

**Teresa Jordan Keynote Address  
National Cowboy Poetry Gathering 1991**

**Transcription**

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**Hal Cannon:** I'd like to introduce to you now our keynote speaker. Teresa Jordan is a woman that I met in 1982. We were both on a faculty of a conference called Inventing the West at Sun Valley, Idaho, and it was there that I heard her speak in a very articulate voice about ranch women in the West. She had just released a book which was an extremely successful book, and there's been many books that followed that were really born out of the kernel of her idea. The book *Cowgirls* is currently out of print, but will be republished soon.

Teresa is not a stranger to ranching; she grew up on her family ranch in the Iron Mountains of southeastern Wyoming. She's been a fulltime writer for a long time. Since then she has taught writing at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. She now lives in Portland, Oregon, and she's someone that I just like being around. She's got a great mind and a wonderful heart, and I'd like to introduce her to you – Teresa Jordan.

[audience applauds]

**Teresa Jordan:** The only problem with such a nice introduction is you have to follow it. As Hal said, I live in Portland, Oregon, now, but I grew up in Iron Mountain, Wyoming, and I really do feel that, that my roots are there. I still feel – let me get settled up here – I still feel very much a part of that culture. I'm very lucky to have grown up inside that culture. I was out at the Spring Creek Elementary School yesterday. Some of us from the Gathering have been going out there and doing some stuff with the kids, and they've been writing all sorts of poems themselves, and some of those poems are up on the wall. One poem by a young lady said she had "roots on her boots," and she had this lovely little drawing of boots with little roots coming down from it, and I think I have roots on my boots and they go all the way back to Wyoming. It will always be deeply ingrained in that soil.

I think probably that the smartest thing that I've done in my life so far is choose my parents right, because if I hadn't grown up with the parents I had I would not have probably grown up on a ranch. And I loved having the chance to grow up tied to the environment, tied to the seasons, to have the chance to work with animals and work with the land. Work inside something which Wendell Berry calls "home economy," where – one thing I like so much about ranching life is that you don't, your job isn't outside of your home. Your job is your home, and the whole family is involved with it, and I think it's a wonderful way to grow up.

Another thing I really liked about growing up in that culture was the chance to grow up in a storytelling culture. And we lived far out – we were fifty miles from Cheyenne. Chugwater was closer – it was twenty-six miles – but the road was so bad that it seemed like it was further away. We always sort of pointed toward Cheyenne. Our closest neighbor was two miles away. We didn't have telephone, we didn't have TV, we got a telephone later – TV never came in very well out there. But you told stories to pass the time, and you told stories for entertainment, you told stories as a way of being together. You'd tell stories when you're riding to a distant pasture, or on the pickup on the way to town, when you gathered with friends in the evening and maybe played some cards.

One of my favorite times for stories was when my father would sharpen knives. And he was like most cowboys – he had a thing about a good, sharp knife. He was almost obsessed with it, really. And we'd come home sometimes from school, and Dad would be in the mood to sharpen knives and he'd get all the knives together. He'd get all that he could find – the skinning knives and the butcher knives and all of my mother's kitchen knives and all our pocket knives, and he'd cover the kitchen table, the old oak table, with newspapers and get out the sharpening stone and the three-in-one oil and arrange these knives in order of decreasing size, and Mom would make some coffee and make some cocoa for us kids and we'd sit down and that's when the stories would begin.

My dad might tell a story about the time he roped a wildcat. He [was] just out of college then and he was riding a green broke horse. And he'd start out and he'd say, "You know, I was just getting this horse used to the rope. I was flicking this rope around his ears, down around his forelegs, under his tail, casting at twigs and sagebrush. Came through a little stand of scrub pine and I looked up in a tree and here was this bobcat looking down at me. And I wasn't really thinking. I thought, 'I'll just scare that cat and just pop the rope at it.' Darned if I didn't catch it. Only lucky loop I ever had in my whole long life."

[audience laughs]

And Dad would go back, you know, start concentrating on his sharpening again, looking at that blade on stone, then he'd look up at us over the wire rims of his glasses and he'd say, "You know, I was tied hard and fast to the saddle horn. Now everybody knows that you never tie hard and fast to the saddle horn on a green broke horse. I knew that you never tie hard and fast to the saddle horn on a green broke horse. To this day I don't know why it was tied hard and fast to the saddle horn on a green broke horse, but there it was, and that cat was mad as seven hundred dollars and he was coming up the rope to me." And then he'd go back to sharpening, you know, and he'd look at that blade up in the light like he could see how sharp it was, and he'd lick the hairs on the back of his hand and shave them with that newly razored edge.

And my brother and I, we'd be sitting on the edge of our seats. It didn't matter that we'd heard this story before, that we'd heard it many times before. We'd be sitting on the edge of our seats and we'd say, "Well, Dad! What happened?!" And he'd set down that knife, you know, and he'd pick up another and sort of look at it, and just lazily start to sharpening it, and acting like, you know, he didn't, he'd completely forgotten he was telling a story. He was thinking about something else. And then finally he'd look up

and he'd say, "Well, I cut that rope." And he'd gesture with that knife and we could almost hear that rope held taught in our imaginations pop as he cut through it.

And then he'd look back down to the stone and he'd say, "You know, it was a brand new rope, too."

[audience laughs]

There were other stories. There's this story about the old fat cook who worked for us for a number of years and she always carried a pistol in her apron pocket. And she came from sort of harsh people, you might say. Her son was sent to prison, he killed his step-dad, when his step-daddy tried to make him take a bath. And she was sort of the same, same ilk. You didn't mess around with her too much. But one year, the hay crew, one fellow on the hay crew didn't really like the food very well and he started complaining about it, and she really didn't say anything the first night, and stood it the second. About the third time he complained about the food, she wasn't really much of a woman for words, but she just sort of very quietly walked up behind him where he was sitting at the table and took that pistol out of her pocket and put that cool barrel on the back of his neck, and said, "Now, you eat that. And you tell me that's good." He did. "Yes, ma'am, that's very good. I – Good food. Thank you very much." That was a line in our family. "You eat that and tell me it's good."

Then there was a time that my father took a load of cattle up to Montana – a semi load – and he had a flat on an inside dual tire. He was scrambling around under the truck trying to get it changed and all the cows in the truck cued up and they just sort of came around and took turns piddling on his head.

