

## Working with Dirt

Jonathan Muzzall  
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<http://www.jonathanmuzzall.com>

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Kevin Pfischer followed Old Man Paterson into the woodlot to see what he was doing there with his shovel.

The Saturday before, Kevin had been sitting alone in a comfortable chair in his parents' screened-in porch, enjoying summer vacation and reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, when he heard Old Man Paterson whistling down the sidewalk. Kevin finished the paragraph he was reading and stuck his thumb on it and looked up to see Old Man Paterson moving past his house with a shovel over his shoulder. Kevin recognized the tune Old Man Paterson was whistling, but he didn't know the name of it. He wanted to say hi but the shovel left him silent. He went back to his book, took a break for lunch, and was back on the porch some hours later when he heard the tune again. Kevin went to the window, touched the peeling paint of the weathered sill, and looked closely at him. Old Man Paterson's clothes, a red-and-white button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up and light-colored jeans, were covered in dirt, and so was his face. He had a red bandanna tied around

his forehead. Rivulets of sweat had made tracks through the dirt on his skin. The shovel looked old, but sharp. In the midst of his whistling, Old Man Paterson noticed Kevin staring at him from the porch, and said hello before Kevin could say anything or step back into the shadows. Kevin said, Hi. Everything seemed fine. Kevin read more of his book after he was alone again, but because of the dirt-covered man he had trouble following the story.

The next day, Sunday, Kevin was in the same place at the same time, sitting in a cushioned wicker chair on the porch, reading his book, and now Old Man Paterson carried four orange cones as well as his shovel. On Old Man Paterson's return trip, the cones were gone, and he was as dirty as the day before. Kevin waited around every day after that for Old Man Paterson (though not entirely friendless, Kevin kept to himself), but he didn't appear again until the following Saturday. No cones this time. Just the shovel. When Old Man Paterson was a ways down the block, Kevin let himself out of the porch and closed the door quietly behind him. He watched Old Man Paterson turn the corner, and then started after him. From the corner, it was a straight shot half a mile to the woodlot. Kevin knew right away that was where Old Man Paterson was headed, so he kept his distance. Once Kevin got there, the woodlot itself wasn't big enough for him to lose the trail for long; further, if he stopped to listen, he could still hear Old Man Paterson faintly whistling.

Kevin stayed on the path, at first, using his ears to figure out where Old Man Paterson was. After Kevin drew as close as he could on the path, triangulating the location based on the whistling, he crept through the bushes and fallen leaves, moving as quietly as he could, until he spotted one of the orange cones in the middle of a small clearing. Kevin was able to see Old Man Paterson, thigh-deep in the middle of a hole, digging. The sun was beating down on him as he worked. The orange cones ringed the perimeter of the hole,

which was as far across as two men who were stretching out their arms. Instead of a bandanna, Old Man Paterson wore a mesh baseball hat. Kevin watched him digging, slowly, piling up the dirt around the edges of the hole. When the shovel went into the earth, it went *shwt*. Katydid buzzed from beneath the bushes and trees. If Kevin listened hard, he could hear cars and trucks on the highway on the other side of the woodlot.

After Kevin watched him for a while, Old Man Paterson straightened up, dirt on his face, and his back made a sound like two good-sized rocks being knocked together. Before he resumed digging, he said hello to Kevin, who felt then he had been caught and might as well walk out into the clearing. Up close, Kevin could see how much sun Old Man Paterson had gotten, and the dirt smears on the old man's arms gave them a rich, dark texture.

Old Man Paterson asked Kevin if he was having a nice summer. Kevin said yes and asked Old Man Paterson whether his summer was going well. Not too bad, he said. Old Man Paterson stood with one foot on the blade of the shovel, and his chin on his hands on the handle. He smiled at Kevin.

Are you searching for Native American bones? Kevin asked. He blushed, because he meant to say *dinosaur* instead of *Native American* or *artifacts* instead of *bones*. He meant to say one of those two things, but he said what he said. Kevin scratched his leg, pale from having spent most of the summer indoors, and chewed on the inside of his mouth. Old Man Paterson shook his head. Nope, he said. Kevin nodded as if that cleared things up for him. Old Man Paterson said Kevin could stay as long as he wanted, and then went back to digging, whistling parts of familiar songs, taking small shovelfuls at a time, piling them evenly in a ring around the edge, getting dirtier in spite of the exactness of his movements. After a time, Kevin began to feel he was intruding on something Old Man Paterson wanted to be

doing privately, even though he was doing it in broad daylight in the middle of a woodlot on public land, so Kevin said goodbye. Old Man Paterson told him to take care.

