DEEP WILD
Writing from the Backcountry

"The most alive is the wildest."
Henry David Thoreau

VOLUME 3 - 2021

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Cover Art by Mary Lewis Sheehan

Trail to the Light. Oil on canvas.
Monhegan Island, Maine

Artist's Statement: "For me, the place of Spirit and the place of art, healing, and balance occupy the same home within, sacred and timeless. When I walk in the wild, I feel I am there and I come back out with new energy to write it, paint it, share it."

Interior Art by Jon Janosik

Black and white artwork.

Artist's Statement: "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate sensations of birds in nature. I have tried to present my impressions in what is the most congenial and expressive form achievable from me. I have elected to study birds with brush and paint, attempting to force this often-unwilling medium to record their life and beauty."

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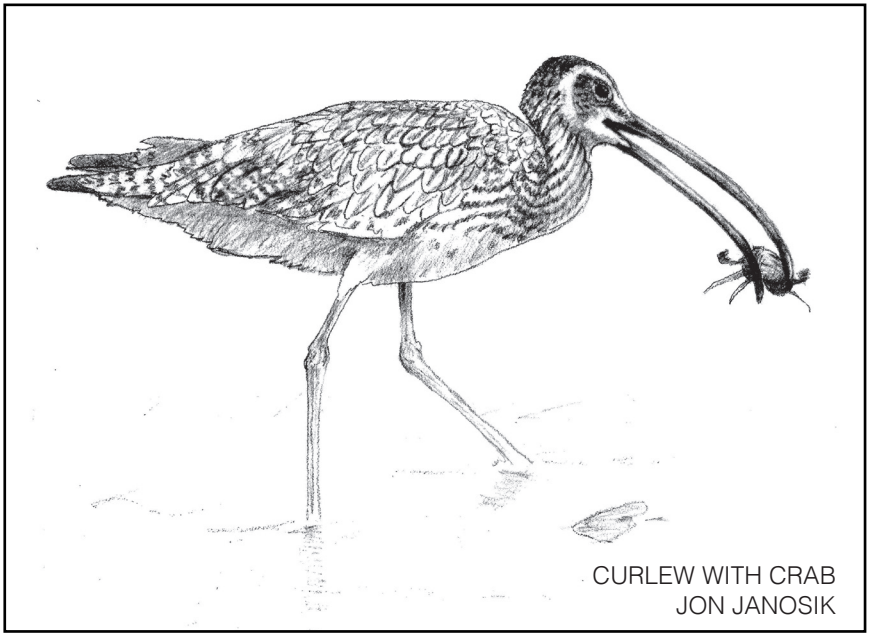

CURLEW WITH CRAB
JON JANOSIK

The mission of *Deep Wild: Writing from the Backcountry* is to provide a home for creative work inspired by journeys to places where there are no roads. *Deep Wild* is a not-for-profit enterprise, published annually in the summer.

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Foreword

"Feel yourself warm free breathing. Know how lucky you are," Anne McCrary Sullivan writes, in "How to Spend the Night in a Canoe, Coldest Night of the Year." Her upbeat words are echoed by many whose work appears in the this issue of *Deep Wild Journal*, in a collective outpouring of optimism as we emerge from one of the most difficult and traumatic years that our planet, and our species, has lately known. Harry Owen, paddling through a lush riparian zone, celebrates how "Untamed, enfolded, we breath the good earth / again." Marybeth Holleman, in "Yesterday, on the familiar trail," encourages us to "step back toward that joy-sap rising, step back / into the only world that is." And Aiden Heung, in "Morning Walk," "thought about all the work I'd leave undone / and continued my walk into the sun."

Alongside this theme of renewal runs a strong thread of community. Whether it's the comforting camaraderie of co-travelers on an extended river trip in Susan Pope's "Canyon," or two buddies shivering in a tent in Jeffrey S. Markovitz' "Freezing to Death in New Jersey," or the more intimate "we" of love poems, or a father and his two small daughters finding solace out of doors in a time of family trouble in Stephen S. Lottridge's "Three White Pelicans," the message resounds: despite all else, we have each other. For Margaret Koger in "Sharing Tarn Water," the community includes the more-than-human world:

Then rise, step back slowly
wipe your chin
walk away—
Glance over your shoulder
see a doe stepping forward
it's her turn.

Solitude, of course, also gives rise to renewal, and communal ties can paradoxically be strengthened when we strike off on our own. Thus, Fred Swanson enjoys "a splendid hour of relief and satisfaction" at the end of a difficult day in canyon country, while at the same time wishing he "could share the moment." The woman in John Means' story "Polecat," living alone in a wild place after an abandonment, finds company in the crows "talking back and forth...in the big trees" and "kindreds" in the spirits that move amidst the fog in the hollows. Dick Anderson,

off the grid on the Kenai River in Alaska, relishes the feeling of "standing in solitude—in a forest, or a glade, or by a river—letting the realization wash over me that I am no longer the center of my universe." He is, rather, "simply a denizen, along with the other animals, plants, waters and rocks." One could wish such a paradigm shift for all of us!

Not every trip to the backcountry is idyllic; sometimes we bear witness to the degradations and diminishments that our cherished wild places are suffering. Dennis Eagan awakes one morning in the High Sierras to "ash raining from a burnt sky" and, fighting panic, thinks, *"I got to get out of here…but which way?"* And Laura Pritchett, in a forest of giant Kauri trees endangered by a virus, is forced to contemplate how "A hike is no longer just a hike, it's a time to reflect on the power of small-but-pervasive things, such as the fact that something so miniscule can take out such enormous and old trees," and from there to consider "the overarching question of *relevance*. And what to *do* to be relevant." This is a line of thought that the editors would like to see explored more in future issues.

Diversity is a key *Deep Wild* value, and the 51 writers whose work appears in these pages seek their bliss through all kinds of activities—climbing, bouldering, skiing, canoeing, rafting, walking, sitting still. We are given glimpses of wild places from northeastern China to Iceland to New Zealand to South Africa, from Alaska to Arizona to the Everglades. We squint into the mist at the seething seashore, flinch at the sight of a marauding grizzly, navigate the bone-dry desert. Our focus ranges from the miniscule to the vast—from tiny dew drops on magnolia leaves to the pulsing, shimmering Northern Lights. Unexpected perspectives invite us to venture beyond our framework: Erin O'Regan White, in "The Good Hunt," makes a case for hunting as a "spiritual practice," consistent with the Eastern principle of *ahimsa*, or non-harming. Regina Gort invites us on a pilgrimage to see the "reverent blueish light" of bioluminescent maggots. Raptor researcher Heather Durham describes a summer spent in a trapping blind on a remote mountain above Nevada's Great Salt Desert. It is safe bet that, wherever in the wild you are, in whatever season, the writers of *Deep Wild 2021* will have apt words to offer you.

We are proud to present the work of two student poets, Lauren Young, a freshman at the University of Connecticut,

and Sam Sharp, a senior at Kent State, winners of our 2021 Undergraduate Student Poetry contest. Contest judge Shelby Newsom praises Young's first-place poem for the "severe beauty" of its wintry imagery, whether it be menacing (the "translucent knives" of icicles "hanging from frost-thickened / branches") or soothing ("The pale bellies of deer exposed / to this glacial night"). Sam Sharp's second place poem "Blankets" is, he reports, "about my first backpacking trip in Winter….It was a frigid, miserable, and quite lonely experience. Even though I didn't know it while we were there, it was just where I needed to be." The student writing contest, an annual *Deep Wild* fixture, will return next fall with a call for nonfiction prose from graduate-level students.

We are privileged to showcase the work of two artists whose work conjures the spirit of the wild. Mary Lewis Sheehan's oil-on-canvas painting, reproduced on our cover, of a favorite wild place on Monhegan Island, Maine expresses this issue's coming-into-the-light theme. The avian artwork interspersed throughout, rendered by Jon Janosik's attentive eye and steady hand, captures for an instant, with brush and paint, the freest and most fluid creatures of the wild.

On a recent *Deep Wild* editors' retreat in Utah's Dark Canyon Wilderness, Heidi Blankenship, John Yohe, and I sat in camp one evening and took turns reading aloud some of the poems included in the journal, which I had printed out beforehand. It cast a sort of spell over us, to hear them uttered in the open air where they are most at home, and they became, in the course of the five-day walk, part of our context for reflection and conversation. We wish for a similar enlargement when you carry this book with you as, in the words of Erin Robertson, you "walk jauntily / filled up to bursting / with freedom and space."

Rick Kempa
June 2021

Upper Wind River

—after hearing Joanna Macy

Erin Robertson

it doesn't take long
to leave behind the exhaust and thrum
the too muchness
too many too busy too crowded
and be suddenly transported
by two strong legs
to the backcountry
and *wham*
there you are
in silence
no, not silence—
the singing of the Wind River
the chittering of the chickadees and chickarees
littering their pine bough leavings every which way
the crash of a buck's antlers
tangled in golden willow branches
the raven's rasping talk startling the stillness
the slow soft sound you can't hear, only see,
of a million aspen leaves letting go, one after another

it doesn't take long
we don't go far
only a mile or two
but suddenly the world is ours
all this sky these crags this forest
this stream that sings even in winter deep under ice
they all open to us
we open to them
we walk jauntily
filled up to bursting
with freedom and space

Dawn Paddle

—Quetico Provincial Park, Atikoken, Ontario

Katie Budris

When the alarm sounds, it's still too dark
to see if there are slugs in our shoes.
We unzip the tents, pull on damp socks
and empty shoes, break camp by yellow-glow
of flashlight lanterns, and carry our packs
to the shore. One by one, we flip canoes,
slide their aluminum noses into the water,
load up and crawl in.

The lake is still, ever-so-gently lapping
the canoe, barely pushing back against
my paddle. We move slowly, single-file,
our three canoes followed by another
group of three, group of four. Ten total
slicing through the darkness, sliver
of moon above. Cicadas sing
to us as we paddle. I lean back and look up—
blanketed by deep blue sky with ten thousand
pin pricks of stars, like dots made by
a hummingbird trying to escape
toward daylight.

Somewhere in the silence, a glow
emerges. We pass through tall lake-grass
in the fog, watch for moose, keep lips
pressed shut. Purple precedes pink
and amber until finally, sun-fire breaks
the horizon, outlining pine trees, shimmering
water-surface in all directions. Morning comes.
We are no longer silent out of exhaustion
or necessity. Just awe. Creation. Peace.

Lessons of the River

Mary Emerick

We had been on the river for four interminable days when I fell into the churning waters of Government Rapids. For four days I had been trying to turn my body into liquid, to absorb the slow, ancient flow of water. I had not succeeded.

More used to land than water, I was not suited to river life. That was abundantly clear from the first day, as I stood at the Sand Island put-in. A merciless sun baked the hard pan under my feet, and the mound of gear tried my patience as my companions and I worked to fit it all in two rafts. It was late afternoon by the time we launched.

I had agreed to come along because my friends, experienced river runners, were going. They spoke of days like dreams, a river with a gentle current like a hand on a back. The San Juan River had its start in snow, but by the time we joined it in southern Utah, they said, the water would be warm. There would be sedimentary rocks that lay like folded blankets and the murmur of the river at night to drift us into sleep. We would see bighorn sheep, they said. I needed a change, and I thought this might be a good one.

I had been pushing myself to an invisible limit on land because I loved the meditative state of skimming the imperceptible edge between endurance and collapse. Any vacation time I could manage, I traveled to hike a long-distance trail. I hiked twenty, twenty-eight miles each day. Time itself, I felt, was running out. I could feel age starting to creep in like an invader: a twinge in the knee here, a surly IT band there. It was as though a clock ticked in my head counting down the time I had left. Like a clock, I was wound tight, unable to sleep at night. I wasn't at all sure about the San Juan River or what I had gotten myself into.

But the river was beautiful. I watched its rippling back as I sat on the raft, clumsily attempting to row. The color of diluted coffee, it rolled past our camps each night, headed to Lake Powell, where it would be swallowed, its wildness tamed. At night I sweated in the tent, immersing myself in the brief coolness of water right before I draped a cotton sheet over my body. September was not kind in river flow or in temperature; the rapids were bony, rocks sticking up like jagged teeth. We pulled the rafts off of sandbars, the river level dropping and becoming grainy the farther south we

went. The mornings and evenings were hospitable; in between, we baked.

I was not as patient as the river. I had learned that the water we floated over was once a sea; fossils could be found in the rims of the canyons above us. After the sea had retreated, the river had been mild, flowing over pancake-flat terrain. But as a mountain tried to build itself, the Colorado Plateau lifting, the river had changed forever. The steep gradient created by the uplift had allowed the water to cut sharply down through rock, one thousand feet below where it had begun. All this had taken time, days, months, years, decades, eons.

We hiked up to a stone cabin where someone had hauled rock and timber to a waterless location. Just for the pleasure of the view? I did not know, but standing there far above where the river doubled back on itself, I could see where I had been and where I was going. I was not used to looking back; I had always been tilted forward.

I was fixated on destinations; more than once I had dragged unsuspecting friends on longer hikes than they would have liked. One spring afternoon as we sat on the rim of Hells Canyon, a friend pulled out her sleeping pad and prepared to read as I looked on in dismay. I gazed out over the endless expanse of tawny grass and rock rim. *Why stop now*, I thought, *when there is so much more to discover?* I was always reining myself in.

On this trip, things were different. After daybreak, the others wandered slowly down to the kitchen area and sat in folding chairs with coffee, contemplating the way the river meandered down through the canyon. The conversation meandered as much as the river, slowly flowing from one topic to another. Often, we did not leave camp until ten or eleven. On a trail, I would have hiked double-digit miles by then. This was river time, Brent explained. The best kind of time.

Once a sumptuous breakfast was complete, it took forever to load the boats; in my raft the groover—our makeshift toilet—was the first thing to go in, and there was always someone who needed to use it at the last minute. There was a complicated arrangement of straps and nets meant to hold everything in: the coolers, the kitchen table, our dry packs. There was so much stuff: an ultralight backpacker, I was bemused by it all. I had spent years winnowing my gear down to the bone, choosing the least amount of weight

to skate the edge of survival. River trips, it seemed, were the opposite. We set up a small city every night.

I heard Government Rapids before I saw it. There had been a few rapids on the river already, brief moments of heart-thumping rowing, but nothing that had seemed impossible. This rapid sounded different, like thunder from an empty sky. It burst from a V of smooth water to a whirlpool of white froth, running headlong through a narrow bend.

We scouted the rapids from a trail overhead. *I should walk this,* I thought, looking at the churning water. But another group was sitting there, taking turns running the rapids in a small inflatable boat. It wasn't that bad, they explained. You just had to come in at the top, take a hard right toward the canyon wall, and then head for the middle. You just danced between the rocks. It seemed possible, and my impatient self didn't want to wait for the rafts to come through.

We set up for our run. I sat on a cooler, clutching a rope, as Jerry handled the oars. The raft in front of us expertly navigated the frothy water, kissed the side of the canyon, and was out to the cheers of the other rafting party, perched on the rocks. We were next.

The first few strokes went well, the raft lumbering through the waves, spray ricocheting off the bow. This was the tricky part, to weave past the rock that we were about to hit dead on. A wide-mouthed hole waited below, waves foaming around it. I instantly knew what was going to happen: We were going to slide over the rock and the raft would flip. "Rock," I yelled ineffectually, and the next moment I was airborne.

My head smacked against a rock as I went under; I had foolishly not asked for a helmet, trusting in the raft. Too late now. My body plunged deep into the gritty water, propelled like a bullet.

The lifejacket did its job: I bobbed to the surface gasping for breath as the wave train hurtled me like an insignificant piece of driftwood. Beneath me, the river was a muscle. It carried me without effort through the rapids as though I weighed less than air. The raft went by, still upright, no way to hoist myself up its rubber side. I watched it go.

When you fall out of a boat and are taken through a rapid, it is called swimming. This makes the event sound innocuous and

tame. I swam Government Rapids, but it wasn't anything like my contemplative laps in the city pool. Instead, I bounced through a washing machine, rocks scraping my legs and feet, tossed from one wave to another. There was no time to think, just to react. Keep feet downstream, eddy out when possible.

Done with me, Government Rapids spit me out into calmer water, and I fought the current to crawl onto a small beach where my companions quickly gathered with ice collected from coolers. My fall from the raft had been captured on an iPhone; watching it later, I see a rag doll flying through the sky. I have no idea how I survived.

I would later learn that the rocks through which I swam were studded with marine invertebrate fossils, remnants of the ancient sea.

I had been very lucky. We were two days' float from a road. A blow anywhere else on my head and I might not have lived; I could have fractured any of the bones in my body or never surfaced. I had escaped with only a lump that would slowly fade as we continued down the river.

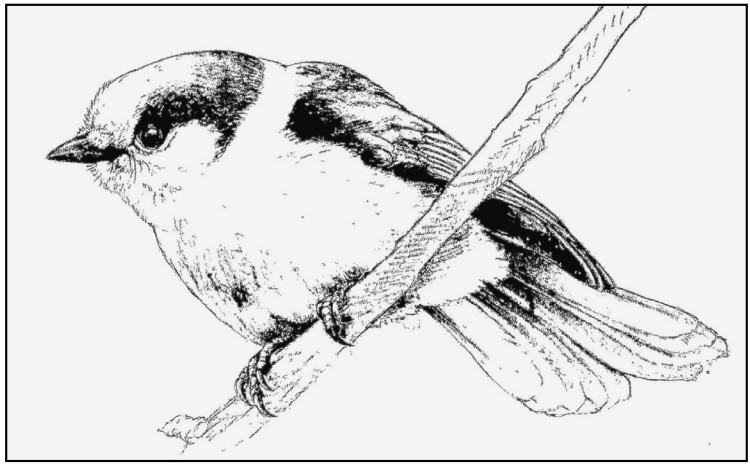
Around the next bend, it was as if Government Rapids had never been. The river returned to its gentle push. At Slickhorn, we beached the boats and hiked upcanyon, finding rainwater pools in the flesh of the rocks. On our second-to-last night on the river, the night after my accident, I dragged my tent to a sandy wash. Bats swooped in low over the canyon walls, the desert so quiet I could hear the whisper of their wings. The soft September light was gradually erased as if someone had taken a black paintbrush to the sky. Later, a full moon teased, highlighting the canyon walls above us. The nights were long and delicious, the days slow and rhythmic as they had been before. That hadn't changed. What had changed was how I thought about the river.

I lay in the sand feeling the bones of the earth under my body. I slipped off the raft to float through layers of sandstone and time. The hum of the river filled my ears. I sat in a lawn chair watching the delicate fingers of the sun move across the canyon walls. I had no need or desire to move. I was keeping river time.

By headlamp, I read the guidebook, learning that Government Rapids was formed through a combination of constriction, gradient, and rock that stubbornly resisted erosion. The rapids changed with the water level but the stone skin beneath did not. I had been swimming through time.

A windy push took us to the end and we pulled the rafts in a skim of water instead of rowing them. The take-out was desolate and forlorn, a sign warning us not to continue or risk facing a waterfall from which we might not return. There seemed to be still so much more to discover, and I wasn't ready to leave. I had unraveled on the river, the tight knot I had been unspooled. It would take days to rebuild myself into the woman I had been before.

The river didn't magically cure me: at home, landlocked, I still fill every day to the brim. But I haven't forgotten what the river tried to teach me. I catch myself sometimes in my headlong run through life, pull back from the precipice to breathe. The river stays with me, the slow march of geologic time, a swim through an ancient sea.



GRAY JAY

Bouldering

Patricia Thrushart

Your breath, your heartbeat
quicken,
the boulder you chose

—or did it choose you?—
fractured
by freeze and thaw,
tumbled by time
to squat here,
its crevices
waiting.

You study its secrets,
height and bulge,
the mossiness of it,
the rootless lichens,
the snakelike roots of small trees
tangled like lovers,
the old pitted sandstone skin
you expect will be cold,
but is dry, warm,
even in shadow.

It awaits your hands
ready to caress,
to probe,
dusted
with desire.

Yesterday, on the familiar trail

Marybeth Holleman

A routine walk, you know the kind: your mind
is far away, and it's just your bones walking,
marking the rhythm of heartbeat to footstep.
It's always like this right before you see them,

the ones who never take an absentminded step,
staring at you with heads lowered, ears erect,
paws spread wide and hackles half-raised,
golden eyes deciding whether you're predator
or prey. What other category do they need?
What other thought? It's you,

with your thousand-and-one concepts, who must
step back toward that joy-sap rising, step back
into the only world that is.

Better the Bear You Can See

Mathew Channer

I see the grizzly before it sees me; an immense, oblong shape, joints sliding beneath fur at the four corners of its back as it advances down the hill. It glides over uneven ground, perfectly suited to the rocky mounds and tangled gullies I have fought through all morning. It disappears into the folded land, then crests a small ridge, only thirty meters away, head upright, chest rippling in the wind that sweeps up the valley.

I freeze, not by choice. *Paralysed by fear*: so much more than a turn-of-phrase. Bears have been too-familiar friends this summer. But only black bears. Never grizzlies.

The bear's enormous head turns in my direction. It, too, goes utterly still as it contemplates the strange creature in its domain. I see it in terrifying, dazzling detail. Dark brown fur, four-inch claws, legs thicker than the tree trunks a smarter, quicker human might have tried to hide behind.

"Hayley," I whisper, not daring to look away. "*Hayley!*"

"Whoa…" Hayley parts the bushes behind me. "That's a griz!"

I hear her stop moving, and she and I and the bear ponder each other across the sparse vegetation that I imagine to be my lifeline. A Canadian stand-off. I struggle to remember my training, wishing I had paid more attention to those tedious videos of grainy bears stalking through grainy forest. The dense, dull excerpts from forester's handbooks, delivered via email to my distant living room.

Do not look them in the eyes. Grizzly bears often take this as a territorial challenge.

I am looking the bear in the eyes. I cannot look anywhere else. Everything falls away, as if my surroundings are props swept by a strong wind off-stage. Just the characters left now, and one of them is in danger of being written out of the script.

"Matt, come to me," Hayley says, fear lacing her words.

"No way," I hiss. "Come to me."

This isn't cowardice; it's tactical thinking. I don't want to take my eyes from the bear, nor can I risk stumbling as I retreat, possibly exciting it. I reach slowly into my back-bag, unsheathe my knife. Three-inch stainless-steel Gerber. Good for cutting boxes

and boosting egos. About as useful as a popsicle stick against a quarter-ton of bear.

A whistle blows across the valley. A faint cry of "Grizzly!" drifts on the wind. Too quiet. Too late. The bear's black eyes are unfathomable, yet I understand perfectly that I am less than prey to this creature. Prey would at least stand a chance, if attacked, of survival. *If charged, DO NOT RUN. Do not try to swim a river or climb a tree. Lie down and remain silent, even if the bear claws or bites you.*

I shake with fear and adrenaline. I came here with a billion-dollar corporation behind me, with trucks and helicopters and eight-inch boots and three-inch knives and a six-module training course and confidence like a suit of armor, and still I am inconsequential. I do not belong to this world of spruce and stone and snow. My world ended at the bottom of this mountain, it's inevitable advance, for once, too slow.

Oh, to go back there! To wield a pen instead of a stainless-steel shovel. To shower and shit among gleaming porcelain instead of mosquito-infested canvas. To escape with the comfort of climate-control this uncomfortable, uncontrollable climate. To forget the eternally-dancing evergreens and slowly ripening strawberries and bursting fireweed flowers like streaks of paint on the landscape. The jagged Rockies, ever-present, the bared, bottom jaw of the yawning sky. The money and masochism that draws me back each summer to resow what the titanic logging companies relentlessly harvest. Six years in the bush, three-quarters of a million trees in the ground, and until two minutes ago I thought I had planted and sweated and bled and sat through bear-safety videos enough to call myself wild.

When confronted, remain calm. Do not speak aggressively to a grizzly bear.

"Oi!" I yell. "Get the fuck out of here!" So much for bear-safety.

Seconds pass in a mad flutter of heartbeats and imagined maulings. Wind rustles the waist-high grass, flicks stringy bits of hair into my eyes. Leaves and flowers shiver with anticipation. A woodpecker rattles a hole in the silence. In a moment of bizarre lucidity, I realise it is raining. Rain, like bears, is familiar here.

The grizzly turns its head as though mildly embarrassed by my outburst. With a barely perceptible twitch of its shoulders, it steps off the ridge and submerges in undergrowth.

My fear doubles. Better the bear you can see. Another turn-of-phrase, coined by a quivering tree-planter in what might be his final seconds of life. I step gingerly over slick, treacherous logs, try to maneuver myself and Hayley behind the bear. I glimpse a mass of moving muscle among infant pines and scraggly poplars. It vanishes incrementally, and my pulse explodes each time it is swallowed among greenery.

A bulging, matted rump appears down the hill, then sinks from view. I breathe. My cramped fingers ease around the hilt of my knife.

We are permitted to live.

"That was a big one," says Michel, after we have bashed through a gully and waded a snowmelt stream to reach the trucks. "Saw him cross the road down there. He won't be back."

Our crew huddles, smoking, shivering, staring at the six-shades of green we are terrified to walk back into. The whispering pines, delightful when we arrived, whisper now with ill-intent. What do you know, Michel? Our people cut trails into these hills and took trees from these forests, but our sovereignty ends beyond this narrow road.

"Ok," Michel says with loud, unhelpful bravado. "Back to it guys."

We stub our cigarettes, pick up our shovels. Fill our bags with seedlings and ease our bodies into the bush. We plant in teams of five for the rest of the day, bending and walking and bending in the driving rain, one of us always upright, like meerkats.

We do not belong here.

Going Behind the Glacier

—for Ingo

Sarah M. Brownsberger

You must first cross a farming plain
buried in lava ash:
stovepipes up from hell,
mounds marking pockets of abandoned life
as daydreams mould the rain.
No solid ground or stream for hours, your trail
has been swallowed by wet grit.

The voice of the culprit strikes
from a day's walk off, grunting
and muttering rivers. Your feet weigh
seventy pounds, your heels are eaten.

Finally a mountain heaves up,
its gate a black river, its keeper
a farmwife who tells you all
the names of ruined homesteads,
who gives you coffee and crullers,
whose look says you're a fool to bother,
and the glacier takes it up:
Why bother, why?

As you climb past the snout
it wants a tête-à-tête, pressures you
with its white eyes. It sighs, spent and filthy
from all the earth it has eaten.

Soon you look down on its slumped shoulders
from the roof of time.
Moss, lambgrass, berries rise,
clouds spill off, your pulse
scatters in curls of mist. Sweat-damp,
you start back down: you've gone behind
the time of your birth, and the snipes,
the hawks skim through you.

Crossing the Tephra

—Skeiðará Sands, Iceland

Sarah M. Brownsberger

Each step sank in a cold slush of ash,
so I could not stop, and it went on for hours.
Tainted streams wended and glared; in the distance, breakers
exploded on cliffs. The path was lost, and lost again;
a flash of green in the east was my cairn.

Sweet clay, and then,
sod. I shed my boots to let my heels bleed in the sun.
Arrived! I had arrived on fertile ground. Now two red specks
became my goal. Barns, I discerned. Beyond them, houses.
My legs had turned to stilts; to walk was to fall, yielding,
from pole to pole.

Golden cabbages?
Balls of thatch? Could those be children? Neck-deep
in tasseled timothy, with kernel teeth
and quince cheeks, they squinted through the weaving light
and shouted like Archimedes, *Kona! Kona!*—A woman! A woman!
but what I heard was the ancient cognate—Queen! Queen!

As I lurched onto their doorstep and summoned my voice
I found myself no longer wet ash, or a pair of shanks;
I'm a woman, I explained; I came across the cinder plain.

Polecat

John Means

The little creek that ran out of Polecat Hollow had no name, so Heidi called it Skunk Run. A polecat is a skunk. She had looked that up.

From the hard road the lower part of the hollow was a small floodplain about a hundred feet wide. Heidi's cabin was a half-mile up at the end of the shale road where the flat pinched into the slopes of the stream-cut in the mountain. Behind her were densely wooded, steep hills. Up top to the northwest was a ridgeline topped by jutting cliffs and a spread of talus boulders fifty yards wide and steeply sloping down a hundred yards. She had never seen the top or been up there. Her husband, a hunter, had said it was too rugged for a woman. Twenty feet from her little bedroom, trickling Skunk Run sang to her in her twin bed.

In spring, of course, the Skunk rose and drowned the treble-clef trickle to a gurgling bass. Sometimes in early fall the creek had no water and at night sounded like her long-dead twin brother or during day like her husband, who had thrown her away, moved away somewhere else and left her alone in the old cabin just a few months after she had retired from thirty-five years of teaching high school science.

Not yet an old woman, she forayed up the forest slopes and discovered many things she had missed during her decades of being a teacher and a wife—when she had not yet been able to be alone. Slopes and trees and rocks she had never known became dear companions.

In the morning she could lie abed and listen to the trickling or to the crows talking back and forth across the hollow from high in the trees. When she walked outside, their chatter changed. They recognized and greeted her, then gossiped. They were funny and having fun. Why not? They could see everything from up there, and if there were spirits in the woods, they could see them, too. Their talk made more morning sense than had making breakfast for her husband and trying to talk while she was reviewing in her head what was to be covered in her classes and followed in her daily schedule. Schedules no more, the crows yakked.

Fogs in the hollow used to depress her, but now she deliberately looked into them. Did she imagine or see spirits

performing zany leaps into momentary appearances through the mists? Fog confused distinctions of form and movement, played tricks on the eyes. Some Indians had believed in a spirit called The Trickster, but good science demanded proof. O. K. No husband or schedule could now divert her testing a hypothesis. If it ended in old-age lunacy, so be it.

