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Orcas, British Columbia

Clifford Paul Feters

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Orcas, British Columbia

We reach Sharpe's Bay, two miles north of Lund,
below Desolation Sound. A houseboat
that's always moored, our cabin has long legs,

and the tide passes under our bed.
Late one afternoon our landlord Wendy
whoops, "Whales 'round the corner!"

We scramble to the skiff and out over
Johnstone Strait. She's right. Slick,
arching tons spray, whistle, blow;

six foot fins dip, rise like surging
pennants, titan knights of an ancient order.
Then a disappearance, empty surface,

only the tinted leanings of the sun-
reflected water, all sea a mirage.
Quick as a quake, one erupts front

of the bow, twenty-eight feet of glossy
black-and-white fires from red-gold
waves, lifts up until blue opens

between flukes and water. Our skiff a toy,
boulder-width head, white lines of
bear-claw teeth—Crashes! Splinters the sea!

He knows precisely where we are.
Ruthless eaters, to us they are benign,
attacks on humans in the wild near

nonexistent. He offers wreaths of spray,
spectacular fonts of absolute absolution!
The orca plows the channel, breathes

like an ocean current, arcing high and low
past the still pulsing sundown
dissolving in darkening rose.

Clifford Paul Feters

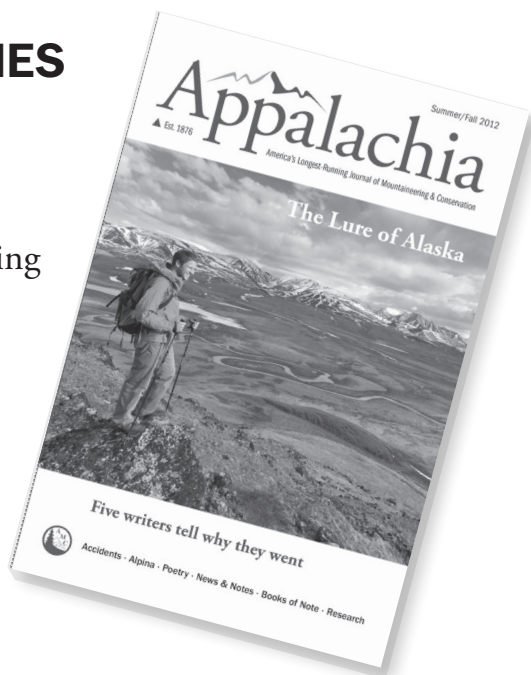
CLIFFORD PAUL FETERS has published poems in *CrossCurrents*, *The Oxford American*, *Poetry East*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Seattle Review*, *OnEarth*, *The Willow Review*, *5AM*, *Rattle*, *Light*, and many other magazines. He lives in Florida with his wife, the novelist Debra Dean.

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