

Bill Siverly

## Waha Lake

Boy Scouts from Clearwater country camped that winter  
In woods above Waha Lake, shivering at six below.  
We put up our flimsy tents that slept three or four,  
Spent daylight scavenging firewood from forest floor,  
And hanging around the campfire against the numbing cold.

Next to us the troop from Lapwai Nez Perce Reservation  
Raised a single giant tepee at the center of their space:  
First the long poles were stacked and crossed above,  
And then the boys shouted for Francis, the smallest among them,  
Who shinnied to the top with rope lashing between his teeth.

After the painted canvas had been stretched around the frame,  
Francis invited me to look inside the finished tepee:  
In the middle of the circle, the campfire neatly laid,  
With sleeping bags for fifteen scouts arranged along the wall,  
Leaving room around the fire to sit and talk and laugh.

Back at our camp, we did our best to seal our flimsy tent  
Against the cold, sealing instead the cold inside.  
We shivered all night as snow fell in tiny pellets of ice.  
As if to borrow warmth, I thought of the tepee holding  
The heat of its fire and fifteen scouts sleeping snugly within.

In gray morning light I pushed aside the snow-encrusted flap  
And walked stiffly out to Waha Lake, the lake itself  
Frozen shore to shore, surrounded by frosted pines,  
Under an ashen sky threatening snow, and then I knew  
We are here, and there is nowhere else for us to go.