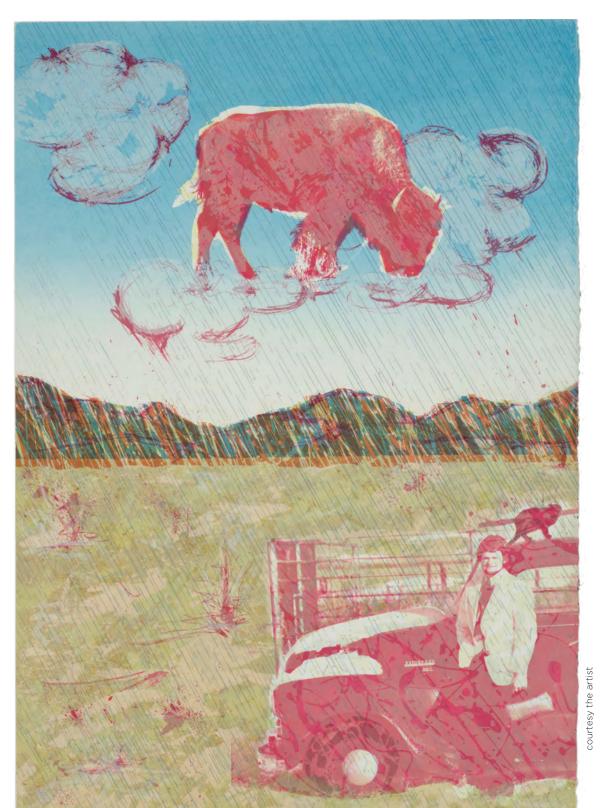
BRAD ORSBURN

Dr. Black Cat's Buffalo Rain Dance, 1980 offset lithograph and screen print, 22 x 30 in



CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Sam

My father, working all hours downtown at the radio station. dressed like the president of an English Bank—Harris Tweed, knit tie, shirts starched with staves and cufflinks. He must have been closing in on 50, no life insurance, investments, no savings or IRAs every last red cent (as he used to say) spent on clothes, watches, sports cars. He believed he was going to live forever no reason to think of anyone left behind.

If he gave a thought to anything else on earth, it was Sam, his 20-lb. black & white bruiser of a tom, who came in as my father returned from work, jumping onto the counter, rubbing against the coffee pot and sugar bowl until he was served his can of Friskies or 9Lives. Then, dish licked clean, he'd paw-by-paw sidle past the fruit basket and toaster and leap on top of the fridge to a cast-iron skillet—too big and heavy to ever use—where he'd curl up

purring as my father spoke to him and scratched behind his ears as he went to sleep, despite dishes clanging and my stepbrothers blaring reruns of Gilligan's Island.

22 or -3,

I was teaching tennis, working a night shift for \$2.50 an hour at Hi-Time Liquor, reading Yeats behind the register when it was slow. I had a VW van, monthly payments, I was going nowhere but drinking after work with pals mai tais, Singapore slings, Three Dagger Rum, imagining what might be left of the exotic world after Vietnam, should I ever put together the wherewithal to find my way out of town, burning blindly through the youth I had left.

I was doing nothing, really—moonraking, plenty of time to kill yet, when he rubbed up against my leg, I made little effort to give him the attention his sweet disposition deserved, to offer anything more than a casual scratch. Now, waking in the middle of the night, just short of 65, far too late in the day to recoup the smallest loss, I think about that old boy and realize how much I miss him.

Christopher Buckley's twentieth book of poetry, Back Room at the Philosophers' Club, is due in spring 2014 from Stephen F. Austin State University Press. With Gary Young, he edited Bear Flag Republic: Prose Poems and Poetics from California, 2008, and One for the Money: The Sentence as a Poetic Form, from Lynx House Press, 2012. He was the 2013 winner of the Campbell Corner Poetry Contest. He has received a Guggenheim, a Fulbright, and two NEA fellowships, as well as four Pushcart Prizes.