

“I’d Like to Be There with You to Enjoy Them”: Voices from the Past

Sonic Abundance

Episode 6: “I’d Like to Be There with You to Enjoy Them”: Voices from the Past

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Voice Actors: Keira Alejandro, Andrew Ashley, Christopher Caruana, Joshua Ponsones, Emmarie Wilson

Duration: 44:26

KYLE: I’m Kyle Stedman, from Rockford University, and I’m here to introduce an audio drama I produced. But first I want to take a few minutes to situate that work, so you don’t feel too adrift on the rushing river of words.

So I’ve been spending a lot of time studying a collection of letters and diaries written by my family members over the last 170 years. And as I’ve read and organized all that writing, I’ve felt the pull to *do something* with it—to let this family archive guide my scholarly and creative work.

But here’s the thing: I think of myself primarily as a sound scholar, someone interested in making and understanding noise, audio, music, that kind of thing. And the documents in this archive . . . are all silent. I mean, for the most part, they’re *old*—they focus on my great-great-*great* grandparents, who were born in 1827 and 1831, and their five children, so there aren’t any recordings of their voices for me to listen to or to create audio projects from.

In “The Movement of Air,” Cindy Selfe takes a “*both/and*” approach to written and aural modes of communicating. She keeps insisting, over and over, that she’s not out to diminish the things that alphabetic writing does well, but instead she’s writing to open her readers’ eyes to all the things that sound *can also* do.

So I started wondering what it would look like (and sound like) to invite that “both/and” spirit into my work on my family archive. The strengths of the linguistic mode are clear when doing genealogical work: paper and spreadsheets and notes are helping me understand all this writing. But what about the aural mode? I started wondering, how might sound help me engage with my ancestors in a new way, and share what I learned with audiences?

Think about what audio texts are good at: when they’re voiced, they embody content, in affective, personalized, powerful ways. Audio also exists in time, inviting audiences to sit and dwell in an experience, when it’s harder to skim or skip ahead. Audio texts also invite layered experiences, where words, music, and sound effects can combine into a single auditory effect.

So that’s where this project comes in: it’s an audio drama that attempts to enter the words of my family in a new way, not to take the place of the words

they wrote, but to enact them—which feels like a very Cindy Selfe kind of thing to do. All the words you’re about to hear in the drama are verbatim quotations from family letters and diaries presented chronologically, as if we’re listening in on family conversations over a series of years. I wanted to hear what these words sounded like aloud; I wanted to feel a bit more of what these authors felt when they wrote these words—or even as they might have heard them, perhaps gathering around the table to read them to other members of the family.

I wish I could easily explain why this imaginative “listening” to my family’s voices feels so important to me, but I’m struggling to articulate my purpose. I mean, to be honest, there’s some irony here: I so rarely pick up the phone to hear the voices of my living relatives, but I went to great lengths to imagine the voices of the dead ones. And by the way, I’m hardly the first person with a rhetoric background to engage with the dead in a multimodal project; check out Erin Anderson (2016), Trisha N. Campbell (2016), and Jody Shipka (2012) for projects that helped inspire mine. But when it came to my own motivation, the best explanation I can discover inside myself is that even after reading my relatives’ writing for hundreds of hours, I still walk away from each letter and diary entry with a piercing awareness of how little I actually know these people, in all the fullness of their existence. Turning to voice gives me one more tendril of connection, something to dunk my ears into like a barrel of water, in my search for a more complete immersion in who they were. I felt compelled to craft this because of what can be gained through audio: a speculative, possible way to understand what these people may have sounded like, how they might have felt, inviting you as a listener to experience some of that feeling right there along with them. It’s the both/and Selfe writes about: I get to have the reading experience in some projects, but the aural experience here.

But beware of taking this audio as straight-up history; it took a lot of curatorial discretion to choose and compose this script. I took words out of context, omitted unnecessary sentences that veered especially off-topic (as all good letters do), and I emphasized certain themes—especially food and family togetherness—simply by choosing to include one clip over another. What I’m trying to say is that the value of these excerpts as historically complete alphabetic texts is questionable, since I’ve done so much to them here—but I will say that in the transcript, I *am* very careful to share the original writers’ words exactly as they wrote them, typos and all, with square brackets marking where I adjusted their shorthand to make more sense out loud. Still, it’s fundamentally a creative reconstruction.