[audience laughs]

My brother and I liked that story. Now these stories were entertaining and any one of you out there has grown up with dozens of stories just like it. They're entertaining, but you know, they're also instructional. They tell us how to live our lives on both a literal and a metaphorical way. We learn not to throw a rope at a wildcat unless you really wanted to catch it. We learn not to complain about the food, especially when it was free. And we learned that some things in life really aren't very pleasant, but you do what you have to and go on. I love those stories and I love the chance to be instructed by them. But a few years ago I began to realize something about those stories, and that's that those stories were almost always about men. And they were almost always told by men. The storytelling culture was really primarily a male culture. We listened to these stories but we didn't necessarily tell them. There were exceptions, of course, but for the most part that was true.

There were stories about women like about that, that old cook, but the stories that were about women tended to be about outlaw women – women who were in one way or another sort of beyond the pale. They weren't really the stories of ordinary women in their ordinary lives, which usually when you get into the detail of it tend to be pretty extraordinary in the telling. We just weren't telling those stories. We had a sense of the West as a very male place. Even as recently as 1976, a major textbook on the West was

published that listed the names of only three women in its index. It had a little section on family in the West that ran for all of about two pages.

But since that time, over the last decade, decade and a half, we've really begun to realize, to miss these stories and realize that they haven't been told. And we have been going back to look for them and retrieve them. There's been a tremendous amount of effort out of the universities to do this, so historians and folklorists, sociologists, anthropologists. But there's been a tremendous effort among writers and cowhands, among poets and filmmakers, among all of us who live out here in the West, and care about it. There's just really been a, a tremendous effort to go back and find these stories and understand them. And I think that we're doing this because we really need these stories.

The Skatchet Indians, a Northwest tribe, a storytelling culture, also believe that it's very important that you tell a story right. Even an acculturated Skatchet will be very careful when they tell a story that they tell it truly, that they tell it right, that they tell it whole. You don't just forget something and make it up as you go along. And they believe if you don't tell the story true, that it will actually damage your audience, if there is someone out there, if there's a pregnant woman out there, it may make her miscarry her baby, or her baby may be deformed, because the story was deformed. The other people in the audience will have their lives literally shortened by not telling the stories right. Not telling them fully. And of course, we're talking here about those deep tribal myths that shape the sense of the tribe and who they are. But I think much is true of the way we tell our stories, too. If we don't know these stories, we learn from stories, we live our lives by stories, and if we don't have all the stories we need, it may not shorten our lives, but it may make them a good deal harder.

As we've been searching for these stories and hearing the stories that other people have found, I've, my, my work is very much based on those, and I'll just share some of those stories with you. One – there's a story of a woman by the name of Abigail Malick, and I learned about her in a book *Far From Home*, written by Lillian Schlissel, Byrd Gibbens, and Elizabeth Hampsten. And Abigail Malick went out to the Oregon Territory with her people in, with her family in the late 1840s, and in *Far From Home* are some letters that she wrote back to the states, to her family back in the states.

A couple of these letters so affected me, that I made a poem out of them. And this is really – it's a free verse poem, it's really found poetry, because almost every line of this poem comes directly out of a letter that she wrote back home, including the repetitions and the use of language, and it was just such a beautiful thing I just, I needed to work with it a little bit. And this poem I titled with a line out of a letter, which is *My Oh Dear Children, I Wish You Were Here*.

*I never shall see any of you anymore.  
And you never shall see Hiram anymore.  
He went a-swimming in the Platte, a-swimming  
And he drowned in the Platte.  
He swum across the river, across the fast broad river.  
He swum until he couldn't swim anymore.*

*And the young men cried, "Oh, Hiram! Oh, swim!"*

*And Hiram said, "I can not swim any more."  
And the young men cried, "Oh, Hiram! Do swim!"  
And Hiram cried, "Oh, God! I can not swim anymore."*

*One boy took a branch and started to swim to him  
The river ran too fast  
The young men said, "Oh, Hiram, Oh, swim!"  
And Hiram said so loud it reached the bank,  
"Oh, Lord, Jesus, receive my soul, for I am not anymore."*

*So now you know. You need not ask about him anymore.  
It will not do you any good to trouble us about him anymore.*

I think one reason that we haven't told the stories of women is because some of those stories were so sad, is really so painful. I think that those stories couldn't be told at the time people were living so close to the edge, that they felt if they talked about them, they wouldn't have the courage they needed to go on. This letter that Abigail Malick wrote back to her family, so wrote it in 1850, but Hiram died in 1848. She had waited for two years to tell this story at all; and then when she told it she didn't want to talk about it anymore. "So now you know/you need not ask about him anymore/it will not do you any good to trouble us about him anymore." The story was not told.

And I think that at that point, we began not telling the stories of women's lives, because women were really the keepers of family. It was, and to a degree that I think it's hard for us to understand now, as we were traveling, as we were going out on the transcontinental trails, the roles between men and women were very much defined. Women ended up doing a tremendous amount of quote-unquote "male work," but their role in the family was to be the keeper of the family. Really with industrialization, as men had left the home to go out and work for pay, where before the family at home had been a, been a, a responsibility of both men and women, when men left the home to work for pay, the home and family became the responsibility of women, and it became a responsibility they took very close, very, very keenly. They were really the keeper of the family's stories; and when it was too painful to tell the family stories, I think we began to lose some of them.

I'll tell another little story here, and I think this story really is apocryphal, but it's illustrative, so I'll pass it on because it, um...A little girl was helping her mother cook Christmas dinner, and she said to her mother, "Mom, why do you always cut the ends off the ham before you put it in the oven?" And her mother said, "Well, you know, I don't know why, to tell you the truth. My mother always did it that way. We'll ask her when she comes."

So Grandma comes for Christmas dinner and the little girl says, "Grandma, why y'all, why'd you always cut the ends off the ham?" And Grandma says, "Well, I don't know. My mother always did it that way." So then they go to the rest home, and they pick up the great-grandmother and get her settled in the car to take her for Christmas dinner, and they all want to know, "Now why did you cut the ends off the ham?" And she sort of laughed, and she said, "Well, I only had one pan and it was too small. The ham wouldn't fit in it otherwise."

[audience laughs]

Well, you know, we learn these things. We learn these things, and we pass them down generation to generation, and sometimes we don't even know why we keep doing it the same way. We don't, we have a bigger pan, but we don't know that that we don't have to cut the ends off the ham anymore, and I think that that's true with some of these stories that we haven't told. It's, we can tell them now, we have a big enough pan for them, and I think we really need to tell them, if we want, if we don't want to damage our audience, and damage ourselves by not knowing them.