One day from her porch she saw cloud hanging down over the ridgetop. She hiked the mile up to the boulder field—the football-field-sized slope of big rocks below the fractured cliffs. The fog had lifted in streaks, enough for her to see through the divides all the way across the rocks. There were no trees or vegetation in the swath of talus. It was a desert of boulders that had tumbled over ages from the cliffs like the dead. She sat and contemplated the emptiness. She lost time passing.

Thousands of boulders cover the slope,
each cracked off from a common cliff.
Of face and form, each its own.
Scan them all, all alike and still, stones—
a desert on a mountainside, not dead.

A stupid poem she scribbled in her pocket notebook. It needed work or perhaps thrown away. And where had "not dead" come from, and what was "dead"? Then, just as she thought she would get up and walk back, she saw something fleet or frisk through a slit in the lifting mist. Was she perceiving evidence or seeing things? Going loony? Voices next?

So what? Why worry about sanity now? She had no classes, no relationships, no marching orders. If she could watch the antics of some ghosts across the rocks or among the trees, bring them on.

The appearances never lingered. They zipped through a crack in her field of consciousness at the speed of light flashing through a camera shutter set at, say, one-five-hundreth of a second, enough for an image. Wavelike oscillations? What were they? They seemed amorphous, at least not of human shape. Perhaps, at her age, she was having vision problems. So what? Bring them on. Indians had believed there were spirits in the rocks.

Heidi was not afraid of them. A hunter in the woods with a deer rifle—now that she was afraid of. Her husband had taken many deer. Heidi was a vegetarian, but she had eaten the venison he provided every fall in order to verify him. He hated hunters who killed for sport.

The deer meat had given her weird dreams. Just before he had moved out, she was beginning to sense that dead deer in her stomach and bowels was connecting her to invisible forms of being who had been taken before their time. She had never believed in spirits. She told him none of this. "The deer gives me strength," she told him. That was what he wanted to hear.

In the Sunday New York Times Crossword, the clue for 4-down read, "organism that structurally resembles another organism." She had once known the word for that but had been away from her science classes too long. She had to cheat: "isomorph," of course. Maybe humans and rocks and spirits were isomorphs. Early one fall evening when the full moon rose huge and orange in the east she climbed without a flashlight through the woods up to the boulder field. She could see all the way across—no fog. There was a hint of a wind. She waited and watched. Surely on a night like this, she thought.

She sat for a couple of hours. Nothing. It would have been too pat for them to obey the clichés or stereotypes of fiction and film. Did she have to be a believer before they would appear?

No. She saw something round wafting in the moonlight, maybe tumbling, bounding, puffing itself up in the wind. It was coming for her. Her spine tingled—no cliché. Balloon-like, it inflated itself out to spheroid, the size of a human head but featureless, yawing first away and then toward her eyes. Bah! It was a plastic bag. Like the ones she still refused at Wal-Mart. Here it was on the ridgetop, deluding like another weather balloon mistaken for another UFO. She grabbed it, wadded it and stuck it in her pocket. Alien it was.

Returning through the woods, she felt an atmosphere about her, like the scent of a skunk, an aroma she liked—you never knew from whence it came. It stayed with her, went to bed with her. It was a lingering that might have frightened others. Surely she was imagining it, but it was sentient, made her feel it was fine for her to exist, that her visit to the stones was existential and required no approval or verification.

The aura embraced and ensconced her through the night, more palpable every time she got up to pee and every time the faraway thunder rumbled her awake. At first light it was gone. Not something she would have told her husband. He had once said, "You like the smell of a skunk? You're nuts."

Heidi lay abed and tried to listen to the creek bubble down, but the sound was hollow, unnatural. She put on her flip flops and went out. Crow silence. An empty plastic water bottle was wedged where the water ran through its little gap between two small rocks. The bottle had stoppered the flow, the little, trickling waterfall. Some hunter had thrown the bottle away up in the woods a day, a week, a year ago. Not her husband. He had always carried his empties home. Last night's thunderstorm must have washed it down.

Her husband. He had thrown her away. She had always arrived home from school around four-thirty. From then until five-forty-five was her time for scribbling poetry and preparing dinner between lines. One day she lost herself in her other world, and dinner was late. He knew why.

"Dawdling away your time. In your own little vanity," he said. He had never asked to read a word.

Dinner, when they had it, passed in silence, a stream with no water, the beginning of the drought, the stoppering. He resented the uses of her life, her presence, her existence. He had no further use for her.

There she was, a plastic water bottle, flicked away without a thought. She picked it up. Her waterfall trickle returned, same as before. There was no away, and she was now one among those who lived here. She had kindreds and would not be thrown away.

Ode to the Slow

Wendy Videlock

I've an affinity for ghosts, and so,
dwelling as we ghostly do, with the caw
and the screech and the piñyon moon, where the freeze
and the thaw and the witness are
together alive and together entombed,
here on the edge of a high desert world
where all is stone, and all is sky,

here where an ancient sea surged forth
and slowly died, here where the ruins and the peaks
have changed their names to butte and bluff,
here where the Ute had slowed their feet
and harvested the piñyon seed,
here where the reach of the canyon ends
or begins, or infers—like knowledge, it's always

a rapture or a bit of a blur (one could soar on the wing
or fall in)—here where the rolling stone knows
the world is only made of sand, and the arc
is the mark of the fallen star,
here where the ghosts and the slopes are wan,
and empty of virtue and of sin, I lower a bridge,
and watch the morning fog roll in.

Numinous

Cassie Van Domelen

Olympic Peninsula Wild Coast Trail. I'm out here by myself in April because I'm trying to replenish something in me, and this is the only way I know to do it. I get a late start down the beach after a tricky time with the tide. I wait two hours while the surf recedes, then climb through boulders and under logs, and finally make a run for it.

This stretch of Pacific Coast is stupefying—old growth hills climb straight out of rough sea, and pieces of broken mountain litter shores and coves, spires and remnants piercing the perpetual fog. The Coast Trail itself is a stretch of the imagination—it consists of walking down the beach, rounding jutting points at low tide, and crossing overland at impassible headlands. Overland trails tend to be rope hauls up eroding cliffs slick with gray mud, sometimes fortified by the crumbling infrastructure of ancient cable ladders.

I don't mean to camp at Scott's Creek, but with sunset falling fast, it's as far as I can get tonight. There's a campground marked on the map, but it's buried under storm-tossed logs. I find a small clearing on a sandy ledge among thick tree roots, mostly flat, barely big enough to pitch a tent. It's the only option, but it's within a foot of the high tide line. Behind the camp site, jumbles of massive logs. Behind the logs, thick salal and an impenetrable forest climbing sharply uphill.

An otter runs the creek to meet waves as the sun sets and the tide draws out. Hummingbirds turn to bats; the sound of sand fleas like rain against my tent. My whole body's sore—good sore. The sand fleas turn to rain at some point.

I wake at 1:30 a.m. to earth-shaking, world-booming surf caber-tossing old growth logs a foot below my tent. I get up to do a Tide Watch. This involves me monitoring the tide for nearly two hours, until it crests. It involves me putting all my gear in my backpack and throwing it onto the higher logs above, then pulling the stakes on the tent, ready, in case. When, an hour before high tide, a wave swamps under roots and logs into the corner of my small camp, I heave the whole tent, still assembled, up onto the log pile behind me.

Raccoon eyes and stars, moon barely a sliver. Meteor or something, glowing red and trailing through broken clouds, falling toward the sea but turning dark before it hits. Two juvenile raccoons spend the night trying to figure out how to break into my food, which is tied in a bear hang on a limb over the tide line. At 2:50, tide receding, I re-stake my tent in its original spot and go back to bed.

I'm surprised to find my food still hanging in the tree in the morning. Feeling very alive, half-stupid/half-savvy, I pack up and keep walking.

From Strawberry Point the next afternoon, I see, back-lit through waves and sun, a sea otter flotilla. I think at first it's kelp, a raft of bulbous heads trailing whip bodies. Apply binocs. Sea otters—twenty to thirty of them! A tangle of heads and feet and tails, floating *en masse*, mothers with young, waiting or resting or maybe just being. I watch them for more than two hours, when, in response to some invisible cue, some just-right tide, they disperse and begin fishing among the rocks. Moms dive, babies follow, small heads pop up first then mothers after, the wee ones swim to the big ones and climb on. What gives me hope: so many otters. What melts me: all this patient mothering.

Hiking out two days later in heavy rain, climbing wearily over a log across the trail, wings woosh by my head as a bald eagle leaves its wooded roost. Moments later, I come upon a deer browsing in the dense salal, not ten feet from my face. We hold each other's gaze until, unfazed, she turns downhill.

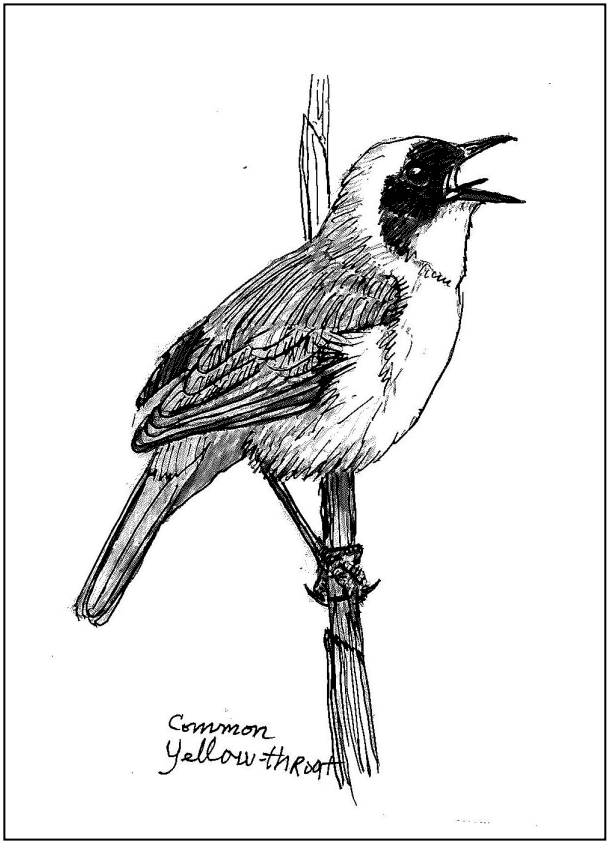
Walking, rain, rain, walking, climbing, heaving, rain wind rain ropes mud ladders, more mud, more ropes, hauling, rappelling, carrying more weight than I know I should, I think: *this is the closest I've been to my young self in a long time, and I like it. I like her. I forgot.*

It's not that I was fearless. It's just that, sometimes, I could fly. Weeks in the wilds, alone. Mexico, Guatemala, South America with an accordion. Painting, music, friends, bicycles. I used to dance. Before the bathroom floor breakdown. Before the ensuing stopgap reinventions that left me less vibrant and less courageous and less trustworthy.

Everything I own is wet, including me. Mud. Including me.

I take my blessings from the sun and the water, the wind the campfire the otters the deer. Blessings in beach coyote tracks, the

dawn chorus, the robins the eagles the spy-hopping seals. I take my blessings and carry them home. I do not count them. It is not possible.



COMMON YELLOW-THROAT

James Bay open-mouthed

Ren Pike

whistle, the lights will come
through black spruce
across muskeg
traversing tributaries
ice solid six thick

the lights will come
without a hoof print
without a snow squeak in minus forty
white expanse three-sixty darkness
each breath a set of quills

lie back exhausted, legs, arms akimbo
skis done shushing
lie back wind-burned, with parched lips
unquenchable thirst
drink it in, halting gulps

lie back long as you can
frigid snow bed of the snow queen
the beat of feathers, the rush
of waters beneath still winter
where wolves prowl
snowshoe hare
all ears

see the night oscilloscope green-line
massifs, bird beak
overlooks plow-down valleys
exhale clouds crystal-plated
heartbeat collaborating
atmosphere a wild reshaping
lit avalanches fall
northern lighting you

Canoeing the Kenai

Dick Anderson

Seen from the air, Alaska's Kenai Peninsula is a carpet of trees, interspersed by lakes and streams. The canopy is so dense, that you cannot imagine yourself alone in a canoe—far from the throngs of the salmon-besotted fishermen lining the shores of the Kenai River—winding through this maze of wildness.

But now I *am* in my canoe, the fishermen long behind, and that same community of trees that I marveled at from the air, now reveal their individual character: stately Sitka spruce, standing tall and proud, claiming their space, some embracing massive boulders with their roots; sun-spangled aspen, clacking like castanets in the crisp autumn breeze; and paper birch, peeling and bleached white, casting a corridor of lengthy shadows in the late afternoon sun.

A bald eagle perches high in the tufted apex of a cedar, and as my canoe draws near, it swoops down, as if guiding me forward, alighting on a treetop far down the lake, repeating the process over and over as I approach. Thus, I am escorted on my journey, as if a spirit animal were leading the way. Finally, the magnificent bird soars off, leaving me alone and strangely bereft, as if to remind that companionship is ephemeral, and only I can determine my ultimate destination.

Sometimes the trees are guideposts, an objective to mark my progress. Other times they are a haven of shade for a noonday repast, a cradle for a nap, or a terminus for the day's journey, providing shelter for the night's camp. From my canoe, as the late afternoon shadows lengthen, causing the tree-filtered sun to dance on the water, I search for just the right spot, where the forest encircles protectively, the wind is diminished, and a patch of level ground awaits my tent. Taken together, these sheltering conditions are rare along Kenai shores, and I think back on last year's journey, canoeing through the remote warren of lakes that saturate northern Saskatchewan, when I learned the perils of waiting too late in the day to locate a suitable campsite. This time, my search is quickly rewarded, and I set about the chores of establishing my temporary home.

Dawn breaks in a frigid chill, and with drowsy reluctance I climb out of my body-warm sleeping bag and race to pull on long johns, socks and boots, and add the layers that I know will later be peeled off as the day progresses, a daily ritual which is the price for communing with nature at this time of year. Emerging from the tent, I am greeted by the sight of my own breath, fogging a world covered with the icy crystals of a first September frost.

Caught unprepared, I discover that the firewood I've left unprotected shines with a hoary sheen. I am forced to drop to my hands and knees and forage for reasonably dry kindling. Despite my gloves, my fingers are growing numb, and without further delay, I feel my way beneath the spruce needles that cover this sub-arctic forest floor. Eventually, I assemble a modest collection of dry twigs and muskeg. With hands that now feel like clubs, I try to strike a match.

After two unsuccessful attempts, I produce a tiny flame. Willing myself to be patient, I nurse the fragile flicker, blowing as steadily as my shivering breath will allow, hoping the sparks will catch the neighboring kindling. Finally, my efforts are rewarded and the tiny flickering flame slowly becomes a glowing fire. Soon I will be feasting on coffee and flapjacks. Though it is hardly the dead of winter, I nonetheless can't help but recall Jack London's cautionary tale of a fire not built.

Sipping the last dregs of coffee, I finally rise to survey the environs surrounding my camp. The distant mountains that were purple the previous evening are now white with snow.

Suddenly, the morning quiet is torn by a deafening sound, similar to the report of a rifle, and my body involuntarily tenses in prickly alert. Not thirty feet from shore, a bright silver Coho has broken water and leaps high into the air. My heart leaps with it, and as the great fish plunges back into the water, I am seized by the desire to engage this beauty, which I estimate is easily upwards of 20 pounds. My rational mind knows this is foolishness. The light tackle I've brought with me is no match for this prodigious salmon.

Nonetheless, I grab my pole and feverishly rig the line, selecting my largest orange-spotted Lazy Ike as the lure of choice. I scramble into my canoe and push off for the spot the Coho has so recently vacated, his leaping body still etched in my vision. Casting the line, I decide to troll back and forth over the area. Rather than

hold the rod with one hand and try to paddle with the other, I lean the tip of the rod on the deck of the stern, thread the handle and reel under my seat and hold it tightly in place between my boots. Even though the likelihood of a strike is negligible, I am ready to grab the pole in an instant.

Well, maybe not an instant. No sooner have I begun paddling than my pole leaps from between my feet, the reel protesting noisily as the line shoots out. Before I can even grab for it, my pole rockets over the stern and dives into the water, far from my reach and instantly out of my view. My "engagement" with this adversary is brief and humbling. I have lost my favorite rod and reel, my favorite lure, and more than a bit of my pride. I paddle back to shore, still excited though chagrined, and begin to break camp. Another day in the Kenai has begun.

I spend about ten days canoeing the waters of the Kenai, with some 40 miles of that trekking the trails between lakes. Many of these portages are a mile or more in length over rugged terrain. As a sixty-plus-year-old traveling alone, I can only handle about 50-60 pounds while making the trek from one lake to the next. I haven't had to do this much portaging since paddling Quetico's boundary waters some years before. Like then, I shoulder a fifty-pound pack for the first leg of the portage and trudge off, carrying a paddle in each hand.

Upon reaching the launch site at the next lake, I shrug off the pack and paddles and return to fetch another load, consisting of a second 50-pound pack, a camera bag, my tackle box and a spare fishing pole. Wearily, I return one final time to heft the canoe onto my shoulders and haul it to where my other equipment is stashed. I have no fear of my gear being commandeered, as there is no one around to do so! My main precaution is to make sure the food packs are safe from bears or other critters. Fortunately, the rather complicated procedure of hanging these packs from the highest available limb is a skill I have mastered in previous journeys.

One can hardly think about Alaska without thinking about grizzly bears. Stories abound, especially in our media-saturated, voyeuristic environment. Advice from rangers and other experienced outdoor advocates is sometimes conflicting: Make sure your campsite has a small perimeter, so you are not claiming

too much territory. . . . Mark your territory just as the animals do and claim a large space. Clean your fish at least a hundred yards away from your tent. . . . No, clean your fish and cook your meals near your tent so you're not claiming too much territory. Stand tall if you come across a grizzly on the trail. . . . Avert your eyes lest the animal think you are challenging it.

It will take several journeys and many years for me to reach my own conclusions about how to stay safe and feel at ease in bear country. In preparation for this trip to the Kenai, I visit a sporting goods store to explore the possibility of purchasing a rifle. There I learn about various weapons and ammo I will supposedly find indispensable. "This beauty'll bring down an elephant," I'm advised, "but it's got the kick of a mule." I also compare a variety of pepper sprays that I might deploy to ward off a charging animal. "This one shoots fifty feet, but this one only has a range of twenty-five. 'Course that presumes the wind is with ya."

For a number of reasons, most of all my lack of experience with firearms coupled with an aversion to inflict harm on an animal in whose territory I am an uninvited guest, I choose to carry bear spray. Thus, traipsing the portages of the Kenai, I have a large aerosol can clipped to my belt, always fearful that I may catch the activating lever on a shrub and envelop myself in a cloud of pepper. Actually, there is little chance of that happening because by the time I managed to put down my gear, unclip the spray, remember how to deploy the activating lever, gauge the wind, aim, and spray, the bear will likely be long gone—or on top of me.

To avoid this possibility, I follow the advice to make noise, singing a tune based on a childhood ditty at the top of my lungs. Thus, "Rain, rain, go away," becomes "bears, bears, go away." Actually, I'm conflicted because, as a photographer, I would love to come across a bear (at a safe remove)—but how is that going to happen when I'm making all this racket? After a few days of feeling rather silly, I lapse into relative silence, deciding that the bears will easily hear me tramping through the undergrowth.

Do I actually run into a bear on this trip? I do hear what I guess to be a quite large animal moving through the brush about fifty yards ahead of me. When I arrive at a small intersection of two animal trails, I come across a freshly steaming pile of bear scat. But that's as close as I come.

Folks like my friend Harry shake their heads and wonder why I put myself through the tortuous and somewhat risky routine of going solo into the wilderness year after year. I certainly have as well. I've never come up with a simple answer. All I know is that somehow the rewards far outweigh the difficulties. For me, the experience of reconnecting with the natural world and the larger universe is essential for feeling whole and complete. Over the course of a year, I inevitably find the routine of work and city life self-focused. No matter how fulfilling the work or stimulating the urban environment, the center of this activity is "me." I schedule my time. I have appointments to keep, tasks to fulfill, self-imposed obligations to meet.

My remove to the wilderness, usually for a couple of weeks. frees me from this encompassing cycle. My pace, reflecting my experience of time, slows, sometimes to a near standstill. Inevitably, when I return to the wilds, I find myself standing in solitude—in a forest, or a glade, or by a river—letting the realization wash over me that I am no longer the center of my universe. Rather, I am simply a denizen, along with the other animals, plants, waters and rocks. The longer I stand in stillness, an atavistic sense of belonging recurs, as if returning to a way of being that I have forgotten. I am a part of a continuum, a flow, small but not insignificant. I am revisiting my ancestral home, a home to all who have come before and all who will come in time. Each year, this renewed awakening reinforces my determination to continue my journeys to the wild, despite the aches and pains.

A fog is looming over the lagoon—spreading a gauzy blanket that muffles the lapping of the icy water. I stand on a rocky outcrop jutting out from the shoreline, my hands cupped around a steamy mug of coffee. The earth is shuttered, still asleep. On my right, patrolling the edges of the lake, a regiment of tall pines stretches skyward, the pinnacles of these guardians obscured in the ghostly atmosphere. Overhead, escaping the haze, the southwest sky yawns, a blue expanse promising a crystalline, sunny day. Eastward, the sun is fog-bound, a silver disk bathing the rocks and trees in a phantasmal glow of bleached light and ebony shadow.

Free from the cacophony of the city I've left far behind, my mind seizes this opportunity to slow down and meander through

time. I recall how last night I was standing here on this identical rock, serenely surveying this same scene, aided by a waxing moon. The contours of the shore were then plainly visible, and now, trying to reconstruct the details of that vista, I find myself suddenly transported, as if my present self were merging with my self of last night. It's a strange, eerie, yet not unfamiliar feeling, time and my two selves gently merging, as if I were looking at a ghost of myself—a ghost who, across the expanse of time, is looking back at me.

As I stood here last night, only the occasional shiver of ripples on the lake and the howling of a wolf had interrupted the stillness. I recall how reluctant I was to break the spell and begin the noisy job of setting up camp—erecting a rain tarp, chopping wood, staking the tent, rattling pots and pans, building a fire.

I had eaten supper in silence, transfixed by the blaze, drawn deep into the flames that were morphing red to orange to yellow, shuddering skyward and then falling back into themselves. As I sat thus entranced, time again shifted and I found myself imagining how fires like mine must have comforted those who crossed Beringia—the Siberia-Alaska land bridge—as they journeyed here thousands of years ago, seeking food and shelter. Then, as now, fire must have been a shield against the night—a haven for all who shared its warmth and light. I could almost feel their ghosts and wondered if they had dwelt in this very place.

As my campfire slowly embered, satiated and sleepy from my evening repast and the labors of the day, I had stretched out, wriggling my shoulders and butt into Kenai's forest floor until I'd fashioned a comfortable cradle. Grabbing the nearest rock for a pillow, I'd scanned the heavens, enveloped by the deepening silence of the night—a silence broken only by the mourning of that distant wolf.

Gazing up from my prone position, searching the heavens for falling stars, my thoughts once again began drifting, this time to the past of fifty years ago, where my seventeen-year-old self, also looking skyward, huddled against the chill and watched these same stars as they flickered over Blackduck Lake in northern Minnesota. That night I had also stretched out, but in the bottom of a rowboat, anticipating my older brother's arrival the next day.

I'd invited Lyle to join me for a week at the lake to share a cabin I had rented with my summer savings, hoping we might

reprise for one last time the summers we'd spent together as kids. He would be arriving in the morning, but that night was mine alone to savor. Luxuriating in my solitude, I'd rowed out onto this beloved moonlit cradle of my youth.

I was a pipe smoker back then. (It was my teenaged conception of maturity.) I'd lit my pipe and lay back—a cushion under my head and a blanket thrown over my legs—gently rocking with the waves. My fishing pole dangled over the side of the boat, but I was hoping I would not have to respond to any sudden pull on the line. Half a century later, I still recall the fish had obliged.

After some time—perhaps a minute, perhaps an hour—I'd roused myself from this fifty-year-old memory. Last night's fire had turned to ashes. Pulling myself up from my prone position with the aid of a nearby sapling, I had hobbled back over to my Kenai lakeshore, like old men do after sitting too long.

I'd stood by the shore quietly, bidding farewell to the day. Another wolf call sent a thrill down my spine and suddenly I had the irrepressible urge to howl in answer to his plaintive cry. I threw back my head, cupped my hands around my mouth, and, inhaling deeply, howled to the heavens.

"A-r-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o," I had wailed, over and over. "I'm here too! I exist! I'm part of this!"

Now, standing here on this misty Alaskan morning, I breathe in the crisp, refreshing air. I no longer need to howl. Howling is for nighttime. Morning invites gentleness to usher in the new day. I bask in the surrounding tranquility, and reverentially tend to my morning duties, as if tiptoeing through a cathedral. I cook my breakfast in silence. I strike my tent in silence. I load my gear in silence.

Wading into the fog-shrouded water, I launch my canoe, and the rhythmic pull of my paddle deepens my morning trance.

How to Spend the Night in a Canoe, Coldest Night of the Year

Anne McCrary Sullivan

When a steady north wind has blown the water from around your boat,
left you surrounded by thick mud, deep enough to swallow you whole,
when you have taken the shock of a rising tide that stopped short,
turned away acknowledge the inevitable. Get to work.

Remove everything that has served its purpose—empty canisters,
empty jugs; set them on mud. Spread tarps, mats, sleeping bags
in the bottom of the canoe. Put on all the clothes you can. Use the rest
to insulate sides of the boat. Lie down in the nest you have made,
pull over you the folded tent. Wait.

Soon the moon you have watched grow larger each night, nearly full now,
floats with Orion, balances over the wooden paddle planted in mud.
Trace with your eyes the dark shapes of unnamed mangrove islands.
Listen for the dolphin's blow in the channel you can't quite get to.
Feel how your face grows colder your body warmer. This

is wilderness. It holds you, pins you at the center of the universe,
suspends you in the essential. Time has nothing to do with clocks. Tides
defy their charts. Watch the slow arcs of passage stars and moon.
Feel yourself warm free breathing. Know how lucky you are.

After Eleven Days Paddling

Anne McCrary Sullivan

I sleep in a bed again,
lie too straight,
wake to check the ropes;

arms, wrists, hands tingle,
reach for the paddle that always
sleeps beside me

in that green and blue world
where nothing is superfluous,
everything is fluid.

I awaken to walls that do not flap
and breathe, look up at the ceiling—
a low, blank sky

remember how at sunset, seven
white ibis stepped in single file
along the arching roots

how the slow moon sank
like a grape through mangrove honey.

Burning Mental Impressions

—September 7, 2020
Bench Lake, Kings Canyon National Park

Dennis Eagan

Thick smoke had infiltrated the high country during the night, turning the tent into a claustrophobic prison with its nylon walls closing in on me. I crawled out of the sleeping bag, dressed, and stepped out the door into ash raining from a burnt sky. Smoke is common in the High Sierra in late summer and fall, but I had never seen it this bad at 10,600 feet. Little did I realize that twenty miles to the north, the National Guard was rescuing one hundred sixty hikers by helicopter from the projected path of the Creek Fire—the largest single wildfire in California's history. It would burn for months, force forty-five thousand people to evacuate their homes, destroy over eight hundred fifty structures, and scorch more than a third of a million acres.

I got to get out of here, I thought, *but which way?* The sky's uniform tint left no clue as to the fire's direction. A suppressed panic washed over me. I fired up the Jetboil and made a cup of coffee to ponder my predicament.

The second aphorism of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra—Yoga chitta vritti narodaha*—tells us that the mind is the cause of suffering. The classic definition: yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. I often struggle with a world and country that are much different than my vision of what they could be. This year more than ever, a global pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, and dysfunctional politics have made the backcountry a precious refuge. But now with the entire West burning, even the wilderness felt suffocating.

In yoga philosophy, Agni—the Hindu fire god—expresses his energy through the sun, lightning, and the sacrificial flame. He transforms things through intensity. There is no escaping his fury here in the West's fire-ecology where blazing forests and smoke-filled skies have haunted people for thousands of years. But Agni has a benevolent side. He is also the campfire's warmth on a chilly night and the breath in the wood stove that heats the home. Fire shapes our sylvan landscape, awakening seedlings stored in the soil by melting their resin coating. Aspen, lodgepole pine, and the

largest living beings on Earth—Giant Sequoias—are all born of fire. Sequoias are Agni's trees. He has blessed them with fibrous, fire-resistant bark up to two feet thick that allows them to survive even the hottest burns and to live for up to three thousand years. Other forest plants only germinate through changes in soil chemistry driven by smoke, ash, and char. Agni presents the ultimate dichotomy: life and death.

The Creek Fire had started three days earlier, the same day I left the trailhead at Road's End in King's Canyon National Park with six days of food. I'd almost canceled the trip on account of the lousy air quality that had been eddying around California for the last couple of weeks, due to the SQF Complex Fire burning in the southern part of Sequoia National Park and the nearly four hundred other fires raging across the state. But that first morning, a clear blue sky gave the green light. My luck held the following day when I made my way up Arrow Creek and over Arrow Pass to my camp here at Bench Lake.

Yesterday, as I scrambled up Arrow Peak's northeast arete, my throat began to feel scratchy. The daily upslope breeze had pushed smoke up from the foothills and Central Valley all the way to 13,000 feet. Evening's cool air shoved most of this haze back down. But then around 6:30 p.m., an ominous black wave of smoke began to creep in from the northwest, over the Monarch Divide. Within minutes it had blotted out the sun.

