly pens seem to lose their ink.

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My father and his brother Jerry had gone to the northern reaches of Alaska to run the Alatna River for many reasons, some articulated and others not: my dad had never seen the headwaters; my uncle Jerry had run the river before and knew no wilder place; returning was on his life list; Jerry was sick and his time spent on trails and in tents was becoming limited; and Alaska is enormous and unknown, a place worthy of reckoning. I imagine they went because Alaska hovered like a dream from their childhood when they spent long afternoons in the hayloft considering what lay beyond the landlocked plains.

Written first on a legal pad in thin blue lines of ink that run like waves across the page, then later transferred to the computer, the journal my dad made of the trip, composed on the flight back, begins: "Jerry and I met in St. Louis to begin our incredible journey."

He then moves quickly to describe those few hours, not even 24, when everything was still okay—arriving in Fairbanks, flying to the hinterlands, renting gear from the outfitter. He names the few people they met, the meals they ate, the conversations they had with the taxi driver. I imagine his pen pausing for lengths of time as he begins the story. I imagine him nursing a drink, staring into the clouds, and willing himself to recall more of what would typically pass unnoticed, not wanting to set out on what he knows will lead to pain. I imagine he clings to these moments the way he clung to their raft; I imagine he is frightened when he must leave them behind. Yet he begins.

By the time my dad is on the second page of his journal, the ordinary fades like fog at the rising sun. He writes that well into the morning of their first day in the Alaskan wilderness, long after the bush pilot has left them at Summit Lake, Jerry fell while trying to fish. It is the first glimmer. After recording the number of fish Jerry catches, their length and type, my dad writes that Jerry told him he had fallen while walking back to the camp and was worried he had cracked a rib. In amongst the arctic char comes a hint, like frost, of fragility.

And then on the morning of the second day, they realize that fuel is running low. My dad does not write why, but I know it is because my uncle overhauled the fuel canisters before they left and did a poor job of it. The irony is bitter, for my uncle was a chemical engineer, a specialist, in fact, in fuels. The founder and editor of what became *The Sinor Synthetic Fuels Report*, a man who helped design the first space shuttle in the '80s and worked on alternative fuel sources in the '90s, Jerry is faced, on July 12, 2003, with the knowledge that he and my father are two days into a 14-day trip and have already used half their fuel.

Aidan has not yet been conceived on July 12. His being waits in the universe for a body, and in my journal I remain transfixed by the ordinary in my life: a new puppy that won't behave, a deadline for an essay, heat that has clamped the intermountain west and refused to let go. I mow the lawn, riding the tractor up and down the hill beside our house, and consider calling my mom to make sure my dad has gotten off okay. The day before my father left for Alaska, I chose not to call him to wish him a safe journey. Our last interaction, an argument over a card game, had left me angry and resentful, feelings as familiar and worn as my favorite shoes. I will not learn for several days of his ordeal. When I do, I will, at the age of 34, believe that I am somehow to blame because I failed to call.

My dad and Jerry spend that afternoon falling as they struggle in inch-deep water, using ropes to line, or drag, the raft down the shallow headwaters of the Alatna. It is hard work, lining a boat. I say this not from experience but from the way my father's hands looked when he returned from Alaska. Swollen and scabbed, they were so bloated that my mother had to type the initial draft of his journal. His hands betrayed the difficulty of the trip in a way his words never would; their stretched skin remained with me later when he suggested that he had done nothing at all.

Others had been asked to come along on the trip, including my husband, Michael, and me. Being in the backcountry was something my extended family did together, like others might see a movie or eat out. Every summer we backpacked in the Rockies, choosing wilderness areas over national parks or forests in hopes that the additional work of getting there would mean having part of the planet to ourselves. A dozen people from three generations around a campfire in the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness was not unusual; only two people in the central Brooks Range was.

That evening Jerry admits to my father that he had to lie to his doctor about coming to Alaska. His prostate cancer and Parkinson's were becoming more complicated and he had, just days before, been placed on new medication that is giving him trouble. My dad writes:

> After dinner, we sat around the fire talking about successes and failures, investment strategies, future trips, hopes for our children and life in general. It was a very good evening, but it was also the first time he mentioned the third member of our group (Cynde) and why she wasn't with us. When I said, "Cynde did not come on this trip." He responded, "I know, I just forgot."