By the time he returned home, Kevin's older brother, Todd, had rolled out of bed. Todd was taller than Kevin by half a foot. He had spent most of the summer running around outside, playing football and other games, and his hair was lighter and his skin was tanner than his brother's. Todd wanted to know where Kevin had been, and Kevin explained that he'd been out in the woodlot, where Old Man Paterson was digging a hole. Todd asked Kevin what pirates called their buried treasure and Kevin thought about it for a while. When he gave up, Todd said, *Booty*. Kevin thought he should have been able to figure that one out. He retreated to the porch with his book and read. After a time, Todd joined him, asking why Old Man Paterson was digging a hole out in the woodlot. Kevin said he didn't know. Then, Kevin said, Why do we call him Old Man Paterson? He doesn't seem that old.

People say he's older than he looks, Todd replied, and made up his mind to see the hole for himself. He called his buddy RTD on the phone to ask him to come along. *RTD* at that time stood only for *Richard Theodore Deuterschmidt*, though shortly it would come to stand for *Rick the Dick*. Todd and RTD took their time getting ready and by the time they arrived at the woodlot, Old Man Paterson was just leaving. Covered in brown and black dirt and sweat, he said, Hello, boys, and whistled his way past them. Todd and RTD shared a look, and then decided they'd rather see the hole than talk with Old Man Paterson. Even though the woodlot was only so big, they didn't have any whistling to guide them, so it took the rest of the day to find the hole, and when they finally succeeded, they didn't know what to make of it. RTD laughed because the hole made him nervous. Todd climbed down into it and admired it from the inside, placing his hands on the cool earth of the walls. He scooped up a

clump of dirt on the bottom and broke it apart with his fingers. He walked directly across the bottom of the hole and then around the perimeter, estimating the diameter at twelve feet, which put the circumference at more than thirty-six. He climbed out and asked RTD if that sounded about right, but RTD only tittered in response. Without Old Man Paterson there, Todd didn't feel the way his brother did, like an intruder, but he did have a sense of Old Man Paterson, as if the hole said something (he wasn't sure what) about its maker. He liked the hole, and though he wouldn't have been able to say why or how, this in some way satisfied him. He and RTD left. When Todd got home, Kevin was still on the porch. Todd asked him if thirty-six feet around sounded about right to him. Kevin thought it closer to thirty-eight. Todd said that the hole was something, and Kevin agreed.

Todd liked to sleep late, a habit acquired from his father, so only Kevin watched Old Man Paterson walk toward the woodlot the next day, Sunday, but the brothers stood shoulder to shoulder in their front porch when Old Man Paterson was returning. Kevin wanted to ask him what he was really doing, and Todd wanted to tell him he liked it, whatever it was, but neither of them worked up the courage to talk just then.

Meanwhile, the hole had made RTD so nervous he couldn't talk about anything else, with the kids in town, over the Internet, or with his parents, in his house, the second-largest in the neighborhood. At the dinner table, RTD's father had given his mother an amused look when he heard the story, but Mrs. Deuterschmidt didn't like Old Man Paterson, who was suspicious because, among other things, he lived alone.

On the next day, Monday, RTD and four other boys went to look at the hole. RTD had invited Todd but he declined for himself as well as Kevin. RTD brought his crew of marauding boys straight there, where they spent an hour making disparaging remarks about

the hole and climbing into and out of it. They kicked some of the dirt back into it, dirtying themselves in the process.

Kevin suspected they were up to mischief and hoped Old Man Paterson would catch them, but by now he had figured out that Old Man Paterson worked during the week at a factory in the city. Kevin wanted to observe the street during the evenings, to see if Old Man Paterson worked on the hole at night, after work, but his parents had grown worried about how much time he had been spending on the porch by himself and had signed him up for an evening basketball league at the school.

