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True Beginnings at CutBank

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Introduction

True Beginnings at CutBank

When I came to teach at the University of Montana in the fall of 1969, Earl Ganz soon handed me the job of advising the student literary magazine, *The Garret*, which published only student and faculty writing. It was easy that year. The editor was Jon Jackson, who had come to Montana from upstate Michigan to study ornithology. He turned to writing, he claimed, because the students were more interesting, not more interesting than birds but more interesting than ornithologists; you can only spend so much time with birds, and they never want to go out for a drink afterwards.

Jon, who lives down the Bitterroot and has since published a number of first-rate police procedurals, did a terrific job with *The Garret*, printing among other things the most complex short story I've had the privilege of encountering, "Seagreen Incorruptible," a sort of palimpsest by an impossibly brilliant undergraduate named Edmund Apfell (who went on to the Writer's Workshop in Iowa City, published a novel, and, I think, now works in the medieval section of the Oakland Public Library).

But Jon left, and the magazine turned into a problem, mostly because of funding. The Associated Students at UM were putting up the money, and the Publication Board couldn't see the point of funding a magazine which was only interesting to a couple of dozen writers on campus.

By 1972 David Long, Gary Thompson, and I decided we should reinvent the entire wheel, and start a new magazine—we proposed to publish student and faculty work mixed with that of nationally established writers, and we promised to print art, a major selling point. In short, we proposed a "national" literary

magazine, one the entire student body, and the University, could regard with pride.

Surprise, we got the money. I remember the three of us in David Long's living room, trying to pick a name for the magazine. The name had to be one word, it had to be easy to remember, and it had to begin and end with a consonant (I'd been reading up on Ezra Pound at the time), and it had to have Montana connections. I went out to the car and got a map of Montana. I'd read a town name and we'd laugh. But after a while we settled on "CutBank." Maybe I forced the issue. I don't know that David or Gary liked it (or my "standards") too well. But I was the faculty advisor, and got my way. Which was the end of my influence. Some brilliant person, years later I think, added the subtitle, "where the big fish lie."

The next year I was gone to California. David, who has gone on to publish regularly in *The New Yorker*, and Gary, who teaches poetry writing at Chico State University in California, got the magazine published. Since then, students have done the work, trained their successors, and held things together.

That's the story so far as I understand it. It makes me swell up and act prideful.

—Bill Kittredge