After compiling my script, I hired young actors associated with my university to read the lines, directing them as best I could but also letting their acting expertise guide the sound of these voices. I then edited the recordings together with some music and sound effects, worried all along that I was overdoing it, but trying again to use the aural mode for what it’s best at: connecting text and audience, all emotions allowed.

Finally, let me add a note here about the people whose words you’re about to

hear, in hopes that you won't feel *too* confused. Some of you might even want to keep this part of the transcript open as you listen, to remind yourself who is related to whom. So here's who shows up, in the order you'll hear them:

First up is Lyman Stedman, born in 1827 and died in 1916: my great-great-grandfather, and father to most of the other people you'll hear. Lyman's words here are from his lengthy collection of farm diaries that he kept throughout his life over multiple volumes, though these selections were written when he was 76-78 years old. At this point, he had lost his wife Emily many years earlier and was living on Brown's Island on the Ohio River between Ohio and West Virginia with his unmarried daughter Mabel. He spent most of his life as a farmer after dropping out of college in the 1840s for health reasons; he also served as an elected official in many capacities, including as a state representative in West Virginia. He was father to five children, born over a 26-year period. Lyman is played by Christopher Caruana.

Next you'll hear the words of Chester (or "Chet") Stedman, born in 1878 and died in 1916. Chet is the youngest of Lyman and Emily's children, and he never married. He was a doctor in the U.S. Army, stationed in Maine, Washington, DC, Ohio, Alaska, Oregon, and Washington state, so he was more widely traveled than the rest of the family. Excerpts heard here are from his letters home, written between age 26 and 38. Chet is played by Andrew Ashley.

Then there's Audubon Stedman, born 1854 and died in 1920. Audubon is my great-great grandfather and second of Lyman and Emily's five children, a full 24 years older than youngest brother Chet. He was a journalist and farmer, and the father of two: Faber and Waldo, who we'll hear at the very end. During his father Lyman's long illness, Audubon moved home to Brown's Island to farm and help his sister Mabel care for their father. Excerpts heard here are from his continuation of Lyman's daily journal after Lyman became unable to continue it, written when Audubon was aged 59 to 65. Audubon is played by Joshua Ponsones.

Next you'll hear Blanche Stedman Keyes, born 1852 and died 1937. She's the oldest of the five siblings, and housewife to preacher John Keyes. She left home early and had five children of her own; at age 26 she was actually pregnant with her third child even as her mother Emily was pregnant with her youngest brother Chet at the same time. Excerpts heard here are from her occasional, rarely used diary, a record she kept for her children, written between ages 61 and 77. Blanche is played by Emmarie Wilson.

Toward the end, we'll hear from Mabel Stedman, born 1862 and died 1948. Mabel is the middle of the five siblings; she never married, and she cared for her father Lyman on Brown's Island until he died. After leaving the island, she lived 29 more years in nearby Toronto, Ohio, just a couple miles up the river, as the longest surviving member of her generation. For years, she hosted her nephew Waldo (Audubon's son) in her home, writing lots of letters to my grandfather Allan (who was Audubon's grandson and her great-nephew—I know

this is getting confusing, I'm sorry). Mabel enters the audio drama late because the only extant letters of hers come from later in life, when she was 75-84, written to my grandfather Allan, Allan's mother Minnie, and Allan's first wife Betty. Her letters can be confusing to understand without context; in the excerpts here, she laments first for the early death of Allan's father Faber, Audubon's first son, and then she laments even more for the infant child Allan and Betty lost, and finally for Betty herself. Still, it felt wrong to leave Mabel's own voice out of a script that talks *about* her so much in earlier texts; I only wish we had more of the words she wrote as a younger woman, too. Mabel is played by Keira Alejandro.

