

Along the Way

John DesCamp



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To my parents, Bayard and Jean DesCamp,
and to the family and friends who have walked
this far with me along the narrow road

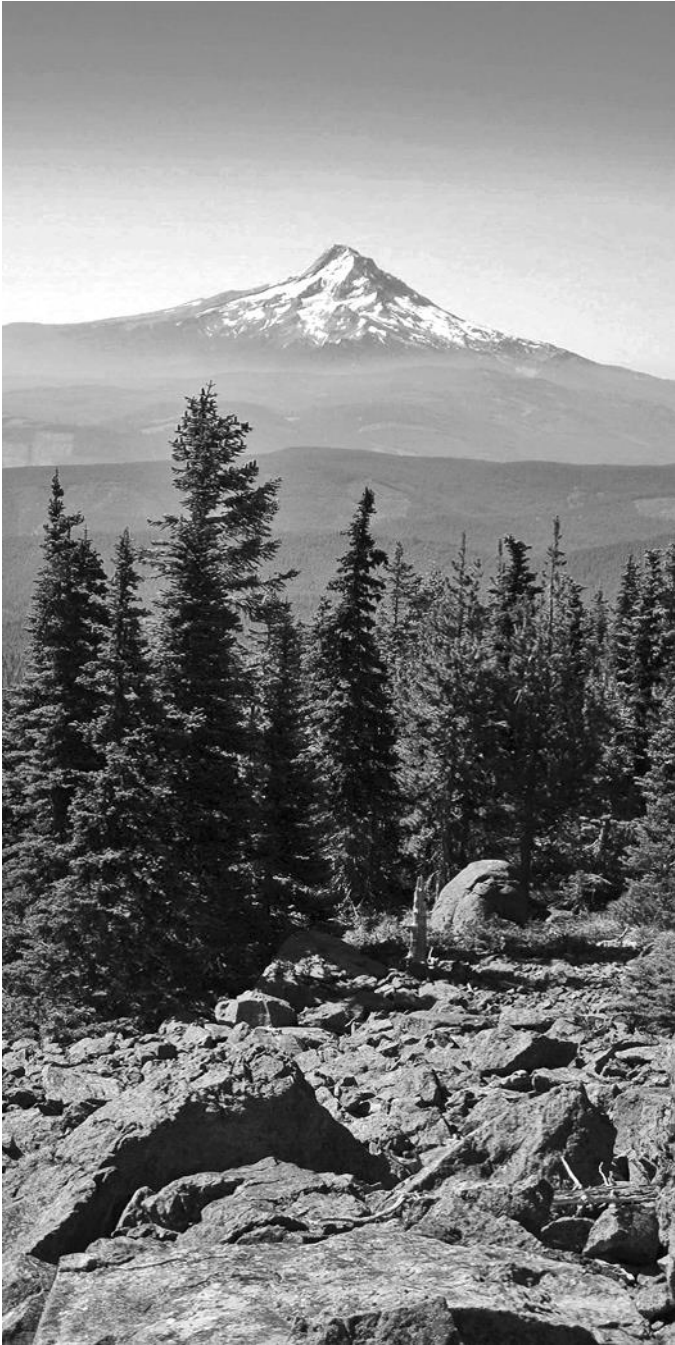


With special thanks to my friend, Steven Unzicker,
who was entirely responsible for designing this
book, and who gave me his encouragement and
sound judgment as the project unfolded.

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In my beginning is my end.

T.S. Eliot

The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to
fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Albert Camus



Meditations

The Midwife

Words are the enemy of feelings:
deeper meanings lost
in the dictionary's shiny steel
building block certainties.
Write down what I feel?
Try making bricks out of fog.

There's a slippery, bloody gulf between the two:
feelings struggling to be born whole,
without defects---but how would we know?---
as we inspect them: twisting, squalling,
raw and inarticulate.

So we swaddle them in words,
capture their bare essence, exclude
their inconvenient mystery.
But meaning shifts,
changes the subject like an old man,
slides away, begins anew,
leaves the old conversation unfinished.

In this shifting ground between two kingdoms
I tend my brood.

Spring Again

At times I almost get it:
that happy disregard
for worst-case scenarios. And
my blessings always outweigh my problems
as the days unwind

Astarte's¹ crescent arcs across
the April night;
cherry petals drift past, unnoticed,
lifted on the swirls of cool Spring air.
From their altar on my terrace,
Winter's remaining yellow pansies
glare at the world.

.

There's a new world to see:
right here, right now, every second,
I'm flooded with God's green beauty.
There's just no time for
worrying about tomorrow.

Recycled

A sunny day in the youngest month.
Senescent snow banks,
spent and soiled,
dissolving in the rain,
huddle along the forest road.

Resigned, nostalgic,
amazed they've aged so quickly,
they dream of being white again.
But this bright day is not for them;
time's arrow points in only one direction.

Melting unnoticed, they sink
slowly through the porous forest floor
to feed new life
as Spring comes again.

Sunday Morning on Wind Mountain

I. The Hawk

In bare branches above marsh grass
a dark, high shouldered shadow
waits for a ripple, a quick
bending of the blades,
which means he will eat early this morning.

He's not just still, not just patient.
He just is.
An elemental presence in the landscape
like the branch he's pressed into service
for his sniper's perch.

II. Into the Darkness

Rising relentlessly,
the trail bores into the unlit forest tunnel.
Lungs burn, legs ache:
payment for last night's excess.

Breathe, step, breathe again;
keep a narrow focus.
Don't look too far ahead.
I breathe, step, and empty my mind
of all but the path.

III. Rock Concert

Suddenly, at the tree line,
the trail changes from earth and leaves
to rough paving of basalt;
clanks sharply under my boots.
It's an instrument with narrow range:
leaden wind chimes,
but it keeps time with my steps.
The soft, rhythmic march

MEDITATIONS

pulls me up the mountain.

IV. *Cathedral*

Halfway up, briefly, the trail levels.
In the mist, two old firs stand arm in arm,
mother and father to a tribe of younger trees;
cathedral doors into the sanctuary
of the ridge.

I stand between them,
mother and father, sense
their pre-occupation with the wind, their brood,
and their tenuous hold on the rock.
They allow me to enter.

V. *Prayer*

Bring me home.
Redeem me, Lord.
“Re-deem” me.
Regard me yet again.
Turn your sight on me once more.

Bring me back into your regard,
Pay my debts,
Take me out of the pawnshop
And return me to your love,
Bring me home.

For the love of God
is man’s salvation;
the weak grow strong,
and the strong carry on:
Bring me home.

VI. *The Summit*

Here I am. Again.

ALONG THE WAY

What's this about, this all too allegorical climbing,
pushing upward the rock
of my unanswered questions?

My life story repeated endlessly
in the ascent, the rest,
the far views,
and the trudge down the mountain,
returning to my rock.

In the end, it's for those few minutes
at the top
when my heart is still; when
my rock and I are one.