I'll tell you another little story and this was a story that my great aunt Marie told me. She was, my great aunt Marie grew up on the ranch where I was raised. She was a Jordan, and then she married John Bell and they ranched about ten miles away, out in the Iron Mountain country. I was very close to her and she really was, she was one of those women, all she ever wanted in her whole life was just to work outside with cattle and horses and the land. She told me a story, when she was a little girl about a woman who lived up in the hills behind our ranch, Mrs. Steele. And when Marie was very young one time, Mrs. Steele came down to the ranch, and to talk to Marie's father, and she said, "Mr. Jordan, you have got to help me. My husband has gone stark-raving mad. He has a rifle, and I'm afraid he's going to kill me." So my great grandfather went with Mrs. Steele back up to her ranch, and, and Mr. Steele had gone mad. So somehow or another they got him subdued and took him to town and he never recovered from that. He was in an institution the rest of his life, and Mrs. Steele ranched alone for many years. She could have left the ranch, but she didn't, she chose to stay there. And she was on a, on horseback one time, a horse fell on her and broke her arm badly, and the arm – they didn't set them too well in those days – and the arm never healed right. And she had long hair, she had a long braid, but she couldn't really comb it right anymore, because her arm didn't work right, so she cut her hair off just like a man's.

And that story always touched me. I just thought, it just really moved me, and to how she would do that, how she would choose to keep on with that life, even though it, it meant the loss of a lot of things, and you know, it's an important story then. It's really the same story as the story with the cattle truck and all those cows cuing up – life is hard sometimes, but you do want you want to and go on. But of course it's a deeper story than the cattle truck, because it's really talking about when you lose those things that are very most important to you.

You know, Mrs. Steele was so vivid to me. She died long before I was born, but I could see her with her crippled arm and her hair cut short like a man's, and I really thought I knew the whole story of her, but lately I have been going through some family papers. Some family papers have come into my possession, and I ran across some talks that my great-grandmother Jordan, Marie's mother, had given to women's clubs; she belonged to a lot of women's clubs. And in them, she referred to an incident with Mrs. Steele, and she actually talked about it in two different talks and she talked about it in two slightly different ways. And I'll read those to you because I think they are instructive, and I think the difference between them is. And she was talking to the women's club, and sort of some of these things you would normally talk to women's club about, and telling about her first horseback ride, and this is how she wrote it the first time:

*I went to Mrs. Steele's to spend a night while John went on twenty miles further to buy some cattle. It was nine miles for me to ride. It was March and very cold and the wind blew and was a real blizzard. Plenty of snow on the ground. I was very tired and cold when we arrived at noon. Mrs. Steele had a delicious meal waiting for us, then John went on. It was an awful night; the coyotes howled all night. I was sure John would never get back alive, but after two days, he got back and we started home.*

It's a, it's a little story. Then sometime later she wrote it again and this is how she wrote it that time, and it's really, it's the same story, but it's different:

*After John left, a perfect blizzard came up. I was afraid John might be out in it and couldn't sleep. The coyotes howled close to the house. Mrs. Steele had just lost her husband and was very upset also. Her walls were papered with magazine covers and the picture near my face was men shooting, and women and men drinking and fighting. Mrs. Steele had a long, dark nightgown, and she walked the floor all night. I'd never seen a dark nightgown before. She kept the light on and all in all, it was a very long, hard night, and I was frightened. Two days later, John got back and everything was alright.*

It's really a very different picture, these two women alone in the night and they're both just scared to their deepest heart, and Mrs. Steele is pacing and can't sleep or turn out the light, because she's just lost her husband.

I thought I knew the story of Mrs. Steele and how she'd accommodated to the loss of her arm, but I realized there in this story, there're so many more mysteries. How did she go through that hard time? Why did she choose to stay on the ranch? What was her tie to the land that made it so powerful for her that she would? And I think as we, in finding those stories, we may never be able to retrieve her, but hopefully from our families, we can retrieve others. We get some real clues of how to come through some hard times of our own.

You know, for a long time, really up until the last few years, where, women were talked about; they were talked about in very idealized ways and very generalized ways, and Dee Brown wrote – and this is such a good quotation, I'll pass it on to you – that “the women attracted little attention individually, but as a mass maternal force, their power was unmatched in the domestication process that transformed the wild frontiersmen into ordinary, placid citizens.”

You know, the thing about stories, is that stories about real people, that are about individual people with individual details in their lives, and quirks and strengths and weaknesses and eccentricities. And that's really not a story. What is a mass maternal force? How do you tell your little girl to be a mass maternal force when she grows up? And what does it mean to us as we're measuring ourselves, and all we have to, to guide us is some sort of vague vision of some mass maternal force out there who knew how to do things. I think this, this gets, this comes down to us through the stories of the prairie Madonna, which is a very generalized person, or the backbone of the West, or this sort of clichéd sense of the ranch wife. These were women who went through real hard times,

but came out on top. It doesn't give us much specifically about them. We can't picture them individually. We have no idea what it really meant.

In this first, the first time my great-grandmother wrote about Mrs. Steele, how she made a big, made a good meal and it was a hard night but they sort of made it through, it's sort of the mass maternal force at work. I mean, it was hard but we made it through. But you don't have any idea of what it meant or how they did it. And in this second writing you get a vision of two women alone in the middle of the night, struggling very hard and we get a sense then of what it means to come through something like that.

I said that we need these stories and I think we do, because I think we, we'll all, we may not – these are extreme stories Mrs. Malick and Mrs. Steele, they're extreme losses that they had, and our lives may not seem so extreme and yet we face the very same sort of losses in our lives even now. We do have that deepest, hardest I think of all losses, people lose children, and it's the hardest loss to endure. It's a very the hard loss for the family to make it through. In fact, when, in families where there is a loss of a child, eighty percent of those marriages can't survive it.

There's, there are things that we can learn from these early stories that may help us when we have those very drastic losses themselves, and while most of us will never be as alone as Mrs. Steele is, the truth is that women end up alone. The average age of a widow is fifty-six years old. Eighty-five percent of all surviving spouses are women, and there's very little chance of remarriage. There's some, but not a lot. After the age, over the age of sixty-five, for every one single man, there are nine single women. So most women do end up alone, and it's important we understand what it means, and we understand how these people made good lives, triumphed in that, and found humor and, and strength and ability to go on. And of course women aren't the only ones who end up alone; men do too, and I think it's often harder for them because it is rare. There are even fewer stories that, that help us with that.