Now I was looking at a twenty-plus-mile hike out of the backcountry while sucking air that contained enough particulate matter to qualify as hazardous on the AQ Index. My intended route back to the car was the most direct and all downhill, but if this new fire was burning up that drainage, I would be walking right into it. Should I go south or north on the John Muir Trail? Exit the mountains to the east or west? I hadn't seen anyone since I left the trail in Paradise Valley and started bushwhacking up Arrow Creek two days ago. There was no one to consult. Most sensible people were staying indoors and avoiding strenuous exercise.

Though it would require a dozen miles of off-trail travel, I decided to stick with my original plan: follow the South Fork of the King's River downstream to Paradise Valley and catch the Woods Creek Trail out. Every other option would have required climbing a couple of thousand feet over a pass. At least going downhill, I'd

avoid breathing hard and stressing my lungs more than necessary. I'd know within a few hours of committing to the canyon whether or not my decision was the right one.

Then something remarkable happened, once I began to move: my mind shifted from melancholia to wonder. I stopped obsessing about survival and started focusing on route finding. I found myself once again enjoying the backcountry solitude and the beauty around me in spite of the oppressive smoke. My agenda—the peaks I had hoped to climb—faded away. Since the trip was ending early and the trailhead lay only two days away, I had plenty of food and no need to rush. Over the next eight hours, a magical day unfolded as I made my way downstream through forest and meadows, boulder-hopping across talus fields or in the riverbed. I noticed the tangerine glow of sunlight dancing on the river, a stone face where water had carved three perfectly round potholes in the granite, amber trunks of cedar trees growing out of snow-white cobbles, and a tortoise-shaped boulder. I saw the earth as it was, not as I wanted it to be. Smooth slabs, crystal clear pools, and stair-stepping cascades all appeared quite lovely in the rusty light.

According to the *Prthivi Sukta,* or "In Praise of Mother Earth" of the *Atharva Veda*, one of Hinduism's oldest texts, "Agni flows through all creatures in the form of hunger." *Jatar agni*, the fire of digestion, converts food to fuel. On the emotional level: rage must have burned in the hearts of the vigilantes under Major John Savage in 1850 when they attacked an Ahwahnechee village on December 8th, set fire to the natives' pine huts with embers from their own campfires, and drove the indigenous people from their home in Yosemite Valley… and left a black scar on the beginning of the modern conservation movement. Psychologically, *bauddhika agni* burns mental impressions. It seemed Agni had changed my mind. What should have been one of the most miserable backcountry days of my life was turning out to be a delightful wander through the wild.

I don't take climate change and the devastation of our western forests lightly. Similar to many people, I suffer from solastalgia—the term for a psychic affliction first coined by Professor Glenn Albrecht of the University of New Castle, Australia—the existential grief of habitat loss.

Albrecht describes solastagia as "the homesickness you have when you are still at home," due to environmental changes. My

home lies in the Sierra Nevada foothills where oak, pine, and manzanita mingle. I hike, ski, and climb these mountains, kayak the rivers, and often, just sit and stare at the landscape and scope critters through binoculars. The entire range is my home. But hotter and longer summers, beetle infestation, and multi-year drought have turned the Sierra's forest floor into a powder keg that I sit on through each fire season, hoping and praying that Agni will spare me, my home, my community, these mountains, this canyon, and all the creatures in it.

But in the face of environmental degradation resulting from climate change, my sense of connection to and appreciation for the natural world only deepens. Solastalgia does not stand alone; in fact, it only exists because of biophilia—love of life. E.O. Wilson, who has been called the father of sociobiology and the father of biodiversity, defines the word as "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes… our existence depends on this propensity, our spirit is woven from it, hope rises on its currents." It's an emotion I felt long before my wife, Andie, introduced me to these two concepts. I remember the anguish I felt as an eight-year-old in Los Angeles when my father washed down an army of ants that had invaded our kitchen sink. I cried and begged him to stop drowning the poor insects, as if I were going down the drain with them. My love of nature comes with a cost, one I'm willing to pay.

When I went to bed that night under a thick smoke ceiling, I could barely see the canyon walls a few hundred yards away. Feathery wisps of ash drifted down from the sky to rest upon the sleeping bag. In contrast to the impending sense of doom that I had experienced at the beginning of the day, I felt blessed to be there at that moment, realizing this canyon or at least every living thing in it could be torched soon. I no longer take for granted that a wild place I visit will remain the same.

Desolation

Kim Trainor

That night by Lightning Creek at the base of Desolation
before the ascent to Kerouac's *awful vaulty blue smokebody rock*,
through forest of western hemlock and fir, stepped meadows,
snowstorm and whiteout conditions to his boarded-up lookout
and the blank void, we lay in the tent hushed to blue, blue-black.
I was tired and hushed too, just barely flesh aware of self, but you
were wide-eyed, talking mind and the universe—how embodied
in every moss, lichen, worm, dust, star, a consciousness
that could be measured, emanating from matter like energy, locked
into a pattern released at death, slowly, reabsorbed like human elements,
carbon selenium iron cobalt gone to ground but even dust still bearing
the faintest pulse.
You say you don't remember this—only the fire
we built on the lake shore, bourbon and stars, cracked glittering
edge of the galaxy pressing down—but my sleepy flesh absorbed
your words. I said, *hold onto me,* and you sang *nigunim*
under the tent's blue skin and brightly scattered night.
And maybe we were angels for a time, winged and sere, sung
bodies under the awful vaulty blue. Scorched, desolate.

Desert Draw

Janet Goldberg

4:00 p.m. and we were getting a late start on our hike, my husband and I, on our yearly Death Valley trip, this one though maybe our last since we were thinking of separating, going our own way. Our third day in, the road ended, as it always did, at a canyon, Desolation Canyon, a hike we'd never done in the many years we'd been coming to the park. Yesterday's hike to Zabriskie Point, one of our favorites, had taken us up to a tourist-ridden area offering hypnotic views of rippling canyons. There, the paved parking lot had been full; here in Desolation Canyon, though, there was no lot. Now, at road's end, was only an old van, burnt orange with tinted windows, parked up against the wall. My husband, after turning off the ignition, opened his book *Hiking California's Death Valley,* on the cover rippling sand dunes, a man hiking across them. "I want to look over the trail description one more time," he said.

I got out, walked toward the van, and then called back to my husband. "You think it's abandoned?" Then I peered over at the trailhead. Rocky, shadeless, it looked as desolate as its namesake. Badwater, Hell's Gate, Devil's Golf Course, the Funeral Mountains—some, attracted by the grim names, came to the park to kill themselves, even whole families, I'd read three nights ago in the *Tehachapi Gazette* when a freak snowstorm up in the mountains had forced us off the road into a dive motel for the night on our way to the park. But still, I thought, as I headed toward the van, it was hard to believe a family would come out here, twenty miles of washboard just to get in. At the van now I took off my sunglasses, trying to see in.

"Hey," my husband shouted, "what are you doing?" He was out of the car now.

I walked back over to him. "There's a big straw hat in there and a dozen sealed up garbage bags. No seats at all."

My husband pulled our pack out of the car and slung it on his shoulder, handing me the water bottle. "You're going to get yourself in trouble one of these days."

Truth was I was already in trouble, my husband thinking I'd cheated on him, but for the sake of the trip we'd called a truce.

"What do you think is in those bags?" I asked, as we headed over to the trail.

"Not what you think. Manson's in prison now, an old man, right? Isn't that what you said?"

"Right. The court reversed his death sentence." That was in the *Gazette* story too, Charles Manson's time in Death Valley, stowed up in the Panamints, up Goler Canyon, at the Barker Ranch, where he'd hatched his plans for the sensational Tate-LaBianca murders some forty years ago. After we'd left Tehachapi, I'd said we could go see the ranch for ourselves, the turn-off for Goler Canyon off the main road into the park.

We walked single file down the narrow trail as it rose and dipped, my husband leading. I stopped for a minute and looked back at the van, still thinking of Manson, the school bus he drove up Goler Canyon, his followers in it. He hadn't actually committed the murders but instead sent the alienated, drug-crazed runaways he'd collected, brainwashed. I turned back around and started up the trail again, but my husband was already out of sight. He'd wait up though, I knew, so I kept walking, listening to the ground crunch beneath my boots, the sky above, blue, unforgiving. Already hot, I wiped my forehead and then heard footsteps, foot-dragging behind me. Pausing, I looked back. A man in a gray t-shirt and white pants was coming toward me, a tripod under his arm, a small, square pack on his back. Gut hanging over his waist, he could have been any man, middle-aged, out of shape. I lifted my hand, but he didn't seem to see me. I turned and started walking again. But then I heard footfall right behind me, the man somehow having caught up with me. As he veered slightly around me, head down, passing, I caught the side of his face. It was flushed and puffy, and he was breathing heavily. Stopping, I watched him for a minute, hauling his tripod, its dark legs dragging behind him. Yesterday, up at Zabriskie Point, were all sorts of tripods, armchair photographers behind them. I started walking again, up ahead my husband's familiar shape coming into view.

Leaning against a rock, he lifted his hand.

"Did you see that weird guy?" I asked, coming up alongside him.

"With the camera gear and strange pack. Yeah," he said.

"God knows what he thought of ours." I glanced over at it, on the ground, a ratty thing we'd patched up over the years,

lightweight and flexible, perfect desert material. I peered up the trail, a fork ahead, to the left a wide wash, to the right a narrow one.

"Which way are we going?" I asked.

My husband lifted the pack. "Your choice."

"So where do you suppose he came from, the man," I said, as we headed to the fork. "I didn't hear a car come up the road."

My husband shrugged. "Anywhere. Park's full of unmarked roads."

At the fork now, we stopped. Above us on a small outcropping of rock between the washes was the man again, tripod still under his arm. His hand above his brow, he squinted down at us. "Hey, which way?"

I took off my sunglasses and looked up at him, his face still red, his shirt now stained with sweat.

"Makes no difference," my husband said. "Trail's round trip."

"That so? Well thank you very much." Turning, he scrambled forward, dragging the tripod.

"Now why'd you tell him that?" I whispered, though this wasn't the first time we'd run into a solo hiker, always men, lonely sorts, coming up behind us, wanting some company. Harmless. But we'd never had anyone backtrack on us, *then* get friendly. Plus, he had no water.

My husband shrugged. "We can take the other wash a ways. Or we can just turn back. It doesn't look like the most promising trail anyway."

I peered down the narrow wash, the man out of sight now.

My husband drank from the water bottle.

"I can carry the pack," I said, taking it from him. As we walked, I unzipped the front pocket, slid my hand in, feeling for the pocketknife we always carried.

"So what else did that Manson article say?" my husband asked.

"The Barker Ranch where the gang stayed. There was a picture of it. Pleasant-looking. One story. Stone. That's where the police found Manson. A small guy. Hiding in a cabinet under the sink. Now people camp there. Can't seem to stay away. The park service is thinking of razing it."

My husband stopped and wiped his forehead, no shade in sight. "Okay, I think I've seen enough. Let's head back. Cut our losses."

I looked up the trail at the parched, colorless landscape. "Hold on," I said, spotting an opening in the canyon wall. We'd scrambled up chutes before, vertical openings, the result of erosion, even though they could be dangerous. The Zabriskie Point hike had lots of them. I peered up the chute. "What do you think?" I asked.

"I don't know," my husband said. "Looks steep. I'd better go first. I'll call if I think it's passable." He started pulling himself up.

"Okay," I said, though I didn't like being left behind, especially here so far from the main road. "Call me," I shouted up as he climbed, the chute swallowing him up. Stepping back, I drank from the water bottle. Then, looking for some shade, I saw about ten feet uptrail a small apron, a shadow extending out from the canyon wall. Something was in it, though, lying down, and as I took a few steps toward it I saw the thick curved horns of a ram and stopped. I'd heard they were in the park, but I'd never seen one. I expected it to bolt, but it just lay there, placidly peering at me as I stood in the sun sweating. I ran back to the chute. "Hey!" You up there?" I shouted. I dropped the pack and pulled myself up, started climbing, the walls closing around me. But my feet slipping, I stopped, worried about getting back down, and, crouching, rotated, and slid back out, using my palms as brakes. Back in the wash, I brushed my hands off. They burned a little, scraped up and bleeding.

"You see that Bighorn?"

I swung around. The man had on glasses now, thick ones making his eyes blurry. He laid his tripod down.

I took a step back, trying to appear nonchalant.

He nodded toward the chute. "Your husband up there?"

"You get its picture? The ram," I asked.

"I got my shot. Looks like you hurt yourself there."

I looked at my hands, at the narrow cuts.

"Let me fix you up," the man said, reaching behind for his pack.

"That's all right." I lifted my pack, reaching in, feeling for the knife.

The man turned back around. "Whatever you say." He lifted the tripod as if he were going to leave but instead started opening it, spreading its legs. "Now no need to be afraid. Your husband he'll be fine if you . . ." He took a few steps toward me and then

stopped. “Now what do you have there?” he asked, as I struggled to get the knife open. But the knife slipped out of my hand, falling not far from me, glinting in the sun. We both lunged for it, and then I heard a dull thud, the man hitting his head on a rock protruding from the wall. On the ground now, on his stomach, he was groaning. A trickle of blood ran down the side of his head. Suddenly sand and pebbles rushed down the chute, and then my husband, landing on his feet. Looking from the man to me then down to the knife, my husband asked, “What’s going on here?” He picked up the knife.

The man, rolling onto his back, grimaced. “Your wife. She tried to kill me.”

“That’s not true. I didn’t do anything. He came after me.”

My husband walked over to the man’s pack and unzipped it.

I squatted down beside him.

“What if he has a gun?” I asked.

“A gun?” My husband looked back at the man.

Sitting up now, he was holding his head, rocking back and forth.

Wallet, lenses, boxes of film, Band-Aids, a stack of pictures, women, shot from behind, shoulders down. There must have been a hundred of them, my husband leafing through.

“Shouldn’t we check his ID?” I asked.

“I don’t want to know who he is,” my husband said, putting everything back, zipping up the pack. “Let’s get out of here. We’re not far from the trailhead. Come on.” My husband grabbed our pack.

The man was looking over at us now. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. He was still bleeding. “You’re just going to leave me?”

“Don’t say anything,” my husband whispered. “He’s not hurt that bad. He’ll get out himself. Let’s go.” He took my hand, and we started hiking out. I looked back again. The man hadn’t moved, but now he was shouting at us. “You won’t get away with this!”

“Get away with what?” my husband asked. “Did you stab him?”

“Are you crazy?” I said. “Did you see those pictures?”

“Come on.”

We started walking faster and faster until we were running, sprinting. After we came around a curve, my face burning, I said,

"Wait," and we slowed down. Bent over, sweating, I tried to catch my breath. I felt dizzy.

"Look," my husband said. "Something just ran across the trail."

"What?" I felt myself go cold.

"Over there."

We went over to the canyon wall. There, a large, tufted bird with enormous feet and black-ringed eyes was whipping a mouse against a rock, the rock speckled with blood.

"Roadrunner," my husband said. "They break all the bones, swallow their prey whole."

"Hey! Wait up!" The man, half-walking, half-limping, was coming toward us, dragging his tripod.

"I don't believe it," I said.

My husband pulled me back on the trail, and we started running again, not stopping until we reached the mouth of the canyon. I wiped the hair out of my eyes. Sweat was running down my back; my shirt clung to me. I drank from the water bottle, thinking of the ram cool in its apron of shade, its glassy eyes taking me in, and I shivered. The wind, as it often did late afternoon, had picked up, was whooshing through the canyon. I handed my husband the water bottle. "We must have lost him this time," I said.

My husband took a sip and then shook his head. "Don't bet on it. Wouldn't surprise me if he's already back."

I put my hands on my hips. "That's impossible. Are you trying to scare me?"

"I thought you liked being scared. Isn't that why you wanted to go to the Manson place?"

"I was just kidding about that. You'd need a winch to get up there." Confused, I looked at my husband.

He walked toward the car.

"I didn't stab him, you know. He came after me. And I didn't cheat on you," I shouted. But my husband kept walking. Sighing, I turned around, taking one last look, the wind lifting the sand, swirling it up into miniature tornadoes, tiny ghosts traveling across the landscape.

Abandon

Mark MacAllister

The long-unused trailhead was exactly where promised
just past Hannah's Creek and marked by a tumbled cairn
the tread crossed by spider webs
and corkscrewed trees dropped by last year's storms

after three ridges it flattened out
the creek doubled back on itself to form a small island
and because I remember camps the way others
        do faces or birthdays
I knew this as a site I'd found more than half my life ago
mapless and with a woman I would discover
possessed the planet's loveliest hipbones

I have since learned two senses of *abandon*
one notes the joy of being profoundly unburdened
how everything we required then simply came to us
as if on the back of the animals
that rested while we bathed in the waist-deep water

the other is to allow a place to go unvisited
to eventually forget it was ever there

Edge Walk

Fred Swanson

The juniper at the top of the cut bank offered only a little shade, but I sat down next to it anyway, letting its stiff branches shower me with loose bark and scaly leaves. Up here, away from the cottonwoods in the gulch, the late-September sun held court like it was July. I wiped the sweat from my face and contemplated my half-full water bottle. I'd finished the other two on the hike in, assuming that the spring would be flowing. I hadn't reckoned with this autumn's lingering drought and record-breaking heat, which had left not so much as a patch of damp sand down in the watercourse. All that remained was a tangle of dry grass and dead limbs which made the going next to impossible.

In more than fifty years of backpacking I have never had to ask myself whether I could make it out alive. Now the question formed a dark shape in my mind. I had not thought to fill the five-liter bladder I always carried on these desert trips, since my previous ventures into this canyon persuaded me it held perennial water. I would have to make it to the river, several miles farther down this trailless and increasingly difficult canyon. Alone and about out of energy, I faced a tough walk.

Like most backpackers who spend time in Utah's canyon country, I was an early fan of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, the book which drew so many of us to this part of the Southwest. His chapter "The Dead Man at Grandview Point" is one of its most thoughtful, depicting a search for a missing hiker of about my age which took place in 1957, during Abbey's second field season at Arches National Monument. The victim had wandered down a dry canyon near Upheaval Dome in what later became Canyonlands National Park; Abbey transposed this locale to Grandview Point, a stunning lookoff which better suited his literary purposes.

Abbey related how he and his brother John, a ranger at nearby Natural Bridges National Monument, followed the victim's tracks in the sand as he wandered up and down the canyon, then climbed up to a ledge where he took shelter under a juniper. "There, on the brink of nothing and everything, he lies down in the shade to rest," Abbey imagined. "He would not have suffered much after that; he may have died in his sleep, dreaming of the edge of things, of flight into space, of soaring."

I had no intention of remaining in the meager shade of my juniper; thirst and delirium did not seem like a pleasant way to go. Abbey wrote that "to die alone, on a rock under sun at the brink of the unknown, like a wolf, like a great bird, seems to me very good fortune indeed," but I had not come here to test the boundary between life and death. The plan had simply been to enjoy a ramble down a pleasant, well-watered canyon—which is what my family and I had found here on two previous trips. Now, through a simple, basic error, I'd placed myself in a difficult and potentially dangerous situation.

After downing half the remaining contents of the bottle, I pushed myself erect, shouldered my pack, and tried to reconstruct the route we had followed ten years before. That trip had seen three days of birdsong, balmy weather, and a lovely clear rill flowing over the slickrock. This time as I proceeded downstream, I searched every hidden pocket and pour-off for moisture. At one point there was a patch of wet sand, but I pushed on, a vision in my head of green trees arching over a cool stream.

I knew that dehydration, accompanied by a frisson of panic, could lead to a stumble and fall, so I took extra care where I set my feet on the brittle ledges and crumbling sidehills. There was no one within miles of me. I carried a satellite beacon in my pack, but calling in a rescue would be a last resort. I was still sweating—a good sign—and once I was out of the brushiest part of the canyon the going grew a little easier. There was a chokepoint ahead, an immense stack of Wingate blocks that had fallen from the cliff, but we'd wormed through it before with no problem. Still, obstacles appear harder when you're alone—or you convince yourself they are.

A short way below the boulder pile the canyon presented its gift to a weary hiker: a pothole full of clear water, deep enough to have remained since the last rainstorm. Sitting cross-legged on the cool sandstone, I gave silent thanks and drank my fill. Another half-mile of canyon, much of it a jumble of boxelder and poison ivy, led to the river and a delicious night's rest under the desert stars. The downcanyon breeze stirred the leaves on the cottonwood trees, while the clear water rippled underneath a hundred-foot cliff. It was a setting as lovely as could be desired.

The next day took me downriver along sandbars and through willow thickets as I aimed for a primitive trail the guidebook

promised would lead up and out of the canyon. Ever since the cows were removed from this river bottom decades ago the verdure has grown noticeably thicker, and I finally gave up and stayed in the water, where slippery boulders and deep pools presented their own challenges.

By mid-afternoon, fed up with all the thrashing, I came to the side trail, which began as a stiff climb up a sand dune. After resting beside a tall patch of willows, I chugged as much water as I could and filled my water bladder, for there would be nothing more until I reached the truck late the next day. A slow plod up the dune, struggling in the open sun, brought me to the base of a Wingate cliff and the start of the cattleman's trail, which followed a continuous ledge beneath the serpentine wall of sandstone.

Pausing for breath, I noticed a growing dampness on my lower back. I took the pack off and discovered a pinhole leak in the bladder, which was now emptied of a third of its contents. I had not checked it before the trip, and some cactus spine had probably done the honors. Again fear and confusion rushed up my spine: should I go back? To return the way I had come would surely be as arduous as the path ahead, and I did not want to face that riparian mess again. I inverted the bladder, which left the pinhole slightly above water level, and went on.

The ledge route wound in and out of embayments in the cliff, offering dizzying views into the canyon I had descended the day before. The trail was well-defined but showed no recent tracks, and the views from it were as grand as any I'd seen in that country. A growing sense of elation powered my legs as the trail wove around massive prows of rock. My energy was flagging, though, and I began to look for a level spot on which to make camp.

After passing a dry gully in one of these embayments, the trail climbed up a steep hill. Pausing again, my eyes caught a movement above me. Wings, dark and silent. I turned around, my feet groping for purchase in the loose soil, unsteady but still erect. A turkey vulture had floated down from its usual height and was inscribing a close gyre around me. I rotated along with it, our eyes locked together as we circled like a pair of comic figure skaters. Then I laughed, raised an arm in salute, turned, and went on. Over my shoulder I called out, "Not yet, not yet."

I did not suppose that this encounter meant anything beyond a wild creature's curiosity, although I was mindful of Cactus Ed's

wish to be reincarnated as a vulture. Abbey wrote that if he were to die in the desert, his decomposing carcass would nourish the roots of a juniper, which he observed would be "immortality enough for me." I was not ready to merge with this stony ground, nor even take wing as part of a soaring bird, though it be the stuff of dreams.

That evening I sheltered in a rising wind beside a stunted juniper a dozen feet back from the rim. From my sleeping bag I could watch the lowering sun highlight the stone monuments across the river. It was a splendid hour of relief and satisfaction, and while I wished I could share the moment, my solitude made the privilege all the sweeter. I had no illusion that I belonged in this country, for the past two days had shown me its alien face. Yet in that evening's beauty, a sharp crescendo of joy rose in me. I knew at last why I had come.

SCRUB JAY (LIFE)

2021 Deep Wild Undergraduate Poetry Contest

Each year, in keeping with our mission to promote emerging writers, *Deep Wild Journal* sponsors a no-fee contest for student writers. This year's contest garnered entries from over sixty undergraduate poets. We congratulate the winners and commend all the student poets who are working hard to make beautiful things out of words.

First Place
Lauren Young, University of Connecticut - "Tonight, in the Northeast"

Second Place
Sam Sharp, Kent State University - "Blankets"

Honorable Mentions
- Brenden Carroll, Nicholls State University - "Song of Green"
- Eliana Franklin, University of North Carolina at Asheville - "The Painter"
- Brandon McWilliams, Seattle University - "Mountain Mind"
- Xena Wolf, Carleton College - "stump beach, ca"

The first place prize is $100 plus five copies of *Deep Wild*, second place $50 plus three copies, and Honorable Mentions a copy of the journal. The contest was judged by Shelby Newsom, Associate Editor and Social Media Manager at Autumn House Press, Poetry Editor for *Coal Hill Review*, and Associate Editor at *Deep Wild Journal*. Shelby's comments on the winners:

> In Lauren Young's poem "Tonight, In the Northeast," we are entrenched in the still wonders of a snowy woods where winter, described for its severe beauty, is examined with quiet rapture by our thoughtful, carefully treading speaker. The deeper the snow she inches through, the more intimately she acquaints us with the natural world around her. Young's descriptions are striking enough to make you shiver. She not only transports us to a Northeastern woods that is all but forgotten and "emptied of noise," but invites us into the mystery of an aliveness in the environment that pulses through us.
>
> Sam Sharp's poem "Blankets" is a clever meditation on the labors we perform during a trip in the backcountry and how these activities which at first cause discomfort lead to a kind of ease and rhythm as we find solace in nature. Sharp is not just interested in the group of hikers in this poem, but more so in the active world around them where squirrels eavesdrop, mud-ice stubbornly clings to boots, rainclouds interject, and the fire watches them with a fixed gaze. To all who venture out into the wilderness, Sharp's poem acknowledges that our compulsion to carry heavy packs and perform difficult labor is the hard work that makes us worthy of meeting nature where it is.

Deep Wild 2021 Undergraduate Poetry Contest
First Place

Tonight, in the Northeast

Lauren Young

A sheet of birds thins into wind
& the woods are emptied
of sound. In the dark stillness, I tread
through knee-deep snow,
examine the length of every icicle
hanging from frost-thickened
branches. These translucent knives
a contrast to the fistfuls of pine
needles. The bark weathered
& cracked. Here are my field notes, scrawled
in frozen ink: the probability of hurt
should I stand beneath a rain of ice,
the angles in which my chapped lips
start to peel, the number of hours it will take
for my bluing hands to warm. I walk
alone, accompanied only by animal tracks
& the shadowed moon, yet all I can think about
is softness. The pale bellies of deer exposed
to this glacial night. The folds in my wet coat
as I huddle around myself. If I cry out
to the ghostlike air, it is all for the miracle
of touch: my finger cut by a shattered icicle.
The red of a human pulse running out
towards a world, this honest line of life.

Deep Wild 2021 Undergraduate Poetry Contest
Second Place

Blankets

Sam Sharp

Gray squirrels nestled in leaf dens,
eavesdropping on the conversation
mud-ice holds with our boots
while drunken rainclouds interject.

Walk. Sweat. Talk. Set up tent.
We boiled rice and remembered
bottled water will freeze.

Sweat. Saw. Split. Hunt for dry.
The fire watched us watch it through ski masks
with holes meant for M&M's.

Walk. Filter river. Search for daylight.
It wasn't darkness,
but black closing in on us.

Shudder. Sweat. Growl at a coon in camp
& hope to discover sleep before the cold
wakes our bodies into 'build a fire mode.'

& I cannot say why
we chose to spend these days
underneath the play-dead treetops,
tucked behind listless barren hills
and snowed-in trails,

but when I slid into my sleeping bag
on the third moonless night,
I did not need to shiver.

Barbies in the Backcountry

Peter Anderson

The first time I notice the Barbies we are a mile in from the trailhead. I see them strapped to my youngest daughter's pack as if taken hostage. The Barbies could care less that the load we have carefully packed onto our four-legged porter, a burro named Sabina, is listing to the left and about to flop over. One of the Barbies looks at me, pouty, sassy—*Oh, you're like so incompetent*—as I try to shift the load back into place.

When the Barbies make their next appearance, I am secretly happy they have been liberated from my daughter's pack, stripped naked, and set afloat in a very cold mountain stream. The Barbies ride the current, their long, slinky legs goose-bumping off creek bed cobbles and their carefully coiffed hair trailing like algae behind them. *Get me…like…out of here*.

How strange this must be for the Barbies…to be without their closets full of Barbie clothes, without their pink corvettes and mini cell phones, hundreds of miles from the nearest mall, headed into a long night with a cold bivouac ahead of them. As if their creek immersion weren't enough, they are now perched in a remnant snowbank near our high-altitude camp, legs akimbo in exotic yoga positions. *Hellowwwwww…we're Barbies not G.I. Joes*.

Poor Barbies. They are now huddled together in a large woolen mitten, having weathered the night dressed only in pink evening gowns. *We didn't…like…sign up for this*. And yet they are smiling in the morning sun, as if maybe they are proud of their new survival skills. And I am glad that my daughters set the terms when the Barbies come to play, and not the other way around.

Three White Pelicans

Stephen S. Lottridge

The high desert of southwestern Wyoming is bleak and unconsoling. Open, barren, dry and worn, it does not readily offer comfort. No idyllic scenes of verdant leas, abundant, colorful flowers or gentle, rolling hills. No quiet, forested paths, no isolated beaches, no sylvan ponds, no refreshing, sweet-water springs. Vegetation is low, scrub and sparse, with the occasional juniper or aspen rising where alkali water seeps close to the surface. But if you look closely, and search well, you may find pockets of solace. I knew such a place, or thought I did, from years of poking around the arid countryside looking for something hospitable. And on that day, my young daughters, Stephanie and Deirdre, and I needed a refuge.

