

## KUBIASHIVIK

The one and only time  
I ever heard the word  
was on the evening news  
in the early 1970s.

Two professors,  
psychologists from UCLA –  
a man and a woman –  
had built a cabin  
on a remote tract  
of Alaskan wilderness.  
They called it  
Kubiashivik.

They earned cash money  
consulting for oil companies.  
Once a week,  
at a camp they were flown to,  
the man and the woman  
talked with construction workers.  
The workers lived in desolation.  
The workers were building  
the trans-Alaska pipeline.  
The workers found life in the desolation of the Alaskan wilderness  
stressful.  
The man and the woman  
listened.  
Mostly though,  
the man and the woman spent their time  
working in the solitude of their space  
at Kubiashivik.

As often happens when people wish  
to be left alone  
a firm crew was dispatched to interview them.  
The man sat on a log  
at the edge of the lake  
from which they drew their water.  
The newsperson asked irrelevant questions.  
The man was polite.  
It was the kind of place –  
a point where  
irrelevance and reality intersect –  
there, at Kubiashivik.

Finally,  
with a resigned smile, the man –  
the woman beside him –  
told their story.  
They had received letters  
from friends in California  
and other places.  
The friends all complained.  
Their lives were hectic.  
Their friends wished that they could live  
in the remote solitude of  
the wilderness,  
if only –  
If only there was running water.  
Their friends thought it a great effort  
to carry water from the lake.  
If only there was indoor plumbing and  
a toilet that flushed.  
If only there was a telephone.  
The man casually chanted  
the litany of if only-ies.  
The list was long  
for life was uncluttered here,  
at Kubiashivik.

As always,  
there was the ultimate if-only.  
The man smiled.  
The man talked of the grizzly  
that broke upon the door  
to their root cellar.  
All their friends had commented –  
they would love to live in the wilderness  
if only  
there were no bears.

Wherever a person lives,  
the man continued,  
there are bears.  
Critters that prowl the night and tear open the door  
to a person's root cellar.  
The difference is that here  
the bear  
is a real one.  
That is the simplicity

of Kubiashivik.

I have offered you  
food and comfort and love.  
Often I have thought  
of Kubiashivik –  
Knowing that you will come to understand  
that the difference between  
desolation and solitude  
is whether you fear the bear.

Kubiashivik?  
Roughly translated it means,  
The place I choose to be  
for now.

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1990