Up until that point, Old Man Paterson had not done any digging after work, but on Wednesday of that week he had a little extra time. Since it was summer, it stayed light long into the evening, so he went out there after dinner. Of the four boys who went with RTD to look at the hole, three of them told their parents about it, and two of the adults, in addition to Mrs. Deuterschmidt, were interested in what was going on. Those two adults went that very same Wednesday to look at the hole, and were just leaving the woodlot as Old Man Paterson was getting there. The two adults were Caroline Swanson, a school counselor, and Everett Ingersoll, a cop. Though they were leaving together, they had arrived separately. Old Man Paterson said hello to them. Caroline wanted to ask him about what he was doing, but didn't feel comfortable doing so with Everett there. Everett had already decided there wasn't much harm in Old Man Paterson's activities, since he had put the orange cones up, so he wasn't going to ticket him or bring him down to the station, but he stuck around out of politeness. They stood at the edge of the woodlot, exchanging pleasantries about the weather—it hadn't rained recently and wasn't supposed to anytime soon—and about their

jobs. No one said anything about the hole. After a few moments of silence, Caroline said she had to be going, and Everett went with her.

Caroline, who lived on the corner near the woodlot, resolved to stay alert for a time when Old Man Paterson was alone, so she could question him. And Everett didn't think anymore about Old Man Paterson until Mrs. Deuterschmidt forced him to.

Once Old Man Paterson reached the hole, where the air was still and the night was quiet, he saw what the children had done and went to work cleaning up their mess. Then, in order to make room, he cleared away the dirt that had been piling up along the rim of the hole, spreading the piles out so they weren't as high. He did a little more digging afterwards, slicing the shovel into the earth. But he had lost some time talking with Caroline and Everett, and night was falling faster than expected. On top of that he had to work in the morning, so he hauled himself out of the hole and headed for home. Though his expenses may have been meager, Old Man Paterson had lost some money in a pyramid scheme many years ago, and he hung on at the factory even though he was past the age when most people retired.

Old Man Paterson didn't dig on any other evenings, but on Saturday began digging a ramp into one edge of the hole, so he would be able to get more easily into and out of it as it got deeper. Just then, Caroline Swanson, the school counselor, emerged from the bushes and asked him how he was doing. Caroline was a bony woman with a high forehead. Her shoulders were wide and her hair was long. Old Man Paterson said he was doing well, and asked Caroline how she had been. She said, Fine. Birds chirped. The buzz of the katydids rose and fell, and cars sped along the highway in the distance. The sun shone sharply on Old Man Paterson, standing alone in his hole, and Caroline squinted as she ventured farther out

into the clearing. Old Man Paterson was about to go back to his digging when Caroline asked him not how he was doing, but what.

Just some digging, Old Man Paterson said.

Caroline didn't think this answer really explained anything. She asked Old Man Paterson if something had happened, and he said, No. Caroline had studied psychology and wondered to herself if he was trying to return to the womb, or dig his own grave, or get to the bottom of some mystery that had opened up in the very center of his life: if not consciously, then subconsciously. She wondered if he had received a letter from an old acquaintance informing him that a woman he used to know had died. Instead she asked Old Man Paterson if his mother was still alive. It wasn't what she meant to ask, but it's what came out.

Old Man Paterson said, She passed on many years ago. Caroline didn't know if Old Man Paterson had any children who were grown and had moved away, so she asked him about that, and he said, No kids. Might not be too late, though. What do you say?

Caroline was too shocked to say anything right away, not only at what Old Man Paterson had said, but at her own feelings, which were that she would have liked to take Old Man Paterson home to her bed without cleaning him off in the shower first. But, how old is he, anyway? She asked herself. He seemed ageless.

What she eventually said was, I've got three kids already, and Old Man Paterson smiled and said, I know. I didn't mean anything by it. Caroline blurted out, Are you digging your own grave? Old Man Paterson said, Are you kidding? It's just a hole. Caroline didn't ask him if he was trying to return to the womb. She asked him instead if she could stay there for a while, and Old Man Paterson said, Okay. They talked about the weather and about



Caroline's children until Old Man Paterson had finished for the day. Caroline had many theories about why her students at the school and their parents did the things they did, about why they were confused or unhappy, and she had helped many of them throughout her career as a school counselor and just by being a good listener. She would help many others. But all she could conclude about Old Man Paterson was that he must enjoy working with dirt. Beyond this, he remained unknowable to her, and though she had enjoyed his company, he also made her nervous. Caroline Swanson went home to her children and her husband and Old Man Paterson went home to his small but well-kept house, which had two red rose bushes in the front and not much else.

A deeper hole required a greater attention to safety. Even though the hole was well off the path, it was more than waist-deep and someone who stumbled into it would not simply be irritated but could also get hurt.

