

Bill Siverly

Elizabeth Creek

For Mike Wiley

We woke to canyon sunlight on the Clearwater
And drank black coffee at the mouth of Orofino Creek.
We drove east to Greer, as the river narrowed to rocky holes
That long ago tested my father's skill for catching big rainbows.

Passing through Weippe, Pierce, and Headquarters,
Fabled towns of gold rush and timber harvest days,
We followed gravel roads up the North Fork, rushing river of
memory,
Hard fishing down steep brushy banks, but rich for catching trout.

No longer fishermen but fishers of our selves, we checked in
With forest rangers at Kelly Forks and drove up Black Canyon
To Elizabeth Creek, that fountain of youth splashing over golden
stones.

I recognized it instantly from fifty years ago when my father and I
Backpacked upstream to Elizabeth Lake, source of all clear water.

Down on the North Fork we found a fisherman casting flies
Who said he had not seen Elizabeth Creek, and did we hike in?
We told him we had seen it with our eyes, but we were old men,
Unlikely to undertake that same hard trail again.

Later we lounged in deckchairs above the Clearwater,
Drinking dark merlot as sunlight left the canyon pines
Reveling in the long day's quest for Elizabeth Creek,
New lives breaking the surface like trout as evening fell.