Finally, there's Waldo Stedman, born 1882 and died 1958. He's Audubon's second son, who lived with Mabel on-again, off-again after his wife died. Waldo is played by me, Kyle Stedman.

So let's get on with it. This is "'I'd Like to Be There with You to Enjoy Them': Voices from the Past."

[gentle, quiet acoustic guitar (Jangwa, 2022), along with some birds chirping (Luzanne0, 2018)]

LYMAN: Lyman Stedman. 1903. Brown's Island, West Virginia. December 24th: Waldo & Annie came in a.m. & Faber and Chet in p.m.

[quiet sounds of unintelligible conversation fade in, like people sitting around a table enjoying themselves (f-r-a-g-i-l-e, 2019)]

December 25th: Christmas—all of the above named with us enjoying good cheer—glad to have them with us in a pleasant reunion.

[guitar continues alone; sound of marching steps fades in]

CHET: Chet Stedman. 1904. Newark, Ohio. May 26th: You spoke of coming out to camp. Would like very much to have you come; but must frankly say, beforehand, that our facilities here, for entertaining female visitors for more than a few hours at a time, aren't what they might be. *[laughs]* But I'll try to see that you don't starve, anyway, when you come. Surely you might get away for *one* night.

[guitar continues as farm noises fade in (Luzanne0, 2018)]

LYMAN: Lyman. June 19th: Mabel & Waldo at 9 ½ a.m. set out for Newark, Columbus &c.

June 20th: [Mabel] & [Waldo] returned this morn. from Columbus [Ohio]—*[heavily, feeling the weight of his son heading so far away]* Chet. is to start this [evening] from Columbus Barracks with his regiment for San Frisco, en route to Alaska.

[guitar fades out, replaced by whistling wind (craigsmith, 2018)]

CHET: Chet. August 7th. Fort Liscum, [*as if he can't believe he's saying it*] Alaska. My kingdom for a culinary department of *my own*, that will satisfactorily cook chow *as* I want it, and *when* I want it! I like flapjacks the size of a dinner plate, and tomatoes cooked with bread, and boiled onions, and bread pudding, and apple sauce, and various other unfashionable concoctions that don't occur to me now.

Now, I'm sending you, in this letter, thirty dollars; and it is my desire that Pa shall go down to Fred Becks, at his very earliest convenience, and get measured for a *good suit* and be sure the coat tail is long enuf. [. . .] We'll call it a Christmas present; but I want him to get it *now*, so he'll have it when Christmas comes. And I want to especially insist, again, that this suit of clothes *be purchased*, in the very near future.

[*return to the farm, with more quiet farm sounds (Luzanne0, 2018)*]

LYMAN: Lyman. 1905. Brown's Island. May 1st: Went to [Steubenville] by Trolley. Deposited in Nat'l Bank a check [...] for 5\$ that Chet sent to us last [August], & has been in my coat pocket since, forgotten.

[*quiet, repetitive piano music begins (Quadrado, 2021b)*]

1906. October 17th: Chet. came to us unexpectedly from 'Newport News' [Virginia].

October 18th: Chet. left us for Columbus, [Ohio].

November 24th: Mabel & Chet. left for Washington [trip].

November 30th: [Mabel] & Chet. returned home.

[*heavily*] December 5th: Chet. left us for Ft. Stevens, Oregon.

[*piano fades out, replaced by rain and thunder (daveincamas, 2007b; matucha, 2012)*]

AUDUBON: Audubon Stedman. 1913. Brown's Island. March 26th: Raining. River rising rapidly. Fastened boards on fences and hauled all the loose gates onto higher ground.

March 27th: Cleared out cellar and hauled fence posts onto higher ground.

March 28th: River came to a stand at daylight this morning, after rising to a state of [...] just 1 ½ inches higher than 1907. Took nearly all our fences away. Lost three nights sleep this week—one, shipping calves, and two watching river.

[*rain fades out, replaced by outdoor sounds of crickets and birds (BenDrain, 2019)*]

March 29th: [*cheerfully*] Clear. River falling fast. Made hog yard to confine pigs until get fence built around hog lot.

