

Poem Read at the Inauguration of Governor John Baldacci, January 2003:

Building a House in the Woods, Maine, 1971

A good uphill mile and a half from a not very good  
dirt road,  
That distance on foot meaning a sort of mincing strut  
over frost heaves  
And washouts across what had been a poor road at best  
fifty years previously,  
Through tangles of witch hazel, alder and birch saplings  
And-at this time  
Of year in the low spots-sucking gurgling mud:  
that expedition  
Taking the better part of an hour to a ridge side where  
a few gaunt, disheartened  
Apple trees and dead elms from the nineteenth century  
stood like blank-eyed  
Sentinels and where you intended to build a house  
that would stare  
Without curtains at a prospect of more ridges and then  
real mountains that  
Receded to the serene distance of pale green eternity.  
And why shouldn't love be made here, meals cooked and  
consumed, fires stoked,  
Children born who would have the boundless woods to learn from,  
who would feel freedom  
In their footsteps and taste the calm thrill of dawn.  
Weren't all of us  
Young and able to split, hammer, haul, plant, saw, push,  
carry, lift, and  
At the end of the physical day simply and sublimely sit?  
We breathed the dank clean air, the thin sharp smells of  
pine woods and dead  
Leaves and melting snow, and we started to whoop and jig  
for the vision of it,  
The earth strength that we had lived too long without.