

# To Victor

for Sherman Alexie

At 35,000 feet,  
we converse.  
You whisper through the turn of a page  
while I, like a good 'skin, am silent  
when you speak.

The stewardess points out the reading lamp  
as she hands me a cup and can.  
I smile then reply,  
"Such things are best spoken of  
in the dark."

We talk about the merry-go-round  
at my third elementary school.  
You tell me to climb on,  
say you'll spin me  
'till the years stretch and snap,  
throwing me toward the past,  
screaming,  
"Never sign treaties  
you can't translate yourself!"

There are five Ways to this language  
and each contradicts the other.

The way of the treaty maker:  
Paul Newman and Robert Redford  
in *The Sting*, splayed across a rotting  
drive-in movie screen, while my date  
wonders why I'm not trying anything.

She will find out soon enough;  
misdirection is everything.

The way of the horse trader:  
350 horses nickering softly  
beneath the skin of a '67 Mustang.

The salesman doesn't even speak.

The way of the soldier:  
Little Bighorn was a massacre,  
the Long Walk a relocation,  
Wounded Knee ...a battle?

The way of the settler:  
these are the only words we understand:  
escape,  
opportunity,  
freedom.

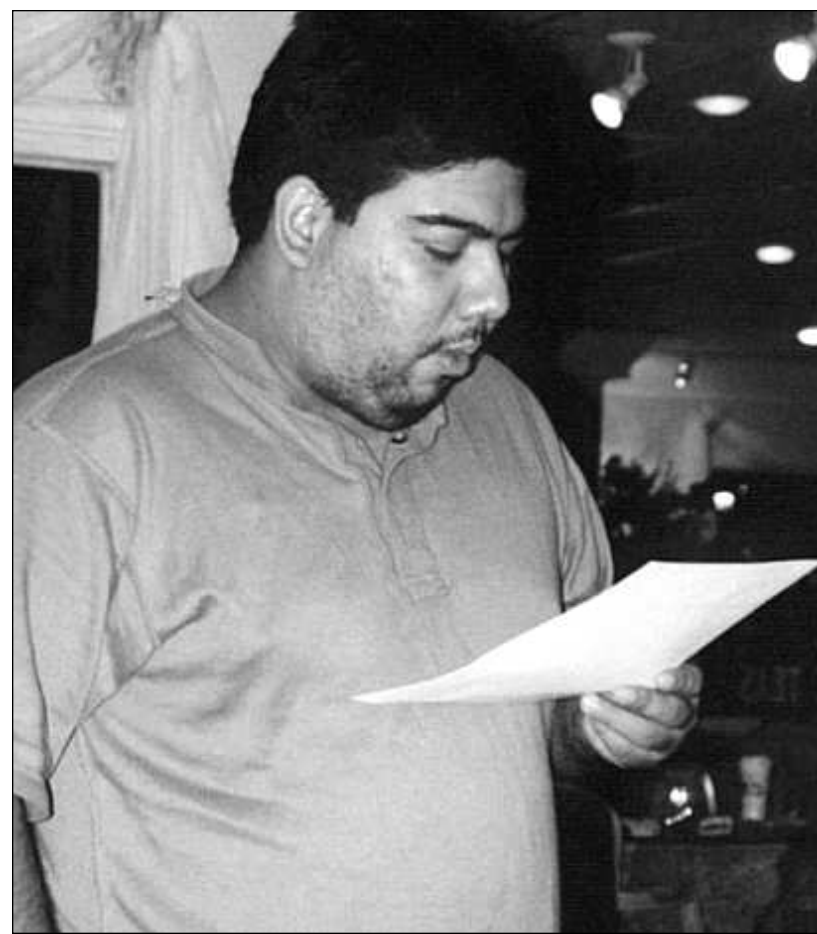
You will teach us  
how to forget what they mean.

The cartography of the Native American language:  
Lakota, Chippewa, Shoshone, Hopi, Chinle, Quechan, Navajo, Papago, Cherokee,  
Pauite, Shawnee, Spokane, Apache, Arapaho, Algonquin, Yaqui, Yuma, Picayune,  
Cocopah, Couer D'Alene, Dakota, Mohawk, Delaware, Nez Perce, Blackfoot, Pueblo,  
Tohatchi, Tselani, Yavapi, Teecnospos, Oljatoh, Chilchinbeto, Laguna, Cabazon,  
Cahuilla, Morongo, Pechanga.

(Indian).

The woman in the window seat notices you,  
asks me my tribe.  
I tell her:  
"Hopi, I think;  
my family likes to say that grandfather  
once saw an Indian;  
but he was drunk,  
so he might've been mistaken."