On Sunday, when Old Man Paterson returned to the woodlot, he brought, along with his shovel, another quartet of cones to better mark the perimeter and to demarcate the edge of the ramp. He was met at the woodlot entrance by Everett Ingersoll, the cop, who was a stocky man and quite hairy. Old Man Paterson said, Hello, Everett, and Everett said hello back to him and walked with him into the woodlot, to the hole. Everett wasn't entirely sure what he was going to do, or how. For the moment, he was just walking. Everett asked how it was going, and Old Man Paterson said it was going fine, but Everett then thought to himself he didn't really know what *it* was in Old Man Paterson's case. As they approached the hole, Everett asked Old Man Paterson how he handled tree roots and Old Man Paterson

said, For one reason or another, there aren't as many as you'd expect. So far they've all been small enough that I can break them with the shovel and keep going.

Old Man Paterson started his digging, whistling a phrase of this or that, for the time being leaving the cones he had brought stacked up next to Everett. Without consciously deciding to begin, Everett said, I'm going to have to ask you to stop digging. Old Man Paterson stopped digging and looked at Everett, who said the hole was on public land and was a danger to passersby, especially children. He was looking off to one side when he said this, his hat pulled low to keep the sun out of his eyes. When Everett had first heard about the hole and then seen it for himself he had thought it strange, though on some level he also admired Old Man Paterson's single-minded determination. Then, he forgot about Old Man Paterson and what he was doing until Mrs. Deuterschmidt, Richard Theodore Deuterschmidt's mother, called him on the telephone and demanded to know when something was going to be done about the abomination in the woodlot. Mrs. Deuterschmidt told him it was on public land and was a danger to passersby, especially children, and was an affront to the law and to nature. Everett thought *abomination* a bit strong but let it pass rather than argue with Mrs. Deuterschmidt.

Nevertheless, Everett had also been reluctant to confront Old Man Paterson. Though he was not one of them, Everett knew some men needed to work all the time and he suggested now to Old Man Paterson that he look into construction or working on a road crew or farming or digging graves if he wanted to keep doing it. Old Man Paterson said, This is the hole I want to dig. Besides, he said, I got a job. Everett said he was sorry, but this was the way it was.

While this was going on, a newspaper reporter who had been tipped off by an anonymous source was walking into the woodlot to interview Old Man Paterson. But before he had gone very far or figured out the angle, a call came on his cell phone instructing him to get back in his car and out on the highway to cover a gasoline truck that had exploded in the next county, so he wasn't able to investigate after all.

Old Man Paterson placed the extra cones he had brought around the hole and at the edge of the ramp and walked up the ramp out of the hole and past Everett out of the woodlot. He hadn't had the chance to get very dirty. Mrs. Deuterschmidt watched him, with satisfaction, from behind her curtains. Everett wondered if he should fill in the hole himself, since there wasn't anyone else to do it just then, but Old Man Paterson had taken his shovel with him. Everett didn't really want to, anyway, so instead he went back to the station and wrote up a report and filed it away in a drawer labeled *Miscellaneous*.

Old Man Paterson couldn't dig during the days, because of his job, and he couldn't dig on the weekends, because people had made a stink, so the next Friday he went after midnight to do what he had to do. Because it was less conspicuous, he took a short-handled shovel, instead of the regular-sized one, and he wasn't going to turn on the lamp on the spelunking helmet that had been in an orange shoebox in his crawlspace until he was well away from the woodlot entrance. He held his lips together, as if he were whistling, but made no sound; nevertheless, Mrs. Deuterschmidt slept lightly and she felt a disturbance as he walked by. She followed him into the woodlot with a flashlight. RTD was still awake, playing videogames in his large bedroom, and when he heard his mother leave the house he followed her, even though he was scared of the dark and of the sound of the leaves in the trees.

Mrs. Deuterschmidt saw what Old Man Paterson was doing, in spite of what Everett had assured her he told him, and with her cell phone dialed 9-1-1. She said to the dispatcher, He's doing it again. Will no one teach him a lesson? Do you think you can get away with shirking your responsibilities? The dispatcher got Everett out of bed and sent him to the scene. Everett took a battery-powered lantern and picked up RTD along the way, who had lost track of his mother in the gloom of a moonless night and was cowering in the bushes and thinking about coyotes.