Crystal clear in thought only 48 hours before, Jerry now confuses white rocks for sand dollars and imagines people who aren't there. Reeling my mother, Cynde, into the story, my uncle's mind was taking refuge in the familiar—she usually accompanied them on their trips. In fact, she'd been on their last trip to Alaska when the same river, the Alatna, had pulled her under with its giant river arms, leaving her bruised and sore but not broken. Reading this as a warning, she chose not go on this trip—the cold, the mosquitoes, the lack of dry land. We all found excuses; mine had something to do with a porch that needed painting and a new dog that couldn't be left alone. When we learned that Jerry was dead, when we learned that my dad had, by himself, paddled the body of his dead brother for 60 miles in search of help, we wondered, as Jerry had, why we weren't there.

Jerry, though, refuses to allow us to remain outside the warmth of the campfire and brings us into the story—first my mother, then, the following day, his daughter, his wife, his son, and others—weaving us into the landscape. Perhaps he imagines my mother gone for a minute to the tent to put on a layer of fleece, or his daughter down by the river watching for eagles, or his son on a night hike, waiting for stars that will never appear. For Jerry, it seems, we are all there in Alaska, poking a stick at the coals in the campfire as the night declines to come to an end and the sun lingers forever on the horizon.

15 Because I am the oldest in my family, I cannot say what it is like to have an older sibling, one whom, perhaps, you have revered your entire life, whose path you have followed, whose choices you have been taught to see as good and right, and whose decline you must witness. Instead, I am familiar with the responsibility of being the eldest, of making a path, of always being watched. "I know, I just forgot," says Jerry, the one who never failed his siblings or his children. My first thoughts are of how hard that moment must have been for two men born in the Corn Belt just after the Depression, when weakness and error simply were not options. I imagine the shifting of feet, the stoking of fire, the busying of hands with mess kits and fishing line, anything to ignore the monster that has crept into camp threatening to disrupt a pattern, a practiced way of being, that these two men lived for over 60 years.

But later, I reconsider this moment in my dad's story. My dad reads the early signs of mental deterioration in Jerry's inability to distinguish between reality and figment, but I wonder if the dementia is not working to refigure a truer truth, not bound by actual truth, that seeps into the emotional truth of things. What if Jerry's failing mind is only failing to erect the boundaries and borders we typically build? What if, in those moments, the possibility exists that those who are not "there" actually are there warming themselves by the fire? What if, rather than being alone in the Alaskan wilds without fuel, with physical and mental loss pressing in, my dad and his brother are surrounded by family? What if the felt truth is the actual truth?

Or maybe I am just wishing it had been so. Maybe Jerry doesn't feel grace in the dissolving line between fact and fiction but rather experiences the swirling hysteria that must accompany the declining grip on reality. Maybe when he says "I know, I just forgot," he is really wishing with all his heart to stand firmly on the banks of reality.

I will not know that I am pregnant for several weeks. Only Aidan will know of his existence and then only in a cellular way. That I could be inhabited by another without my knowledge unnerves me. Hormones busily make preparations for my body to do what it has never been taught but must somehow now do, and I open another carton of milk for my breakfast cereal. In my journal I worry that friends no longer like me, that I am getting nothing done this summer, that I want to back out of a conference in September, that I should call my mom but don't. All the while an egg is waiting and a favorite uncle dying.

When I look back at these journal entries years later, days when I know my dad was fighting to stay alive, I am at first embarrassed by what fills the page. Though I could not know of the miracles happening around me, I wish I had been less concerned about the mundane and more outwardly focused. I find it hard to imagine that I could write several lines about the inadequacy of my pen and the failures of an eight-week-old puppy. But recently I have begun to see these pages as a kind of tether, a line connecting me to these ordinary moments in my past, allowing me to recover what would typically have been left to fade. On July 14, 2003, hormones releasing, my father fighting, and my uncle failing, I worried about taking our new puppy running. To have left this

moment unwritten would have severed the only connection I have to a day in my life where the world split open without my notice.

