

*Imagine this place is not about us and never has been and never will be and  
that this is the history it teaches us and that this is what we must learn and  
never seem willing to study;*

--Charles Bowden, "Contested Ground," excerpted in *Harper's Magazine*, Jan 2010

I get up on high to hear Ewald Weiss' music rising up dulcet from cavernous Jefferson Ravine. Weiss was the fellow who, as a member of a German orchestra playing atop Mt. Washington in August of 1890, wandered off during a lull for a chance at looming Mt. Adams. He never returned.

I get up on high because the mountains see everything, know everything, *are* everything. Human life is not life. Blind, arrogant, self-absorbed, making our mouselike prints on the landscapes we try to tame or cultivate, all of us -- after a mere-mortal span -- will leave this place. Some might be remembered on a plaque. Limitless in their ferocity as well as their beneficence, mountains will remain. High on Jefferson's frozen flank you feel the gaze of gods.

I get up on high because the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, in Paris for a Cezanne exhibit in the summer of 1907, found courage to write a beyond-loving letter to his wife. One half-line of it rings in me like a sonorous bell:

*The further one goes, the more private, the more personal, the more singular an experience becomes...*

*Singular:* that is what these mountains are. Philosophically speaking, no other thing is quite like them. *No other thing* is quite worth the getting-up for, and the beholding.

*from Muskat, Timothy, "Pearls of Peril: A winter Trek Across the High Presentials," ©2012*