Having little faith in the 9-1-1 dispatcher, Mrs. Deuterschmidt didn't wait for Everett to arrive before laying into Old Man Paterson. She first said, The cops are going to be here any minute. Old Man Paterson had his back to her. He straightened up, cracking his back, and turned to smile at Mrs. Deuterschmidt. Hello, Kathy, he said. Mrs. Deuterschmidt said, Don't Hello, Kathy, me. I know what you're up to. Which was a debatable assertion, but that's what she said. Mrs. Deuterschmidt had solid-looking, round haunches and a small, square face that conveyed how bitter she had become, though not why. Old Man Paterson dug up another shovelful of dirt—*ksbunk*—and threw it over the edge of the hole in Mrs. Deuterschmidt's direction, whistling tunelessly, maddeningly slowly, like a killer in a horror movie, and shining his headlamp in her eyes as he did this. Mrs. Deuterschmidt said, You just wait.

Under Mrs. Deuterschmidt's narrowed eyes, Old Man Paterson continued his digging with the short-handled shovel. The hole looked like a giant had slammed an enormous baseball bat into the ground and then walked off, leaving a cylindrical depression behind.

Everett arrived with RTD. When Mrs. Deuterschmidt saw Everett, she said, Finally. When she saw RTD, she said, I'll deal with you later. Everett had been dreaming about swimming in a fancy hotel pool when he was awakened and felt like he was still underwater. He heard himself say, I meant what I said the other day, sir. Please cease and desist. Old Man Paterson cast the shovel into the dirt and turned off the lamp on his helmet. He looked at Everett and Mrs. Deuterschmidt and RTD standing in the ring of light shining from the government-issued lantern. Mrs. Deuterschmidt's flashlight was an orange speck. Old Man Paterson said, I'm almost finished. If you let me get my regular shovel, I can be done tomorrow.

RTD could feel his mother's body tightening with anger. He was terrified by the monster in the hole in front of him and also by what his mother might do or say and before she could do or say anything he said, You're going to the crazy house. Mrs. Deuterschmidt made a gurgling noise, which sounded like assent. But Everett felt then he could breathe properly again and he asked Old Man Paterson what he would need to make it happen.

Over Mrs. Deuterschmidt's look of rage, Old Man Paterson said if he had his regular shovel he could finish it in one sitting. That was all he needed: his regular shovel, and a little more time. And that'll be the end of it? Everett asked. Once it's finished, Old Man Paterson said, I'll fill it back in myself. He's lying, Mrs. Deuterschmidt managed to say as her flashlight went out. I'm not lying, Old Man Paterson said.

Everett asked Old Man Paterson if his garage was unlocked and he said it was. Everett said to Mrs. Deuterschmidt and RTD, Unless you want to walk back in the dark, you'd better come with me, and marched away from the hole. Mrs. Deuterschmidt and RTD hurried after him. Mrs. Deuterschmidt crawled into bed next to her sleeping husband and lay

awake. RTD wrote curse words on the inside of his desk drawer with a permanent marker, which marked the beginning of his nasty behavior. Perhaps because he would forget how it started, he would never completely recover. *RTD* would no longer stand for *Richard Theodore Deuterschmidt*. Despite the attention of Caroline Swanson and others like her, he became, irrevocably, *Rick the Dick*.

Old Man Paterson did what he could with the short-handled shovel until Everett arrived with the regular one. Everett handed it down to Old Man Paterson and, unable to think of anything, returned home without a word. Old Man Paterson worked now faster than he ever had before, but just as precisely. He kept digging down, and when the sun rose he turned out the lamp on his head, took off his helmet, and worked in the early dawn until long after the sun had risen. When he reached the bottom, not even the top of his head extended above the edge. He pressed his face against the ground and against the walls to get a better look at the sweep and line, depth and surface of his creation. He used the short-handled shovel to smooth the walls, to add uniformity in some places and subtle details in others, and then the final finishing, adjustments too delicate for tools, was done with his hands. He pulled himself up onto the ramp and walked out of the hole. He examined it from all sides and breathed. He crouched down to get a better look at the near-perfect cylinder over six feet deep and almost twelve feet wide; after viewing it from above he refrained from making any additional alterations. The dirt covered Old Man Paterson. It wasn't only on his boots and clothes and arms, but also it concealed his face and stuck in his hair.

That same morning, Kevin and Todd had been watching for Old Man Paterson to go by. Kevin was up early because he often rose early, especially if he was in the middle of a book, and by now he was near the end of *Huckleberry Finn*. Todd was up early because of

vague, uneasy feelings, so strong that when he carried them out on the porch, they kept Kevin from getting any reading done.

