

DRAWING THE LINE

For Yosh Kuromiya

I.

Yosh is drawing the line.  
It's a good line, on paper,  
and a good morning  
for just such an endeavor --

and the line seems to find  
its own way, flowing  
across the white expanse

like a dark, new river...

II.

Yes, Yosh is drawing the line.  
And you might say he's simply  
following his own nature --

he's always had a good eye,  
a fine sense of perspective,  
and a sure hand, a gift

for making things ring true,  
and come clearer into view.

III.

So the line makes its way,  
on paper, charting a clear  
course like a signature,  
starting from the left

and towards the bottom-end,  
logically and gradually  
and gracefully ascending

to the center where it takes  
a sharp turn upward, straight  
towards the top before it  
finds itself leveling off

to the right again, descending  
slightly for a while before  
dropping straight down, coming  
to a rest near the bottom,

bending, descending gradually  
and gracefully as it began, but

at the other side of the space...



IV.

No sooner said than done.  
Yosh relaxes for the moment,  
blinks his eyes, realizing

his intensity of focus, almost  
like prayer, a sunrise meditation  
of deep and natural concentration.

V.

Ah, another beautiful morning!  
Time to move on, see what the day  
provides by way of promise...

And as for the drawing, well,  
the line is drawn, on paper --

other dimensions can come later...

VI.

Yosh, although a young man --  
a teenager -- is naturally  
calm and confident by nature.

Thus, when he draws a line,  
it tends to stay drawn.  
He'll make adjustments,  
but doesn't make mistakes.

That's just the way he is --  
trusting his own judgement  
as a person, as an artist.

As a result, he is a most  
trusted friend, judging  
from the many friends who  
count on him, rely on him,  
respect what he has to say...

That's just the way he is --  
"good-hearted," as they say:  
"If you need a favor, ask  
Yosh; he'll go out of his way..."

VII.

Still, though, "You've got to draw the line  
somewhere" -- and as the saying goes,

so goes Yosh, and his friends know  
certain things not to ask of him.



What "everybody does" just may not go with Yosh, the set of beliefs, the sense of integrity, values, he got from his folks.

VIII.

As for this drawing in his sketchbook, you might well ask: "What is it?"

As is, at this stage, it's just a line -- a line that goes sideways, up, over, down, descending to the other margin.

Is it just a line? An abstract design? Or might it stand for something?

At first glance, it looks to be a line charting the progress of something that goes along slowly, rising a bit to indicate, oh, maybe a normal growth rate or business-as-usual

when all of a sudden it jumps, reflecting a decisive turn of events which lasts a while before returning to resume

what might be assumed to be a more regular course of activity concluding

at what may represent the present on the journey from the then to the now...

That's what graphs show, the flow of activity, the rise and fall of events often out of our hands, so it can become gratifying to simply resume the bottom-line of normalcy again, starting over at square one, back to the drawing-board...

That is, it could have been worse. The line could have been broken, snapped, or bottomed-out into nothing, going nowhere fast like the slow and steady line monitoring a silent patient...

Or, the line could have turned back into itself into a dead-end maze, a meaningless mass of angles and tangles...

Ah, but if you asked an observant child, the answer might be: "Well, it just looks like the bottom of my baby sister's mouth -- 'cause when she smiles, she only has one tooth!"

And if you asked Yosh, he'd simply say, in his modest way: "Oh, that's just Heart Mountain."



IX.

Maybe you had to be there.  
For if you were, you would not only  
not have to ask, but you would  
appreciate the profile, the likeness

of what looms large in your life  
and mind, as large as life staring  
you in the face day by day by day

and so on into night, where it is so  
implanted in your sight and mind  
the unmistakable promontory protrudes  
a prominence in your mildest dreams,  
and even when the dust billows, or clouds  
cover it, blowing snow and sleet and rain,

you can't avoid it, you can count on it,  
Heart Mountain, Heart Mountain  
is still there. And you're here.

X.

Ah, but it is, after all,  
just a mountain -- one of many,  
actually, in this region,  
in this range, and if anything  
distinguishes it, it's just  
its individual shape and name.

And the fact that it stands  
rising up out of the plains  
so close you can touch it,  
you can almost but not quite  
get there on a Sunday picnic,  
your voices echoing in the ever-  
green forest on its slopes...

As it stands, it is a remote  
monument to, a testament to  
something that stands to be  
respected from a distance,

accessible only in dreams,  
those airy, carefree moments  
before the truth comes crashing  
home to your home in the camp...

XI.

Yosh can take you there, though,  
by drawing the line, on paper.

And Yosh, with his own, given name,  
is somewhat like the mountain --



an individual, certainly, but also rather common to this region.

He's just so-and-so's kid, or just another regular teenager engaged in whatever it takes these days...