But you know, we don't need these stories just for these, these biggest losses, either. They can inform us – it's a quiet, sometimes a very quiet, informal stories that give us the most we need to know what, how to live our own lives in invaluable ways. You know, there's, there's no question now that the family is in danger and that they're very hard times now for families. The majority of marriages don't survive. I was reading a comment from a psychologist in a, *The Oregonian* the other day who said, "You know, with the divorce statistics these days, it might just save you a lot of time and trouble if you just find somebody you hate and give them your house."

[audience laughs]

And in ranching, there's even more at stake, because it's not just a family that breaks up and it's not just a house that breaks up, it can be a whole way of life. Family dynamics are so important, they really haven't been talked about very much in, in the history of the West, and yet, if the family doesn't work well, it's hard for things to be very successful. And you know, and there's, but people have been, are so displaced from the land, where it's such a struggle to keep on to a, to keep hold of a family place. So many people are having to leave the cowboying professions, and there's so many reasons for that. There's so many economic reasons, there are reasons of taxation, there're reasons of cattle prices, there are reasons of harsh weather, high interest rates in all the

West. But if you look hard enough, every time someone's displaced from the land – not every time, but often when someone's displaced from the land – if you look hard enough, somewhere in there there's also this story of a family dynamic. In no means in all cases, but a lot of times, if the family had been able to work in ways that it wasn't able to work, those people might still be on the land.

So some of these smaller, quieter stories are important to us, and I've been writing a lot about my family these last year and year and a half, and looking at my family's stories and trying to learn from them, really go into them and see, get, gather from them what I feel I need to live my life. And I've been thinking a lot about my mother's stories. I grew up so aware of my father's stories. Somebody once told me that when I talked about my father it was drawn in hard, clear lines, but my mother was much less distinct. She was sort of like a Monet – sort of like an Impressionist painting. But I've been going back into her stories and trying to hear them. My mother died when I was twenty, we were very close and it was a great loss. I still miss her. There's so much I'd like to ask her and so much I'd like to share with her. But we were close and she told me a lot, and I realize that a lot of the things she told me give me an awful lot of guidance, even yet. And I'll just tell you one of those stories.

My mother was a, she was a very wise woman. She was very warm and she had, she had a rather irreverent sense of humor. She had, she was satisfied in her life. She was content with who she was and the life that she, the life that she lived. But she hadn't really thought she'd married a rancher. When she met my father in college, he was in officer training, and the first early years of their marriage they were in the service. They both liked the service a lot. My father did not intend to go back to the ranch. He intended to be career Army. But he was a tank commander and he damaged his hearing, he went deaf and there really isn't any future for a deaf officer, so they came back to the ranch. And they came back just as my brother was born and then a year and half later, I came alone.

My mother was quite ill around my mother's birth, and then she was again when I was born. So she was terribly tired, she just wasn't really very well. My brother had been this big, round, happy, laughing, baby, but I was a more difficult baby. I had colic and I just cried all the time; it was very hard to comfort me.

[a baby cries in the audience; Jordan laughs]

It's always great to have illustration for the audience.

[audience laughs]

And I would wake up from my two o'clock feeding and I just wouldn't go back to sleep. I'd just cry and cry and cry. And I wouldn't let my father hold me at all, I just wanted my mother to hold me. So she would walk in the hall in the middle of the night, just walking and walking and walking, and I'd be crying and crying, and finally when she got so tired she couldn't walk anymore, she'd put me down and go downstairs and sit at the kitchen table and have a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

And out in front of the house, about a half mile in front of the house, the railroad runs through and there's no crossing there, it just runs parallel to the road. But there was

a passenger train that would go through at three in the morning. And if – he didn't have to toot his whistle, because it wasn't a crossing, but if he saw the light on in the kitchen, he'd sound that whistle. And my mother would be sitting there sometimes at the table, all alone and that train would go through and the whistle would blow. And she was so lonely at that point. She was out here fifty miles – she hadn't grown up on a ranch, she'd grown up in a small town. She'd never been so far away from other people, she'd never been without a phone. It was a very hard time between her and my father then. They both said it was the one really hard time in their marriage.

And here she was with a child who she couldn't comfort and a husband who she couldn't talk to, in the middle of the night, all alone, fifty miles from town, and that whistle would blow, and you know how lonely a train whistle is. And she really wondered if she could make it through. She really didn't think she was cut out to be a ranch wife, and she thought about leaving, and – of course, this was in the fifties when single mothers weren't very common – but she knew she could get by. She was a pretty capable woman. And I think that if it had really gotten to that that Dad would have left the ranch rather than lose her, because they valued what they had with each other. And then there's a third possibility, too, if she had never come to terms with being out there, and it's something which we've all seen a lot. She could have just sort of disappeared into a sort of depression or bitterness or withdrawal or alcoholism. And it happens in the country; it happens in the city, we've, we all are familiar with it.

But she was sitting there that night, and that train whistle blew and she was feeling a little sorry for herself, and all of a sudden it came to her that if she lived in town and it was three in the morning, she wouldn't even have a train engine to say hello to her. And it was a moment, I think, when things began to change for her, when she began to feel those typical types of connection that you make out there in such isolation sometimes.

It's a very small story, it's a very quiet story. It's not really a story that you tell sitting around the kitchen table sharpening knives, and yet think how many lives hinged on that moment. Of course, it wasn't just that moment, it was a dozen moments like it, or maybe a hundred moments like it before she really became at ease with her life out there. But if she hadn't, think how many lives would have been affected. I would have either grown up in a much more unhappy family, or grown up off the ranch, or even grown up without both my parents, and the same would have been true for my brother. It's a small story, but there's something in there that helps us as we're struggling to make our own families work.

You know, I learned a word, I was introduced to a word a few days, a little while ago, and it's a pretty good word. I'll tell you about it. I teach a course in Portland on the creative process, so I've been doing a lot of reading on creativity. And I read a book by John Briggs titled *Fire and the Crucible*, it's a book about creative genius. He said that one thing about a great mind is that, that a great mind can keep what seems, a lot of what seems like opposites in, in, in the mind at one time. Its come – things don't have to be black and white, there's a certain comfort with ambiguity and with polarities. And great work has this quality to it, and he used a term – he introduced to me a term I'd never heard before, but which I've come to like: *omnivulence*. And what omnivulence is, is that quality in that great piece of work that is more than any one thing. And as an example there's a, the first line out of a Hemingway story in another country – the narrator who's a wounded soldier says, "In the fall, the war was always there, but we did

not go to it anymore.” And that’s a line that has so many different qualities to it. There’s a certain nostalgia in it, there’s a certain relief, there’s a certain irony – it strikes so many different emotional notes in us, and that’s, that’s really what a chord is. A chord is not just one note, it’s more than one, and those really resounding chords that vibrate through our whole bodies are six and eight and ten notes, and a great work of art has that sense of omnivulence.

