

Conversations With William Everson

~ poet and printer ~

at Kingfisher Flats near Swanton, California

Last Visit

Sunday, January 30, 1994

Bill Everson went into Dominican Hospital with pneumonia last October 16th, and nearly died. He was in intensive care for over 2 months, on life support, didn't get out until early this month. They botched a tracheotomy when he went into pulmonary arrest; they cut one of his vocal chords.

Bill is sitting stiffly in his big chair at home, his neck held straight by a supporting pillow. He is hooked up to several tubes, one to his throat, more than one to his abdominal area. The sound of a medical pump can be heard coming from the bedroom, and the connecting tube is hard to avoid stepping on.

He looks gaunt, his mouth receding, no cheeks at all, like that painting, ("The Scream" by Edvard Munch).

He starts talking about a pilot, it's very hard to make out his words. We are getting maybe 60% through the inarticulate whispering and throaty gurgling and mumbling.

EVERSON: ...my accident.

TIM: You had an accident? You mean the pneumonia?

EVERSON [whispers]: No.

FRANCES: You mean when they cut your vocal chord?

EVERSON: No. The crash. [Long pause.] We started losin' altitude, we were headin' down fast. We landed in the water, it was an amphibious plane. We tried to take off but couldn't get much altitude, crashed back into the water. They pulled me out. It was a great tragedy. People died. Some of them are still down there. It was the greatest ordeal of my life.

TIM: When did this happen, a long time ago?

EVERSON: October.

TIM: Just before you went into the hospital for pneumonia?

EVERSON: The day before.

FRANCES: Where did this happen?

EVERSON: South Dakota.

TIM: It takes a large body of water to land an amphibious plane, it must have been a lake.

EVERSON: It was a stream.

FRANCES: What part of South Dakota?

EVERSON: Twenty-Nine Palms.

TIM: There are no palm trees in South Dakota.

[Silence.]

[The next time we saw him was in the coffin.]