The divorce had frightened and confused and saddened us all. The pain was fresh and sharp. Somehow, we couldn't get out of the house, as if we were trapped in our own misery. As the day wore on, the girls, Deirdre in her pink dress and shiny black shoes, Stephanie in her shirt, jeans and tennis shoes, alternately screamed, hit each other, squabbled, quarreled, then banded together, huddled anxiously. I separated them, yelled, offered bribes of treats and toys, threatened, gave it up. I wanted to offer some balm, but found no resource in myself. I rattled around the house purposelessly, room to room, as tension jolted through the space and a mute anguish infiltrated every corner.

Baffled, I stopped before the back window, which I had passed a score of times in the last hour. The slanting afternoon sun glinted on the blue, metal swing set, and a swift breeze shook the thin leaves of the Russian olive tree in the parched lawn. I stood, and a boyhood memory popped inside me, a memory of what had saved me as my parents fought silently toward dissolution. I strode into the living room. "We're going camping," I commanded. They jumped, and heeded.

This was not a planned outing, as our excursions usually were. At that moment, we were fleeing. I knew that the great teachings of human history instruct us not to rely on our environment for our happiness. But we were human and we wanted to escape, outdoors. We loaded the car in a frenzy, exhilarated to be setting out, looking forward with no plan, but on

the move. I flung the tent, sleeping bags, pads, Coleman stove and some warm clothes into the back. The girls dragged out sweaters, blankets and their favorite pillows. I jammed in a cooler and the old utensil chest and we flurried off. Quick stop for gas and ice, another to pick up milk, water, cold cuts, bread, mayo, mustard, fruit, carrots, cereal, juice, coffee and cocoa. Not camping fare, but good enough. No toiletries, just toilet paper.

We hit the Interstate west, with coal trains rumbling and semis blasting past, crossed the Green River where Powell started his long exploration of the Grand Canyon, turned right at the top of a long rise and headed north on a two-lane. The girls had quieted, inquisitive and ready for adventure. I had a vague map in my mind of one specific dirt road that would take us back down toward the river. I kept an eye out for it, energized to be underway and uncertain where. Miles along, just as I was thinking I had missed it, we dropped down a steep slope and there it branched, exactly as my memory held it. A quick brake, a crank of the wheel, and a thick dust plume flying out in the southwest wind marked our passage till we veered right onto a faint, hillocky track in the coarse grass that wove through willows and cottonwoods and bounced us to the end of an obscure peninsula.

Rolling to a slow stop, I cut the engine and we tumbled out. Stretching, we heard the sound of. . . . nothing. No machines. Few reminders of human passage, besides ourselves. The wind still scoured the earth, the grass was sparse and crackly, the sage was prickly and the cottonwoods twisted and gnarled. But it was as if, in leaving the house, we had come home. The river rippled swift and even, with a slight susurrus as it swirled through the low grass on the bank. We stood in silence for some time, breathing in the clean air. The faint, slightly acrid smell of the willows, the odor of river mud and vegetation, and the scent of crushed sage cleared our heads. Small birds flitted, their quick songs sharp and sweet. Ground squirrels darted and dove. Tentatively, quietly, companionably, the girls began to explore, calling softly to each other to look at this or that, exclaiming. They wandered together, slowly, one blond head and one brown, hair aflutter, bobbing here and there.

My body eased, my eyes sharpened, and my ears attuned. My muscles relaxed and came easily alive as I stretched to unpack the gear and pitch camp. The smell and touch of outdoor equipment,

mine since childhood, gladdened me. I worked steadily, skillfully. The wind eased as afternoon drew into evening, leaving a barely audible rustle in the cottonwoods. My tasks done, I joined the girls in walking the land, with no human sounds but our footfalls and our occasional, low voices.

We meandered the low peninsula, holding hands, then not, frogs in the backwater accompanying the crunch of our footfalls. In time, hunger claimed its own, and we ambled back to camp. Supper was sandwiches, carrots and juice, the tin plates and cups set out on a torn camp blanket covering a patch of lumpy ground. We sat cross-legged, side by side. Some ants joined us and we shared our food with them. We commented on this and that as we slowly ate. Finally full, we cleaned up and stowed the food, then came back to the blanket. At the girls' request, I told stories of camping with my family when I was a boy their age, as my parents had told stories to me. We quietly sang a song or two, tunes I had taught them, as the desert sunset spread out across the sky and lit the distant buttes with pastel fire. We lay back on the blanket as the stars made their entrance. "Star light, star bright…" We gazed long, silently, wrapped in our own wishes. As it always does in that country, the night chill came on suddenly. We rolled over, got to our hands and knees; I herded the girls into the tent and snugged them into their bags. I gave them butterfly kisses, rubbed their backs, told them I loved them and we all said good night.

The girls asleep, breathing in gentle unison, night sounds crept in: the rustle of the running river, the tiny crackle of nocturnal animals in dry vegetation, and the owls, first one, then many, softly booming their calls in the cottonwoods. Images arose: My boss and friend dying in August, wandering his house in confusion and terror. My mother, in September, dying in her pauper's hospital bed, her Scottish Presbyterian childhood fear of the torments of hell competing with her adult practice of forgiving meditation, as I massaged her swollen back with blue mineral ice. Her body lying soft and finally tranquil on the gray, metal, mortuary table. My young sister, in November, dying on a distant coast, hair thin, matted, gray, a tube in her nose and catheter in her crotch, begging me to tell her what I thought was going to happen, as I held her bony hand and pushed aside the flowing tube to kiss her salt, dry lips one last time. My two spinal surgeries, in February and July, as my wife was leaving.

My back pressed against the uneven ground, the images took shape, lingered, faded. Memories of past camping trips arose. I inhaled the familiar odor of canvas, the faint tang of dew-dampened sage drifting in. And the owls, those ancient omens of death, beckoned me. As I attended, sleepless, to their voices, they transformed themselves into warrants of life, reassuring, comforting, telling of wildness, healing and continuity.

Morning found us tousled and cheerful. Yawning and murmuring, we crawled out into the dawn, into cool air and early light. We were quiet. I fetched the food and blanket from the car, put some water on the stove for cocoa and coffee. We dumped Cheerios into bowls and poured milk over them, each to his or her liking. We slurped and chuckled for the fun of it, the spoons clanking invitingly against the speckled, blue-glazed metal. We each poured seconds. I leaned over, sloshed our cups full of coffee and cocoa and settled back between them.

Abruptly, Deirdre said, "Look, Dad!" Stephanie echoed, "Yeah, Dad, look!" In the near eddy, three white pelicans floated toward us, an adult and two young, tightly grouped, spinning and swaying with awkward grace, holding their place against the current. The girls leaned closer to me. I put an arm around each as we sat in wonder. The girls slowly twined themselves into my lap. In the widening day, we watched silently, gratefully, as the pelicans eyed us, unafraid.

Riparian

—for Shane

Harry Owen

We scramble and slither down the kloof trail
to a place where two canoes lie quietly
waiting, upended on a rack above
the reed-clad river. This is where you start
to write yourself—braille of the riverbank,
scrawl of the wild.

Silence on the water is filled with psalm
of paddle, splash, breeze-whisper; white-breasted
cormorants stiller than branches, giant
kingfishers direct as bullets across
the sun, holt and heron, raven and kite,
river and sky.

Easing upstream through rushes, lily-pads,
dragonflies, silt—entwined as we are in
these lost words for wilderness our children
no longer hear about in their cults
of Instagram and cheap celebrity—
we feel at peace.

Then, deep in the shade of overhanging
boughs we clamber ashore to be embraced
by a forest far older than either
of us, than both, than any, than all. We
enter by the ancient riparian
stoep of Eden.

Untamed, enfolded, we breathe the good earth
again, its fig and boer-bean, yellowwood,
cycad, wild plum, sending down living roots.
Civet, duiker, waterbuck print out their
welcome in the Kap's mud, otters confer
a gift of shells

as we too rest here, leaving only our thanks.

Buller Mountain Fire Lookout

Benjamin Murray

We parked the car at the gate, the trail head. When they had been here, he said, they had been able to drive up another mile where the road gave out to a stream. Around the base of a boulder next to my car, wrappers of granola bars and meat sticks had strangled themselves in long, green grass. We spoke of the changing leaves, the ones popping out from behind all those evergreen pine needles. We started up the trail. He seemed to know where to put his feet, as if he had transported back in time, and following him was Mom and not me. All I saw for the first mile was the back of his brown leather boots, their imprint, rocks varying from gray, tan, white with speckles of black and flakes of silver, ants commuting, puddles with leaves drowned, and carefully putting my feet where he had; even as an adult, even as the season died out to winter, even as the years pulled us apart like the drifting of breeze through all these trees, I was still following him.

Our skin bubbling sweat on our backs and arms and legs, we sat on a downed tree not far from the lake, bordered, it seemed, by a thick layer of mud. Our boots sunk into the brown paste, and I noticed the tiniest of holes peppering the surface of the mud. Inside, at the movement from our hands, bugs jumped out, scurried to another hole, their clear and tan bodies barely visible.

Those damn bugs, he said.

Had they been here when he and Mom were here?

Yes, he said.

Our hands pressed into the smooth trunk of this tree; how many had sat here contemplating this view? Across the lake's empty surface, a vegetation unlike any other. We could see inside the water, watch as the trout navigated the broken trees and branches long ago dead. He told me as I ate some crackers that wood didn't rot unless it was exposed to air, and that's why the wood in there still looked intact and real and present; that inside the water, were layers of history and memory and pain and joy and the runoff of snow packs and the slow drain of dozens of streams. A water skimmer skimmed.

Your mother loved those bugs, he said.

I didn't know if he meant the mudbugs or the skimmers, but I nodded all the same. Our boots were muddied, our pants doused in dirt. The afternoon moved on, and in the wind was nothing except for a draining of the world beyond the mountains, beyond the saddle where I suspected the trail continued on to the fire lookout, beyond the interior complexities of any bug's movement from one hole to another.

The climb turned strenuous. Dad grabbed at branches and stalks, crushing leaves and needles. His feet moved slower, and all I heard was his breathing, drawing in, shooting out, a syringe of oxygen, opening and closing. The trail switchbacked, until we arrived at the fire lookout. This was Buller Mountain. This was where 30 years ago a young man and woman hiked and watched the sun cross the sky, watched shadows change the greens of the pines, watched the clouds filter and form and dissipate, watched the squirrels quarrel at the base of the tower, which now had all the windows broken out, which now had all the wooden steps removed, which now had a slight lean to the supports, its green paint flaking from all the storms through the decades.

How do we get up there?

He moved closer, eyed the staircase that wrapped around the tower to the top, some 30 feet up. He put his boot on the metal edge where the wood step had rested. Like this, he said, and, taking the metal railing in his hands, he maneuvered up the staircase using the small edges.

You're crazy.

No, I'm old, he said.

We made it to the top. The floorboards were lifting at the ends from the rain, as the roof was mostly gone—only the skeletal frame remained.

At the top, he pointed out in all directions, as if this land was foreign, which it was to me, and was tasked with informing me of essential landmarks. He said that tall mountain to the north was Robins, its bare rock face arching into the air. To the east was a huge swath of forest, punctuated by tiny, blue-green-clear lakes. He said those lakes were joined by a stream, and in the spring, it turned into a river. He shook his head, remembering a moment that he didn't share, and I didn't ask. The south contained more

mountains, Charles, Eagle, and so on, Dad's voice trailing off. And the west—he pointed to the lake—was where we had hiked from. Up here, we saw the great expanding forested valley; it seemed to never end. But it did, somewhere. Somewhere was the car, the road, and mile markers counting out to the next state line.

It was darker out now; the sun fell behind the edge of mountains too far away to name. Night was coming.

Do you miss her?

We stood at the railing, looking out over the lake where we'd sat.

Tell me what you see, he said.

I saw the tops of pines pointing to the sky; the gentle sway of the branches as the wind picked up and died down; the granite growing faint as a ghost; the lake no longer clear and empty, but now a blue and green unbroken surface.

Do you miss her?

I waited. It was cooler now. We seemed to stand there forever; forever it seemed to take for the sky to darken enough to see the stars. The sun was gone. Light escaped our world; it ran down all the edges before seeping into the soil and brush and the backs of sparrows.

Tell me what you see, he said. I saw the faint outlines of trees. I saw stars waking from their naps. What else was there? I imagined the people who spent hours looking over the land, on the watch for fire, for glow, for smoke. I imagined their hands around mugs of coffee, listening to radio static. Tell me what you see.

I see your mother. I see your mother and I standing like this years ago. I see her now. At this altitude, we saw the tendrils of our galaxy, blue and green and hazy, but distinct, filtering the stars. Somewhere, the moon had struck. I thought of my mother, his wife, in a meadow somewhere close, dancing and singing, beating her chest in time with the bird noise, with river language, with sky love, shaking the dead from her limbs, alighting in the dark, forgetting the eight years she has been dead.

At First Light

—for Jade

Matt Daly

The exhale of your wilderness
breath wakes me, and I wake up.
The landscape inside you cascades

and gathers into a light rain
even here in a basin without clouds.
Your fine mist inhabits my lungs,

and my dry earth skin soaks
you in. Through tent mesh, I watch
limestone peaks turn to bronze

and tumbledown. The beaver
who slapped flat water through the sleek
evening is at it again at dawn. I wait

for your eyes to open so I can,
like the sunlight we saw flood
through a keyhole of rock to ember

the riverbed, pitch into them. You pour
into me. You erode what I was
in this beginning that begins again.

Three Knocks

Jack B. Bedell

It doesn't matter how many times
I've heard my uncle say
the sound is just trees

cooling down after a hot day.
Whenever I set up camp
at the edge of this swamp

those knocks make my skin
twitch. I know there's no
quick way out, push-poling

the skiff, and what solid land
is left would just be a trap.
Nothing to do but tuck in

like a turtle sunk in mud
or a catfish under a log.
Daylight will come,

or it won't, and there's always
stars to count outside the tent.

Forever Glades

Deb Liggett

My love affair with the Everglades started with a road sign. Before you get to the Pa-Hay-Okee boardwalk on the main park road, there is a sign announcing Rock Reef Pass, Elevation 3 feet. Or perhaps I fell in love the first time I used the toilet at the Royal Palm Visitor Center. As I innocently pulled a piece of toilet paper from the dispenser, a frog leapt out and hopped between my thighs into the commode. I shot to a stand. Before I could turn and identify the frog, it pogoed out and off under another stall. I could track its progress down the row of stalls by the exclamations of surprise as it made its escape.

On our first visit, Jay and I were living at Big Bend National Park working as rangers, and were embarked on a poor man's holiday. We drove from West Texas to South Florida in our white Volkswagen Beetle—our battered, lemon yellow Old Town Tripper canoe strapped to the top. Other travelers smirked at the sight of us. If we'd turned turtle into a bayou beside the interstate highway, we could have paddled the rest of the way.

After two weeks of tent camping, paddling, chasing birds, and swatting mosquitos, we headed home to Texas. But the hook had been set. A watery land. A spacious horizon. To our desert eyes, it smacked of the exotic. A marvelous subtropical jigsaw puzzle of tree snails, indigo snakes, bromeliads. Gators and mangroves and ibis, oh my.

It was another five years before we transferred to the 'glades. Soon after this vacation we moved from Big Bend to the Dry Tortugas. From the Tortugas to Voyageurs National Park. From Voyageurs to the Everglades. Each change in latitude moved us up a link in officialdom, but neither of us was yet chained to a desk.

At Everglades we lived at Flamingo, an outpost consisting of marina, lodge, and campground. Jay's protection ranger job required him/us to live in government quarters at Flamingo so he could be on twenty-four hour emergency call for overdue boaters, law enforcement, and medical issues. As the Pine Island District Naturalist, I commuted the thirty-eight miles back and forth to park headquarters. Our stilt house (raised above storm tides) overlooked Florida Bay. Alligators trekked across our yard as they hauled themselves from mangrove forest to saltwater bay. An

osprey nested in the adjacent radio tower. We cultivated orchids on our porch, and from there we heard fish jump and night herons call. Over time, we acquired our own fleet—three canoes, a motor boat, and a shallow-drafted sailboat. In South Florida, boats proliferated with very little effort.

Friends we'd met at Big Bend lived across the cul-de-sac in the employee residence area. Hunter and Devi also owned a small fleet and when our days off coincided, we fabricated adventures together. We might motor to Key Largo for lunch, gliding though the sinuous and ankle-deep Crocodile Dragover, search for snook in the mangroves, fish for snapper off a channel marker, or drift across the grass flats of Florida Bay hoping to glimpse feeding turtles. We often visited friends, park volunteers who spent their winters on a houseboat in the shallow mangrove estuary. Dry land was unavailable, and we erected our tents on the semi-flat roof of their houseboat. By tradition, whoever had the biggest catch, which we ate for dinner, wore the baseball hat with the stuffed fish that read CARP HEAD DIEM.

Hunter, Devi, Jay, and I were always scheming, always plotting.

We resolved to venture into the heart of the sawgrass and canoe through Taylor Slough, a feat not attempted for at least a couple of decades. A difficult exploit and also certifiably crazy. Everyone else had better sense. But it was an intriguing proposition. An adventure worthy of our joint effort. A lark.

The Everglades ecosystem is a wide, slowly moving river of grass. A shallow sheet of water flows from Lake Okeechobee in central Florida across the Everglades Agricultural Area, crosses Alligator Alley, south under the Tamiami Trail, and finally into the park. Within the park, Taylor Slough and Shark Valley Slough empty into Florida Bay.

Not surprisingly, there were some practical considerations to resolve before our expedition. Water. Mosquitos. Camping.

Winter is the dry period in the Everglades and the season when the greatest number of people visit the park. In the winter, the water recedes and pools in shallow limestone basins, attracting a concentration of wildlife. But we needed deep enough water to be able to pole or paddle our canoes. Our trip would have to be done after the summer rainy season had commenced, when water again flooded the open glades.

The Everglades is home to forty-two species of mosquitos—populations of biblical proportions. No one knows this better than those of us who have lived at Flamingo. Our entire life was contrived around avoiding the worst of the prevalent mosquitos. There were three edicts: never walk across the grass, never stand in the lee of a building, and never take your trash out or bring your boat to the dock at dusk or dawn. Never ever do these things. In northern latitudes, homes are built with cold-weather entries. Our stilt houses had a double entry, both screened, to thwart mosquitos. The wet season was the most mosquito-infested, yet we had to camp (and face the bugs) at least one night in order to cover the distance. We had a dilemma.

Where do you camp in the middle of a river?

The Everglades horizon is dotted with bumps—hardwood hammocks and cypress domes—most carved into ellipses by the flowing water. In both cases, the tree canopies rise above the sawgrass glades. Seen from the air, the cypress domes are donuts that often surround alligator holes in their center. Not a camping option. The hardwood hammocks are raised ground (by a few feet) but densely treed with subtropical hardwoods. Shady and still. A haven for mosquitos. Our solution was to fashion a sleeping platform using our canoes.

Elsewhere in the glades, the park had constructed chickees, wooden platforms four feet above the water with a roof shelter and a port-a-potty attached. We proposed to build a chickee-like platform on our canoes. Each couple purchased a four-by-eight-foot sheet of three-eight-inch plywood, cut them into four two-foot widths, and trimmed the corners so the pieces fit semi-flush in the floor of the canoes.

When slatted together across the tops of our canoes, the plywood sheets created an eight-by-eight-foot platform for four (good) friends to sleep on. We drilled holes in the edges of the boards and fitted our shock-corded tent poles into the holes to form a skeleton. Mosquito netting draped over the frame completed the canopy. We skipped the rain fly, opting for a breeze over wet weather protection.

The four of us field-tested our design on the level ground in front of our houses. We lashed our canoes together, laid the boards across, made some minor tweaks to our system, and declared victory. The neighbors were used to our antics.

We planned to canoe up the slough from Florida Bay roughly to Pine Island. Water flow in the glades is about three feet per hour, not enough to impede travel. We navigated via map and compass. If we went too far astray, we would eventually bump into something familiar. Even so, we scouted from the air. Hunter had a scheduled patrol flight, and I joined him. We flew out over the slough and plotted our intended route from the air. Everything looked good.

In June a friend ferried us by motor boat to the mouth of Taylor Slough. We off-loaded the boats, stowed our camping gear, grabbed our paddles and push poles, and slid onto the seats of the canoes. We wore long-sleeved cotton shirts, tropical fishing pants, baseball hats with bandanas draped over our necks, high-top canvas wading shoes, and cotton gardening gloves. All four of us had umbrellas for shade.

It was as well we wouldn't be seen by the public, but there was a reason for our getup. Sun and heat were real issues. Mud and marl could suck your shoes off if you were wading. The sawgrass was truly SAW GRASS, and gloves and long sleeves provided essential protection. Bug spray lasts longer and is less toxic when used on clothes, hats, bandanas, and gloves.

If we had forgotten anything it was too late. We were out of radio contact.

Canoeing through the Everglades means that the first paddler eats the spider webs. Someone has to do it, and we took turns leading. A mullet, an unappealing, oily fish if there ever was one, flopped into Jay's and my canoe over the gunwale. I tossed him out with gloved hands. We bounced off mangrove roots, paddled when we could, and painstakingly worked our way through the mangroves toward the open, sawgrass glades. The maze grew more constricted and tangled. Abandoning our paddles, we waded and pulled the boats. We lifted our canoes up and over the curved roots of the now-cursed mangroves. Again. And again. And again.

Hot, and wading-thigh deep in brackish water, we tired. After a couple hours of effort, we sent Devi, the smallest among us, scrambling up a mangrove to see if she could find an open thread of water. No luck. We rested, peering around for the nesting crocodiles, and resumed our efforts for another couple of hours. Finally, we popped out into fresh water and sawgrass.

We followed some clear water threads through sparse sawgrass. The sun was out. We stopped, filtered some water,

and topped off our depleted bottles. Unseen from our aerial reconnaissance, we discovered some old white PVC route markers from wetter times when rangers patrolled the slough with airboats.

Where no natural fire had burned in recent years, the sawgrass grew thick, waving three feet above our heads. The air was still. The reflection caused by the natural silica embedded in sawgrass made for oven-like conditions. Jay and Hunter broke out the push poles and stood in the stern of the canoes to propel us through deep grass. The poles, fourteen to sixteen feet long, have what is called a duck foot on the business end—a hinged flange that opens under pressure and creates a stable foot. Poling is the way the Miccosukee and Seminole people traveled through their home country.

As the afternoon progressed, thunderclouds began to build. The sky darkened, and we could hear rumbling and see lightning in the distance. It was time to stop for the day. But where? The threat of lightning was real. Did we want to camp next to a tree hammock and its swarm of bugs? Would the height of a hardwood hammock provide protection from a lightning strike? Or did we want to tie up next to a small cypress in the open glades with fewer mosquitos but no protection from an electrical storm?

We mulled around in indecision. Paddled this way and that, back and forth, eventually opting for fewer bugs. The storm and the lightning danger would pass. The mosquitos near the hammock would be ever-present.

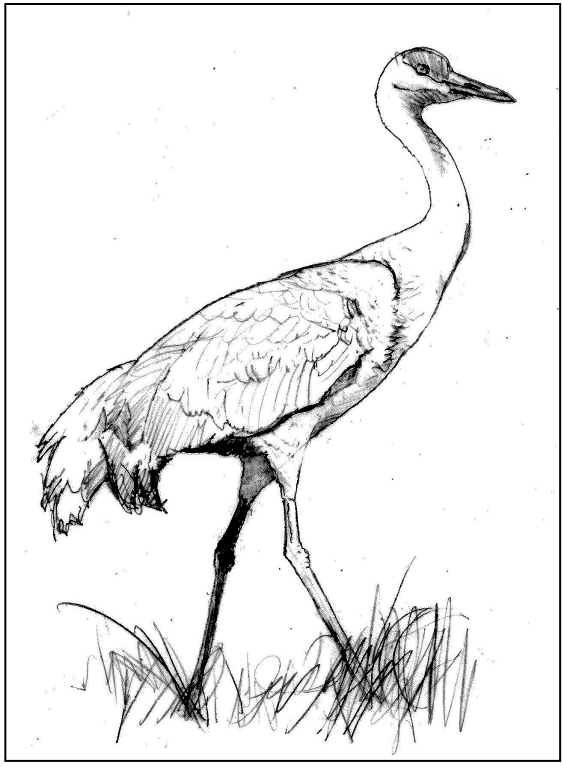
We lashed our boats together, then slid out and waded around the canoes as we built our platform and raised the canopy. One at a time we shinnied up on the platform and slipped under the mosquito netting. Our stability was more precarious than during our pretrip test, but it worked. Or so we hoped. Dinner was something out of a can; someone may have had a warm beer. We saved the stove routine for coffee at breakfast.

Some angry spatters of rain fell before the storm skirted us and moved off to the west. Dark settled in. Heat lightning flashed. The air was still, the insistent whine of mosquitos on the other side of the netting audible. We killed a few on our side and drifted off to sleep, shoulder-to-foot, foot-to-shoulder. Early in the night Jay rolled over, or I rolled over, or we rolled over simultaneously… and we felt a board crack. Damn. The chink in our best-laid plan. Hunter and Devi, smaller and less likely to break the furniture, woke at the noise, laughed, and went back to sleep.

Jay and I whispered and discussed a possible repair but decided it was best to live with the problem. Lying on our sides, curled around the weak spot, we tried to avoid breaking the board even more. We napped off and on the remainder of the night. The vision of falling through a crack and becoming wedged in the canoe was vexing. Thicker plywood was needed on the next trip.

The next trip?

Yes, some of this trip was hard-slogging. We suffered a few bug bites. Our middle-of-the-night platform failure had shifted the poles, and some mosquitos slipped under the net. But by midday I had stopped itching—and we started plotting the next adventure as we paddled toward the take-out.



LESSER SANDHILL CRANE

Muscogee Pearls

Deidra Suwanee Dees

thin strand

loose end waving

from the magnolia leaf,

clear water droplets
in beaded
succession

retreat from first light
in the bayou;

Muscogee pearls

unrivaled by

diamond or jewel

One Hundred and One

Eric Shaffer, Jose Alcantara, Matt Daly

A season has passed since I felt the moraine
pass beneath my feet and beneath the snow.

Stars no longer burn winter's black
drapery through with pinholes. I stand

between the blue of summer and the lake
of forgetting, the gauze of cells sheathing my hands

empty of everything but traceries,
the upward gaze of daisies submerged in cold water

a fish's silver fin, the familiar bend and ache.
To be alive with currents shaping my movements

means that I will remain, enmeshed among
a hundred frogs beckoning the warm night.

Authors' note: The composition of this poem arose out of friendship, shared admiration and trust among three poets who live thousands of miles apart. One poet wrote a line which was emailed to the second poet who responded within a couple of days with a line which he sent to the third poet. After three additional rounds of line-by-line composition, each poet had one chance to revise the poem in any way he wished, no questions asked.

The Moose, the Dragonfly, and Me

Susan Marsh

A stone shifts under my weight, and the ripple rides the skin of the mountain lake into deeper water. I watch as it spreads, attenuates, and disappears. A cluster of glacier-deposited boulders offers a variety of seating options at the shoreline, and I choose one, loosen my day pack, and settle in. A dragonfly rests on the boulder beside me, unconcerned by my sudden intrusion.

Above, granite spires ring the skyline like points on a crown. October's raking light brushes the high south ridges with a rosy-peach wash, while north-facing walls stand blue in perpetual shadow. The water reflects a mirror image of those chiseled peaks, no breeze stirring the surface.

This glacial lake is fed by snowfields whose meltwater drops in a series of cascades. From a game trail that winds down the mountainside beside them, the creek's spray transforms sunlight into rainbows, and the clamor of water falling on bare rock is enormous. From the far lakeshore I cannot see the creek at all. Its sounds drift my way in intermittent murmurs.

Closing my eyes to listen, I follow my thoughts the way I once followed that game trail. My mind wanders back to a summer afternoon, memories arriving as images—blooming balsamroot, mountain heather, polished stone cradling white foam. The scent of sun-warmed snowbush on the breeze.

When I open my eyes the dragonfly is busy cleaning its mouthparts. The sun has moved, and a glimmer strikes its transparent wings, catching the light and throwing it back in tiny rainbows, a miniature reprise of the prisms made by creek spray. Like that summer day when I rambled down a discontinuous game trail, this moment feels like a gift, as if the boulder, the lake, and the dragonfly have invited me to join them in repose. I cease to exist as someone separate from this wild place: I am no more, and perhaps much less, than the dragonfly that shares this boulder. Leaving my companion to its grooming, I close my eyes again to watch the insides of my eyelids glowing red with the brief infusion of sun.

A resounding *crack* breaks the stillness. I scan the cliffs and talus slopes for a puff of dust, the signature of rock fall. Nothing.

Then, louder: *Crack!* It rises from the far side of the lake and echoes off the mountain front. A slight movement across the water catches my eye and I fumble for binoculars.

The lake's inlet creek, having spent its energy tumbling down a few thousand vertical feet, runs flat and deep for its last few meters to the lakeshore, meandering between hedges of willow and tall cured grass. From behind the twiggy wickerwork, two bull moose emerge. Striding into the open side by side, they hold five-foot antlers over their heads like parasols. They stop and twist their necks and their heavy racks rebound—*crack!*

Apparently satisfied, they stand together again, shoulder to shoulder as they nibble lakeside sedges. They wander apart, then meet and spar again, producing another sharp report. They glance around as if wondering what all the noise is about before retuning their attention to the sedge. Each time they perform their ritual, a retreating echo settles into the still air like another ripple on the water. How fortunate that I am here to see, to hear, to witness.