Another example is the Mona Lisa. The Mona Lisa is probably the one work of art I can mention immediately comes, we immediately all visualize it, we know it so well. And there’s been a lot written about the Mona Lisa’s smile, and Briggs points out it’s really an omnivulent smile, it’s not any one thing, and it’s often described in all these opposites. It’s a, there’s, it’s a saintly smile, it’s a sensual smile, it’s a compassionate smile, it’s a cruel smile – it’s all these things. I think one reason that it lingers for us, that we just, we never quite forget what the Mona Lisa looks like is that it has this great sense of omnivulence.

Certainly lots of the poems that we hear here have that sense of omnivulence, those poems that stay with us over time, and you can think of Bruce Kiskaddon’s *When They Finish Shipping Cattle in the Fall*, or Buck Ramsey’s *Anthem*, they’re poems that strike a lot of notes for us at any one time. Another poem that does that is that lovely poem that we were introduced to by the Australians last year, *Past Carin’*. And I was introduced to it – some of you may well have been aware of it before. And I won’t recite that poem to you because I know it will be recited several times during this Gathering. I’ll just take one chorus out of it. It’s about a woman in the Outback who had faced drought and lost several children and poverty and her husband was away shearing, and she talks about how she’s just grown to be past caring.

*I’ve grown to be past carin’ and past looking up or carin’.  
I’ve pulled three through and buried two since then  
And I’m past carin’.*

And it’s a, it’s a poem when we heard it last year that everyone was deeply affected by, I think it’s lingered for all of us. And of course the ironic thing about that poem was that it wasn’t written by a woman, it was written by a man. And maybe in some ways, it makes sense that it was written by a man – it was written by Henry Lawson – it makes sense that it was written by a man, because I think that as we as women tell our stories, there are a lot of things that we’re afraid to tell, and I think we’re very afraid to complain. I don’t think we want to be seen as complainers, and in some ways *Past Carin’* is really a poem of complaint.

But the reason that it stands for us, and the reason that we don’t just sit there and squirm in our seats as we hear it, is that it’s not just a poem of complaint, it’s an omnivulent poem. It has all these other qualities in it. You see this tremendous strength, you know even as this woman says that she’s past caring, that the very fact that she’s talking about it means that she’s still fighting. And that poem works for us.

And of course there are many women’s poems, too, that have that sense of omnivulence. One poem that has stayed with me from last year’s Gathering was Jody Strand’s poem, *The Hired Man’s Wife*, where she talks about what it’s like to make a home and make a home right, and get a garden planted and get your family settled and

then have to move on, because you're husband's found a better job. Again, it was a poem that worked, because she looked right in the heart of something that is really hard, and found a way to move through it, found a way to talk about it honestly without glossing over it at all. These are poems that don't come out of our sense of what it is to be a mass maternal force; there's nothing much less omnivulent than a mass maternal force. But the real, but when we look real deep into these real stories, detail by detail, and tell the truth of these stories, we get into something way beyond complaint or way beyond blame, we get into this wonderful, omnivulent life, which is what we live.

If we haven't the stories – if we haven't told women's stories, there's another sort of story that we really haven't told, and that's the story of men within the context of family. And I'm happy to see the degree to which we really are beginning to tell those stories, and there was a poem in the Dry Creek Review which just came out by Tom Sharp, *The Round Corral*, which is a poem that moved me very much, and he talked about growing up in a family that was harsh, and how that harshness marked him, and how he had to work through that harshness not to pass it on to his own son. If we need these stories to know how things work, we also need these stories to really look at those things that don't work and get them out in the open so we don't just pass them on generation to generation and keep cutting the ends off the ham.

For the second half of this talk, I'd like to talk, tell some of the stories of the men in my family. I'd like to share with you an essay where I've been – what I'm really am, I'm not a poet and I'm not a speaker, either – but I am an essayist, and so I'd like to sort of illustrate some of the things I've been talking to you...

[break in master cassette]

...titled *Legends*, which is about four generations of men in my family.

My grandfather disliked children and cats. He was a grand old ranch man who pulled his boots on first, and his britches on after, who never went outside without a hat. He chain smoked Camels, pinched between thumb and middle finger, or dangling from the corner of his mouth. Sunny, even my brother and I called him by his nickname, would never have held a smoke like a goddamned dilettante, between two outstretched fingers, and he flicked the butts a good ten yards after stepping them out.

He dressed meticulously in starched khaki shirts, and five-button Levis, pressed to a knife-edge crease. Sunny was crippled up from too many bad horses and too much bad weather. I don't remember ever seeing him ride. I only remember him angry that he couldn't. He sometimes stomped from the house and roared away in his Cadillac to find the hired men and cause some kind of trouble for my dad, but mostly he stayed home and surveyed the ranch from the picture windows of his second floor apartment in the big house.

I learned to count by playing blackjack with Sunny, while the big Siamese slept on his lap. In the summer, if the cat went hunting or I helped outside, my grandfather would scowl around downstairs, "Where's that damn cat?" He'd ask my mother. "Where's that kid?"

I feared my grandfather, but I also loved him. He played fair, and he played often. He wasn't much of a talker. Mostly he chewed on a toothpick and studied his cards. Still,

he taught me necessary lessons. By the time I started school, I knew better than to cut a blackjack deck, touch my cards before the deal was done, or expose my own good fortune with a smile.

Occasionally, he would reminisce, like the time *House of the Rising Sun* came on the old Philco. "I was there once," he said of the Louisiana whore house as gazed out the window. And then, as if he remembered he were with me and not my brother, he flicked his cards abruptly. "Hit me!" He said. I dealt him a queen. He tossed his toothpick in my pile.

Sunny received his nickname, I've been told, from his sunny disposition. By the time I knew him, he was mostly humorless, often angry. I realize now he was also tender, but tenderness embarrassed him, and he disguised it with gruffness. Finally, he grew bitter, and then he grew old.