Day three is, my dad writes with typical understatement, a difficult day. By late morning, Jerry can no longer stand upright. As long as he keeps walking, he can remain erect, but as soon as he stops moving, he falls into the river, into the raft, onto the rocks on the shore. The Alatna is painfully dry. My dad and uncle continue to line the 15-foot Avon down the shallows and over the sand and gravel bars, heaving their belongings, wishing for more water. Rain falls. Granitic rock formations appear in the far distance, holding court above the U-shaped valley where nothing grows above a foot. There are only tussocks, sedge, and the occasional willow, beaten low by a wind that hammers the landscape. Every now and then, an eagle flies overhead, a herd of caribou flees their approach, the rains desist for a minute, then the sky opens.

Every now and then, my uncle asks where they are and where everyone else is. When this happens, my dad responds, "Jerry, we are in the middle of Alaska going down the Alatna and there are only two of us."

Only two.

Only two days ago, all was right in the world. Two years ago, the signs of Parkinson's were less apparent. Two decades ago, Jerry and my dad were in the prime of life, building shuttles that could return to earth and writing treaties dictating how the world should act in time of war. Two score ago, they were getting married, finishing school, taking road trips to Florida to see the alligators. Only two.

More falling. One moment my dad looks up and Jerry isn't there. Beaching the raft, he goes in search of his brother only to find him near the shoreline, soaking wet; gloves, glasses, hat missing. He has been looking for my mother in the cotton grass. She has been gone so long. Time bends like the river. Now and then, here and there, near and far move closer together. I am at home writing in my journal an entry that will forever root me to this day long after the day has passed, the egg that will become my son knits into my body either to grow or to perish, and over a campfire the night before, my dad and his brother bring us onto the river in the stories they tell.

Though he only admits "real concern" at this point, there must be terror for my father. He is 200 miles from a city of any size with a brother who is gradually leaving him. He searches for the missing gloves and hat and then abandons the search. Who knows what the river might have taken? Is it at this point, I wonder, surrounded by acres of tundra, with so much missing, that he remembers a conversation he had had with Jerry shortly after the Parkinson's diagnosis? Knowing that the disease would leave him bedridden and imprisoned in a body that had once been able to bushwhack through the Rockies for miles without rest, Jerry asked his younger brother to make sure he died in the natural world. When the time came, help him find a cliff, a valley, a bottomless river, a final ceiling out of sky. Using the raft to steady Jerry's failing body and guiding both down a river that has grown steadily in the rain and the lower elevation, perhaps my father turns to the now clear sky and considers what he is being asked to do.

They set up camp, my dad erecting Jerry's tent, and eat a cold dinner. The lighters and the waterproof matches had been soaked during the day's struggles and would not light. Somehow the plastic bag had been left open. My dad does not have to write that Jerry was in charge of these things. More than 10 years of backpacking with my family tells me that Jerry held the matches. He was the one who made the fire, cooked the food, called us from our tents when the sun was just beginning to chase away the morning chill. He was the one who chose the routes, found the campsite, told us how close to the river we could pitch our tents. He was the one who held the map, named the stars, and warned us repeatedly about the three greatest threats in wilderness backpacking: lightning, sunstroke, and falling.

Day Four. Jerry can no longer speak. His voice is a whisper, words slurring together. They decide over breakfast that they are in real trouble and need to head to Lake Takahula for help, a journey of 60 miles. Two retired school teachers live in a remote cabin in the woods near the lake with their dog and a satellite phone, information handed to my father and Jerry with their fishing licenses and now more precious than fuel.

This, then, is the way things are. My dad writes, "Jerry was gone part of the time." In these moments, he is utterly alone.

The last time I had seen my uncle was only a week or so before the Alaska trip. We had had a Sinor Family Reunion in Grand Island, Nebraska. My dad's younger brother, Keith, lives on a lake and the family gathered for a weekend of swimming and boating and beach picnics. The entire family was there, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters, sweating under the Midwestern sun while the black flies bit our ankles.