The late October afternoon is gold and liquid blue. I fill my lungs and hold my breath, as if I could capture and hang onto this exquisite instant when the earth itself seems to pause between seasons. High mountains still bask in the last rays of run, their southerly faces now softening into a deeper shade of rose. For as long as I can hold my breath we'll share this graceful caesura—the moose, the dragonfly, and me.

Echo

Benjamin Cutler

To catch the first low light
of day spilling into the last

broad leaves of the year—warming
their umber to amber—we began

our hike under morning darkness.
The trail, rising with the sun,

led us up through blue fog and purple
aster, along the leaf-laden stream,

above the narrow headwaters,
to the evergreened ridge. There,

into the high, open noon, we sang
our question—Hello?—Hello?—

again and again. Even now, love,
in the dim evening, this echo

whispers the song of our two-
voiced future: returning,

repeating, fading in the valley—
offering only itself in answer.

Lost in the Woods III

Dagne Forrest

At dusk we'd swim again, the water draped
about our shoulders, a glimmering dark
stolen from the shadows behind us. The bowl
of sky still blue, though leaching light,
the oaks and maples on the shore in front of us
the ripest green, pulsing with the last low rays
of the sun. As we slipped through the river's centre,
bands of successive ripples flipped from black
to green, the lush shoreline reflected
onto liquid shards that fused briefly together
like living glass at the river's edge. It felt
like we could push back the shadows
and climb into the sunlit angles of the past by
setting one well-placed hand into the familiar
greening verge in front of us, just out of reach.

Canyon

Susan Pope

It's my third trip to the Grand Canyon, the canyon everyone thinks they know. October, end of the season, when motorized mega-rafts are no longer allowed on the river. The cool, quiet time, when the National Park Service allows campfires on the beaches. Some days I'm a lucky kid, seized with the thrill of adventure, climbing the Canyon wall to peer into ruins of the Anasazi granaries or discovering tiny orthocone nautiloid fossils, straight-shelled ancestors of the chambered nautilus, in the floor of Nautiloid Canyon, remnants of ancient shallow seas. Other days, I curse this river, plunging through rapid after rapid—Granite, Hermit, Boucher, Crystal, then Tuna, Agate, Sapphire, Turquoise, Ruby, Serpentine. Wet-dry-wet-dry, scour, rinse, repeat. By night I'm a limp piece of laundry, stretched out under the stars, lying awake, the next rapid rumbling below.

The first time I came was on foot, down the Kaibab Trail to Phantom Ranch, fresh from college with a brand new husband. One husband, one child, two grandchildren, three college degrees, and five careers later, I returned with second husband Jim to travel the Colorado River in dories. Whitewater. Cliff-scrambles. River bathing in full view of 24 people. Once was enough, I swore then.

Yet I'm back. The river demands a wakefulness absent from everyday urban life. It spares me the life of my mother, who died last winter. Protected. Secure. Inert.

Beyond the cocooned life of my mother, I fear death by drowning or falling. This trip offers the prospect of both. The river rages with sucking eddies and crushing waves. I could easily slam into a boulder and shatter like wood. Or be wrenched into a churning hole and spit out down-river, blue and lifeless. Land is no safer than water. A dark jagged scrape spreads across my thigh after a misstep down a slippery chute, red stripes on my forearm scream of an encounter with a cat's claw acacia bush. Shelley, the nurse in our little band, anoints me the winner of the black and blue contest. "Eat more bananas," she says. "You need potassium." But there are no bananas. No stairs. No railings. No safety nets.

On day thirteen, our only lay-over day, we pitch our camp on soft sand, among willow brush and boulders dumped and

scoured smooth by seasonal flash floods, at the toe of a great wash emptying out of National Canyon, a long sinuous rift of undulating Muav limestone growing wider and steeper the closer it gets to the Colorado River. Jim and his friend Chris climb the rubble along the Canyon wall, peeking between rocks, oblivious to the threat of snakes. Jim's drawn to edges—cliffs, rocks, and towering waves. He craves the rush of life and potential death slamming him in the face. I knew when I met him that he would take me to places I feared. But sometimes he slips away from me as he does now, forgetful of the fact that I'm not as quick or nimble or bold as he. I don't want to need him, but I do. I hate to admit my fears, especially to myself.

I brew a cup of strong Earl Grey tea stirred with honey and find a table rock high enough to give me a view of the river while I jot notes in my journal. I've been craving time to myself to record the landscape and sort out what I've been experiencing. Words seem too imprecise to describe the sights and colors on this misty day—the alternating layers of cream, mahogany, and charcoal-gray rock, the pale white evening primrose and fading yellow wands of Prince's Plume. So I make crude sketches. At my back, National Canyon yawns wide and beckons me to explore the jumbled rocks calved from its striated walls. Roger, our guide, promises a long hike tomorrow to the source of all this debris. Our goal: an amphitheater hidden deep in the canyon, glimpsed by few people. On our route we'll find fossils, and clear, deep pools for swimming. But the trek entails nine scrambling miles of ropes and narrow ledges. We will squeak close to death. Several times.

The next day, sun still hidden behind the canyon walls, we pick our way easily through rough sand and loose gravel for the first mile or so, skirting around jagged boulders and avoiding puddles left from the last downpour. We reach a clear, shallow pool at the foot of a freight-car-sized boulder wedged between the canyon walls. After stretching along the canyon floor like a crooked pearl necklace, our group coils up at the pool, voices echoing against the layers of multicolored rocks.

The only route forward means climbing a sheer, flat wall on the far side of a pool. Ahead, Roger has somehow wedged his way up a narrow crack and secured a double-knotted rope that dangles to the canyon floor. One by one, my companions grab the rope, pull back, press their feet into the wall, and hoist themselves up.

Biceps pulling, bicycle calves pushing, Maggi hauls herself up with a single grunt. Next, slender Laura, in her pumpkin-colored, sweat-stained t-shirt, chants, "This is what I came here for, this is what I came here for." Legs bent, boots grabbing the wall, butt thrust out, hands grasping the knotted rope, she's up and whooping above us.

Stomach churning, hands trembling, I remove my trail shoes, which came from a running store back home, where, feigning calm nonchalance, I asked for the shoe that would give me the most grip on rocks. A young, lean, long-legged kid brought out a set of bright green shoes with yellow stripes and gray- and green-striped laces. I prefer to blend with the scenery, but so far these treads, their hue now subdued by red river sand, have not failed me on wet or dry surfaces. I've also stuffed my green grippers—bright rubber-fingered gloves designed for grasping slimy fish—in the side pouch of my pack. I'll look like a green-footed monkey on the rocks, but at least I've got some thin protection from slipping.

Donning sandals, I wade through the deliciously cold knee-deep pool. Across, I trade foot gear, slide the gloves over my sweaty palms, and face the wall. I lean back and struggle for traction on the burnished stone, but my feet slip like bald tires on ice. My arms do not have the muscle to haul my gangly frame up the rock wall. Craig, the guide assigned to spotting us, gives my flailing butt a boost. The momentum pushes me out from the rock so my feet can take hold at the same time my grippers gain traction on the rope. Finally, my arms and legs join forces, and I reach the ledge, panting and sweating. Triumphant.

Below, the canyon walls resemble layers of petrified biscuit, air bubbles trapped in gaping holes, sides rough and gritty. At the bottom, water trickles along a caramel-colored gravel floor feeding clumps of rich green foliage. Above, Roger has strung a second rope on a series of toe holds in the canyon wall. Grabbing the yellow- and red-striped rope, I inch my way up the wall to the narrow sill above, the trickling stream and jumble of fallen rocks on the canyon floor dropping twenty, thirty, one hundred feet beneath.

"Butt out, feet in," Roger commands.

I teeter around a thorny acacia bush thrusting out of a crack in the rock. In front of me, Shelley yells. "In my next life I want smaller boobs and longer legs."

"Neither of those help in the least," I call back. Finally, I reach the bolt holding the rope to the rock where Shawn, our white-hatted cowboy guide, waits on a cereal-box-sized lip of rock. Letting go of the rope, I take his hand, step onto the ledge, and creep along the canyon wall.

"Go slow. Stay on the inside," Roger barks. "Pay attention."

I mumble to myself, over and over and over, "Go slow, stay on the inside, pay attention."

Ahead of me big, burly Bob never stops chattering. His words do not register, but his constant prattle provides an antidote to the hissing voice inside my head: *Are you crazy? You'll kill yourself. What makes you think you can do this?*

Bob's murmurs dwindle as he ambles ahead. I speed up, chanting, "Don't look down, don't look down."

But I do. I look down long enough to know that a slip over the edge would mean death, or at the very least a crushed skull or broken back. The end of me.

We hug the wall, descend to the floor for a brief walk on smooth pebbles, scale another massive pile of rubble, and repeat again and again. I'm one of the stragglers, along with Kirsten and Matt, the designated "sweep guide." He makes sure that no one at the tail end of the group goes astray or gets lost. Or falls to her death.

We catch up to Jim and Chris shooting photos of a tree trunk wedged into a crevice high above our heads, evidence of the power of a past flood. "Oh, hi," says Chris, surprised to see us. Jim squats to capture a patch of bright green algae in the puddle at his feet. Once again, I'm displaced by the view through his camera lens. *Hey*, I want to yell, *I'm here*. But I don't. I let them dally, two boys spellbound. Now and then, we meet up with cowboy Shawn and his cowgirl Jalynda, who rows our giant gear raft. New lovers, they linger beneath the shade of an overhanging ledge, then disappear, reappearing periodically ahead of us.

Kristen adopts me. Some fifteen years younger, she also lost her mother last winter. She's an athlete—legs of a marathon runner, sinewy arms sculpted by years of yoga. We reach a massive slab of rock blocking our passage. Matt wedges his feet into a crack and pulls himself to the top. Kristen clasps her hands and offers me a step up. I hesitate, not wanting to put the full weight of my body onto her hands.

"It's ok," she smiles.

I place my right foot carefully into her cupped hands, grab hold of Matt's outstretched foot dangling from above, and haul myself to the top. Kristen quickly scrambles to join us.

"Woohoo," I yelp, and high-five her.

Matt, who has never been back this far into the canyon, scouts for footprints of our friends in patches of damp sand. Slot canyons appear on either side. Prints materialize here and there, enough to reassure us we're still following our people. Push, pull, up, over, again and again. My sweaty hands grasp Kristen's and Matt's strong fingers, and the soles of my shoes cling to the layered limestone.

Along the way, a thought shakes loose in my brain. I'm no longer in charge. No longer required to care for Mom, my daughter, my grandchildren, or anyone else. I am free, but I am not alone.

Kristen picks up a small salmon-colored stone. She holds it up to the light. In the center lies a small white ring. We each hold it in our palms, turning it over, examining it from all angles. "Looks like a segment from a crinoid," Kristen says. A crinoid, we learned from one of Roger's geology lessons, was a plant/animal creature that attached itself to the bottom of flat, shallow seas and took in food by waving its flowery head in the current. Anchored, but flowing with the tide. My mind wanders to warm, clear, blue-green waters, clams buried in the sandy bottom. I caress the stone, a reminder that my life is just a tiny link in a chain from the distant past to the murky future.

We move on. The adrenaline from my triumph at surviving this series of physical feats begins to wear off. Stripping off my long-sleeve outer shirt, sweat wicking through my thin t-shirt, I smell my body working at capacity. Little puncture wounds from poking my right ankle into so many rocks begin to throb. I check my watch. We've been hiking over three hours. It's not the distance that's wearing me down, or the heat; it's contorting my body over this stony obstacle course.

Where is this elusive amphitheater? I picture a vista atop the rim where we will look down on the river, but instead we seem to be descending deeper into the earth. We lose the murmur of voices connecting us to the rest of the group. I'm tired, having long before burned off my breakfast pancakes, but too hot to feel hungry.

We hunt for more footprints. A slot canyon opens to our right while the main canyon looms ahead.

"Which way, Matt?" Kristen asks.

Faint human sounds burble from a small aperture in the canyon wall. We hesitate, then head toward them. We scramble up a pile of rubble and enter a hollow, circular chamber, shaped like the inside of an inverted globe, with a hole at the top. It could be a ceremonial kiva, with smooth, curved walls of stone, and a smoke hole revealing the turquoise sky. Or a womb, life squirming at its core. Voices reverberate against the multi-colored layers of stone, laid down like strips of clay. White streaks trace the course of a seasonal waterfall that plunges from the rim. A small puddle at the bottom of the bowl is all that remains of that cascade. A sudden deluge from above the canyon's rim could release a torrent that would flush us out to our camp with the rest of the debris.

Our companions perch along the sides of this enormous bowl. I sit, letting the hard, cool stone caress my butt and the damp air filter through my soaking shirt. In this shaded sanctuary, which could easily become a death chamber, I take a minute to rejoice in my own stubbornness.

Unpacking my smashed peanut butter and jelly sandwich, battered apple, and crumbled fig bars, I feel embraced by the rock and my companions. The men show off, racing around the curved walls, seeing how high their momentum can take them before they are forced to scurry back to a gentler slope.

Maggi, Kristen, and Shelley crowd around an object at the bottom of our giant bucket. I rise on stiff, wobbly legs and shuffle around the side to investigate. A brown- and red-striped creature wriggles in Shelley's outstretched palm.

"Is it a millipede?" someone asks.

I crowd closer. "No, millipedes have legs all around the sides of their bodies," I say. "These legs are in groups underneath its body."

"Must be a caterpillar," Maggi, the biologist, remarks. "Some big moth or butterfly."

Hoisting up its midsection, the animal crawls up Shelley's arm. Maggi gently scoops it into her hand and carries it to an acacia tree at the entrance to the chamber. "It needs to pupate," she says. From its cocoon it will sprout wings and fly, long after we're gone.

The cool shelter, the food, the water, and the companionship have restored me. I am banged, bruised, scraped, punctured, strained, sore, but alive. Brave even. Thankful for friends, and my own fierce tenacity.

I pull my journal from my pack, make a few notes, and try to draw the shape of this container that encircles us, but do it no justice.

"Okay troops." Roger rises. "Time to head back. Gotta reach camp before sunset."

I linger at our portal, then dart to catch up with the stragglers. On the way back, some detour to strip off their clothes and slip into cold, clear pools trapped in rock dams at the canyon bottom. My pace is faster than on the way in, my feet more sure against the rocks. I know when to ask for a hand or a push. The sun's nearly gone by the time we arrive at the rope descent. We assemble along the tiny terrace as one by one my friends grab the rope, lean back, legs against the wall, and push themselves over the edge. When my turn comes, I clutch the rope, tip my rear over the edge, and lean back on the rope. But I fail to tip back far enough, and my feet lose their purchase on the wall. I twirl, slamming into the rock, scraping my arm and my elbow. Below, Kristen records my graceless descent with her tiny video camera.

"Way to go, Sue," Maggi yells. "Cirque de Soleil."

I laugh in spite of the pain. My feet hit the soft gravel. I brush off, rub my arm, and wade through the water. Ahead: camp and a cool beer. Farther ahead: Lava Falls, mother of all whitewater.

I have scaled walls, squeezed through cracks, and scooted along narrow ledges, muting the gravelly voice that warns me of death, the voice of my mother who knew nothing of canyons or cliffs or whitewater rafting, and whom death claimed nonetheless. Tomorrow, with the help of an oarsman, I'll pitch against towering water and bail like my life depended on it. I'll control what I can. What I can't, I'll let go.

Morning Walk

—Mo Gan Mountain, Zhejiang, China

Aiden Heung

One creek
would be enough; one muddy trail
led me up hills where green
tufted within the milky fog
of morning. Summer felt like Autumn.
On my skin tiny feet of dew.
On my boots the color of stones.
Above me, waxberries cobbled in red.
Beneath, a lake pooled in
from the west, out of my control.
The wind began to stir
through the tall grass that tongued my legs.
Pews of boulders on the shimmering slope.

I halted under a tree that blew light,
ate my breakfast,
thought about all the work I'd leave undone
and continued my walk into the sun.

Freezing to Death in Jersey

Jeffrey S. Markovitz

I was going to freeze to death in New Jersey.

The wind gusts threatened to rip the fly off the tent and all I could think about, there, suffering the kind of cold that felt like pain, was that there were people in the Himalayas just then, in Antarctica, on portaledges on the sides of mountains; and I was going to die in a state I'd heretofore thought of as nothing more than a highway between Philadelphia and New York (with apologies to Garden Staters). Little can emasculate you more.

Ten years before, I hiked the Appalachian Trail through Pennsylvania: 230 miles of hiking in just a couple weeks. The state most thru-hikers lament, the histrionics about the rocks, the wildly mischaracterized and misunderstood part of the trail—that's my home state. I had time, the endurance of a twenty-seven-year-old, and absolutely no responsibilities.

Maybe somewhere in the back of mind I thought about the entire AT, but it was an item on a life bucket list rather than the college gap year or mental breakdown or huge life change or whatever else that provokes people into hiking for four or more straight months. I live and work in a big city; and though I reject the redundantly posited oppositional binary of city vs. wilderness (expressed ad nauseam in a faux-wild disdain for all things society), I'm also a big-time outdoors kind of guy. I'm okay with the binary: I love the city and I love the wild. In some ways, cities are the calm, peaceful places one retreats to from nature. Its laws, rules, traditions, etiquette, culture, and governance demand order. Anyone who claims peace in nature has not felt the fury of the earthquake, the velocity of the wind, the impotency of being in the center of the ocean. A tent in winter. Nature is the beast from which the city dwellers ran when they built their towers to stave off the outside.

The PA AT was a liminal point in my life; it confirmed what I long knew: that a significant part of my identity belonged to playing outdoors. But it was also enough. I didn't hike another substantial stretch of the AT for more than ten years. I got married, got tenure, bought a house, and had a son. In the midst of all of this, however, the trail lay quietly, dormant, inside of me.

A decade after the first trip, it roared awake.

With stunning vibrancy, thoughts of the AT, memories, and a new determination to return assaulted the foreground of my thinking, nearly to an obsession (I regret to report that I still suffer). I began to orchestrate a plan to section-hike another state, despite the trickery needed to suspend my current and infinite responsibilities. I started "training," updating my gear and maps, and getting my affairs in a flight pattern for my college's spring break (which started in February, for some reason). I also found a friend as hair-brained as me to hike a long way in freezing temperatures.

Winter backpacking is—euphemistically—intriguing. The gear is heavier, the days are shorter, it's, well, colder; so you hike more slowly, complete less miles. But I wanted the novelty (reread the open: I did this to myself). If I'm to one day have hiked the entire AT, I want my varied experience over the years to be diverse: summer hikes, winter hikes, day and night, various companions. Leafless trees. Longer views. Nuanced challenges. Such diversity on my lifelong AT hike is important to me.

So, New Jersey.

I'm no stoic. I'm not a hurly burly mountain man (though I sometimes appear like one); I am susceptible to intense emotion and deep nostalgia, so coming back to the I-80 bridge, to recross it back to the point where the PA-NJ state line is marked, again, after ten years, to stitch together my last hike to the current one, filled me with deep joy. I was back; the trail was still there—waiting for me. I'd convinced my best friend since sixth grade, Billy, to come along and, even though he'd never backpacked before, he was more physically fit than me (than most people). We suited up every stitch of clothing we brought, left our packs with the car in the lot, and walked halfway across the bridge, squinting at the sonic waves of passing tractor trailers, to straddle the aforementioned painted line. It was foolish cold. It was colder than it ever was at that time in that place, but we had a small window: dads with jobs and little time to choose when and how we'd like to adventure, so we gathered courage and massive pounds of warm-weather gear and headed out anyway. I was confident (read: arrogant) that, despite whatever inclement weather we faced, whatever objective danger, we'd be okay. I'd had some experience

cold-weather trekking, knew some techniques, and, come on…New Jersey? Even when, a few hours into our hike, we received alerts that a snow squall (whatever that means) was imminent, even when the snow squall (it was just snow) came, we felt safe. This is because we were stupid.

I knew it was really cold about thirteen miles in. I'd gotten what I wanted: bare trees, no other hikers anywhere—dire, beautiful, deserted wilderness; but my fingers ached in my gloves and my sinuses felt stabbed with each dry breath. So what? This was tough. It was rugged. It was good.

We made it about sixteen miles when the sun was close to setting, and with no shelter or campsite nearby, we set up our tent on an exposed ridge in a small, makeshift clearing just off of the trail. It wasn't ideal, but it was what we had. To be safe, we needed to build camp and prepare for the cold night before the sun totally set. I might be naïve in some ways, but I'm no dummy. I know that despite the popularity of the Appalachian Trail and relative benign wilderness of anywhere in New Jersey, you still had to take precautions, lest you find yourself in nature's dunce cap: profound mortal trouble. To that end, we hurriedly built camp and got our warmest overnight gear ready.

As the sun went down, the temperature dipped to eighteen degrees, not including the violent wind that raced up the ridge and across our exposed tent. Even so, we felt okay because we were prepared for that, until we hit the first real glitch in the journey. I'd learned the technique of pouring boiled water in Nalgenes and stuffing them into your sleeping bag to create a nice little personal oven. You can cuddle those bad boys all night long. However, it was so cold that my camp stove wouldn't light. It never really occurred to me that I might not be able to rely on fire, which meant I wouldn't have my boiling little Nalgene friends. This was the crux, the fulcrum upon which the day went from uncomfortable to dangerous—I panicked. It wasn't the cold, nor the wind, nor the reality that we were miles from anything manmade; when that gas wouldn't release from the canister, I began to have those unfortunate and, once released, constant ideas of absolute peril: I was going to die. I was going to orphan my family. I was going to orphan Billy's family, because I didn't have what I needed to survive that weather. I was going to die in New Jersey.

But here's the thing, the real thing: I wasn't going to die in New Jersey. Not even close. Here's a rundown of the exact situation: I had a suitable tent, a sleeping bag rated well into those temps, an inflatable sleeping pad to keep me off the ground, and—wait for it—thick wool socks, warm base-layer pants, hiking pants, a long-sleeved shirt, a hoodie (hood up), a big winter puffy (hood up), a knit cap, a face scarf, and gloves with chemical handwarmers. Oh, and I got the gas to work by putting the canister under my armpit for ten minutes. So we had our Nalgenes, too. We were, in short, very far from freezing to death. I even had a down vest I didn't feel I needed to use. But it didn't matter; once the panic first initiates, it's really tough to come back from it.

You can be as layered as you want in a tent, but when it's that cold, you're never going to be completely comfortable. If you add the natural discomfort to the aforementioned panic, then stuff gets bad. We couldn't sleep; we could barely keep from shivering. Do I even need to express the utter misery that was having to pee? To get out of the tent? It felt like we were going to be in there, awake, suffering the entire night. I was horrified. And I know, it all seems laughable. But if you're anywhere right now other than in a situation like that, it's impossible for you to know what the experience felt like. Even now, writing this in a warm house, I have a tough time conjuring the exact feeling. What I can say, unequivocally, is that for hours, I thought I was going to die. But worse—way, way worse—we had to admit that we failed. We promised each other that, if we survived the night (the drama!) we'd plot an exit strategy the next day and get out. We were in over our heads. We were pathetic adventurers.

So I had to lie awake all night and think about what a failure the journey had been. That I hadn't hiked a mile on the AT for ten years and there I was, back, for sixteen of them and a potential to end up like Jack in *The Shining*. I had to think about all the people I told of my five-day hike, now reduced to one: my students, my family. I had to think about that one time I could get away on a mini-vacation from my life only to have it laugh me back home, four days early. I had to think of all the training and preparation that went into one giant balking. All the money sunk into the black hole of gear acquisition for a day-hike and a thrown-in towel. I had to lie there in the misery of the cold, with the anxiety of dying, and

ruminate on what a letdown it had all become. Translation: I had become.

Man, it hurt. Worse than the cold.

Somehow, it was dawn. I'd slept. There was no drift; my consciousness just hit a wall—light switch off—and I was up again with the sun. As I maneuvered through the micro-movements of waking, realizing I was still in my body, cracking the shell of respiratory ice that then lined my sleeping bag, Billy and I looked at each other; he had his phone out. "You know," he said, "the forecast for the next two days is better. 50s." We could try. We could make it.

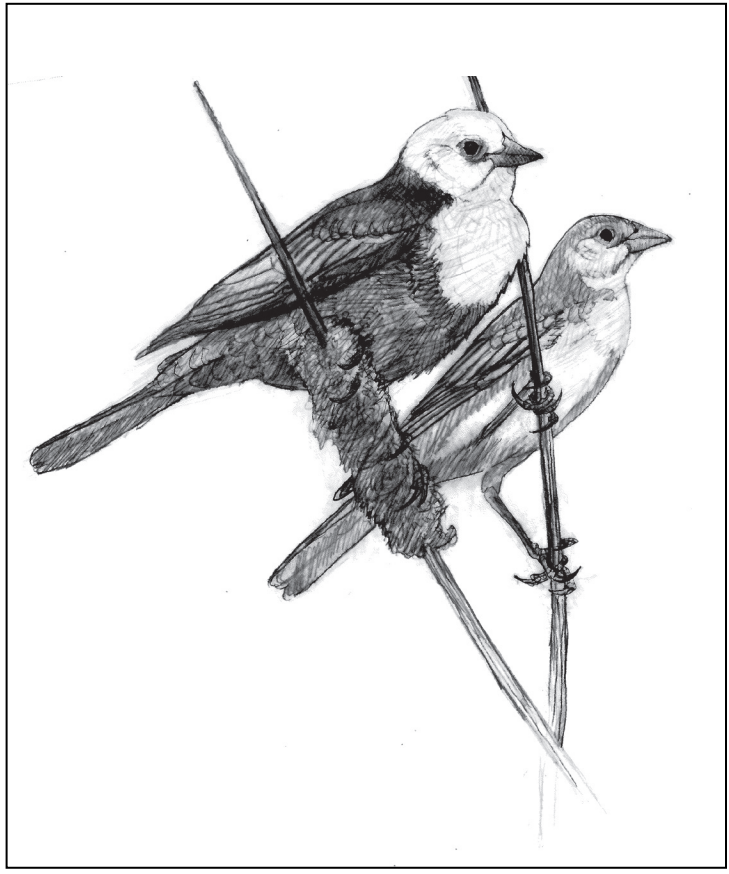
That was all I needed.

From somewhere I cannot explain sprang a renewed energy to carry on. The trail had humbled me, but it did not break me. My vanity checked but my determination doubled, we packed up, breaking our promise to any holy thing that: if we survived, we'd leave, go back home. Instead, we'd hike on, tempting a fate that spared us.

I'm thirty-eight. If I hiked one hundred miles a year from here on out, I would be nearing sixty before I summited Katahdin. This is the reality of my life. The thought is somewhat shocking and disappointing, but it comes with significant positive realizations: I am prevented from hiking because of the wonderful life that I have at home (yup, in a city), but also, the AT is something I will get to experience throughout the length of my human experience. While thru-hikers get a few months of one of their years, the trail will be with me through much of my life. As I change, as the world changes, the AT will be my constant. I think of a quote from Benton Mackaye, the man who came up with the idea of the trail, "I for one would give the prize to the person that took the longest time."

For the subsequent four days it took us to complete the New Jersey section of the Appalachian Trail, I thought to myself—over and over—"I'm not supposed to be here." I didn't so much mean it in the existential *I should be dead* way, but in the *we were about to quit* way. I was deeply grateful, full of appreciation and humility; I was hiking. Somehow (but don't we know how?) the

old trail had more lessons for me. It reminded me how little I was, how weak against the divinity of nature (though I was that nature, too, and so, divine myself), how I had to know my place in the wild of the world and the wild of the woods—and then it moved aside and let me pass.



YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD

Climbing Crowsnest

—an excerpt

Ellie Anderson

We struggle through deep, loose scree
to get to the chimney
and rope up.
You go first, the soles of your boots
directly above me.
I wait until I can't see them
anymore, then I find a foot-hold
slightly to the right.
I hear stones sliding overhead.
Now I have tenuous toeholds
thirty feet above the last flat rock.
Shaking,
I dig my fingernails
into crumbly shale.
I cling to the wall
in a rain of rocks
that try to break my grip.
Before I can turn my head away,
a stone hits me hard in the cheekbone.
My eyes water.
It's quiet again.
Then I hear the scrape of your boots.
I can't look down.
I hunt for the next toehold with one foot.
I'm in the wrong place. The next step
is too long for me.
My hands are part of the rock.
I pry them loose and climb, one
foot, one hand, one inch at a time.
You throw me another rope, this one
anchored. I drag myself the last
thirty feet. Flames drink the blood
in my arms. I collapse on a bed of lichen.
It took two hours to get this
terrified and we are just beginning.
The mountain fills the sky before us.

Saddle Bagger

Robin Woolman

Was-a-day, only a peak
would satisfy the sweat of a climb.
Apex as pay off. Even If mist marred the view, wind
stole the hat, sharp argyles of rock or crusted snow made resting
a chore for snacks, victory photos, and brandy shots—it was the top
I craved.

Now I settle
for saddles: those high
hammocks between outcrops
cartographers cared to elevate to Title.
A pass, a col, a worn threshold where travelers
catch breath, weigh time by the sun, and weather
by the wind, calculating whether to return or
go on, to see, like the bear, the other
side of the mountain without
that final scramble…
There I prefer
to lie among
paintbrush and
tousle-headed pasque:
"old men of the mountain" and splash
my face in seams of water funneled from
those punished peaks, perhaps nap among the buzzing
insects that also stall in this liminal vantage,
before trailing carefully down, having
copped beauty and struggle,
sore, but undamaged.