The morning passed and Old Man Paterson did not appear. Without any verbal agreement, Kevin and Todd put on their shoes and socks and baseball caps and walked into the sun to find out what was going on. They found Old Man Paterson where they expected to find him, standing with the shovel in the ground beside him. He said, Hello, boys, and they said, Hello, Mr. Paterson, not quite in unison. The boys were enraptured by the hole in similar but not parallel ways. Kevin was taken with the enigma of the hole, partly by the riddle of how an absence of something could be a thing nonetheless, and there were other aspects of it that worked on his brain but that he couldn't put into words. As for Todd, he didn't know he possessed an aesthetic nature, but the hole corresponded with it, like something fitting snugly inside of something else. He was moved.

Old Man Paterson watched them looking at the hole. He gave them some time, but then said, I'm sorry boys, but Officer Ingersoll.

The boys were sad, but understood that he had given his word. Todd asked if he could help and Old Man Paterson said he could. As he and Old Man Paterson filled in the hole, Kevin looked on carefully to see if the annihilation of the hole would tell him anything. But the hole wasn't being filled in in exactly the way it had been dug, because the shovelfuls Old Man Paterson had taken out had mingled with each other in piles around the edge, and because Todd was helping, so Kevin was left with some clues to the mystery, but nothing definitive. Filling in the hole took a long time, so long that Kevin went home to fetch sandwiches and water. Finally, when Old Man Paterson and Todd were finished, all three of them walked over the space where the hole had been, stomping down the places that stuck

up and kicking extra dirt over the places that were too low. Old Man Paterson carried the regular shovel, Todd the short-handled one, and they split the cones between the three of them. Together, they left the woodlot.

Time passed. For the rest of the summer and through the fall, when she had a free moment, Caroline Swanson went on walks that took her past Old Man Paterson's home, and though she once walked to his door, she never knocked on it. As fall became winter, walking outside became less pleasant and, Caroline feared, what she was doing more obvious, so she willfully buried her intense but conflicted feelings and in the spring had the worst allergies she ever experienced.

Once Mrs. Deuterschmidt had seen with her own eyes that the hole was gone, she moved on to other crimes and other slights against her good name.

By the time RTD had blocked out the terrifying image of an old man in a helmet in a hole, he was fully entrenched in the phase from which he would never escape. At the beginning he spray-painted buildings with unartful graffiti, got secretly drunk in his parents' basement, and mistreated his friends. Hardly anyone went to his graduation party, and he remained surly throughout his life, only realizing what he had become (that is, a dick) when he was nearly fired after one of his coworkers punched him in the face. Though RTD's realization in the aftermath of the company party at which this occurred was an important one, it was only one step of many, and his rehabilitation was never completed.

A few years after Old Man Paterson finished his hole, he died. The factory where he had worked was having financial problems and the management wanted Old Man Paterson to retire, but he never did, and he succumbed to a heart attack sitting in a plastic chair on his



lunch break. His obituary mentioned his work at the factory and a sister in Missouri. Though Old Man Paterson had lived in the town for as long as anyone could remember, it turned out he had been born in Grand Junction, Colorado, on an unspecified date.

Kevin stuck with his books and Todd went back to sleeping late. The two brothers grew up and moved away from their town and from each other. They both became archaeologists—Caroline Swanson did not discourage them, at least—and, even though they talked on the phone often, they rarely saw each other and never collaborated. Todd lived in Italy, where nothing excited him more than ruins in the middle of a meadow. Other archaeologists were always struck by the elegance of the worksites he administered. One time, a pilot flying overhead was struck so strongly by the orderly beauty of one of his sites that she landed her plane as quickly as she could and immediately went to meet the man she would make her husband. Kevin spent more time in his office than in the field, and met his wife in a more conventional manner. He was also involved with NAGPRA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

One day, there was a great flood in the town where Old Man Paterson and Kevin and Todd had lived, and all of the town's police records were lost. Though Kevin and Todd sometimes talked of Old Man Paterson long after everyone else had forgotten about him, even they more often talked of their own work, and if they ever brought up Old Man Paterson with friends or other members of their families, no one else seemed to care. So when Kevin and Todd became old men themselves and then died, all traces of Old Man Paterson and what he had done passed out of the world. Nothing remained.