

## My Straw Hat

by Adam French

I find the corpse under a duffel bag of ski clothing in the back of my car. I'm overwhelmed by guilt. When did I put it in the car? How many hours has it been lying there, squashed? How permanent is this disfigurement? How could I have taken such a great hat for granted?

The label inside reads "Quality since 1921/Genuine Raffia/Dorfman Pacific." The raffia is still there, the label is still there, the braided leather band is still there, even the sweat-stained liner is still there; but its spirit has departed.

I remember picking it out from the straw hats on a wire stand in a small store in Nevada City, Calif. I hadn't even been looking for a hat, but I ducked into that charming store when it caught my eye in the window. I liked the compact shape; plenty of shade, but still narrow.

It served me well. I remember wearing it and standing in a field in Cambodia while talking to a farmer about the wet-season water shortage, both of us sweating in the sun. Another time it provided some relief as I was riding in the back of a pickup truck through rural Burma, drenched and soon to be cooked as the rains passed through.

I lean against the rear fender of my muddy Subaru, thinking back to the places we've been. Feeling the connection so deeply, I realize I've been too quick to let go. I've become accustomed to accepting object death too quickly.

I formulate a plan to soak and reshape. A glimpse of this hat in the future, reborn in my mind's eye, is enough to give me hope, to propel me past hope to determination—past determination to commitment. There must be a way. If soaking isn't it, then steaming, boiling, even reweaving. Whatever it takes, I will make it; I will remake it. 🖐️

Photo by Lawrence Neeley