[*outdoor sounds fade out*]

CHET: Chet. Fort Stevens, Oregon. April 2: After reading in the telegraphic reports on Monday that the Ohio river was six feet above the eighty-four mark, I've been living in a state of perpetual nightmare. For I know precious well that if it was six feet higher at the Island, you're just about washed away. Certainly hope it isn't as bad as my imagination has been picturing it; but it's bound to be bad enuf, at the very best.

I telegraphed to Toronto on Monday night. But having heard nothing by last night, I sent another one to Steubenville. A little while ago, about eleven A. M., the operator telephoned over that he had a message for me saying that everybody was safe at Brown's island and Costonia; but I don't know yet which one of my messages it is a reply to. It's a whole lot of consolation to know that you're all alive; but the desolation must be something awful.

Even if you are all alive, yourselves, I'm sorely afraid you've lost a lot of stock, and that the house is well-nigh a wreck—to say nothing of the fences being all gone.

[music begins, with static of an old record playing: an upbeat piano jig (Grainger, 1922)]

BLANCHE: Blanche Stedman Keyes. Cambridge, Ohio. April 11th: This is not a diary, but occasionally I'm going to record a day's events. Today has been one of my *big* days, as the Country Contributor says. I was up before six, hurried through my bathroom duties—I hardly take time some mornings to bathe. From bathroom I hurried to furnace room, then back to kitchen. Start breakfast for Miss Frost who rooms and boards with us. [...]

I had to go up street this morning, then serve luncheon, feed chickens, attend to hot beds, then prepare evening meal for six teachers. Tonight we had potato soup, baked beans, cold meat, lettuce, plum butter, bread and butter, prunes and whipped cream with nuts. I have strived to give my literary boarders a constant change of meals, vegetables and desserts.

Truely, as cousin Jenny says "It takes more brains to run a kitchen and dining room than it does for a doctor, lawyer or any other professional." Sometimes I think I can't take it another day. Then when I steal an hour to rest, I feel so much better. I take up my burdens with new energy. I have not made much money, but I have had plenty to call lots of experiences and all of the physical culture any woman needs. If some of the whining sick women would step up into my place for one month with the determination to do their best, they would be new creatures. They say "I can't—My back is weak, and I am so nervous". Alas, so do I have a back that has to be thought of every step of the way, and my nerves almost set me wild at times—especially when those thoughtless women seem to forget that I am human—but God is with me. "He knows all about it."

[piano music ends, replaced by boots walking through something wet, like a marsh (bruno.auzet, 2023)]

AUDUBON: Audubon. 1914. Brown's Island. July 26th: Dad walked out to

the river this p.m. and layed down in the skiff half full of water. Mabel had to get Allan Seeley to help her get him to the house.

[steps replaced by sound of water rushing by in a river (kyles, 2022)]

July 28th: Dad's Cousin Eva Walker came to visit us. Tom Huff brought her over the river in buggy.

August 7th: Blanche Keyes, from Cambridge [...] came to-day.

August 20th: Cousin Walker, after a visit of one month and two days, took her departure for her home in Syracuse, Ohio. She is the most constant and continuous talker I ever heard. She starts her mouth when she gets up in the morning and lets it run until she goes to bed at night. I went with her as far as Lazearville to put her on the Wheeling Car.

[rushing water sound ends]

BLANCHE: Blanche. September 4th. Cambridge, Ohio. From Cadiz my trip took me to my old home on the island. Remained ten days. How I did wish I could stay longer with Pa and help Mabel with her heavy burden. I do wish I could have convinced John it would be best to sell this house and build a little home at Costonia. It would not have been such a struggle to make ends meet. And I could have helped care for Pa—but perhaps tis all for the best.

Cousin Eva Walker was making one of her long visits at the island. . . . She is nice, but an endless talker and *long* visitor. Some people cannot learn that it is hard work for a woman who does her own work and feeds chickens and pigs besides caring for an old person that is as helpless as a child, and has to entertain company for weeks is too much. I helped what I could.