On the first morning of the reunion, I took a picture of my uncle and his family, the camera holding what would soon be lost. They were dressed in blue and stood in the shade. It is the intimacy of that moment, their bodies touching at the elbows, our eyes meeting through the lens, that I remember. All of us, for a fraction of time, holding the pose and each other.

Jerry was very thin. While his no-fat diet gave his prostate cancer little to invade, it left his body with little to live on. Each time I saw him, his belt was cinched tighter and his clothes hung more loosely from his limbs. Yet, he seemed strong. We all said so, watching him play badminton. Yes, we assured ourselves, he was well despite the drugs, the treatments, the long slide to immobility that is Parkinson's.

When the thunderstorm came, we all ran for the garage, carrying beach chairs and leftover food—all of us except Jerry. He headed in the opposite direction, to the lake, where waves were competing with each other to touch the sky. We saw him push off from the boat dock on the Jet Ski and ride to the center of the lake, where he whirled in tight circles as the lightning and the thunder began. We only pointed. Rain hit the tin roof like hail, making it impossible to hear one another. In my mind's eye, he raises his fist to the storm and transgresses, for a moment, his own mortality. He demands participation in life. He will not remain offstage for the drama. The lightning does not strike him down, and he grows in my eyes.

Remembering how this once thick man rode a Jet Ski like a weapon a week before he died, I recall also a moment of vulnerability in a small hotel near Lake Titicacca, our final day in Peru. We were all there: my brother, his wife, my mom and dad, Michael, my aunt, Jerry, his daughter and her husband, a group that typically fished together every summer, now staying in a motel that bordered the world's highest navigable lake. Because Jerry wanted to see Machu Picchu before he died, we spent our frequent flyer miles, hired a guide to take us on the Inca Trail, and found ourselves a year before his death exploring the city of Cuzco,[1] the bellybutton of the world.

It was an amazing trip, but tiring, tiring for all of us—the altitude, the constant travel, the food, the water. We were weathered. On the last day, we were gathering our suitcases and backpacks one last time. Ivan, our guide, was trying to hustle us out of the hotel and into the van to Lima and our flight home. There was a chance we would miss the plane. The commotion—11 adults trying to get organized and into a van, some leaving that night, others the next day—filled the tiny lobby of the hotel and bounced against the low ceiling and narrow door. Amidst the chaos, Jerry came into the lobby, unsteady like a child, eyes wide in alarm. "Ivan, Ivan," he said, his voice matching the shakiness of his limbs, "I have lost my tickets."

We stopped, all of us, bags half-zipped, water bottles dangling at our sides, and looked to Jerry—the man whose knowledge and experience had seemed as boundless as space itself—willing him with our eyes not to reveal himself. Please, I thought, please do not show me this tender part of your belly. I do not want to know that you are anything except what you have ever been. I do not want you to be anything but whole.

Day four still. Afternoon. 67°44' north latitude. The GPS places them, roots them to a locatable spot on the spinning globe, but they are far from motionless. They start the raft down a narrow chute. Rainfall, permafrost, and the many small creeks that run into the Alatna have conspired to create a torrent. Water rushes them headlong down the river, sweepers leaning like animals of prey, ready to pull them from the raft and send them into the roiling water. When they turn the corner and see the giant shale outcrop, a wall of rock that cuts across the chute, they can do nothing but slam into it. The raft buckles and climbs the wall; my dad, in front, is thrown out of the raft and pulled under the outcrop. Somehow the raft, too, goes under or around or over. No one knows. When my dad comes up for air, Jerry and the raft are also on the other side.

The bottom of the raft has been shredded, but miraculously neither my dad nor Jerry is seriously injured. They decide to camp for the night while they try to repair the raft with duct tape. Jerry repeatedly suggests that they just walk to the car and go home. Unable to stand at all, Jerry gathers wood on his hands and knees in hopes of building a fire to warm my father.

That night Jerry insists that they find their location on the GPS. My dad argues, seeing no point in knowing their longitude when their only choice is to

1. Machu Picchu, Inca site built in the fifteenth century; Cuzco, a city in southeastern Peru.

head south on the river, but Jerry will not surrender the point. Finally, my dad agrees and they find the coordinates of the camp.