When I was seven, Sunny had a minor stroke. Soon after, he bought a ranch in Montana. The purchase was a bad decision, but he realized he was coming to the end of his life, and he had not accomplished what he set out to do. He was not the biggest rancher in Wyoming, not in Laramie County, not even on Chugwater Creek. The Montana ranch was a last attempt.

Though he found the necessary financing to gain control of some fifty sections outside Miles City, a ranch nearly as large as the one we already ran at Iron Mountain, the venture overextended us. Drought and several calving seasons where the mercury never climbed over twenty below, left us a hair's breadth from disaster. We nearly lost both ranches. When Sunny asked my father to cosign yet another note, my father refused, unless he also took control. Sunny had no choice, he handed over the reins. We sold the Montana place and hunkered down at home to fend off the bankers. Night after night, I remember waking to hear my father pace in the hall.

In his decline, Sunny bought a stud, a range Thoroughbred, seventeen hands tall, high-withered, Roman-nosed, so mean no one could ride him. The stud ran free on the ranch with a dozen mares, all also unbroken. We wrangled the stud bunch once every two years and Sunny would watch from his bedroom window as we ran them into the corral. We would rope off the yearlings to wean, and the three year olds to break. Before I was old enough to join in the horse breaking, I would stand at the window by my grandfather, listening to him suck down his Camels until he almost singed his fingers, hearing him chuckle as the colt stomped my father, or one of the men into the ground.

The stud's blood made the colts mean. Light-footed in the front, they struck to kill. In a decade, we managed to break only four out of fifty or more. The rest ended up at rodeos, and when they proved too mean to handle there, they ended up as soap.

My grandfather loved that stud, loved the mares, loved the colts no one could break. He loved the thought that he had ridden when he was young tougher colts than stud could ever throw. Through the years, as I watched him watch the colts, he grew older. Bald as a baby, bent-backed, he sometimes dribbled on the khaki shirts he had prided himself all his life on keeping clean.

Sunny died when I was eighteen, and I came home from my freshman year of college for the funeral. At the gravesite, I broke down. Though my outburst shocked that gathering of Westerners bred to never reveal emotion, it surprised no one more than it surprised me. I had not realized before how much I cared for Sunny, how much this man who disliked cats and children, cared for me.

During all the time I spent with Sunny, he told me few family stories. About the founder of the Jordan Ranch, Sunny's father, and my great-grandfather JL, he told me only one, but he told it often. It was the family legend, this story of JL's coming to Wyoming – a story as important to my grandfather as a creation myth is to a Mandan Indian. It went like this:

JL grew up in Maryland. When the Civil War broke out, he wanted to join his brothers who had already gone to fight, but JL was just fourteen and his parents said no. He did the only thing a self-respecting fourteen year old could do – he ran away from home. The war ended before JL arrived at the front. Since he couldn't go back to his family, he started out West. He worked his way across the country, building bridges in Illinois and railroads in Nebraska. When he arrived in Wyoming, he went to work for a fellow named Collins on Chugwater Creek. Collins died and JL was owed a couple years' wages. He took out a mechanic's lien, and got title to what would become the core of the Jordan Ranch. Through the years, great-grandfather bought more cattle and more land, and he never wrote home until he'd made himself into a success.

It's a grand story; one which I've related through the years with pride. The only problem is, it's not quite true. JL was born in 1861. He would have been four years old when Lee surrendered. In fact, he didn't leave home until the fall of 1886 at the age of twenty-five, and then with his family's blessing. He did work his way across the country. He did take a job with Collins on Chugwater Creek. He did end up with title in lieu of wages, but he had not severed ties with his paternal home, as my grandfather would have it. Rather, JL's western adventure was tightly interwoven with the folks back home.

"I've been looking for a letter from home all this week," JL wrote his father in November, 1886, from Ashland, Nebraska, where he worked with a bridge gang. "I've been thinking a good bit about home, and last night one year ago when Ma died," he wrote, the following February. In Cheyenne, the family network helped him establish himself. He boarded with a Presbyterian minister from Virginia who knew his family. Collins, too, was not a complete stranger – he was the cousin of JL's betrothed, Laura Janette Leggett. JL's first venture into the cattle business, purchase of a herd and partnership with Collins, was made possible by a loan from JL's father. And JL never quit pining from home. "I'm well and enjoying myself pretty well, although think could enjoy myself better in Maryland," he wrote in November of 1887, "but have not forgotten the old lesson you taught me, 'business before pleasure.'"

His letters are full of pleads for his father to visit and for his brother to take up land nearby. Even the first record I have from Sunny shows the family tie. "Dear Grandpa," he wrote at the age of six, on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1898, to JL's father back in Maryland. "We have two hundred calves. We're breaking two colts, one black and one buckskin. I like to take care of my sister. Tell Uncle Otho I have a good saddle. He'd better come back. Goodbye. Frank Jordan."

It's not surprising that Sunny's version of the family legend departs from the facts. As one historian has suggested, "History is what we remember. Personal history, I suspect, is what we want to believe." What is interesting is not that the story changed, but that it changed in such predictable ways. Sunny turned his father into an orphan, cast into the Western wilderness alone, a prodigal who returned to his familial home only in triumph, and never to stay, who raised his own fatten calf, branded it, and shipped it east in a railroad car.

Sunny may have felt the need to orphan his father, because he felt like an orphan himself. Shortly after my father was born, Sunny and JL quarreled, over what no one remembers, and Sunny moved to town. He worked as an insurance agent, and later as an assistant insurance commissioner. He would hardly have made a happy salesman under the best of conditions. Then, during the Great Depression, he was surely miserable. My father remembers sitting at the kitchen table while Sunny glued soles on his Oxfords. My grandfather was a physically powerful man, but not a dexterous one. The task itself infuriated him, almost as much as being reduced to doing it in the first place. I can imagine him hunched over the shoe, his cigarette quivering as he swore through clenched teeth, ashes falling into the glue.

JL died in 1935. Sunny returned to the ranch. Over the argument no one now remembers, they had never made peace. In some ways, Sunny was lucky to have a ranch to go back to. Almost from the time JL had arrived in Iron Mountain forty years earlier, he had thought of leaving. On May 29, 1887, he wrote his father in Maryland, "I don't like the country long enough to stay in it long. Think if I stay 'til fall, that'll wind up Wyoming for me." By fall, however, he had decided to buy cattle, though the critters didn't fill his loneliness. "This is Sunday," he wrote some months later, "and it's the most lonesome I ever saw. They can say what they please about a far west life, but it takes a good bit of sand to stick to it, especially me in the cattle business."