From below,
I drink in the scalloped
pinnacles, acknowledge my own
erosion by age, and wonder what losses
will *I* weather? How face the inevitable Sudden Edge
with grace?

Sierra Trails

Brad Shurmantine

> . . . looking up, I observed a very slight and graceful hawk, like a nighthawk, alternately soaring like a ripple and tumbling a rod or two...turning over and over like a kite, and then recovering from its lofty tumbling, as if it had never set its foot on terra firma. It appeared to have no companion in the universe—sporting there alone—and to need none but the morning and the ether with which it played. It was not lonely, but made all the earth lonely beneath it.
>
> —Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Mostly I've backpacked alone. Not by choice; just the way it's happened. I would feel kind of guilty about that, until I was on the trail. There, with every step, every mile, I would feel more and more like Thoreau's little hawk, my loneliness washed away.

Every tree, every bird is just as alone. I'm no outsider. Thoughts and memories and songs tumble through my heart as I walk along, proud of the load on my back and my body for carrying it. I love the huge vistas, the endless mountains of polished granite, the craggy ridges of volcanic rock, all covered or dotted with proud determined trees, laced with cold clear streams. And I love just as much being buried in forest, resting my pack on a perfect boulder as I pant my way uphill, seeing nothing but rocks and trees and forest debris and patches of sky, completely cut off from the world, entombed in wilderness. Quiet. Drinking some water. Hearing bird noises, maybe some branches bending in the wind. Nowhere else to be. No one else to be.

I've managed to make that wildness part of me, a source of endless peace and renewal, endless spring. I haven't had many remarkable experiences in the wilderness—what others might consider remarkable. Take animals. I've seen plenty of deer, marmots, chipmunks, and birds, but I can count on one hand the number of "beasts" I've spotted in all my hundred trips. I nearly collided with a coyote once, coming over a small rise. A gray fox flicked across the trail a few yards in front of me when I was on my way to Ten Lakes in Yosemite. Also at Ten Lakes, but twenty years earlier, I had my most momentous encounter with a lord of

the forest. I was far from the trail, practicing my map and compass skills, sitting on a boulder in a tiny copse of trees next to a small tarn. Suddenly I heard something big splashing around behind me. I rose and edged around the trees hiding me and there I saw, not ten feet away, a big brown beautiful mama bear and two cubs. We stared at each other—she looked right into me. And I got the hell out of there.

That's just about it. To this day I've never even seen a rattlesnake on the trail. Nothing very remarkable, hardly National Geographic stuff. Yet it's all remarkable; the wilderness always thrills me, thins my blood. I've never doubted that the bears and mountain lions, the coyote, foxes and badgers, are all around, aware of me, giving me space. I've never doubted I belong there too.

I've had a few mishaps, encounters with my mortality, and these have helped drill deep in me a sense of how rare and green and precious life is. Trying to find a different way to the top of Mt. Ritter once, I found myself stupidly stranded on the lip of a glacier, hundreds of feet above scree and rubble, the wind whipping through my hair, chilling me to the bone. I suddenly realized I could slip and very easily die, that it might be months before my body was found if it was ever found, because what in the hell was I doing out there, where no one in their right mind would ever go? I hugged that ice, and edged my way back home.

Fell once, crossing an icy stream, and a stick went right through my palm. I pulled it out, cleaned the wound as best I could, and made camp. This was three days into a ten-day trip. Took some aspirin. That night the pain was so intense that I crawled from my tent and lay down in my sleeping bag next to the creek, where I could immerse my wounded hand in the icy water and seek some relief. The next morning my hand was bloated and throbbing; I was exhausted. I packed up (hard to tie your boots with one hand) and headed back, walked eighteen miles that day, reached Little Yosemite Valley (Bear Central) well after dark. As I walked that night I whistled little tunes to keep the bears away, but I kept imagining their huge dark shadows wafting by. Maybe I wasn't imagining.

I got up early. My hand was numb, no longer throbbing, no longer painful. I was feeling good. I hiked down to the Village, passing day-hikers all along the way—fat families, little kids in

sneakers screeching when the mist of Vernal Falls drenched them—and headed right to the Medical Center. The intern took one look at my hand and put me on a bus to a hospital in Fresno, where I was operated on a few hours later. The surgeon took a chunk of wood the size of a quarter out of my hand. Told me I came damn close to losing that hand. Now I love my hand, love holding it in front of my face, flexing my fingers, tracing the scar with the forefinger of my other hand. My hands. Two of them. Lovely, lovely things. Green sprouts.

At one time I liked to hike cross-country. Nothing major. I would locate a lake on the map, a mile or two from the trail, and make that my destination. At the lake I would find a good legal campsite and make a fire ring. At night I would lean against a comfortable rock, an essential feature of a good campsite, tend my fire and stare at the stars, at home in the universe.

Then one day I was out day hiking, two or three miles from my campsite, four or five miles from any trail, and it suddenly occurred to me, as I climbed up a rock pile and hopped on a small boulder that wobbled beneath my foot, that it would be bad if I were to slip or stumble and sprain my ankle. Or break my leg. It would be pretty bad. I sat down on a large rock and had a talk with myself. *What the hell do you think you're doing? They will never find you out here, you fucking idiot!*

It wasn't the risk to myself that caused fear to suddenly mushroom in my chest, erupt and flow like frigid lava down my back. It was the thought of my little daughters, and my good wife. How could I jeopardize them this way? They needed me. Very carefully I picked my way back to my campsite, and the next morning I hiked out. And since then I've stayed close to the trail. Close enough.

When I retired from education I knew I would be quickly forgotten. That's the way it is. The work is critical and unending and there's no point in dwelling on last year's colleague and his or her contribution or opinion. Fill the gap, immediately. Move on. But it's hard to be forgotten. You think maybe you wouldn't be forgotten so quickly if you had been better.

Hit the trail. The summer before I began teaching I hiked the Tahoe-Yosemite Trail, a 186-mile jaunt. Thirty-five years later I wanted to conclude my career with another epic hike. I

had done parts of the John Muir Trail but never the whole thing. Now I would do 195 miles of it, but leisurely, in a celebratory way, befitting my age and affluence. In my itinerary I decided to include a couple cush nights at a resort and motel. At my first re-supply point, the Muir Trail Ranch, I reserved a tent cabin, allowing me to soak in their hot springs and eat the gourmet meals they served up. My second re-supply was the Mt. Williamson Motel in Independence, a town with a surprisingly good French restaurant.

It proved impossible to get a permit out of Yosemite, so I started in Agnew Meadows. The first day was slow and torturous, a mere five miles uphill to Rosalie Lake, but soon I was bounding down the trail like a young man, doing things I used to do: dropping my pack and scrambling 200 feet up Red Cone just to take a picture. At Minaret Creek I met a couple of dharma bums, young, funny guys, one of whom was hiking barefoot because his boots were bothering him. At Tully Hole I met a couple of kids who went to Napa High (they knew my daughter Alea), and we hiked together for a couple hours and talked about their teachers. On Bear Ridge I picked up a few bars on my cell phone and texted home some pictures. At my campsite on Bear Creek I sat on the ground before dinner, not five feet from the trail, drinking my hot toddy (I carried two canisters of brandy; I carried it, so I could drink it), and watched a power hiker come striding along. She was all alone, dressed in nylon trunks and a tank top, with a tiny little pack on her back. She was the strongest, most fit human being I had ever seen. And she blew right by me without even seeing me.

Every day the skies were blue and clear; every creek I splashed right through. Soaked in the hot springs at Muir Trail Ranch and ate some great meals. Found at last the most beautiful meadow in all the Sierras: McClure Meadow. And then God was sweet to me, and added a bit of drama to my trip.

Twelve days into my hike, the morning was clear and blue but the sky began graying up, and right after lunch, while I was making my way past Sapphire Lake in Evolution Basin, the biggest storm of the summer hit (that's what the ranger I met the next day told me). Evolution Basin is a moonscape, and the hail and the lightning and the thunder (thunder like you've never heard thunder) arrived all at once. Within minutes there was an inch of hail on the ground and it was coming down hard, and the lightning

was forking all around me. I wasn't scared but I was confused, not sure what to do, so I crouched down next to the largest boulder I could find, which wasn't very large at all, and tried to figure things out.

The first thing I figured out was that the rain gear I had purchased twenty years ago and carried all this time without ever actually using was total shit; oh yeah, I did get it on sale. Then my guardian angel appeared. This guy, bopping down the trail. He saw me cowering by my rock and called out, "Are you okay?" I told him I was trying to decide what to do and was worried about the lightning. Without altering his pace he said, "You better keep moving. Don't worry about the lightning—that's a great way to die." And off he went, into the rain and hail and mist.

I jumped up and followed him, kept him in sight for the next two hours, followed his footprints in the slush, until I got to Muir Pass (11,955 ft.) just as the storm was breaking. By the time I got there he had been in the hut for half an hour and was heading out. "Hey buddy, thanks, you saved my life," I told him. "Where are you camping tonight? I'll buy you a drink." He told me he was not taking the trail, was heading west, cross country, down Goddard Divide, planned to climb Mt. Goddard tomorrow. A couple inches of slush was on the ground, and the sky was still gray. He was a little guy, no bigger than me. Thanks, Clarence, I muttered, as I watched him disappear.

That night the stars came out and the next morning was blue and beautiful; I was dry and happy and pounding down the trail. Mather Pass kicked my butt but I made it over, and all the following days were calm and uneventful and easy.

In my "Funeral and Burial Instructions," the grimmest part of our Estate Plan, I ask that my ashes be scattered somewhere in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Ashes don't have much nutrient value, so it's not about giving anything back. I just want to be there, disappear there, where I was always happy and forgiven.

Moratorium

Laurinda Lind

Like Kafka or Rilke
I have spent the past
twenty years afraid
to be afraid, but who
is saying this now at the
top of a mountain in the
Laurentians where I could
have had a heart attack
hiking up, but didn't?

It is taking such a long time
to die that I am going
to stop watching. I'll send
the mosquito that's landing
on my leg ahead of me to say
screw it, I'm not coming,
take your time, surprise me.
You could have had me
for a song during the seven
hours of surgery when even

the nurse said, I really thought
that was cancer. I am fatigued
with being fatal, so I'm not
listening anymore. Whoever
I turn out to be, I'm here now
with a shoe full of dead
mosquitoes and a head
full of the mountains and
no better plan than to be.

Catch and Release

Heather Durham

Were flies always so loud? They were just regular house flies, as far as I could tell, though I'm not sure you still call them house flies when they are buzzing around a 9000-foot peak in the Great Basin badlands of northeastern Nevada. Maybe they weren't loud so much as everything else was quiet. The harsh raspy call of a Clark's nutcracker every now and then, the nasal chortle of a mountain chickadee, but otherwise, silence. No water noises—rivers or rain—because there was no water. No wind in the trees, because there were no leafy green trees. And conspicuously no people noise, because we were miles beyond and above the nearest potholed dirt road, and the twenty or so people on that mountain top with me were also sitting quietly, watching and listening, because that is what we were paid to do.

I blinked my eyes a few times to moisten them in the arid heat, gave my recently shaved head a scratch and then returned my hands to the string loop, my eyes scanning through the six-inch slit in the bird blind.

Out on the grey ridgetop ten yards ahead, my string threaded through an eyelet at the top of a pole, down to the leather harness on my lure bird—a pigeon—then over dust and rock back to the bird blind to complete the loop. Quickly but smoothly I pulled the right side of the string toward me, and released. The loop moved clockwise, the pigeon launched into the air and then released to flap back down to the ground. Pull, release: flap up, and down. Scan, and repeat, every few minutes.

The guy next to me on the wooden bench in the little shack controlled a European starling. The woman next to him, a house sparrow. Three invasive species trapped in the city, now living in a makeshift mountain aviary and working for us in the name of science. We were puppeteers orchestrating a raptor farce. When migrating birds of prey flew over the exposed ridge, they might dive in closer to see what the ruckus was about, and not be able to resist the temptation for a mid-migration snack. Birds that flap but don't go anywhere look like easy prey.

"Do you think those turkey vultures can smell us?" I wondered out loud, angling my vision up to the v-shaped silhouettes circling against the blue.

"I'm sure they smell me. I haven't showered in nine days," Liz said, giving her sparrow a tug. Flap flap flap, to stillness. Flies buzzed.

"I want an iced tea. With ice. That's the first thing I'm going to do the next time I go down," Rob mumbled.

"Mmmm, iced tea."

Flapping. Buzzing. Nothing. My eyes were droopy.

"When I die, I want to be up here, strung up to a bristlecone pine or left out for the cougars and vultures," Rob announced.

"Yeah," we agreed.

"Hey we haven't gotten any golden eagles in a while. I want one so bad! Just one golden eagle, that's all I ask. Two more months." That was Liz.

"Yeah," we agreed.

Pull, release. Flapping.

That was pretty much the way it went in the trapping blind, most days, from sun-up to sun-down. There were four other blinds perched on differently-oriented ridges on that mountaintop with similar meaningful/meaningless conversations going on and a whole lot of quiet. Most of the time.

"Does anybody know what's for dinner? I hope it's not pasta aga…"

"INCOMING, TWO-O'CLOCK!"

"It's a "gos," going for the pigeon! Little flap now, Heather, don't scare him."

I sat up, rigid, arms electrified and fingers tingling. Tugged the string, released. The pigeon obeyed. A grey shadow was diving, getting closer.

"Good, now pull your pig' in toward the bow net. Hold him. Coming in, get ready!"

A northern goshawk, the "grey ghost," the largest long-tailed short-winged accipiter, or forest hawk, landed next to my pigeon, closed his wings, and prepared to enjoy an easy meal.

"NOW!"

I yanked a different string to release the spring on the bow net which sent the framed net over both birds' heads, trapping them.

"GO!"

I raced out of the blind toward the now shrieking flapping tangle of birds, Liz behind me in case I needed help since I was the rookie. But I didn't need to think; my body acted, swiftly and

correctly. Size up the situation—look for the dangerous part of the raptor, the talons. Use one hand to press the hawk gently to the ground so he doesn't hurt himself flapping, use the other to reach under the frame of the bow net to grab both legs. Open the net, tuck the bird's wing tips down into your hand so you hold him like an ice cream cone, the safest position for you both. Then trot to the rear of the blind to process your prize.

Liz checked the condition of the pigeon and found him physically unharmed under his leather armor. She smoothed his feathers, re-set the bow net, and followed me to the shade behind the blind to our little bird cage where she chose another pigeon to switch out with mine. He deserved a rest, some food and water, and it was nearly the end of his two-hour shift anyway. We didn't pretend it was a happy life for the lure birds, but we tried to keep it from being too terrible. We were all bird-lovers, after all, though many of us a little prejudiced toward the regal raptors.

A lizard scuttled out from behind the pile of differently sized cans as I chose one, coffee-can sized, to place over the goshawk's head. Big can for this species—a female, probably. Males are always smaller. Supported in the dark she calmed immediately, quieting and relaxing in my hands. I remained attentive to her feet, which if I let free could easily seize and pierce deeply into my hand and grip tightly, effortlessly, like a vise.

I cradled the head-in-a-can end of the bird in the crook of my elbow and balanced her weight on my lap as I started the measurements and made notes on my clipboard. I knew she was an adult, as she had the light grey body and crimson eyes of a mature goshawk rather than the streaky brown body and yellow or orange eyes of a juvenile. This bird had been around a few years, had made this migration before. The bulge in her throat, her crop, suggested she'd eaten recently, and the fat deposits along her breastbone and in her wingpits told me she was healthy. Other measurements meant less to me there, in the field, but were part of a pool of data that together can track health and trends of raptor populations.

I had less than ten minutes with her. Five if I was speedy, which I aimed to be so I could send her on her way with minimal stress. The final step was a uniquely numbered silver band I closed gently around her ankle. After checking to make sure it fit as it should, loose and mobile on her leg but not so bulky it would catch on anything, I readied myself for release.

Standing and firming my grip around wing tips and legs, I stepped back into the sunlight. I slowly pulled the can off her and her head whipped around to face me. We were eye to eye. Squinting blue eyes, sunburned and freckled skin, wide smile. Unblinking red eyes, feathers the color of pewter streaked with ash, mouth open, silent. We locked together. We connected.

I knew why we did the research. Furthermore, I had learned how to effectively communicate the why to school field trips and scout groups, families and lone hikers, any who were willing to drive one hour south from the nearest Nevada town or three hours across the Great Salt desert from Salt Lake City, brave the 3-mile hike straight up this Goshute Mountain peak in the high desert to check out the largest hawk migration site in the western United States. Which was a surprisingly high number of people.

As one of HawkWatch International's educators, I explained the importance of predatory animals as indicators of the health of ecosystems, our goal to follow trends in population size and health in order to recognize problems while there is still time to address them. That was the public face of our research, the big why.

But why was I up there? Why did I shave my head to live in a tent on a shower-less desert mountain for three months? I believed in the big why; of course I did. But I believed in other things, too. The long days of silence, flies buzzing, ravens calling, and quail families tottering about under prickly rabbitbrush. I believed in sleeping on hard ground in a tent village, listening to poorwills cooing and coyotes wailing. And in pulling on winter boots and stepping out of my tent at 3 a.m. to pee, to find a foot of pristine October snow glistening beneath more stars than I thought possible to see with the naked eye.

There was beauty, yes, but there was also a simplicity in the life that just made sense to me, made all the noise and busy-ness down below seem absurd. This was what I knew in theory when I signed up to rough it on a mountain-top for less than minimum wage. This was what I understood with all my senses at the first morning meeting, eating oatmeal and drinking tea from a tin cup as the sun turned the Great Salt Desert below neon orange. Even if I never caught a single bird, even if I didn't get to sink my fingertips deep in the feathers of a prairie falcon or feel the nip of a kestrel on a knuckle, I would believe in the experience simply for

the way I got to live, for a while. Life in the Goshutes just seemed more real, more true. Human drama—what was the point of that again? I was above it. Nine thousand feet above it.

That goshawk in my hands, she was the cream on top. When a hot wind gusted over us she freed her wingtips from my grip and opened them slightly, still holding my gaze. Liz snapped a picture. Then, in one swift move I raised my arm and opened my hand. She flapped once, twice, rising vertically, shook out all her feathers as if putting the whole bewildering business behind her and then glided away. As she circled I glimpsed a flash of her new silver band and then the grey ghost was gone, following the ridgeline south toward her wintering grounds. She left me in the dust, on the earth where I belong.

No time for wistfulness; there was work to do. Back in the blind, I shifted to position on the sparrow. Flap flap flap. Buzz. Quiet.

"Nice gos, Heather."

"Thanks, Rob."

The starling flapped.

"Hey next time we hit a bad weather stretch, we're going down to the hot springs out in that canyon outside of Wells. It's unmarked but Bob knows how to get there. You in?"

"Definitely."

We often talked about what we would do when we came down from the mountain during rare days off or when the weather was too bad for birds to fly, but nobody brought up the time after the field season ended. This was taboo, and we all subconsciously knew better. Some were headed to jobs at ski resorts, others to winter semester of college, a lucky few south to another field research position, but many would be unemployed and couch-surfing until the next seasonal gig rolled around.

I didn't know, myself, and normally that would worry me. It should have worried me. But it was hard to think of life off of the mountain, to even remember it was still going on without me. It hurt my brain; the reality was so distinct. And so I remained there, staring out at silvery-green sagebrush, darker green twigs of Mormon tea, and a few scattered bristlecone pines. I remained there listening to the nutcrackers and chickadees. Sometimes you really can *be here now*. Sometimes you can't help it.

If I sent my awareness anywhere else, it was with the birds we

watched, the birds we trapped, banded, and released. I wondered where they were headed, where they would land. Especially a certain bird with red eyes I wouldn't be able to get out of my head for quite some time. I can still feel her gaze on me.

One of the studies I remember best from my college psychology classes involved strangers paired up and made to stare intently into one another's eyes. They did not speak nor were they allowed to meet up outside the study. Many of them reported developing feelings of love toward the objects of their gaze.[1] I recall some of them formed romantic relationships afterward, though I haven't been able to find confirmation of that.

Neurobiologists have taught us that in the right conditions, eye contact stimulates release of phenylethylamine, a neurotransmitter that stimulates others like dopamine and serotonin to evoke feelings of exhilaration, elation, and attraction. Romantic love. If we humans stare long enough at anything with the ability to stare back, deep connections are made, regardless of the words we use to explain them. Maybe even regardless of the return gaze.

I don't pretend that the goshawk felt anything like love for me. Logically I know she was probably experiencing her own flurry of chemicals more in line with fear and stress. But that isn't what I felt. I felt part of something good, something true.

Those three months as a raptor researcher I spent a lot of time staring deeply at others. At birds, at trees, at lizards, grasshoppers, the dusty dirt. Whether they stared back or not, I felt something for each of them.

And what of human connection? Liz, Rob, and the rest of my little community? We spent intimate hours side by side in trapping blinds or at the observation lookout, evenings huddled by the fire singing hippie folk songs and drinking hot chocolate with peppermint schnapps. Treks to valley hot springs where we'd lounge naked and steaming in the rain and then crowd six people to a motel room to save money. It was a fun, easy togetherness, but were there deeper connections there? Eyes met, phenylethylamine released? Not from me. No. Honestly I remember the look of

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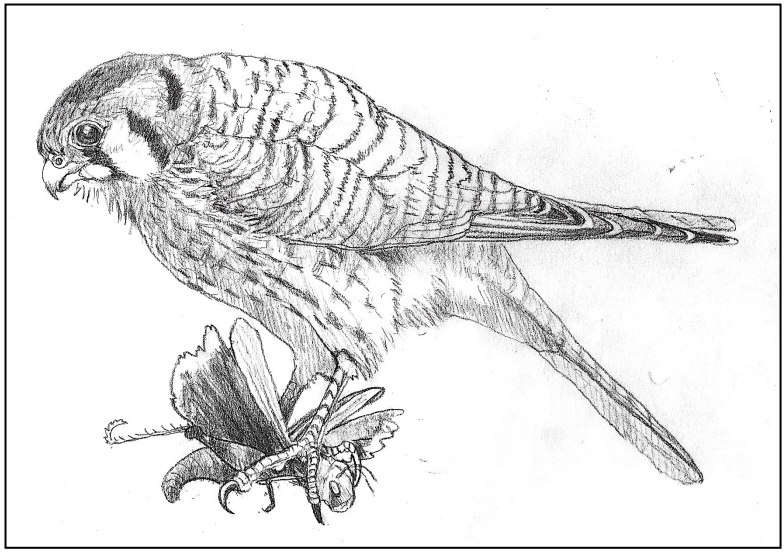
[1]Kellerman J., J. Lewis, & JD Laird. "Looking and loving: The effects of mutual gaze on feelings of romantic love." *Journal of Research in Personality*. Volume 23, Issue 2, June 1989, Pages 145-161.

the bristlecone pine trees more clearly than the faces of my crewmembers.

So. Was I hiding from reality, on the outside looking in? Or, was I living my reality, on the outside looking out?

I do know this. At 9000 feet above sea level where the air was thin and the sky stretched out forever, where sagebrush was more intoxicating than roses could ever be, I fell in love with a red-eyed bird, and I let her go.



HEN KESTREL

Maggots

Regina Gort

On an excursion to the lesser-known site,
Harry from Essex encourages us to army crawl
through a culvert, rappel down a waterfall and hike
in gum boots, upstream, while recounting
the number of freshwater eels he snared last summer.

Assuring us this venture superseded
the hundreds of tourists jammed onto boats
for a mere glimpse:
You get what ya pay for, mate, he said,
watching my daughter's right gum boot get sucked
into the swirling rapids.

The voracious bioluminescent *Arachnocampa luminosa*
keep a safe distance
from their encapsulated walls
depending on their goo to permeate
entrap, absorb and devour their neighbors, cannibals.
But without a way to excrete
they internally burn
their waste, creating ambient glow
from within.
According to Harry, the New Zealand tourism board
changed the name to glow-worm.

By nightfall when we reach the river's headwater cascade
in a grotto, the limestone walls are etched in
a reverent blueish light.
And in this moment, it doesn't matter
how many others have been here
with Harry, basking in maggot light,
or that we could've just as easily traversed
a cow pasture to get here in half of the time.

Here, they lie in a nested hammock for months
consuming, burning, mouthless,
waiting to fly.

Upper Hutcheson

James McVey

Of the several subspecies of western cutthroat trout, the greenback has been described as the most brilliantly colored and beautiful of all—a fact I attribute partly to the especially harsh conditions of its native habitat, although this is only a personal theory. Aside from the signature red slash and gill flap, greenback tend to display considerable variation in color. Some appear silver coming out of the water, while others are distinctly bronze or even green. Some have a golden hue under the belly and along the ventral fins. Spawning males develop bright red coloration along the ventral region in addition to the throat and gill flap.

Greenback possess distinctive black spots, round to oblong in shape and concentrated on or near the tail. They are not big fish usually, seldom exceeding one to two pounds in weight and fifteen inches in length. They are opportunistic feeders, relying mostly on aquatic and invertebrate insects. Finally, greenback are perhaps the most vulnerable of all cutthroats, easily replaced by non-native trouts. Rare, beautiful, and vulnerable, greenback fit the profile of other endangered species around the globe.

Today, taxonomists recognize fourteen subspecies of cutthroat trout based on genetic difference, each associated with a specific native habitat. Four of these are native to the southern Rocky Mountains: greenback, Colorado River, yellowfin, and Rio Grande. The yellowfin is one of at least two cutthroat subspecies to become extinct.

Robert Behnke, for years the world's leading authority on salmonoids, hypothesized that when receding waters put an end to headwater transfers along the Continental Divide long ago, a population of Colorado River cutthroat became isolated in the South Platte drainage. Over the millennia, this isolated population adapted to the particular conditions of its new environment and eventually became the greenback cutthroat. Morphologically, the two subspecies look very much the same, although greenback tend to have higher scale counts and slightly different spotting than Colorado River cutthroat.

Located deep inside the backcountry of Wild Basin, the Hutcheson Lakes were once thought to be among the few places

where relict greenback populations could be found. In fact, the Colorado Division of Wildlife used Upper Hutcheson Lake as a broodstock source for greenback up until 1995. While recent studies indicate the population may not be as pure as once believed, the Hutcheson Lakes maintain a sense of the high and wild. This is about as remote as one can get in the backcountry anymore, at least along the Front Range. The nine-mile hike to Upper Hutcheson is measured not in terms of distance or time, but by the natural features seen along the way: the ponderosa and aspen meadow filled with Black-eyed Susans and bluebells, the sweep of high peaks off to the north and west, the verdant basin of Finch Lake, the ascent across snowfields to the base of Mount Copeland.

Situated at the southern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park, Wild Basin bears the evidence of millions of years of geomorphology. The uplift of the Rockies, which began between 65 and 70 million years ago, continued until at least 7 million years ago and perhaps as recently as 5 million years ago. Wind, water, and ice have slowly shaped the mountains according to their present appearance. The Paleozoic and Mesozoic sedimentary rocks, so prevalent in the foothills, have entirely eroded away at higher elevations, exposing large batholithic masses of Precambrian granite and metamorphics. Infusions of Tertiary quartz appear in the rock in the form of sills, dikes, and stocks. But the most significant influence on the topography of Wild Basin has been the glacial activity, which has carved much of the Rockies over the past two million years. Today, we see evidence of these rivers of ice in the U-shaped valleys, cirques, and morainal deposits.

Sometimes, while hiking the high tundra flats along the Divide, I'll look off in the distance to such faraway places as the Gore Range, Rabbit Ears, or the Never Summers, and think of things I did there. Invariably, I'll think of the friends with whom I shared the experience, as I am transported through memory to a sense of place again. But it's there along the crestline, too high for glaciers ever to reach, where the feeling occurs—rarely below, where glaciers have gnashed and fractured the land. Down below, the rock is too severely broken, the upheaval too recent, the landscape too raw and imposing. If there is any solace in these places, it's to be found in the delicate things: the song of a

sparrow at treeline, a spider web catching morning sunlight in its concentric strands, the white shock of marsh marigolds at the foot of a snowfield. Maybe I am drawn to these things because they remind me of my own precarious place on this earth, my own tenuous existence in the face of such daunting power. A power, I have to say, that fascinates as much as it repels.

Fishing on Pear Lake, my camp for the night, I'll wonder about such matters and what it is exactly that compels a fisher to his pursuit. What drives the fascination? At one point, inspired by the surroundings perhaps, I'll consider our own genetic circuitry and an evolutionary past that has its origins in the sea. As humans, we have descended from marine organisms by way of a gradual metamorphosis that saw us through the various stages of amphibian, reptile, and mammal. As fishers, then, are we really just engaged in a symbolic return to these watery origins? On the other hand, consider the millions of years our hominid ancestors plied their skills as hunters. Surely, somewhere deep within our psychic wiring, such predatory instincts persist. How much of this, then, is genetically determined? To what extent can we explain fishing as ritualistic behavior designed to channel primitive impulses? And while we're on the subject, how many of these coded responses have been rendered inappropriate by the conditions and demands of the modern world we now inhabit?

Night falls under an overcast sky, dark and windy. The light of the fire carries only twenty feet or so to the edge of the forest. Beyond that, a wall of darkness waits at the periphery, thick and brooding. Somewhere out there, not far away, the last of my food hangs from a tree limb. I've made camp on a small bench above Pear Lake, where I settle in late with a cigar and brandy—a ritual I sometimes share with myself when camping alone. Pear Lake is the last camp on the south trail into Wild Basin. Tomorrow, I'll bushwhack the final two miles to Upper Hutcheson Lake.