I wonder at Jerry's insistence. Is it, in a sense, the final act of caretaking in a life dedicated to securing the safety of others, of making sure there is order in the world before leaving it? Or is it because he feels at some deep level that a final resting place should be a known place, a place that holds itself, in its specificity, its repeatability, against the vastness that is the Alaskan wilds, the vastness of the universe? Or is it because his mind, cast to sea, unable to latch onto anyone or anything long enough to recover rationality, holds the GPS like a flotation device, willing the linear to return? For whatever reason, Jerry insists, and because of his insistence, we, as a family, will be able to return someday to that shore, to those willows, to those rocks, and stand in the thicket where he lay down to die.

My dad gets Jerry ready for bed, dressing him in his long johns and tucking him into his sleeping bag, as he had done for me as a child, perhaps as Jerry had once done for him. Hours later, from his own tent, my dad hears Jerry struggling with the zipper on his tent. "What are you doing?" he asks. And Jerry responds that he wants to try his new fly line. The first coherent words in more than a day. My dad takes them as a sign that the new Parkinson's drugs are kicking in. "Go to bed," he says. And this time, when my dad lies down to sleep, it is the sleep of release. Things will be okay, he tells himself. The drugs are working.

In the early morning hours of July 15, my dad hears Jerry struggle again with the zipper on his tent. When he goes over and asks Jerry what he is doing, Jerry responds, "What are you doing here?" My dad repeats the question; Jerry repeats the answer. Unlike all the other times in which my dad has explained that they are in the middle of Alaska trying to get home and Jerry has responded that he knows but has just forgotten, this time Jerry never returns to the here. He remains there, wherever there is, and wonders what my dad is doing at his side.

When the sun comes up the next day, Jerry has disappeared.

My dad spends two hours looking for him, following his footprints, worrying that he tried to go fishing and has been pulled into the Alatna. But fishing was not what Jerry had in mind. Jerry's boot tracks lead north and west of their tents, meandering for close to 50 yards, until they stop near the river. By following his trail, my father finds his brother curled up like a baby in a thicket of willows some yards from the river. Jerry has been careful to lie down next to the willows rather than on them, sharing the ground, choosing a place. Sometime in the night he had reached into his dry bag, to the very bottom, and put on his "going home" clothes, the clean shirt and pants meant for the plane ride back. Earlier in the evening, he could not zip his tent. Now he had laced his own boots. Clothes clean, no sign of a fall or struggle, he is holding a small branch in his hand, holding it like you might a walking stick.

My dad, who must serve simultaneously as brother, oarsman, and priest, blesses the land and loads the boat. In this story, the heroes do not live to see another day. I know my father well enough to know that such an ending is unacceptable.

Jerry was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1995. The following August my extended family backpacked in the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness of Colorado. It was the first backpacking trip since Jerry's diagnosis and the first since my divorce. Loss, it seems, is democratic.

That we would both carry on with our lives was never a question. His illness and my failed marriage did not even warrant conversation. No one said anything to either of us. We hiked, fished, and ate as we always had. Around the campfire we talked about books, or legal questions, or politics, or what the fish seemed to be biting this year. At times I wanted to scream, hold out my emptiness like an amputated limb and demand it be acknowledged, but instead I stirred the soup in my cup and waited for it to cool.

On the last day, we were breaking camp for the final climb out to the cars. Everyone was busy stuffing backpacks, filtering water, or laying ground cloths in the sun to dry. My aunt and I were folding the tent that I had shared in the past with my husband. We were absorbed in one of the greatest pleasures of backpacking—the economy with which you travel, the fact that each thing has its own place—and all seemed fine.

I looked over at Jerry who was busy attending to his own possessions and those of the community. He looked as he had always looked. But then so did I. To anyone else, we were the same as ever. I walked over to him.

What I said was, "I am sorry that you have Parkinson's." What I meant was thank you for taking me into the natural world and showing me how mountains rest their tired bodies against one another and rivers scrape out plains the size of entire states, how meteors return like swallows every year in August to flash across the sky and wildflowers fill valleys so that you can no longer see the trail. What I meant was that I hoped he would find peace, that he would always be able to recognize himself, that he would not be in pain. What I meant was that I felt like I was a failure because John had left me, that sometimes when I sat very still on my couch at home, loneliness suffocated me, that I could not understand how things would ever feel okay again. What I meant was that I was scared. What I meant was that I would bear witness to his loss in hopes that he would bear witness to mine.