In 1890, he returned to Maryland, married Nettie Leggett, and brought her back to Iron Mountain. By the next year, they decided to sell the Wyoming ranch and buy one in Nebraska near members of Nettie's family. "I'm sure can make more money out here than in Nebraska," JL wrote his father, on August 16, 1891, "but Nettie doesn't have much company here, and that is the reason would like to own the Nebraska place." After they had arranged the sale, JL wrote, "Well, I never hated to leave a country as bad as do this one. It just spoils me, but don't think it is the country to keep a woman in." Somehow, JL had forgotten his own complaints about the weather and the isolation; the move would be for Nettie's sake.

For a reason never made clear in the letters, the deal fell through. In a few more years, however, the couple considered selling out again, and now JL was more willing to acknowledge his part in the decision. "I'm involved a good deal with rheumatism," he complained in a letter dated April 19, 1898. "Think sometimes I will sell out, but have not fully decided." By June he was more resolute. "I think we will sell out this fall, if we can to advantage. Want thirty thousand dollars. There's few young men that has a better thing than I have, but Nettie does not have good health here, and I'm not so rugged as I once was. I have seen very few of this world's pleasures and have known nothing but work, and I think if I am ever going to make a change, I'd better do it soon."

Once again for reasons that are not clear, they kept the ranch. Years later, Sunny would remember vague talk about selling, but he would attribute it solely to his mother's unhappiness. So did his sister, my great aunt Marie. "Mother was a great woman, really," she told me once, "but she didn't like living on the ranch. Every year she'd say, 'Now this will be our last year, won't it?' And Dad would say yes. He had no more idea of moving off of there than I had."

In one of his short stories, the Western writer Owen Wister describes a character as not only a good man, but a man. This somehow counts for more in Wyoming. The character earned this praise because he was physically strong, competent to meet the

challenges of an undeveloped land, and had both integrity and a good sense of humor. A miner in Butte, Montana, once described another worker similarly. “He was a big man, more powerful than he himself really knew. He could do things.”

*Not only a good man, but a man. He could do things.* These simple words capture much about what I respect most about my great-grandfather, my grandfather, my father, and the other men who surrounded my upbringing. They could do things. Any one of them could feed four hundred cattle day after day, alone in a Wyoming winter. Build a house from stone they’d quarried themselves. Or line out a dozen miles of irrigation ditch at a one percent grade, with only a thirty-six inch measure and a hundred-yard length of chain.

But if these ranchers could work alone, they also worked together. Each spring kicked off an unofficial race among the half dozen families in Iron Mountain to repair shared fence lines. Necessary labor such as brandings, roundups, and trail drives, were neighborhood festivities. Smoke from a grass fire would cause every single hand on every single ranch to drop whatever he or she was doing and respond.

The history of the West is the story of cooperation, not of isolation. As the Western historian Bernard DeVoto has quipped, the only true rugged individualists were usually found dangling from a rope, held by a group of cooperating citizens.

[audience laughs]

As important to my grandfather as his reputation as a good cattleman, was his name as a good neighbor. Still, he was shaped by a primitivist urge, by a belief that his father had done it all alone and so should he. He was quick to offer help, uneasy when he needed it in return. By some twist of logic, community was commendable, but should flow only one way. In Sunny’s notion of who he should be, there was little room for loneliness, for doubt, for mutual dependence. “I kill my own snakes,” Sunny was wont to say, “and bury my own dead.”

There are few rules to ranching that mustn’t be broken. One is that you rise at five-thirty each morning. In the winter, this means that you sit at the kitchen table and drink coffee for hours before it’s light enough to work, but you get up early because a neighbor might drive by and know you were still abed.

[audience laughs]

A second rule is that ranchers don’t take vacations. In good years, if Dad could get away, we would spend a weekend in the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver. We would visit the zoo and the Natural History Museum, see our annual movie, go out to dinner. These weekends were enchanted. But a real vacation, where we might be gone for several days, or even two weeks, that was unthinkable.

When I was eight years old, my mother, my brother and I went to Yellowstone Park with my godmother and her two kids. It never occurred to me that my father might have come along. It didn’t seem strange that we had left him at the ranch, even though he was laid up with a broken leg in plaster, from toe to hip. The trip to Yellowstone was a lark, a high point of my childhood. I was completely unaware of its undercurrents, or the fact that it had almost torn our family asunder. A few weeks before, a horse had fallen on

my father and crushed his leg. Soon after he got home from the hospital, Dad realized there was little he could do around the ranch when he couldn't walk, ride, or drive. "Jo and I had been wanting to take the kids to Yellowstone," he told Nelson Vineyard. "I think I'll get out of your hair for a while."

My father wanted to put Nelson's name on the ranch checking account so he could cover emergencies if Sunny weren't available. Then Dad went to Sunny with his plan. Sunny's response was immediate: "You aren't good for anything else. The least you could do is stick around and sign the goddamn checks."

I was thirty-three years old when Nelson told me this story. I had never had a clue of it before. When I asked my father about it, he grew quiet. "Yes," he said, "I remember it. I was so angry that day, I would have walked off that ranch and never looked back, but I had no money of my own then, nothing, not a cent. Laid up like I was, I had no chance of getting another job for at least six months. I had a wife and two children. I backed down." My father is proud of his life. He served in Germany and Korea. He took a bankrupt ranch and made it financially sound. He once crawled down a canyon six miles with a broken leg. Only in this encounter with his father does he question his courage. "You needn't be a coward but once," he says.

I'm a child of the sixties and seventies, rosy with faith in human potential with belief in rationality. "Dad," I say, "when somebody is sick or hurt, it's natural for people around them to be angry for a while. Wouldn't Sunny have come to his senses in a day or two?" "Sunny wasn't like that," Dad replies.

I have a rancher friend, a man, who suggests that the West can be understood as the history of fathers fighting sons. Although I find the notion disheartening, I've come to respect its grain of truth. Of the four ranches in the greater Iron Mountain area that have passed from father to son in my lifetime, only one made the transition with grace. One father died without a will, two others, including my grandfather, had not done the estate planning that would have made transition easy, even possible. And I found after driving sixty thousand miles of ranch country back roads, from Montana to Texas and Oklahoma to California, that Iron Mountain is not unique.

