

from *A Daybreak Handbook*, by Jerry Dennis:

DREDGE

Deep in the yard of the house where I grew up are my artifacts. Fishhooks and rusty nails. The pocketknife my father gave me when I was nine that somebody stole. A baseball I lost in the woods in 1964 when the sweet spot of my bat met the sweet spot of the ball and it soared away, a glorious parabola, like the arc of years, to the trees and gone. My brother's stamp collection. Plastic soldiers and plastic guns. Arrowheads, bullets, and cherry-bombs. Test-tubes and a Bunsen burner. Antler nubs of the deer I shot when I was fourteen. Baseball cards in a Band-Aid box packed with wheat pennies, beach glass, a photo of my dog swimming for a stick, letters to my future self warning against the perils of girls and growing old. Beneath it all, a stratum of clean sand, then a stratum of ice, then bedrock. It's a relief when you get beneath the layer where you lived.

ROAD TRIP, NORTH DAKOTA,
IN MY 57TH YEAR

On US-2, west of Minot, with the Great Plains spilling over the horizon in every direction and no other cars on the highway, I opened the windows to let the hot wind rush through. Suddenly everything I knew streamed away in a buzzing exodus like bees from a burning hive.

What a relief to be empty again! It was almost like being young again. I wanted to take up scuba diving, gallop on horseback down a Costa Rican beach, learn to speak French, make love to an actress half my age, shoot a buzzer-beater in a basketball game, invent a revolutionary clean energy source that saves the world.

I pulled into a roadside café and settled onto a stool at the counter expecting service befitting a man of my stature. The tattooed eighteen-year-old waitress said they were out of pie and returned to her conversation with the other customer. They were discussing all the things they would do if they won a million dollars. I listened with great interest.
