

Bill Siverly

Big Hole

Soldiers shot the old man checking on horses.
They charged the slumbering camp, gunning down
Women and children, boot heel stomping the newborn.
Yellow Wolf said, "Some soldiers acted with crazy minds."

The Nimípuu called this meadow "place of ground squirrels,"
Haven of willows and good grazing along the Big Hole River,
Beyond the conflict with Idaho. No quarrel here with Montana,
The Nimípuu not knowing the whites were all of one mind.

One hundred thirty years later I walk the trail
To a skeletal village of lodge poles left behind.
Medicine bundles and bits of faded cloth dangle from ropes,
Placed by descendants of those who survived,
Who yearly walk this trail under the August sun.

Screams of the slaughtered echo through time:
Mystic, Sand Creek, My Lai, Azizabad—unsuspecting villagers
Caught sleeping or eating or playing out their common ways,
Older than language or consciousness.

When will we Americans—crazy for all that we know—
Stop projecting our own shadows and fears
Upon indigenous people around the world?
Yellow Wolf said, "The air was heavy with sorrow."