After getting my uncle's body into the raft, my dad pushes off. For 60 miles, he would be thrown from the raft some 30 or 40 times, each time fearing he would lose the raft, his brother's body, his only way home. Sandbars would catch him and roll his body across their stretches, wearing holes in his neoprene waders and gloves and plunging him repeatedly into ice-cold water. A night and a day would pass. Finally, after wandering for miles in the woods, he would find the cabin with the satellite phone.

About pushing off from the site where Jerry died, my dad writes, "By luck, not by plan, Jerry was facing me for the rest of the trip." With no one else to talk to and a river that seemed to wish them gone, my father turns one last time to his brother for support and begins to talk. For close to two days, he paddles, swims, climbs, falls, and tells stories. Perhaps, he recalls moments from their childhood: throwing rocks over the barn, swimming in the irrigation ditch, the taste of tomatoes fresh from the vine. Perhaps, he thanks Jerry for going to

college and showing him and his siblings another way of being in the world, a life different from anything my father had imagined while inoculating pigs and driving the tractor through the corn. Perhaps, he describes the scenery as they move from tundra into boreal forests, into the winking greens of the white and black spruce. I know he sang songs, and I know my father well enough to know that when he forgot the words to "Tom Dooley" or "John Henry,"[2] he made them up, fanciful songs about heroes and lovers and trains that go all night. I know my father told Jerry he loved him.

In his journal he writes, "We talked," blurring once again the boundary between here and there. And for this I am grateful. Because when I think of what my father went through, what it would have been like to make the trip to Takahulu, the only comfort I can take is in knowing my father had company. As he had several nights before over the campfire, my dad brings all of us onto the raft, a raft on which Jerry is not dead and they are not alone. Weaving together stories of the past, he creates a net that holds all of us, a net that carries him to safety, to home.

The morning my father arrives at Lake Takahulu, I write in my journal that I am going rafting in two days down the Snake River. Worried that the time away from my desk is time poorly spent, I imagine writing an essay about the experience, what it is like to float down a river that begins in the mountains and runs to the sea. Mostly I complain about the dog and how easily I am distracted by household projects. Still, this is the last entry I make before I learn of Jerry's death, the last recorded narrative of what my life was like when Jerry was alive, my father whole, and my son the size of a period.

I like to imagine that at the very moment Jerry died, my son Aidan was conceived, so that for the briefest moment, the past, present, and future stood together and recognized one another. I like to imagine that the suffering my dad experienced, pain that has haunted him every day since his return, is measured out among us, so that we all carry part of the burden. I like to imagine that the stories I tell here, like the stories my dad told me as a child and the ones he recited as a way to remain sane on the river, have the power to reach across distance and time and death to connect me to him, and him to Jerry, and Jerry to Aidan. Jerry can no longer tell his story and I must carry Aidan's for him until he is older. Someday he will carry mine and I will tell my father's and loss will be found in language.

2. "Tom Dooley," folk song based on the execution of Tom Dula, who was convicted of Laura Foster's 1866 murder in Wilkes County, North Carolina; "John Henry," folk song based on the legend of John Henry, believed to have competed against a steam-powered hammer in erecting a railroad, winning the competition but dying of exhaustion with his hammer still in his hand.

QUESTIONS

1. Jennifer Sinor's essay brings together seeming opposites, such as life and death, memory and loss of memory, past and present. What other opposites does Sinor write about? Locate specific places in the essay where you identify these opposites.

2. Sinor uses both her own journals and her father's journals to reconstruct the events about which she writes. How does her use of journals help her accomplish her purpose in this essay?

3. In this essay, Sinor uses rhetorical questions (see, for example, paragraphs 16 and 25). What is the effect of her use of questions? Why do you think she uses them?

4. Sinor uses different typefaces to separate descriptive sections about others and reflective sections about herself. Write an essay in which you use a similar format to do the same.