REAL POTATOES

for Tim McKay

The night after the judge said to his government you can't build your road up there because it would obliterate the silence and drive off the last pilated woodpecker so that the Big Spirit could not come to the Yurok High Seat anymore, the Indians invited us to a school gymnasium in Eureka where every June they honor the elders and the new graduates.

When they called the whites out on the shiny wooden floor to notice us for having wanted to stop the road too, I had to fight back my eyes because we'd all won something and I didn't want to bawl before people I did not yet know.

Instead of words though, the Indians gave us each a sackful of potatoes to take to our kitchens or plant in the back garden. I took the spuds home damp under my arm and when we ate them the next week, the tears of victory tasted real upon my plate, real as real potatoes.