

The Rock Hound

in memory of Bill Haskin

This inadequacy in the eye to see deep enough,
to sort at a standing glance the prize from the sand —.
I spend days grazing the grasslands, now and then
kicking dirt in anger, now and then
sifting excitedly through a blowout's centuries.
Sometimes it's months before I find a keeper,
an agate or an arrowhead, sometimes so long
I fool myself into thinking I've found a fossil
or a geode's bony back, rawing the fingers
in glassy gravel only to unearth a rusty gear,
a root, a can. Sometimes a nephew goes with me,
half-trying, half-bored with effort,
and he discovers the best ones: rattlesnake agates,
obsidian, moonstone, flint. Sometimes, even,
beautiful little points hundreds of years old.
I've done this forever and have yet to enjoy such luck.
On shelves in my home I have maybe only sixty stones,
polished down, two good blue hunks of petrified wood,
maybe four dozen white to gray broken points.
A few of these I found by accident,
herding leaves with a rake or skipping stones
on Wyoming's Powder River. But most took months
of stalling work. I have, besides, two other trophies:
the blue-green scars on my left shin —
a two-pointed one where a rattlesnake struck
while I was scaling rocks at Sonora,
the other a cross-shaped cut where I opened the wound
and bent to suck it clean. Falling back sick,
I passed out. Then woke next morning to find my hand
clutching the piece of turquoise I set into this ring.

—Mark Sanders