



ALASKA ALBUM
by Nancy E. Brown

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Origami Poetry Project

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Traveling the road rough as miners' hands,
We turn off the engine to watch
One, two snowy owls ride the air
Like white smoke over the tundra.
A young porcupine huddles under a willow.
At the next rise, Tangle Lakes shine like
New coins or maybe moons fallen from Jupiter
In homage to this midnight sun.
After a blueberry and grayling breakfast
A snow smell blows into camp.
Quickly we tie the canoe to the car top
In a rush to outrun the blizzard.

Tangle Lakes, Denali Highway

Norwegian men—eyes glacial blue,
Blond hair burned white by sun,
Shoulders built to ship strength—
Sluiced and dredged Nome's gold
Then wintered at these hot springs.
Nearby in wilderness coves stand raven,
Orca, eagle totems. In the strait a pod
Of orcas stampede seals to shore.
Rocks tumble in the crimson tide.

Tenakee Springs, Chichagof Island

We read the shallow rivers—
Wet maps of boulders and sandbars—
Until we bank our boat at Aggie Creek.
At midnight Martin Olson glides his Super Cub
Onto the sandbar for coffee at our fire.
Bang! Pop! Bang! We duck and stare.
Martin laughs, there are abandoned oil drums.
Pop! As temperatures drop like the sun's arc
Beyond black spruce silhouettes against
A char-pink sky. Late light
Lingers behind the Bendelebens.

Aggie Creek, Seward Peninsula

Tanana River—a rumble of driftlogs, oxbows—
Heavy with silt the color of goose eggs—
Hauls its glacial load past the mouth
Of the Goodpaster, the river never seen
By the Kentucky family bearing its name.
Up the Goodpaster delphiniums bloom,
Planted long ago at a trapper's cabin
Now collapsed into earth on a bluff
Above the beavers that build
A new lodge on an old oxbow.

Goodpaster River, Delta Junction

Gambell, St. Lawrence Island

Duffles drop on the floor before
Milli, my children, and I hustle
To where spring ice clings to the shore.
A whale's blood path
Marks the way to flensing—
One foot in the oomiak
The other on the whale's back.
Alarm: a small boy toddles off the ice.
Splash! Snap, a gaff grabs his parky.
That night, dancing at the school,
Aieee! Tong!Tong! Walrus-hide drums.
Later, hands join hands, join hands
To reach home through forty-mile winds
Blowing snow from Siberia.

*Dedicated to the memory of Milli Ekak
who served me whale meat and muktuk
and taught me to play 'Hearts,'
to the memory of my son Jason B. Brown
who took his first steps
on St. Lawrence Island,
and especially to my husband Ken Brown
and daughter Roda L. Motta
who share many of the memories
and stories in these poems
about our former home.*