

LAGO

I was born in West Covina, CA in 1965. I lived the first two years of my life in nearby Glendora, a bedroom community of Los Angeles. My dad was never really fond of the L.A. area, (he grew up in rural Minnesota) so the first chance he got, he moved us out to the desert, away from the pollution and freeways. Three years after that, seeking even further isolation, he moved us to the mountains of Idaho, where I lived until I was 24 and the place I still think of as home.

My time in the desert was brief, but it was at a critical point in my early life—the transition from toddler to child—and it left a deep impression on me. We lived on the southern edge of the Mojave Desert in a town called Apple Valley. (Apparently there were once apple orchards there, but I don't recall ever seeing one.) My memories of the place, although muddled and constantly shifting, are located in the heat and smell of the arid desert air, and punctuated by odd and violent imagery, like swimming in the murky waters of Salton Sea or driving past a box of abandoned puppies on a remote desert road, two of whom escaped and had been flattened so dramatically by car tires that I could make out tread marks in their blood-soaked remains. It was vivid and haunting stuff, but all I have left are slippery and unreliable flashes. The developmental period of early cognition coupled with the harsh desert landscape made for an interesting stew of explicit reports and utter incoherence.

Lago is an attempt to reconcile the vagaries of memory with our need to make narrative sense of things. If one considers our traces in the landscape to be a coded language of some sort, then the act of photographing those traces and piecing them together becomes a form of cryptography. It's like a poetic archeology that, rather than attempting to arrive at something conclusive, looks for patterns and rhythms that create congruity out of the stuttering and incomplete utterances of the visible world. These harmonies, when we're lucky enough to find them, are probably the closest we can get to locating actual 'meaning' and grasping the potency of place.

—Ron Jude