

# The Aroma of Wenatchee

by Gordon Laird

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As our car reaches Stevens Pass, my skin is beginning to telegraph a message. My bare arms are beginning to feel different, and as we coast down the east side of the pass it becomes more and more apparent. The dampness of the coast has gone from my arms, a dampness I could not detect until it was gone and is replaced by a dryness - the dryness of the interior.

Fir trees have given way to pine trees, and now we are driving through pine groves. We have left solid green drapes of the coastal forest behind. Now it is the "peek-a-boo" interior forest, but not a forest as I have known from my youth. Not an Emily Carr forest. More like continuous groves of trees, through which I can see further ranks of trees.

There is a sweet smell of dust in the car, not dust itself, but a hint of the aroma of dust. A different climate has been announced.

Soon we are looking for the turnoff to the left for Lake Wenatchee, but the signal of it will be on the right: a motel-café built in Swiss style. Next we will track through the narrow dirt road into our campsite under the pine trees. Now we have the full smell - the aroma of pine trees and the hot, dry smell of earth which has not been dampened by rain for weeks. Is this something like the "Balm of Gilead" which had healing powers in biblical times? It would be comforting to be "em-balmed" with lotions that smell like this! No wonder the Magi brought myrrh to the King.

As we unload our camping gear we move six and eight inch pine cones from the ground and store them for later use. Paradoxically, we burn them in the grate provided to light a larger fire. It seems like sacrilege, yet there are so many pine cones. The pine trees are spendthrift and we are blessed with the gases releasing the sun's stored energy stored in those pine cones.

We feel lighter, younger, more fit. We move around more easily, as if the dryer climate is taking pounds off us, and giving us a lighter load to carry. We are lizards who have moved back into our own native territory looking forward to

hibernating on a sun-drenched rock. We must be desert creatures. Perhaps we were marooned in the coastal climate and have been exiled from the desert. This is where we should live! Amazing that a change in climate can make so much difference!

The pine fragrance casts me back to my childhood. Mom loved exotic smells. When company was expected she would find the box filled with wedges of incense. Then she (or myself as I grew older) would light the incense punk, lift the tiny metal Buddha and place it underneath, to allow incense smoke to ascend through the eyes and ears of Buddha. Buddha held a small pot on his lap, which would accept another wedge of incense. Soon the room would be filled with oriental mystery.

Pine does smell "of the orient" and reminds me of the little boats which transported exotic spices and perfumes from the Asian to the Occidental world. Sleeping surrounded by the smell of pine is like sleeping in a comfortable branch of a pine tree. We wake up thoroughly refreshed, ready for the adventures of the day.

The smell of the pine-laden atmosphere of Lake Wenatchee passes to me over the 30 intervening years undiminished in its sharpness and its haunting memory so that even the name "Wenatchee" eases me into a reverie.