The usual explanation for these men who failed to prepare for their deaths is that they thought they would never die. But ranchers are nothing if not realists, living day in and day out with the possibility of death. I believe the explanation stems from a much deeper, unconscious reluctance, and I believe it comes directly from the primitivist urge that glorifies men alone and makes him believe he should be able to succeed entirely by himself. If a man can't live up to who he thinks he should be, how can his son ever live up to him?

When my brother Blade was born, my grandfather opened a charge account for him at the Brown Palace Bar.

[audience laughs]

That's true. When I was born a year and a half later, Sunny made a gesture of comparable generosity, but no one remembers exactly what it was.

[audience laughs]

Probably he purchased life insurance, or contributed to my savings account. Whatever the gift, it held few of the expectations that a credit line at one of the West's most famous saloons held for my brother. From the start, Sunny and Blade were like oil and water. Blade didn't stand straight enough for my grandfather, he didn't speak loudly enough or sit a horse right. He worked on the ranch and made a good hand. He could ride, rope, doctor cattle, fix fence, but these were not skills he particularly enjoyed or at which he chose to excel. A happy-go-lucky kid who liked to read and draw and play superheroes in the hayloft, he had no taste for killer broncs. He would not have run away from home at the age of fourteen to go to war.

If it was easier for me to please Sunny – it was easier for me to please Sunny and my dad. With no expectation that I would work outside at all, they took the fact that I liked their world as not only a surprise, but a compliment. With less investment in the results, Dad had more patience with me than he did with my brother, and he liked to teach me things – how to shift my weight when training a horse to rein, how to double-clutch the stock truck, how to hog tie a calf. Along with these physical skills, I learned early what most women raised on ranches know, that it's easier to be a rancher's daughter than a rancher's son. Pushed off into the eddies of family history, we don't have to strong-arm the rapids.

My brother left the ranch as soon as he was able. He became an oilfield roughneck, joined the paratroopers, went to gun smithing school, and now works as a Harley-Davidson mechanic. He seldom calls home.

The first thing my father did after Sunny's funeral was sell the mare and stud bunch. Next, he listed the ranch for sale. Blade didn't want the ranch. I did, but I doubt even were I male, I could have had it. Ranching wasn't fun for my father anymore, and he wanted out. A lifetime of injuries had left him with a pinched nerve in the neck, a slipped disc in his back, and arthritis all over. Estate taxes were devastating, annual interest on the loan required to pay them exceeded the profit the ranch had generated even during its best years. We might have sold part of it in order to keep the rest, but my father chose not to. Dividing the ranch would limit its income as well. If I came back as an adult to participate in management, the resources would be spread thinner yet. Besides, he had brought the ranch back from the brink once, and he was unwilling to do it again. If he were trying to explain his reasons, he might have harkened back to JL. "I have seen very few of this world's pleasures and have known nothing but work, and I think if I am ever going to make a change I had better do it now."

Because it was something she could not imagine her own father doing, my great aunt Marie never forgave my father for selling the ranch. Because the ranch was something I so much wanted for myself, forgiveness came hard for me, too.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the young French man who visited America in 1831, saw a danger in America where as he said, "New families are constantly springing up. Others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition. Americans," he said, "owe nothing to any man. They expect nothing from any man. They acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they're apt to imagine that they're whole destiny is in their own hands. Thus, not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendents and separates his contemporaries from him. I throws him back forever upon himself alone, and threatens in the end, to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart."

When a culture is based on an unrealistic ideal, a frustration sets in. It feeds upon itself until everything that contradicts the ideal must be denied. When we see ourselves or our kin measuring up short of the legends that shape us, our disappointments turn into blame, of a government that interferes, of a wife who would make us move, of a son who isn't rugged enough, of a father who chooses not to ranch forever. Unable to accept our own shortcomings or forgive those of our kin, we orphan ourselves within the solitude of our own hearts.

When my brother was eight and I was six, we decided to run away from home. We announced our attentions to our mother, and she made us peanut butter sandwiches and poured us thermoses of milk. She helped us tie these provisions with some fruit and candy bars, into hobo handkerchiefs, which we hung on sticks and slung over our shoulders. Our ultimate destination was Chugwater, twenty-six miles away, but we hoped to make it five miles to the Vineyards who lived at the far end of the ranch by nightfall.

By noon we had walked about three miles and were almost to the railroad trestle over Chugwater Creek. We were preparing to scramble down the bank and have lunch when we saw a rider galloping toward us. It was Dad. Of course, we stopped and waited. A horse running across a pasture in the heat of the summer really does kick up a trail of dust and it's something grand to see. Our father sat a fine figure on a horse. He was six foot three in stocking feet, in boots and hat, much taller. It took a big horse to carry him. That day he rode Tequila, a fine white gelding. He always used a spade bit and he had the lightest hands.

He reined in as he approached us and Blade and I could hardly wait to tell of our great adventure, but we didn't have a chance.

"What the hell do you kids think you're doing out here?!" he demand. "Just turn around and get yourselves home." He spurred his horse and was gone. We started the long trudge home. The day was suddenly hotter. Our boots hurt and a blister burst on my heel. We were thirsty, but the thought of milk was gagging. Blade asked if I wasted a sandwich and I shook my head. "Me neither," he said. We walked along in silence for a while and then Blade said, "Look." I raised my eyes up from the road. "It's Mom." But as the station wagon approached we realized it wasn't Mom. It was Dad. He pulled up beside us. He leaned over and opened the passenger door. He handed us cold Cokes.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't know you had permission."

[audience laughs]

We took the sodas and crawled into the car. I sat next to Dad. He must have gone in for lunch and taken his boots and shirt off as he often did before he greeted our mother. Now he wore a t-shirt and slip on tennis shoes. His arms, never exposed to the sun, were as white as chicken skin. In the fly speckled light that blazed through the windshield, he looked bleached, inconsequential, but then he pulled me to him. I gave him a hug. This was my father, a kindly man with lily white arms, driving a station wagon, offering Coca-Colas and apologies, and this, too, is my father – a horseman, racing in all in fineness and his fury across an endless plain.

That's it and thank you very much, and now we're on to the real part of the Gathering.

[audience applauds]

**HC:** Teresa Jordan. Wasn't that wonderful? Teresa, come on back. Teresa!

**TJ:** Thank you.

**HC:** Oh, that was great. Kim Stafford, when he gave the keynote address, talked about the whole idea of a note, a keynote, being set for an event, and that was a very fitting note.