

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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