[sound of train pulling into a station, with warning bell (FunWithSound, 2021)]

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. September 25th: Chet surprised us this morning with his presence, having come from Ft. Canby [Washington], to stay a month—maybe longer. Mighty glad to see him.

[train sound fades out, replaced by farm ambience (soloan, 2018)]

October 5th: Took Chets trunk to C.H.P. station, he having [received] dispatch to report at Ft Canby by the 10th of the month, and he left us this p.m. for the west, having been here but little over one week. Chet bought us a wheelbarrow, \$3.50.

November 22nd: This is Dad's 87th birthday anniversary, but he don't know it.

December 25th: Christmas Day. Had steak, mashed potatoes, apple sauce, two kind of bread, Cranberries, Pumpkin and mince pie, and assorted cakes and nuts and candy for dinner.

[solo acoustic guitar playing cheerful arpeggios (Doctor Turtle, 2020)]

CHET: Chet. 1915. Fort Canby, Washington. October 25th: Really believe if I could just get out of this place for awhile, and get back home where I could get the same kind of things to eat that used to taste so good in my younger days, I'd stand a fair chance of perking up a bit: might even gain five pounds in weight! I'd just like to have a chance to try it for awhile, at least; but as long as I can stay with this job, I hate just awfully to think of deliberately giving it up: for jobs like this don't grow on bushes, and I'm getting old!

Dreamed last night that I was at home; and Seddy was there also, looking just about as he used to; and it was evening, and he had gone out to the sugar camp and milked the cows!

[*sounding a bit sick, with a cough*] 1916. February 23rd: Am in hopes, if spring conditions just continue a little while longer, that I'll be able to coax the "frog" out of my throat: for three months I've scarcely been able to say half a dozen consecutive words to anybody, without cough, cough cough!!! It's getting downright monotonous! . . . But I'm staking everything on the spring days: they are so deliciously fine—after the pestiferous blizzard—that it seems like being in Paradise!

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. March 14th: Blanche came from Cambridge, arriving here at 3 p.m. Rain and snow in evening.

March 28th: Blanche went home to Cambridge.

CHET: Chet. Fort Canby. March 28th: Am glad Blanche is with you for a little visit: wish it were possible for some of the rest of us to get home a little oftener. When this time of year comes I begin to think of a mess of real 'greens', and onions and radishes and lettuce fresh from the garden. Oh, I'm getting it bad, I guess!

April 6th: Had a letter from Blanche last night, and she thinks a Rolling Chair would be quite a help in getting Dad around. And I rather expect it would, although I hadn't happened to think of it myself.

BLANCHE: Blanche. Cambridge, Ohio. April 13th: Last month I went to my old home to see Pa. Poor old man—He did not seem to know me during the two weeks I was there. To read the diaries he kept for years, telling of his interest in political affairs, his days of hard work in store and our farm, the many books recorded that he read and studied, his keeping in touch with Congress and every national interest, and last but not least, something was recorded every day about those he loved and worked for. And now to see him sit as a little child, seldom speaking, never reads, eats like a child of two or three years, tears paper for an hour or two, and sometimes his clothes. Can hardly walk, has to be bathed and dressed like a tiny child, tears his bed to pieces and has to sometimes be tied. Oh, it does seem too bad.

Mabel has her hands more than full. I do wish I was located nearer to them so I could go back and forth more to help. I so often wish that John had been willing to sell this home and buy a little home at Costonia. It would not be so

hard on me to make ends meet and I could help to lighten Mabel's burden. She truly deserves a double portion of the old farm for her life of sacrifice, caring for Mother and Father. I am truly willing to go help, but I have my own home.

[guitar music fades out, replaced by sounds of a city street, with the low hum of crowds talking, horses' feet on cobblestones, and the "ah-wooga!" of an old-time car horn (daveincamas, 2007a; Owl, 2013; urupin, 2010)]

CHET: Chet. Portland, Oregon. May 16th: I just had to get away from Canby: the longer I stayed there in the fog and wet, the worse shape I seemed to get into. Think the confounded throat, and the coughing, are what dragged me down so, this spring: I really got afraid that some morning I might not be able to get out of bed and do my work. But with a little change of air, I think everything will be OK.