Steve Ramirez

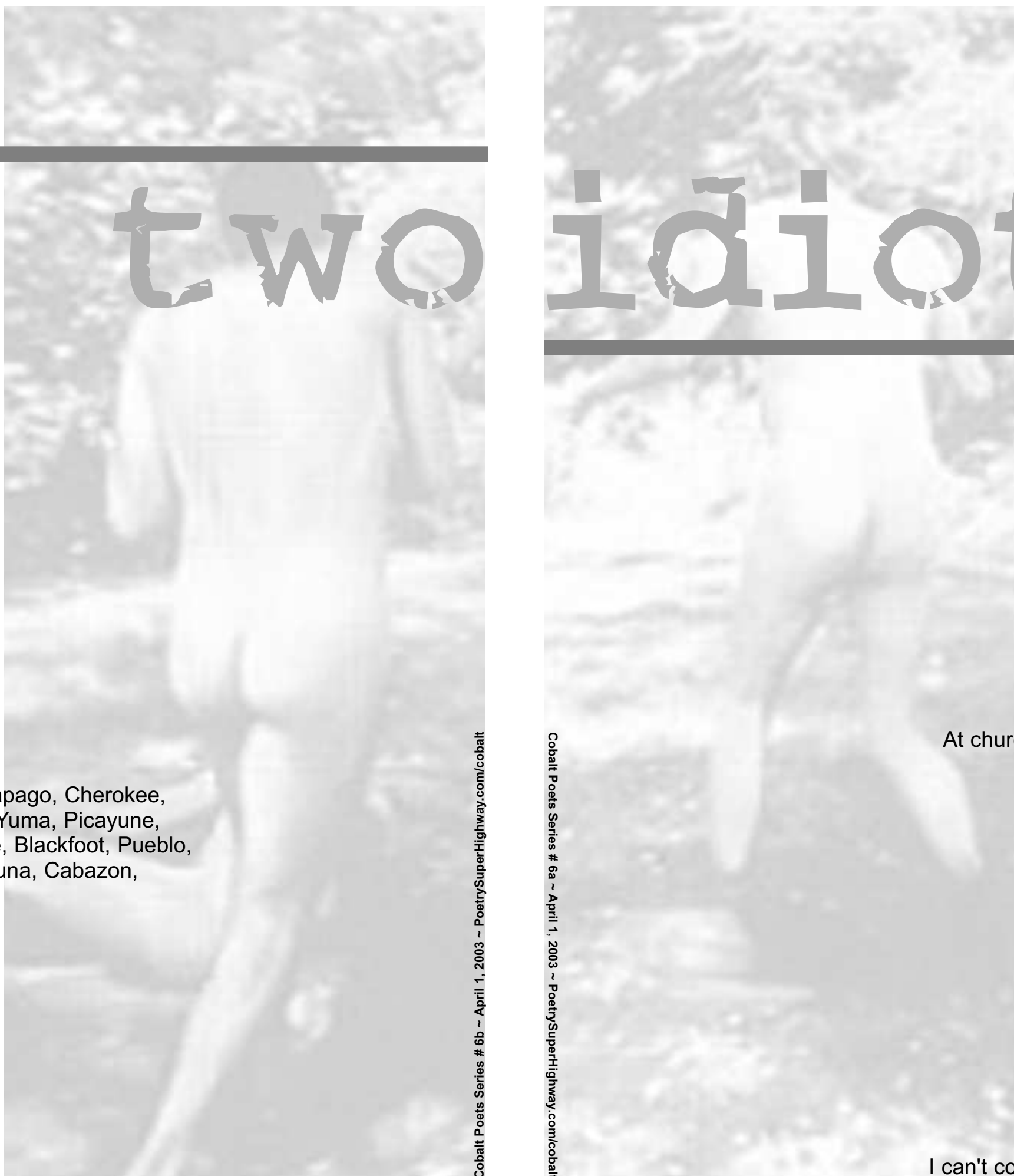


Steve Ramirez hosts the weekly reading series, Two Idiots Peddling Poetry in Orange, CA. A member of the Laguna Beach Slam Team 2000, he's also one of the organizers of the Orange County Poetry Festival, a co-director of the Big Damn Poetry Slam and member of the Five Penny Poets in Huntington Beach. Publication credits include *The Comstock Review*, *Limestone Circle*, *Lummo Journal*, *San Gabriel Valley Poetry Quarterly*, *The Creative Line* and *Incidental Buildings & Accidental Beauty*. Somewhere in there, he even manages to find time to sleep and write poetry.

Ben Trigg



Ben Trigg is the co-host of Two Idiots Peddling Poetry at the Ugly Mug Caffé in Orange, California. As a host, he works to remind people that poetry is often fun, and sometimes silly. When not at the Ugly Mug, Ben spends his time using a BA in drama to work in educational research. He's also known to be found glued to the tv on Tuesday nights watching *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. A child one minute, and a philosophical child the next, Ben's work is thoughtful, playful, and sometimes funny. (in his own mind at least.) He has performed throughout Southern California as well as in Texas as part of the Austin International Poetry Festival. He has three chapbooks, the latest being *Without Fear* from FarStarFire Press, and was published in the Orange County/Long Beach Poets Anthology, *Incidental Buildings and Accidental Beauty*. Ben was also one of the organizers behind the first Orange County Poetry Festival in 2002. He has recently developed an affinity for turtles, and is slowly beginning to figure out his place in the world.



# two idiots

## Speed Through Dark

1.  
My blood flows backwards, deposits oxygen in lungs,  
running from what must be done.  
Exhalation strangles my thoughts.  
I don't want to end this  
'cause it feels so nice, your words whispered in my ear,  
but you make me feel like a man, so it's time I started acting like one.

2.  
At church on Sunday, the friendship greeting has become the sunshine greeting.  
If it gets any friendlier, they're gonna start passing out joints.  
I want to cry.  
This is what keeps us apart:  
My strongest beliefs reduced to affirmations for insecure people.  
They're still enough.  
The trappings have lost their glory and honor, but the truth hasn't.  
If we can't share this, we can't share anything.

3.  
The car hums.  
I speed through the dark.  
I'm still running.  
The car takes me home, but my heart goes elsewhere,  
caught between what I want for myself and what I demand of myself.  
I've finally escaped loneliness,  
but it's time to go back to the old way of life.  
I can't commit to this, and you deserve better than to be a stop-gap for heartache.