The wind rustles the spruce boughs overhead, as I add another scrap of deadfall to the fire. The sough of wind through evergreen needles sounds both soothing and plaintive, like a whispered lament I can't fully understand. The Iroquois had a story for this. They tell of a young woman's death song, heard among the roar of rapids as she approaches her fateful end. The Iroquois had other stories, too. The wail of a loon conveyed the

voice of a fallen warrior caught between worlds. *Aurora borealis* reflected the light of bonfires enjoyed by festive warriors in the hereafter. D.H. Lawrence wrote that the American landscape was haunted by Indian spirits and would remain so until they were appeased by a transformation of consciousness that incorporated Native elements. How else to explain the restlessness, malaise, and madness of the white American soul? Not until we find our proper place among these spirits, Lawrence wrote, can we ever expect to establish a lasting connection to the land.

The wind howls, the fire breathes. I take another drink. Like the wind, my imagination is on the loose tonight.

In the morning, I follow a footpath along the south side of Pear until I lose it under a field of snow. At that point, I turn my attention to the dog-eared topo I've brought along and navigate according to its lines of elevation. Rising to a plateau, I pass a shallow pond and continue south through a forest of giant spruce to the fast rapids of Cony Creek. From here, I turn upstream and head west for the Divide. The hiking is tough at times, especially with all the deadfall, marshes, krumholtz, and fellfields to negotiate.

State biologists once traveled this same route on their way to gathering spawn from the cutthroat of Upper Hutcheson. It's this notion of the pristine that has brought me here. Nine miles from the trailhead, 11,000 feet above sea level, I should expect to find some sense of the wild in this high backcountry. Granted, it's always a dicey affair to expect nature to conform to some ideal of the mind. Tragedies occur for less. And yet, rising from the forest to the tundra and the broken country beyond, I have to believe I'm getting close to some vital essence, some unique distillate of what evolution has concocted here over the course of millions of years. Above Lower Hutcheson is Middle Hutcheson and, above that, Upper Hutcheson. Above Upper Hutcheson is Cony Lake, a glacial tarn, which sits at the base of Cony Glacier. Beyond that, there's only the crest of the Divide and mountains of clouds rising in the sky.

Cony Creek flows from basin to basin, following a staircase of lateral glacial deposits left behind from the great rivers of ice that once moved down this valley. I fish as I go, ever mindful of the principle that drives me onward, which may or may not hold any

meaning in the end. The landscape may be pristine, but it makes for difficult walking; the trout may be wild and remote, but just pretty to look at in the final analysis. I see no surface activity on Lower Hutcheson, so I sight-cast to passing fish. Even underwater, the trout exhibit startling coloration--gold against an emerald backdrop, blending to scarlet red along the ventral fins and belly. From the boulder field, I catch a healthy twelve-inch cutthroat with all the classic markings: red fins and gill flap, black oval spots near the tail and dorsal fin, a faint lateral streak of red.

Above Lower Hutcheson, the trees begin to scatter as I cross a grassy flat overlooking the lake. My strategy is to stay high along the valley slope, above the gorges and marshes and dense thickets of chokecherry growing along the creek. From the tundra slope, I can see the bright snowfield of Cony Glacier below the pass and the creek as it winds through the valley, connecting a chain of boulder ponds like a string of jewels. Fields of scree and tundra descend eastward to treeline and the upper reaches of spruce and fir. I see it all—from the snowy pass to the dazzling lakes to the blue ridges of distant foothills and the Great Plains beyond. And the wildflowers: alpine poppy, columbine, Arctic gentian, elephanthead, American bostort, rose crown, Indian paintbrush, chiming bells . . . too many to count. A gust of wind starts a wave across the shimmering meadow, when suddenly the yellows and purples and ochers take flight on the wings of sulphur, fritillary, and blue butterflies. In pockets of shade, fly agaric blossoms fat and round like baked apples. Lion signs are everywhere, leaving little doubt whose home this really is. Wending my way through thick krumholtz, I discover a single paw print sunk deep in the mud, wide enough to hide a baseball. And rock. Scarps, turrets, benches, fellfields, scree, slabs. . . rock of endless shape and size, of every color and swirly infusion. There's an intelligence to all this, a beautiful necessity. Everything is in its place as it should be, without so much as an afterthought to man—if you exclude what appears to be the strategic placement of lion scat in the middle of the footpath.

At Upper Hutcheson, I rig rod and reel with ten feet of leader and a #18 Adams. Hard to believe but this water looks clearer, more colorful than any I've seen in the Colorado backcountry. Aqua along the sandy shallows, the water blends to a deep green beyond the rocky shelf. A trout darts from the near bank. This

lake is loaded with rising cutthroat and I know it's just a matter of getting the fly close. From the rocks, I wait for the larger fish. The cutthroat of Upper Hutcheson are healthy, colorful, above average in size, and easily caught. Spawning males show red along the belly, fading to gold, then to olive at the dorsal and adipose fins. Many of the smaller fish have parr marks and, for some, a faint streak of red.

I inadvertently tangle fly and leader during a cast, requiring ten minutes or so of close attention. Looking up again, I see that the cutthroat have resumed their feeding in the rocky shallows along the bank. A larger trout passes by, fanning its pectoral fins. From thirty feet away, I put the Adams just off its nose with half the leader falling on the rocks. Not a difficult cast by most standards, but still pleasing to the eye. The trout circles and rises to the fly. At fifteen inches, it may be the biggest cutthroat I'll ever catch along the Front Range.

For the better part of an hour, I've been making my way down the bank toward a large boulder at the inlet where scores of trout are feeding on a hatch of *callibaetis*. With their handsome gossamer wings riding high in the air, the baetids look like tiny windjammers scudding across the water. I sneak up to the rock and wait. Behind me, a cascade of snowmelt sings in the rarefied air. Shadows from high outcrops fall across the glacier beneath the jagged crestline of Elk Tooth and Ogallala. The snowfield is streaked with tracks of fallen slabs below the cornice. Soon the snows will begin again, hardly three months from when they last fell. Upper Hutcheson will freeze over as it has for eons. The fish will hunker down, metabolism low, feeding off the bottom.

But for now, white spinnakers of cloud sail over the scarp, close enough to almost touch. The wind quickens and sweeps down over the lake. A shadow descends and the trout stop feeding. I wait with barbless hook pinched between finger and thumb. The cloud moves away. The wind settles. Upper Hutcheson becomes transparent again in aquablue. Everything comes clear as a dozen cutthroat rise to the new light.

Author's Note: "Upper Hutcheson" is taken from a longer essay which first appeared in *The Way Home: Essays on the Outside West*, published in 2010. Since that time, genetic testing has revealed evidence of hybridization in the cutthroat of Upper Hutcheson Lake. Today, recovery efforts are ongoing to restore pure-strain greenback to their historic range.

Prayer

Eli Coyle

Let not prayers be made of mind,
but the absence of mind,
the silence behind the wings
of Great horned owls
who welcome in the essential darkness,
who are content in building home,
making nest in the rotten snags
at the tops of broken oak,
with no conception for tomorrow,
just ears open, wings open, riding wind,
carrying in a crucified rodent,
pierced in talons, communion
for the family.

Let the homily be
the rolling summer thunder
rippling in the stained glass creeks
of rainbow trout. Let father
be sun giving life, the glaciers
carving granite, the mayflies
hatching on river rock.
Let mother be all things
named and not: the low
and high tides, pine-oak
and madrone, rising foothill,
valley floor, the way of growth
the way of death, the spring rain
in xylem, pulling life
from root to stem.

The Good Hunt

Erin O'Regan White

Safety off. The scope is trained. The crosshairs bisect a patch behind his shoulder blade. Exhale, then squeeze. The report is as crisp and honest as a temple bell.

As easy as breathing out, a life is taken.

The buck struggles back to his feet for a step, then two, then falls. Back to his feet to discover his shoulder is broken and lung punctured. Down again, up, then down for keeps.

I am grateful for my true aim and hot bullet, because my hands are shaking too hard to do anything but needless damage with a second shot. His life dissolves rapidly into the big sky, mingling with pine trees and birdsong and the fresh November air.

By the time we reach him, the soft, glassy eyes stare without seeing. I hand off the rifle to my boyfriend, Philip, and drop to my knees. One hand on the strong, still-hot swoop of the buck's neck, I look him in the eye and give him my thanks.

I am astonished by what I've just done.

I am not the most likely hunter. Although I was raised in Montana, my dad and brothers don't hunt and I didn't grow up hunting. I'm a middle-class, nearly middle-aged, gun regulation-supporting yogi. Unlike 89% of registered hunters in America, I am decidedly female. I am absolutely not a morning person. I simply don't fit the macho, gun-toting hunter-dude stereotype, which makes the barrier to entry that much more rigid. Hell, just to find a safety-orange vest in my size with all the features and pockets (and none of the pink), I had to shop in the boys' section at Sportsman's Warehouse.

So why would I learn to hunt as an adult? And how could I begin to reconcile killing animals with the yogic ethics and ethos that have come to shape my life?

In 2017, my friend Marcia offered to teach me how to hunt. She began hunting in adulthood, as a way to get outside and connect with her dad. Over the seasons, she came to value hunting for its own sake, for the challenge and payoff, for the balance of interdependence and self-reliance that it requires. Marcia is a

teacher, by trade and by nature, so she and another friend, Alex, started a group that teaches women how to hunt.

Marcia and I have spent a lot of time in the Montana woods together—camping, hiking, flyfishing, meandering with my kids. Honestly, the idea of wandering through the forest with a rifle and the intent to kill had never once entered my mind. When she asked me to join her on a women's hunt, I surprised myself with the enthusiasm of my answer.

A small handful of thirty- and forty-something women—mothers, nurses, non-profit directors, writers, scientists—gathered at Alex's cabin in the eastern shadow of the Mission Mountains near Condon, Montana. Two of us had never hunted before. I didn't even have to take hunter's safety, because I was born before 1985 and grandfathered in to Montana's sporting licenses. I struggled to shape my mind around the idea that I could just walk into the woods with a deer tag and a loaded rifle, pretend to know what I was doing, and call myself a hunter.

"But you're not going in alone. And you're not pretending," Marcia assured me over whiskeys after dinner. "You've got common sense and a mentor. You know Montana and you respect the wild. You can call yourself a hunter."

We woke the next morning at an hour I usually only experience once a day. I dressed in the dark as though I were going for a late autumn hike—lots of layers, lots of wool, plenty of Goretex—topped with a lurid flash of orange that only a hunter or a demented '80s aerobics instructor would choose.

Marcia and I paired up and made our way to the patchwork of public lands a mile or so from the cabin. It was still dark when we parked the car and hoisted our packs. She handed me the rifle she'd taught me to shoot.

"So, I can just load it?" I asked. Clearly, I didn't grow up with this. Guns were an alien idea until she took me under her wing. I still felt as though I were a kid who'd been handed a bazooka and told to have fun.

"You can just load it," she smiled. "With the safety on."

Right. Safety emphatically on, I pushed three cartridges into the magazine, clicked it in place, and chambered a round. We set into the woods, aiming for a line of lodgepole pines edging an overlook she'd scouted. The plan was to sit, silently, and hope for animals to start moving down below as the sun rose.

Knowing we'd be perched in the snow, I had cut up an old yoga mat to make sit-upons for us to put beneath us. I'd upcycled a modern accessory used in a five-thousand-year-old Indian spiritual practice to comfort my butt while cradling a gun and hoping to shoot a sentient being. When Whitman wrote of being large enough to contain multitudes, maybe this is what he meant.

We sat for hours, back to back, listening to grey squirrels and chickadees give away our position. We quietly passed a thermos of coffee back and forth. I amused myself with a mental retelling of the legend of Amergin, the warrior-bard who chanted Ireland into being for the Celts. It was the longest story I knew by heart—good for keeping me awake while killing time in silence.

We watched. We listened. Nothing came. This was hunting.

Ahimsa means non-harming. It is the first of the *yamas,* the ethical self-restraints that Patanjali described in the Yoga Sutras. A literal practice of *ahimsa* is easy: I don't squish the wood spiders that trundle across my floor, I don't punch people who piss me off, I don't exterminate the northern flickers that drill into my downspouts. If not killing or physically hurting others were all there is to *ahimsa*, then my answer to Marcia's invitation to hunt would've been a cut-and-dried no.

As with most worthwhile spiritual practices, *ahimsa* is deeper, slipperier, more complex than its literal, kindergarten-level application. It is as much about the mindset behind the actions as the actions themselves. I killed that whitetail, but I did not pull the trigger in rage or for the thrill of destruction. That buck sported a lone, puny, two-point antler—I didn't even do it for a trophy.

Historically, many yogis and Hindus have kept a vegetarian diet in order to stay true to *ahimsa*. The modern food system, however, is fraught with exploitation of the animals, crops, land, and workers that supply our sustenance. Given the exploitation of low-wage workers and the environmental expense that go into growing, picking, and shipping, say, soybeans, the ethical cost of eating tofu in Montana may very well be higher than eating a genuinely free-range, truly grass-fed deer that I hunt myself. As such, a thoughtful, fair-chase hunt is among the most ethical ways to harvest animals as food.

I know for certain that the deer I killed lived a good life in the land of his ancestors, grazing native grasses, drinking from the

Blackfoot River, and roaming the Montana wilds. I also know that his death was quick, and a damn sight better than being mauled by a bear, hit by a car, or slowly starving in an overpopulated valley during the course of a deep winter.

Turns out that shooting is the easy part.

After the life ebbs, there's a body to deal with, and bodies are messy. Blood, fur, fat, organs, fascia, bone, guts and guts and guts—these are all part of the prize. As I cut into the buck's warm pelt and peel back layers of fat and skin, I realize that opening the body of a very newly deceased beast will call a person's bluff. You've got the stomach for it or you don't.

I carefully trim open the abdominal cavity with a word of warning from Philip: "Go slowly, just hard enough to cut. You don't want to pierce the stomach. The acid and waste will ruin the meat." Right. He holds the ribs open so that I can find and sever the connective tissue keeping the belly organs in place. Hungry magpies and crawk-ing crows are already jockeying for position. They know a gut pile is coming.

We've radioed back to Philip's dad, Rusty, who was snoozing in the truck back at the trailhead. He trudges up with a jumbo black sled just as we shed the guts for the carrion birds. Rusty is a cardiac nurse practitioner and, when we free the heart from its bony cocoon, his eyes light up. He is always eager to offer an anatomy lesson, so much the better with a true-life learning prop. I bisect the organ and class begins.

"Now you can see all four chambers: atria, ventricles… There's the mitral valve. Oh! Put your finger here. That's the aorta."

I gently dip my index finger into a sinuous tube and my breath catches. All the blood of this creature's life pulsed through this ring. I marvel at the small honor of holding his heart, and of being the cause for its stillness.

Michael Pollan is at the head of a long line of writers who examine the ethics of where and how modern humans get their food. In his essay, "An Animal's Place," he writes, "Meat comes from the grocery store, where it is cut and packaged to look as little like parts of animals as possible. The disappearance of animals from our lives has opened a space in which there's no reality check, either on the sentiment or the brutality." Like most Americans,

I've been fairly out of touch with the animals that become my food. Although I choose local meat, eggs, and dairy from responsible farms and ranches as often as I can afford, I am still divorced from the lives and the processes involved.

The problem at the root of factory farming, Pollan contends, is unfettered capitalism. Considering the amount of time a person has to spend learning the land, understanding the animals, and just being quiet in the woods, hunting is a subversive act. It is a sharp counterpoint to unfettered capitalism and loud, voracious, American-style instant gratification. I choose to make meat-eating harder for me to do. I have to own the difficult acts of killing and butchering. I sure as hell value a pound of venison more than five pounds of Costco beef.

And making this choice is a privilege. If I didn't live close to public lands, if I didn't have friends and a boyfriend who hunt, if I didn't have enough money to pay for the tags or gear or ammo, hunting wouldn't be an option. Among the many vexations of unfettered capitalism is that people often have to choose between the most ethical options and the ones they can actually afford. It usually takes a cushion of security to be subversive.

Most hunting stories end triumphantly. They are fun to tell and thrilling to hear: Mighty hunter faces tricky odds, up against the hardships of nature and a cunning beast. It seems like he'll end the day with disappointment and a loaded rifle, but thanks to a lucky twist—victory!

But most hunting days don't actually end like this.

I passed four long days in the woods before I ever flicked the safety off. Four long, quiet, invigorating days of hiking, sitting, tracking, backtracking, whispering, guessing, and second-guessing before I had anything resembling a good look at the broadside of a buck. There was no assurance that I would come out of the woods with meat for the freezer. The last two seasons, my tags have gone unfilled. But a day in the backcountry is never wasted.

On this frozen November afternoon, two years after killing my first deer, the broad sky above the Garnet Range is draining its light fast. The snow has slowed to a mist of silver flurries as we pick a path down the hillside back to the disused Forest Service road that runs perpendicular to the slope. Push a few more yards

through a tangle of serviceberry bushes and, ohthankgod!, we can trudge out the last two miles on an established trail.

The day had started with promise. Philip and I came across large, fresh tracks only a mile or so into our hike and followed them up a narrow drainage. Elk being elk, the tracks twisted and wandered—up a hill, back down across the snow-packed stream, then weaving between thick Douglas firs as they ascended again. Philip stopped to cup a clump of yellow snow the beast left behind.

"Damn."

His face dropped as he offered his hands towards me. I inhaled and understood. It was pungent, to be sure, but it lacked the musky reek that unmistakably marks bull elk pee. Our hunting tags were for mature males and we had been tracking a female for the past hour. We left too much of our own scent behind for a bull to follow her.

Plan A, out the window. We spent the rest of the afternoon threading a cross-stitch pattern across the snow that blanketed the deep high-country forest. Eight miles up hillsides, over deadfall, under barren branches, we stepped as silently as our heavy boots and knee-high gaiters would allow.

And now, we've finally made it to the overgrown former logging road that'll guide us back to the trailhead on autopilot. Each step through mid-shin powder means marshaling the dregs of my energy to flex my leaden thighs and press through an alleyway of loitering larches. It could be delirium speaking, but I love it here.

"Wait! Stop."

Philip's whispered warning pierces my soggy mind, and I freeze in place.

"There. Do you see 'em? Pretty sure that one's a buck," he says. He lifts his binoculars to glass four mule deer that graze on the hillside less than a hundred yards from where we stand.

Isn't this just the way of things? I was so ready to be done for the day, to cruise on home with my lethargic quads and knotted shoulders. And here's a good-sized mule buck, consorting with his girlfriends and nosing through the snow for what's left of summer's greenery. He sees us, but is too preoccupied with food and sex to startle.

Without turning my head, I whisper, "I'll take a knee and scope him." I lift the butt of my rifle to my shoulder while sinking

as slowly as I can. The buck zooms to view in my scope, perfectly cross-haired. I call on years of yogic breathing practice and inhale with my diaphragm. Exhale. Hold.

Only now do I notice that the barrel flutters up and down with my pulse. This would not be a sure shot. I lower the rifle.

"You okay?" Philip quietly asks.

"Yeah," I say, my gaze still fixed on the deer. "I just realized how tired I am. Just need a couple breaths."

We could be squirrels or snowflakes, for all the deer's indifference to us. I laugh under my breath—this buck is so ruled by his stomach and his scrotum that he doesn't have the good sense to get the hell out of here. I shoulder the rifle again, center the crosshairs, and… one of his does walks right in front of him. Way to stand by your man, dolly.

I curse her for a while and, eventually, she drifts southward, leaving his flank exposed. Here's the shot. While I've been pissing around, twilight has elbowed the weak autumn sun below the ridgeline. My heart rate is still high. Haste and fatigue have polluted my mind. The barrel still swims. I could shoot the beast, watch him run away injured, and spend the last of shooting light hoping to chase him down and plug him 'til he drops.

"I'm done," I say. "I'm not taking it."

I stand up and sling my rifle across my back for the hike out. After the build of adrenaline and anticipation, a flow of disappointment and relief softens my muscles. We resume our trudge down the track and, finally, the deer startle up the hill. They bound as though on pogo sticks toward the rise, the buck bringing up the rear. He pauses amidst the firs to glance back over his shoulder.

I call to him, "Maybe next year, buddy!"

This was a good hunt.

Real News

Sheryl Guterl

Somewhere bombs explode,
earthquakes unsettle,
politicians quibble.

But here, beside the lake,
the only news is heard on the breeze
or caught by dreamy gaze.

Two herons patiently fish in shoreline weeds.

Tiny frogs hop nervously at water's edge.

Beaver swims busily from cove to reeds and back again.

Natural news not broadcast,
nor podcast, yet the pines whisper
all they know to the leaping bass,
the sunning turtles, and the
dragonflies dancing on the water.

The White Field

Douglas Cole

He hiked through most of the night, stopping only briefly to rest and to drink from his water jug. And he listened, listened hard. He heard no voices, no sound of engines or anything. He listened and heard only the sound of an owl hooting somewhere far off. Maybe they had called it off for the night. Maybe they would resume tomorrow. He wondered if they had gone to his brother. From the crown of his will he imagined his way to him, drifting toward him there in his cabin, his face blazing with light. He smiled, thinking of what his brother had said, and he reached up and touched the medicine pouch his brother had given to him. And at least in that moment, he was sure they would never find him.

Now the air was freezing. He had reached that height. He listened and located the sound of the river nearby, and he was sure in his mind where he was. He hung the flashlight back on his pack and hiked on in the pitch-black darkness, his steps purely instinctive but sure and unfaltering. And his vision went out inch by inch as into a stone, disclosing the structures around him, latticework of trees and arc of boulders and dip of canyon like a relief map in his mind, the green burst of the moss, the flaring red eyes of the creatures out there. He kept on going.

Late into the night he felt snow crunching under his feet. He took the canvas jacket out and put it on. It kept him warm and helped cushion the weight of the pack and the rifle. Coyotes howled somewhere far off, and a thin, crescent Cheshire moon rose grinning through the geometry of trees.

Finally, he stopped. He pulled off his pack and sat down on a rock. He sat there for a long time, listening, his shoulders hunched. All he heard at first was his own hard breathing. He saw absolutely nothing. After a while, his heart and his breathing slowed down. Still he heard nothing. He stayed that way for a long time, feeling dispersed and buried in that silence. At the first sign or sound of pursuers, he'd take off on the move again. He knew he couldn't stay there, but at this point, he couldn't imagine anyone following him in this darkness. The woods were dense and hard enough to navigate in the daylight without a trail, so he figured for anyone else it would be impossible now. He was deep in. And he

kept thinking of what his brother had said…you don't exist. Well, certainly the marks of his passing had been discovered back at his father's place. But at this point, at this time, he had essentially disappeared.

So now what? It occurred to him that it might be better to set up a dry camp and wait for daylight. No fire. But the thought of that invisible line ahead persisted. That line meant something. It had taken on a mystical charge. It meant safety. It meant freedom. And he felt like it was too risky to get his stuff out and set up a camp where he was. If they were following and should approach, he would have to move quickly, and he might not have time to gather up everything he needed. And he needed everything he had.

He put his pack on and made his way back to the river. He decided that above all else, he couldn't stop until he had crossed the river. Only a fool would try and cross it in the dark, so if he did cross it, then he could relax, if only for a moment. At least from there no one would be able to follow him. He approached the river and listened. The river was all he heard. He turned his light onto it and saw the obsidian current flowing. He saw some rocks, too, but they were too jagged to stand on. He pointed his light up and down the river, looking for a better spot to cross, but he couldn't tell. He could search all night and find nothing better, so he decided this was it.

He took a step out onto one of the rocks and immediately went in, his foot slipping off and going into the water, and he had that quick jolt of hope-fear that his foot would land somewhere not too far beneath the surface of the water and he'd climb his way out of it, but he went down hard and reached out and turning to his left lost all bearing and dropped fast and went underwater. He was lost. His left arm hit rock. His knees hit rock, and he lunged up and caught air and fell back and twisted around and rolled back under and flailed in water darkness, blind and breathless and moving in the current.

His foot hit and stopped, and he came up against another rock. His head seemed poised like an arrow in the current. And he thought, now he can pull himself up. Then his foot slipped, and he was taken up again, free flowing in the black. His movements made little difference. He was more a question or a thought than anything else. And he entered a calm, drifting, thinking, well this is it. He looked through the watery lens at the silver coin of moon

above, no notion of the shore. Odd thoughts came to him. This is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends. What form shall he take from the gallery as he rose and fell in the cool belly of the river? So be it. Then a sound of rushing wind came from somewhere, a sound that he realized was his own throat gasping as he broke the surface and took in air again. And turning, he caught hold miraculously to a slick, ropy branch and held himself against the fast force of the current and finally pulling himself back onto earth.

He was soaked through and through. He gasped and got to his feet and coughed and stumbled and felt himself and felt that he wasn't injured, as far as he could tell. He checked his things and found he'd lost his flashlight and his rifle. He was sorry to lose them both. The way would be much harder without them. And he breathed in the night air, harsh and cold, breathed and was relieved. He had made it across the river.

But he was cold, shaking down to the bone cold. His nose and his cheeks felt numb. His hands and feet were numb. He was beginning to shiver in a way that was dangerous. He felt a vague and menacing apprehension. And he knew the air around him was getting colder. He didn't know how high he was in terms of altitude, but he could feel the difference in the atmosphere. The risk of not building a fire was now a critical matter. He was susceptible to the elements. He was going to freeze to death if he didn't do something soon. So he decided to build a fire.

He found a spot in a clearing and searched around near the base of the trees for dry sticks and twigs and leaves and gathered up enough to get a fire started. His hands shook badly. The ground seemed dry, sheltered as it was by the canopy of the forest. He took off his pack and listened again and heard nothing. Okay, this would do. He opened his pack and took out a few of the cans and ripped off the labels to use for starting the fire. Perhaps they were still dry enough to burn. He couldn't tell. His hands felt lifeless. His fingers were numb. He couldn't feel the things he was touching. He had to concentrate to make his fingers move. He watched his hands working with a strange and distant awareness, as though he were watching another person's hands.

He crumpled up the paper labels and bits of dry leaves and twigs and tried to light a fire. This took real effort, coaxing a little flame to take. The matches were barely sparking. But soon enough

he had a fire started, and he found a few seasoned branches and broke them to make smaller pieces and coned them on the flames. Then he had a good campfire burning. And the heat of it began to grow, flowing into him. He collected a few more branches and rigged up some racks near the fire and hung his backpack there and his coat and watched them steaming in the heat. He stood with his back to the fire and felt his own wet clothes heating up and steam rising off his body. He turned and felt the warmth flowing up his chest and his face. Then, for a moment, he panicked, because he thought he might be making a mistake. Anyone nearby, anyone searching from above would be able to see his fire. But again, he fought that feeling back and stayed calm. The forest was thick, so he didn't need to worry about anyone seeing the light of the fire. This is what he told himself, absorbing the warmth and the light, letting his mind settle into the dance of the flames and the pitch-crackle of the wood.

Sensation came back to his hands and feet. And he kept feeding the fire, careful to protect the nucleus but not let it grow beyond a certain circumference. He didn't want a big fire, just a needfire to get him through this. And then he stood there. The cold had left him. But he felt something near. He felt like he was standing outside himself. Had he made it? He felt the surge of a familiar sensation, and his mind opened up, like a child on the first trip away from home. He was light, breathless, floating in space. What a beautiful sense of elation. He didn't want it to end. And it struck him. He was safe. For the moment, nothing was happening and he was clear. His mind flew back over the roads, the old house, the camp by the river, his brother's place. He was looking for something. Somehow, his flight had taken him over old ground, and a pattern seemed to show itself. A crooked smile.

Then something happened to his vision. Something clicked, and he felt like he was looking down a long tunnel. He felt pulled, like he was physically moving through that tunnel, even though he was only standing there. And something was near. No, someone. He felt it. But he couldn't see it. He knew it, though. He could feel the presence of it. He waited like someone in a haunted house. Ah, was this just fear again? A flash. Wait a minute. A sort of pale blue fire glowed out of everything. Was it close to dawn already? His sense of time was way off. Stay still, he thought. Then two green lights appeared, shining through the trees. Stay still. He fought a

growing sense of panic, an urge to make a quick decision and run. But concentrating like that, he kept himself out of it. Then he felt his body again. He made himself feel his body again. And then he saw a pair of eyes.

He was transfixed, staring straight into those eyes in the forest dark. What, are you come at last, he thought. It had to be. What he had been running from was materializing before him, now. The mystery had found a form. He gazed at it and it at him in a moment of perfect symmetry. Then it turned, and leaving his pack, leaving the fire, he followed. Quietly into the dark, nothing followed nothing, he went. The obstacles of the forest, the interlocking fallen branches, the holes, the uneven ground were nothing. As much as he believed his feet touched anything, he was gliding on his way. And he could feel whatever it was breathing up ahead of him, taking on a panther form. If he made out anything at all beyond the eyes it was the sleek black shape of it in the moonlight. No reason here. He was not following that way. There was nothing reasonable about any of this, its presence or his. So he followed. This is the way. He felt the truth of it. But this was not a process of thought. Where it was going, he was going. And he was sure that this was right. It was a piece of the great nothing come to lead him out of the maze. In his life, he had never felt more calm, more comforted. It could lead him off a cliff and he would follow. It could go on past that, and he would follow and keep on following. So he matched his strides to its strides, his pace to its pace, and in that darkness, he didn't falter but went on. He had no idea where he was going or where he had ever been. He was simply going. And in the going, he became something else, a voice speaking out of nothing, saying, and if I told you I used to know the circular truth of the void and that I have been all over it building this breadth and scope, going for however many lines… as it rippled its shoulders that were steeped in the power of escape and parting the darkness, and that his going was to go up and out of all of it at dead of night, well believe me too when I say that I am speaking to you from where I was shook off, like this, where it turned and shrugged me off…and he stopped there still and silent at the dead of night and heard nothing, no further, as clear as if spoken, as if the air itself had said enough.