But this morning, it was different. He was out there at the crack of dawn, pacing around over by the fence, blowing into his hands, rubbing his hands, slapping, clapping his hands together as if in preparation

to undertake something special instead of doing the nothing he did --

that is, he just got to his knees and knelt there, facing the mountain.

Knelt there. Knelt there. Is he praying? But now he's writing. But writing what?

Then, as sunlight struck the mountain, and the ordinary idle elder and the regular bored child approached Yosh, they could tell from the size of the wide sketchpad that he was drawing -- but drawing what? Well, that's obvious -- but what for?

XI.

Seeing the drawing was its own reward. Boy, look at that! He's got it right! You've got to admire him for that!

And, boy, if you really look at it -- in this sunrise light, under this wide, blue sky -- why, it really is a beautiful sight, that majestic hunk of rock they call Heart Mountain!

And to top it off, this talented guy sure accentuates the positive, because he didn't include the posts and wire!

XII.

Yosh, smiling, greeting, is striding toward the barracks. There's a line at the messhall, a line at the toilets.

Better check in with the folks. Mom's all right, but Dad's never adjusted. I may or may not show him the drawing.



It depends. He likes me to stay active, but this might be the wrong subject. It might rub him wrong, get him in a mountain-mood of reminiscing about California, the mountains of home.

And, heck, those were just hills by comparison, but they've taken on size in his eyes; still, when I fill in the shading, the forest, tonight, maybe he can appreciate it for just what it is:

Heart Mountain, in Wyoming, a drawing by his dutiful son here with the family doing its duties -- kitchen duty, latrine duty...

I'll do my duties; and I've got my own duty, my right, to do what I can, to see this through...

XIII.

The sketchbook drops to the cot. Brrr, better go get some coal. It's the least I can do -- not worth much else, me, without a real line of work. But this art might get me someplace -- maybe even a career in here! Doing portraits of inmates!

But out there is in here too, related -- it's a matter of perspective, like lines of lineage and history, like the line between me and the fencepost, between

me and the flagpole, between stars, stripes, the searchlight, and the guy on duty in the guardtower, maybe like me, from California, looking up at the airplane making a line of sound in the sky, searching for the right place in a time of peace...

Yes, if I had a big enough piece of paper, I'd draw the line tracing the way we came, smooth as tracks clear back to California;

and in the other direction, the line clean out to the city of Philadelphia and the Liberty Bell ringing testimony over Independence Hall and the framing of the Constitution. Yes, it's there, and I can see it, in the right frame of mind...



XIV.

No, you have no right  
to imprison my parents.

No, you have no right  
to deny us our liberty.

Yes, I have my right  
to stand for our justice.

Yes, I have my right  
to stand for our freedom.

XV.

And this is where Yosh  
drew the line --

on paper, on the pages  
of the Constitution.

XVI.

The rest is history.  
Arrested, judged,  
sentenced, imprisoned

for two years  
for refusing  
induction under

such conditions:  
"As long as my  
family is in here..."

Eventually arrives  
a few sentences  
of Presidential

Pardon, period.  
But history  
doesn't rest,

as Yosh gives  
testimony,  
drawing the line,  
on paper, again.

XVII.

This time, though, he's a free man  
with a free mind and a very clear  
conscience, having come full circle  
to this clear spring at Heart Mountain.



And Heart Mountain, of course,  
is still there, timeless and ever-  
changing in the seasons, the light,  
standing, withstanding the test of time.

And this time Yosh is free to roam  
his home range like an antelope,  
circling the mountain, seeing all sides  
with new visions, wide perspectives:

from here, it comes to a narrow peak;  
from here, it presents the profile  
of a cherished parent, strong, serene;  
from here, yes, it could be a tooth;  
and from anywhere, forever, a heart.

Yes, that's about the truth of it --  
once a heart, always a heart --

a monumental testament under the sky.

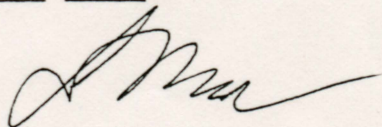
This time, though, Yosh is strolling  
over a freshly plowed and fenceless field  
with that very same sketchbook, searching  
through the decades to find that rightful  
place in relation to the mountain, wanting  
to show his wife where the drawing happened,

where that quiet young man sank to his knees  
in reverence for the mountain, in silent  
celebration for such a vision of beauty  
that evoked such wonder, such a sunrise  
of inspiration, wisdom, and compassion

that the line drew itself, making its way  
with conviction in the direction it knew  
to be right across the space, on paper,

and yes, yes, the heart, the eye, the mind  
testify this is right, here, Yosh, hold  
up the drawing, behold the mountain, trust  
the judgement upholding truth through time  
as the man, the mountain, the profile make  
a perfect fit in this right place and time  
for Yosh to kneel again, feel again, raise  
his radiant eyes in peace to face the radiant  
mountain, Heart Mountain, Heart Mountain --

and begin, again, with confidence, to draw the line!

  
16 July 95  
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21 July 95