May 23rd: I've been uncertain just what to do, in my own case. I'd come home; if I thought I could be of any help; but in my present state I'd be just about as much help to Audie as a wet dishrag—simply another cripple to burden you with, at least for awhile. So I believe, for a time at least, I'll be better off in New Mexico—if I can *only* some day get connections with Washington and get started there! And then after I pick up some, I may come home for awhile. But don't worry about me, whatever you do.

[city sounds fade out]

Fort Bayard. May 29th: Now don't get worried when I say that I have a touch of tuberculosis [*cough*], and that's what's been the matter with me for these two or three years past. I didn't realize what the trouble was, at first; but toward the last I had it pretty well sized up. Seems to me I'm able to talk a little better, already, and I've only been here two days. My appetite hasn't come yet, but I'm hoping for its reappearance in the near future. The food is certainly a lot different from old Dick's.

[gentle piano begins (Quadrado, 2021a)]

June 4th: I honestly believe another week would have pretty near been my finish—that I just got here in the nick of time. I'm awfully sorry to know the game ankle is still so painful: had hoped it was just an ordinary sprain, and by this time would be feeling fairly comfortable. It just makes me sick to think of all the things you are called upon to do, crippled and single-handed.

June 26th: Still flat in bed. My poor old heart doesn't seem to want to behave at all, and there's no use thinking of doing things until it shows some signs of betterment. Now, as far as any money is concerned, that I have ever sent home for any purpose, I don't want anybody to have any worries about it at all. It was all for the common good, and if I could help a little once in a while I was glad to do it. We only live once, and I guess some of us would be about as well off if we never lived at all.

July 4th: I'm getting so I feel a bit of an appetite once in a while, but it isn't

very strong. I can just imagine those little green onions you're getting from the garden now, together with new-potatoes and various other things; and I'd like to be with you to enjoy them. I guess Audie's suggestion that we cripples all come home together and raise butter and eggs, is just about the best solution of our family problem: we don't seem to be able to accomplish very much separately, any more.

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. July 18th: Waldo & Family came last evening. Cultivated corn in p.m. Telegram came from Bushnell at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, that Chet. had died to-day. Went to Toronto and sent return dispatch to have Chets remains shipped to George S. Paisley, Toronto undertaker.

July 23rd: Chet's remains arrived at Toronto today from Fort Bayard, New Mexico. No 24-hour advance notice as promised by the authorities at Fort Bayard. [...] Sent dispatches to Faber, Blanche, Annie, Charlie Stewart and Sam Shields. Sed and wife came this morning. We went to Toronto, and selected a better coffin for Chet.

[piano fades out]

July 24th: Buried Chet at 3 p.m. Blanche Keyes came to Toronto, just after funeral services had commenced.

July 31st: Went to New Cumberland, to talk with County Clerk in regard to Chet's affairs. Gave Rev Ross, \$5. for delivering Chets funeral sermon. Gave Mrs. [George] S. Paisley \$5. for her kindness in furnishing house for funeral. Gave [Thomas] J. Shaw \$6.50 for digging grave in Cemetery.

[birdsong (ztitchez, 2016)]

BLANCHE: Blanche. Cambridge, Ohio. On July 18th, Chet died at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, wither he had gone in search of health. Poor boy, should have left this damp cold atmosphere at Fort Canby long ago, but he evidently did not realize long how serious was his condition.

On 24th of July, we buried him at Toronto by the side of Mother. Mabel is completely crushed for she has been a second mother to Chet ever since Mother left us for her long home in the undiscovered country. I cannot wonder that Mabel felt that he was her mainstay, for he has been so good to her, sending time and again so many things to brighten her life, and help in caring for poor old Pa. And Chet had promised to care for her after Pa goes to join Ma. . . .

He was only thirty-eight. . . . So pure was his life and so full of good works, I cannot believe he was far from the Kingdom, but oh what a comfort it would be to know that he fully trusted Jesus. I cannot understand why with such a mother as we had—for she loved God's word and trusted in her savior and taught us to believe, not one of my brothers or Mabel seem to try to get close to

Jesus, through whom alone we can be saved. Audie especially seemed to enjoy saying unkind things about those who tried to live a true life.