So he turned and made his way back to the river. He didn't try to figure out what happened. He just knew. It seemed as if he'd

only taken a few steps away from his campsite. And he went back to his fire and crouched there beside it and felt the stars crawl across his back and the forest folding its wings. And he kept his fire going, but he didn't sleep. He listened. No voices came during this time. He had moved past that. He had entered that quiet space where nothing comes. All was stillness. And he stayed there as long as he could, as long as he could make it last.

It was gradual at first, almost indistinguishable, a gray glowing forth of the trees, a gathering of substance in the earth around him. He was coming out of the darkness again, into the world again. So he gathered his things and settled his pack onto his shoulders and cinched it tight and kicked the dirt over the place where he had built his fire. He scattered the heap of twigs he'd gathered. He scuffed up the ground where he had been. He did a good job of erasing any trace of his being there. And he moved on.

In the twilight he made his way. And as he went, he could feel something in the forest change. He noticed it in the light. Not the light of growing day, but something else, the way the light was coming through, the way it was reaching him. The trees were more spread out, now, and he saw farther on through the gaps between them. He was approaching new ground.

And then, he was in an open space, a land between darkness and light where the forest ended and another landscape began. He felt like a creature emerging from hibernation as he moved out of the trees. He saw the world spread out, the white waves of snow glowing out and away. And the sun broke its eastern plane, light flowing over the clouds, clouds rolling deep through the valleys to the west and below him, mountain peaks rising like islands. He was up above it all in a dreamsea sky, seeing in every direction. And he went forward, one black quill tip of a hawk far ahead of him scripting its way on the cool arc of wind. What beauty! What glory! he thought. And he went on, thinking, I'll try, I'll try my luck again, going into the white field.

Teklanika

Iain Twiddy

They say thoughts are water, shallow—
they flush in, flash, and then go,
a blank traffic passing through, clinging

to nothing; so I don't know why mine
keep returning to the stark green sweep,
the gem of the land hacked from the vault,

where the light pines, and the stars pin in,
where the stones shoaled at the mountains' feet
braid a river ever redefining,

recomposing its singing lines,
the water every second breathless,
and blinking, wide-eyed carried away;

don't know why such thoughts have me feel
somewhere I have never been, more deeply
than anywhere on the surface I live.

In the Forest of Changbaishan

Kit Rohrbach

The tree root forms the glyph
for rabbit in *cao shu*, grass script

a whisper for rabbits
to shelter beneath
Here you are safe
Here you may sleep

wise and ancient daimyo oaks
speak in slow growth

I lie down
with the roots and the rabbits
in the forest of Changbaishan
my ear to the earth

Dieback, Beetlekill

Laura Pritchett

The Kauri tree in front of me is 700 years old, only a teenager, a huge broccoli floret that skyrockets above all the tumble of bizarre greenery of this New Zealand forest. The tree looks monstrously healthy, though the KAURI DIEBACK signs and gates warn me otherwise. When I stop to scrub and spray my shoes, as required before entering most hikes around here, I read about the fungus that is killing these trees, spread by only a pinhead-sized amount of dirt.

I scrub more, spray more, and it occurs to me that this required stop feels like a gong. A mindfulness reminder. A call to be aware of my presence and the effect I unknowingly have on all around me. A hike is no longer just a hike, it's a time to reflect on the power of small-but-pervasive things, such as the fact that something so miniscule can take out such enormous and old trees.

I stop in front of a trunk, blue-gray and smooth and flaking off in big circles, as if a rock has hit a pond. I spread my arms to feel small—the trunk of this tree is wider than I am tall. What a glorious past—the kauri are a species of conifer that was once widespread during the Jurassic period but are now found only here. What an uncertain future, one that includes words like *dieback*, which strikes me as a funky, odd New Zealandy term, though it also reminds me of my native Colorado's word *beetlekill*, used to describe the dead forests at the hand of a beetle. The terms are accurate, but they bother me, perhaps because just by being words, they normalize the situation.

Kill.

Die.

Who likes words like that?

The words *dieback* and *beetlekill* also imply action, an ongoing situation, and thus they feel like verbs. Even on this glorious hike, I feel some despair. These are hard times, both to be an American and to live on Planet Earth. Eco-grief and Democracy-grief are real. And we are right in the middle of it all, verb-like, seeing things change around us so rapidly.

It feels like a pervasive fungus is creeping, poisoning, spreading—the fungus of economies and social inequalities that

lead to climate change and camps where children are separated from mothers.

All I know is that this is an important time. A time of upheaval, of questioning our assumptions, of questioning our values. The question is: How can we scrub?

I pause in front of another enormous tree and consider: these trees are one of the longest living on the planet, the lifespan being 1000 to 2000 years, and they are also one of the world's largest. Standing near one makes me feel so very small, because I *am* so very small, and I can imagine how the Maori built *waka taua*—war canoes—and a single trunk could house 180 warriors. A single trunk! These trees are *enormous*.

And yet, a fungus.

Like a virus, like a beetle—little things can bring big things *down*.

While staring at the tree in front of me, I realize *dieback* is a good word for what I feel is endangering the passion of my life—writing books, reading books. The literary world is experiencing dieback at the hands of the zeitgeist of our times.

For one thing, there are fewer readers, and I get it—I've had a hard time reading myself in this last year of political turmoil. But on top of that, this is a tough time for many writers. For many of us, there has been the overarching question of *relevance*. And what to *do* to be relevant. Some things just don't seem to be fundamentally worthy anymore, or not at this point in time. A novel I write might change some minds, but it can't directly help shelter or comfort a child on the US-Mexico border, nor will it change climate change policy in the near future.

Art itself can be a huge cultural force, and sure, my novels might be a drop in the sea of that rising—I hope that's true!—but the novel I'm working on here in New Zealand is simply not going to do much for a kid in need. Listening to the bizarre Tui bird won't change the sounds of all that is suffering. Me watching the waves of the Tasman Sea roar onto shore does nothing to stop the roars of hate or intolerance, and not only that, it does nothing to encourage our species' evolution and grace. Who cares if I'm enjoying the waves, feeling restored, amused by the birds? Who cares about my woes and my joys and my creative

processes and the plot of my next novel? Not a child on the border, that's for damn sure—that child needs a blanket and a hug and a government that will foster her.

Hence the dieback of my writing spirit, because it's hard to keep feeling energized about something that doesn't feel relevant to the fungus at hand.

I yearn to get it back. As I hike through the New Zealand jungle, I wonder what many of us wonder: How to find the energy and spunk to be the *opposite* of dieback, beetlekill?

It's easy to catch predators like the possums and rats and cats, which kill birds around here, even to extinction, but it's pretty hard to stop a fungus. So intangible, so pervasive, so small and yet so powerful. Indeed, the scrub stations seem like a shot in the dark. A friend here in New Zealand tells me that indeed all this effort to spray and scrub our shoes might just be greenwashing, because the wild pigs spread the fungus too, and by closing certain areas to all humans, including hunters, the situation might just get worse.

I consider the Kauri tree's trunk, with its concentric patterns on the bark, truly as if someone has thrown a pebble into the lake of its hard surface. I am no expert on fungi or pigs or policy, but I can recognize the wish to do something tangible, to put up big gates with warning signs and disinfectant bottles, announcing an effort to try.

I realize I have done the same in my own life. In the last few years of increasing planetary and human distress, I turned my attention to teaching. It was a conscious choice in a way, although I couldn't articulate it very well at the time—but teaching seemed tangible. It seemed worth a try. It's a cliché thing, to say that hope resides in the young. But clichés are clichés for a reason—they speak to something true—and there is indeed something about teaching that feels solid. The students, sturdy creatures made of blood and bone, will hopefully go forth to become writers and policy makers and advocates. As I hike, I hope this idea greenwashing my soul—I hope my work is of actual benefit.

Teaching. Reading. Hiking. These three are as close to spirituality as I get—and they have been the best teachers of my life. Teaching offers me focus and concern. Literature teaches me

empathy. Nature teaches me mindful awareness. All offer wisdoms about knowing the landscape and the people around me. All raise my spirits. All give me the opportunity to fall in love with each day. All give me the opposite of dieback—they give me *life*.

I hike through palm and Pohutukawa trees and ferns—so much verdant growth!—and consider new words. What is the opposite of *dieback*? Or of *beetlekill*?

Life force.
Life-return.
Live-well.
Resilient-Writing.
Nature-Whole.
Rewilding-Wilderness.

I have to accept it: This is what I have. This is all I have. This is enough. It has to be enough.

I don't know what will happen to these trees, and I don't know how to stop beetlekill, and I don't know how to shelter all the children who need sheltering. But I do know we are living in an important time, and that I can keep trying, metaphorically, to spray my shoes. When I finish my hike, I stop to scrub and disinfect, taking extra care to do it well, because, well, that is what I can do. I look up the mountain and thank the forest, ask it for one further gift, which is the gift of spunk and energy, which is the fungus we need.

Sharing Tarn Water

Margaret Koger

Settle near the inlet
        welcome the damp
                mossy air, clean smell

The pool mirrors your face
        your elbows bend
as you inhale—

Yes, go on, settle
        on palms and knees
                leaning forward

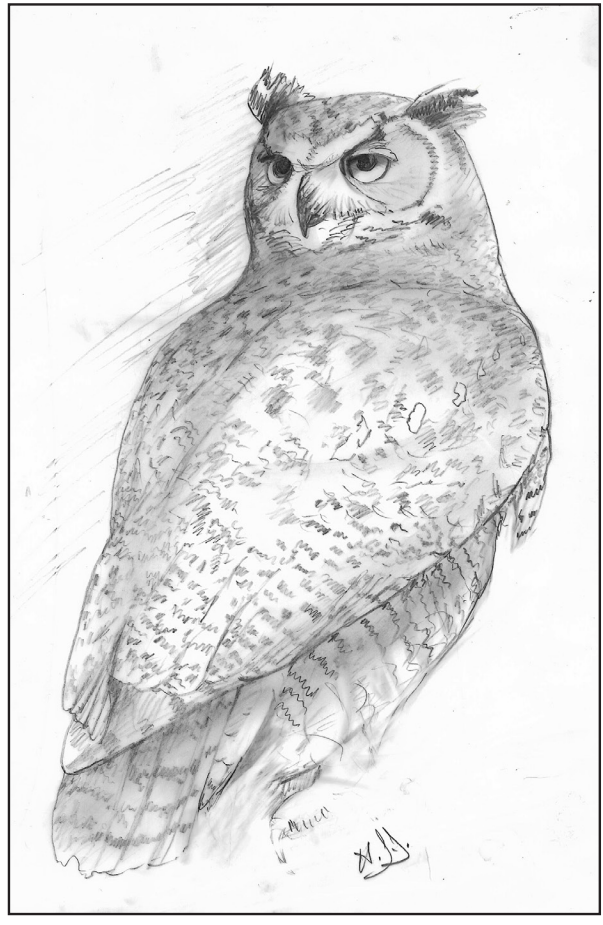
Your face disappears
        as cool water surrounds
                lips, mouth, chin

You must sip gently
        savor the clear liquid
                careful not to breathe

        only swallow
                swallow
                        swallow—

Then rise, step back slowly
        wipe your chin
                walk away—

Glance over your shoulder
        see a doe stepping forward
                it's her turn.



GREAT HORNED OWL

Contributors' Notes

Jose Alcantara has worked as a bookseller, mailman, commercial fisherman, baker, house-framer, studio photographer, door-to-door salesman, and math teacher. Though he was born in New Jersey, Jose was drawn to Alaska where he spent four summers living in his tent and eating lots of ramen and broccoli.

Dick Anderson, Creative Consultant for the Psychotherapy Networker, is a writer, songwriter, and photographer. Dick's wilderness memoir, *Solo: Venturing Alone in the Northern Wilds*, is available online at Amazon, IndieBound, Barnes & Noble, Atmosphere Press, and elsewhere. Dick lives in Takoma Park, Maryland and River Ridge, West Virginia. *www.solobydickanderson.com*

Ellie Anderson lives in Bellevue, WA. She has won the Eyster Prize and SMK award for short fiction and been nominated for Pushcart. She has only recently been submitting and placing poetry. She is looking for an agent for a novel. To read more, please visit her website: *www.elliejanderson.com*

Peter Anderson lives with his family on the western slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains where he helped launch the Crestone Poetry Festival, an annual gathering of southwestern poets. Visit his website at *petehowardanderson.com*

Jack B. Bedell is Professor of English at Southeastern Louisiana University where he also edits *Louisiana Literature*. His latest collection is *Color All Maps New* (Mercer University Press). He served as Louisiana Poet Laureate 2017-2019.

Sarah M. Brownsberger is a poet, essayist, novelist, and Icelandic-English translator. Her wilderness experience has been green and gray, colored by the mosses of Cascadian forests and of Iceland's lava moors. *sarahbrownsberger.com*

Katie Budris has a Creative Writing MFA from Roosevelt University. Her poems have appeared in over a dozen journals, and two chapbooks with Finishing Line Press: *Mid-Bloom* (forthcoming, 2021) and *Prague in Synthetics* (2015). She is Lecturer of Writing Arts at Rowan University and Editor-in-Chief of *Glassworks*.

Mathew Channer is a writer, blogger and adventurer from small-town Western Australia. When he is not planting trees or getting himself lost in the Canadian wilderness, he can be found living in his van somewhere along the Australian coastline, surfing, exploring, and occasionally writing things down. *www.mathewchanner.com*

Douglas Cole has published six collections of poetry, *Ghost*, a novella, and *The White Field*, a novel. He was nominated twice for a Pushcart and Best of the Net and received the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry. He lives and teaches in Seattle, Washington. *douglastcole.com*

Eli Coyle is currently an MFA poetry candidate at the University of Nevada, Reno. Eli grew up in the California Central Valley and has spent the last ten summers backpacking through the state. Last summer his adventures took him to Evolution Valley, a paradise deep in the Sierra.

Benjamin Cutler is a high school English teacher, award-winning poet, and author of *The Geese Who Might be Gods* (Main Street Rag, 2019). He lives with his family in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina where he frequents the local rivers and trails, often with a fly rod in hand.

Matt Daly likes standing in rivers or near them. He is especially fond of standing in or near rivers that are closer to their origin springs and glaciers than they are to dams.

Director/Tribal Archivist at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, **Dr. Deidra Suwanee Dees** follows Muscogee stompdance traditions. She teaches Native American Studies at the University of South Alabama. A Harvard and Cornell graduate, she writes poetry in her head while canoeing at sunrise on ancestral Muscogee waterways. *Heleswv heres, Mvto*.

Heather Durham is an essayist and naturalist from the Pacific Northwest. Her first memoir-in-essays, *Going Feral: Field Notes on Wonder and Wanderlust,* includes the essay herein. Her second, *Wolf Tree: A Personal Ecopsychology*, is forthcoming from Homebound Publications in 2022. She works with other wildlings at Wilderness Awareness School. *heatherdurhamauthor.com*

Dennis Eagan spent most of his life as a wilderness guide and outdoor educator. He has been teaching yoga since 1998 and loves blending eastern practice with the wild. He has just completed his first book: *In the Wake of the Aleut: Kayaking the Sea Otter Trail.*

Mary Emerick started backpacking at age five. She works for the US Forest Service and has received the national Aldo Leopold Award for Wilderness Stewardship. One of her proudest achievements is section hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. She is the author of three books. *maryemerick.com*

Dagne Forrest lives in a small town west of Canada's capital with several other humans, a labrador retriever who doesn't bark, three cats, and a small flock of chickens. Wild spaces shape her poetry, both directly and indirectly. No day is complete without a walk in the woods. *dagneforrest.com*

Janet Goldberg, born in the northeast, moved westward for graduate school and fell in love with California. Her novel *The Proprietor's Song*, set in California's mountains and deserts, will be published in summer 2023: *https://www.regalhousepublishing.com/janet-goldberg/*. When not teaching, Janet spends her time swimming, hiking, and biking.

Regina Gort is a poet, a chef who prefers thimbleberries to huckleberries, and mother of three daughters. She lives in the Upper Pennisula of Michigan where fiddleheads, chantarelles and skinny dips are abundant. *www.poetryisahouse.com*

Sheryl Guterl, a retired educator from New Jersey, moved to New Mexico for more sunshine, less ice, and taller mountains. She enjoys all things outdoors, including walking her dog, hiking mountain or bosque trails, and gaping at the night sky. When forced indoors, Sheryl reads, writes, and bakes bread.

Aiden Heung currently lives in Shanghai. He is the current poet-in-residence at Swatch Art Peace Hotel and attends Varuna Australia national writers' house master class. He was born in a Tibetan autonomous mountain village, a place he never leaves behind though he's been living in various cities.

Marybeth Holleman is author of *The Heart of the Sound, Among Wolves,* and the forthcoming *tender gravity*. Raised in North Carolina's Smokies, she transplanted to Alaska's Chugach after falling for Prince William Sound two years before the Exxon Valdez oil spill. She's happiest in places where humans are outnumbered. *www.marybethholleman.com*

A professional painter for the last 40 years, **Jon Janosik**'s paintings and illustrations have been exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution, Carnegie Museum, Edinburgh Museum UK, and the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, and commissioned for the National Geographic Society, Readers Digest Association, Nature Conservancy, Carnegie Museum and Audubon Society.

Margaret Koger is a retired school media specialist with a writing habit who lives near the Boise River. She was raised on an acreage where she roamed the fields with her dog Buck. She's thrilled to recall multiple excursions in the Idaho wilds and plans to enjoy many more.

Retired from the National Park Service, **Deb Liggett** now writes and makes her home in Tucson, Arizona. Deb scrambled, paddled, and camped her way from seasonal ranger to park superintendent in assignments that crossed the nation. She still measures success by the number of nights spent sleeping on the ground.

Laurinda Lind hikes it off in New York's North Country. A Keats-Shelley Prize winner and Pushcart Prize nominee with publications in *Blueline, Kestrel, Reckoning, Spillway,* and *TIMBER* (etc.), she thinks a leg/lung affinity for steep hills is why a bout with Covid and a stroke didn't kill her this year.

Stephen S. Lottridge was a professor of Russian literature and a clinical psychologist. Educated on the coasts, he is a native of the mountain and sagebrush west. A resident of Jackson, Wyoming, he is the father of three adopted children, all of whom he raised to gravitate toward the wild outdoors.

Mark MacAllister grew up in northern Illinois, spent a great deal of time on his grandparents' dairy farm in Wisconsin's Driftless region, and learned to write at Oberlin College. Mark now lives in Pittsboro, North Carolina and takes frequent hiking trips to the Wisconsin Northwoods and to Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Jeffrey S. Markovitz is a writer and educator living in Philadelphia. His affinity for the wild is perpetual, aching, and insatiable. *www.jeffreysmarkovitz.wordpress.com*

Susan Marsh lives in Jackson, Wyoming. Her work explores the relationship of humans to the wild and how caring for other beings helps people care about each other. She is the author of an award-winning novel, *War Creek*, a poetry chapbook, *This Earth Has Been Too Generous*, and ten non-fiction books.

James McVey has long been drawn to the wild backcountry, in such places as the American West, Chilean Patagonia, and the Khumbu region of northeast Nepal. His fifth book, *Loon Rangers*, is to be published this year by Saddle Road Press. He lives in Eldora, Colorado.

John Means has published haiku, poems, short stories, novel excerpts, and two geological guidebooks. He loves to get purposely lost in the woods, blunder through briars, climb over rock fields, and dance across creeks. He used to go canoeing in winter, but a few years ago he wimped out on that.

Benjamin Murray is a graduate of Eastern Washington University's MFA program. He enjoys roaming the woods of the PNW for Sasquatch and kayaking rivers. His work has appeared in numerous journals including *Arkana*. His flash piece, "So, Coach Andrews Interrogates Me," was shortlisted for *Columbia Journal*'s special edition on Uprising.

Originally from Liverpool, **Harry Owen** moved to South Africa from UK in 2008. Outspoken in his commitment to the natural world and a passionate advocate of poetry for social consciousness and change, he is the author of eight collections. He lives amongst wine and mountains in the spectacular Western Cape.

Ren Pike grew up in Newfoundland. Through sheer luck, she was born into a family who let their kids run wild in the woods. Her work has appeared in *Confluence*, *IceFloe Press* and *FEED*. When she's not writing, she dreams about small boats and open seas.

Susan Pope's family left New York for Alaska when she was five. She thrived in a place surrounded by the wild, facing adventure and disaster in equal measure. She has never lost this thrill of exploration and discovery. It has carried her to wild places all over world. *www.susanpope.org*.

Laura Pritchett's work is rooted in the natural world. Her five novels have garnered numerous awards, including PEN USA, High Plains Book Award, and the Milkweed National Fiction Prize. The author of two nonfiction books and editor of three environmental-based anthologies, she directs the MFA in Nature Writing at Western Colorado University. *www.laurapritchett.com*

Erin Robertson was raised by Walnut Creek, Lake Erie, Morse Mountain, and South Jersey's salt marshes. She teaches outdoor nature writing classes for children in Louisville, Colorado (*www.wildwriters.org*). Find her poetry in the *North American Review, Poet Lore, SageGreenJournal.org*, and elsewhere. *www.erinrobertson.org*, *www.robertsonrambles.com*

Kit Rohrbach has been writing poetry for a while now about whatever catches her fancy. After reading a hypothesis by ecologist Suzanne Simard that trees communicate with each other via their root systems, the obvious question became 'What would they tell us if only we knew how to listen?'

Eric Paul Shaffer broke up a raucous and vicious fight between four Mynas in his driveway this morning. Yup, that's life, noisy, messy, contentious, and fun. Reading, writing, playing guitar poorly, and running are his other pastimes. Shaffer teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at Honolulu Community College.

Sam Sharp is a writer, hiker, harmonica player and amateur naturalist. As a recent college graduate, he's currently working on different projects that combine science and art, intellectual and emotion, nature and humanity. When he isn't writing, you can find him on the trail, in the lab, or biking down the road.

Mary Lewis Sheehan, our cover artist**,** resides with her husband in rural New Hampshire, Florida, and Nova Scotia. A mother and new grandmother, she treasures both her family and her tribe of writers and artists. Metaphors capture her, and she dwells in them for a time in poetry and paint.

Brad Shurmantine lives in Napa, CA, where he writes, reads, tends three gardens (sand, water, vegetable), takes care of chickens, cats, and bees, and works on that husband thing. He backpacks in the Sierras and travels when he can, and has a serious passion for George Eliot. *bradshurmantine.com*

Anne McCrary Sullivan is a Florida Master Naturalist and an Everglades specialist. She has paddled over a thousand miles in the mangrove areas of Everglades National Park. She is co-author of *Paddling the Everglades Wilderness Waterway* and (forthcoming) *The Everglades: Stories of Grit and Spirit from the Mangrove Wilderness.*

Fred Swanson has been exploring and writing about the wild lands of the western U.S. for the past half century and finds them no less entrancing now than when he started. *www.fredswansonbooks.com*

Patricia Thrushart's work celebrates the wilds of Northern Appalachia. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Watershed Journal*, a regional literary magazine, and on the website *North/South Appalachia*. Her work has been published in *Tiny Seed*, *Tobeco*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, and *High Shelf Press*.

Kim Trainor is the granddaughter of an Irish banjo player and a Polish faller who worked in logging camps around Port Alberni in the 1930s. When not hiking the back country she lives in Vancouver, unceded homelands of the Xwməθkwəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

Iain Twiddy was born in the flatlands of eastern England, studied literature at university, then lived for many years in the snowlands of northern Japan. His poetry has appeared in *Harvard Review, The Common*, *Salamander*, *Illuminations*, *The Blue Mountain Review*, and elsewhere.

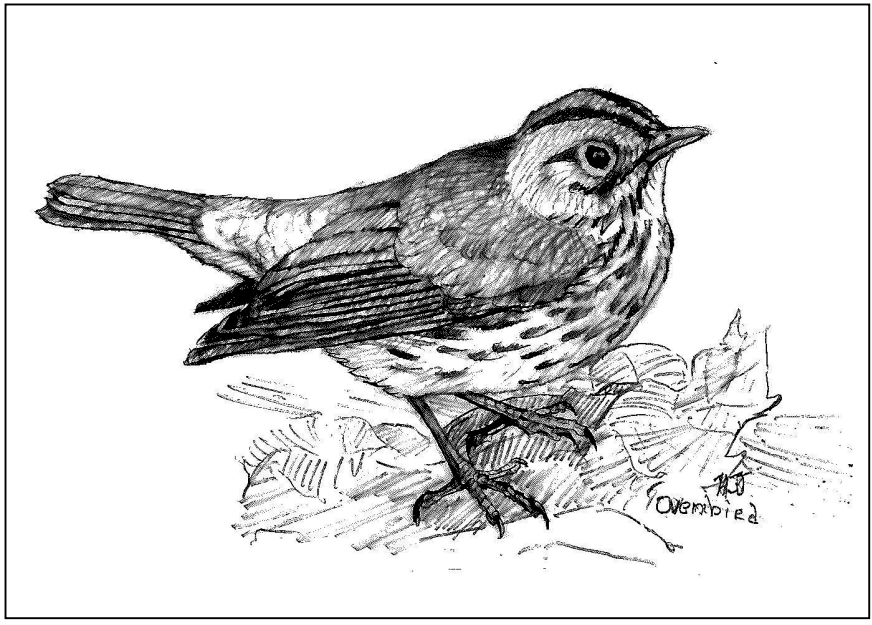
Cassie Van Domelen is a writer, musician, and visual artist who cut her teeth hiking and canoeing through the wildlands of the West. She lives and works on a farm in rural Oregon with her husband, a trusty dog, and a passel of poultry and ungulates.

Wendy Videlock lives with her husband on the edge of a cliff at the foot of the Grande Mesa in Palisade, Colorado, where the quail and coyote roam. Her books are available from Able Muse Press and EXOT.

Erin O'Regan White grew up exploring the woods and creeks around Missoula, Montana, that river-ribboned land of writers and wanderers. She backpacks in the summer, hunts in the fall, and photographs wildflowers during the blooming season. She's a writer, yoga teacher, and an MFA student at the University of Montana.

Robin Woolman was never much of a peak bagger but loves a scramble. Marmot country is her favorite terrain—plenty of that in the Northwest where she teaches physical theater. 2020 quarantines got her writing again, which is a kind of trail finding. Publications include *Global Poemic, Cirque*, and *Poeming Pigeon*.

Lauren Young, our Undergraduate Poetry Contest winner, lives in southern Connecticut. She has just completed her first year at the University of Connecticut, where she is an English major. When not writing, she enjoys taking short walks, sipping tea, and listening to music.



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Credits

The following work has been previously published and is reprinted here by permission of the authors:

- "Canoeing the Kenai" by Dick Anderson, is excerpted, in slightly different form, from his wilderness memoir, *Solo: Venturing Alone in the Northern Wilds* (Atmosphere Press, 2021).
- "Barbies in the Backcountry" by Peter Anderson in *Heading Home: Field Notes* (Bower House/ Conundrum, 2017).
- "Going Behind the Glacier" by Sarah M. Brownsberger, in slightly different form, in *International Poetry Review*, Spring 1985.
- "Muscogee Pearls" by Dr. Deidra Suwanee Dees in her chapbook *Vision Lines: Native American Decolonizing Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: TA Publications, 2004).
- "Catch and Release" by Heather Durham in *Going Feral: Field Notes on Wonder and Wanderlust* (Trail to Table Press, an imprint of Wandering Aengus Press, 2019).
- "Yesterday, on the familiar trail" by Marybeth Holleman in *Cirque*, Summer Solstice 2010.
- "Moratorium" by Laurinda Lind in *Passager,* Winter 2017.
- "Three White Pelicans" by Stephen S. Lottridge in *Nature's Healing Spirit: Real Life Stories to Nurture the Soul,* edited by Sheri McGregor, Sowing Creek Press, 2018; and in *Three White Pelicans: Stories for Stephanie and Deirdre* (Deep Wild Press, 2021).
- "Upper Hutcheson" by James McVey in *The Way Home: Essays on the Outside West* (University of Utah Press, 2010).
- "Canyon" by Susan Pope in *Bluestem,* Spring, 2011, Vol. XXII, No. 2.
- "One Hundred and One" by Eric Shaffer, Jose Alcantara and Matt Daly in *Clerestory Poetry Journal*, Jackson Hole Writers Conference Special Issue, 2017.
- "Ode to the Slow" by Wendy Videlock in *The Hudson Review*, July 2019.

Thank you…

…for joining us on these wilderness forays in this third issue of *Deep Wild: Writing from the Backcountry*, the home for creative work inspired by journeys to places where there are no roads.

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Submissions are open in the fall for the following year's issue. We welcome the opportunity to consider poetry, fiction, non-fiction, book reviews, and art that are true to our mission. See *deepwildjournal.com/submissions* for full guidelines and exact deadlines.

Each year, we sponsor a no-fee student writing contest. Check the website in the fall for details of the upcoming year's contest.

To stay in touch, follow us on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, or on our blog at *deepwildjournal.com/blog*.

Happy hiking, climbing, kayaking, skiing, rafting, snowshoeing, canoeing…living!

"The most alive is the wildest."
Henry David Thoreau