[quiet thunder peal, and then it and birdsong fades out]

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. November 28th: Father lying down in invalid chair all day—first time in his life that I ever knew him to do such a thing.

November 29th: Showers. Went to Steubenville and sent telegram to Blanche Keyes, at Cambridge, to "Come at Once", as Father seemed to be nearing the End.

Lime 10¢ Pork \$2.

Father died at 8:30 p.m.

BLANCHE: Blanche. Cambridge, Ohio. November 29th: Pa died November 29, 1916. Beginning his 90th year, having celebrated his 89th birthday on November 22, 1916. Dear old man, no one knows more than I do what a grand man he was. During the past 20 years since Mother's death, he has gradually failed in both body and mind. It was so sad to see him losing his grip on life for I remember him as a little child, a young girl, and woman with my own little ones growing up around me. [...] He made no profession of religion, but his life was beautiful, which to me was and is a constant example to live honest and true to myself, to man, and to God.

[quiet, outdoor sounds—birds and wind—that continue through many of the following lines]

AUDUBON: Audubon. Brown's Island. December 3rd: The funeral service taking place at 2 p.m. [...] The kind attention of the people of the Presbyterian Church was perfect in every detail and we shall never forget their kindness. At the Cemetery, the caving in of the grave interfered with the customary lowering of the coffin, being the only balk in the whole service.

[meditative solo guitar begins (Shaw, 2011)]

1917. April 5th: Went to Toronto and had Chets effects reshipped to Steubenville. \$1.98. There were twenty-one pieces of it. White kidney beans .74 [cents].

November 16th: Cloudy & Rain. Had to get up at 4 a.m. with asthma. [. . .] [William] Porter came over to grind his ax and shell some corn, but I didn't have breath enough to wait on him. [...] My smoking for asthma becomes more frequent every day, and my heart grows proportionally weaker.

BLANCHE: Blanche. 1918. Cambridge, Ohio. January 26th: My birthday. How such mile stones make us stop and think. I am 66, in many ways feel no older than at 30, but I can not stand quite as much. I do want to live to do good for forty years if it is God's will.

AUDUBON: Audubon. 1919. Brown's Island. April 4th: Mabel Blanche and Sed packing to move. Cy Ferguson was to come over to-day and bring a farmer to look at the Island, but did not put in an appearance.

April 5th: Mabel, Blanche & Sed. Packing. Dan fooling around.

October 1st: Waldo helping to move out.

[guitar fades out, replaced with increasingly loud sound of water rushing (kyles, 2022)]

October 2nd: Waldo and J.T. Lee, took load of moving over the river.

October 4th: Lib Cochran and Annie Jewett went to Island and milked Dottie Dimple. I deserted the Island, and went to Toronto. Fell down when getting on trolley car and hurt back of my left hand.

[rushing water fades out, replaced by occasional birdsong]

BLANCHE: Blanche. Cambridge, Ohio. October 27th: Soon after I came from Cadiz, I had to go to the island on account of Mabel being very sick with bladder trouble. How she kept out of bed is still a wonder to me. I stayed three weeks to help the best I could. My heart aches for Mabel.

After Aunt's death, I made another trip to the island on account of selling and helping Mabel to pack up. Oh how my heart has ached to see the old farm go into the hands of strangers. During last months, Mabel at last got moved into her new home in Toronto. I do want to see her but my pocket book runs low and a new furnace must be put in.

[more heavily] 1920. February 27th: Have returned from Toronto. Audie's funeral was held Wednesday morning at 10:30 at Presbyterian Church. During the last four years, we have buried Chester J, Father and Audubon J at Toronto Cemetery. And Raymond my boy at Annapolis. I wonder who will be next? For death is something none of us can escape. So long as I can, I want to live and help make this world better, but there is so little I can do in a financial way. But if I can make our day brighter for someone else I feel that I have done a little good in my small corner.

[birdsong continues as meditative solo piano enters (Podington Bear, 2017)]

1923. April 19th: A beautiful bright morning but still cold. The past winter has not been extremely cold, but long, making coal bills immense, for the air has been constantly chilly and damp. But we must take all these days of winter and summer just as God sends them. . . . I am not young—past 71, but I do want to live until I am a *hundred years young*, if I can help make the world a little better.

1925. October 29th: Mabel has been quite sick "intestinal flu". I do feel sorry for her, all alone, except roomers, most of the time. I am well most of the time

but 73 and have *deaf* ears, and not quite as strong as in years ago. I just can't pick up and go as I used to. I have asked her over and over to spend the winter months with us, but have not succeeded thus far. Our furnace would keep all warm and save Mabel that much.

1929. April 3rd: The picture on the otherside of this leaf tells the story of Charles Keyes Stewart's death. We all must sooner or later go to our long home—but such tragic deaths grinds us to death.

[*piano music stops*]

They are such a shock. I feel as though we had been dreaming. . . . It seems to me he must come back and walk in. He was my first grandchild, as dear to me as my own boys. Oh God help us all to be ready to go home.

[*sound of river water fades in*]

MABEL: Mabel Stedman. Toronto, Ohio. 1937. September 16th: I feel so broken—dazed and numb—and feel *so bitter* to think I never got out even one nice sum, after getting the little farm he so loved. No use talking, things arent right. There's Aunt Blanche 85 last Jan—I don't mean I want her to go—but she's living in *mental darkness*—of no comfort to herself or any one—yet lives on—and your Dad had to go, when he was so happy and so wanted to live.—Why oh why—

[*crackle of an old record begins, with cheerful/sappy chamber music (Taylor Trio, 1922)*]

November 16th: Dear Kidlets: Allan and Betty—owe you both letters—Betty's came first then Allans—so you'll notice the envelope whoever is home gets first look at letter. Did get one written last [week] to Mom—[*hesitantly*] telling about Aunt Blanche.

[*abruptly upbeat again*] *Thank you* for telling me what you are expecting next spring—I *am glad* to see it, tis a boy—because the desk out home goes on down to *eldest* son. [. . .]—and *would your* Dad have been glad to see some *little Steds* about—and he didnt even know—tho maybe he does now? This is a typical [November] day—gloomy—dark, damp. My Dad use to say—“No sun—no moon—no stars—November.” Certainly fits today.

[*crackle of old vinyl continues, but now it's a new song: still small chamber group, but playing a slower, sadder song (Florentine Quartet, 1917)*]

1946. January 20th: Oh Allan, Allan—I've written you countless letters at night when could not sleep—since Betty left you.— Then daylight comes, my fingers dont want to shove my pen. Will try see what I come to this a.m.— Mom said you had a *hard* job [answering] letters—had come to Betty—not knowing she was gone.— I can well imagine what a heart aching job that would be—felt so bad for you when down Christmas—tho couldnt didnt dare say a word; you looked *so* lost, desolate—broken hearted.— There is but one thing to be thankful for and that is cold comfort—but poor little soul she is *at rest*—sleeping peacefully,

her sufferings all over—my never ceasing cry is “why oh why” it had to be. She *so loved* and *enjoyed* life—but suppose there was a reason somewhere—

Here is a bit of “doggeral,” my Dad called it.—I heard my mother say in days way back yonder, people use to end their letters with it. Just came to mind few days ago—“My pen is bad—My ink is pale—But my love for you—Will never fail.”

August 1st: Guess *one* thing upset me some, I’ve been digging out, looking over old letters, burning a lot—a few kept as curiosities—no stamp no envelope. — Think I found all of Chets.— Rereading them broke me all up, tore open the old hurt—is still so deep—I can’t burn ‘em.

[*music fades out, replaced by rushing of river water*]

WALDO: Waldo Stedman. 1947. Toronto, Ohio. November 27th: Dear Allan: Mrs. McBooth left last night and Miss Harman came when she left—Evelyn Cleeree found her. Waldo.

[*river water fades out slowly*]

[*End of transcript*]

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