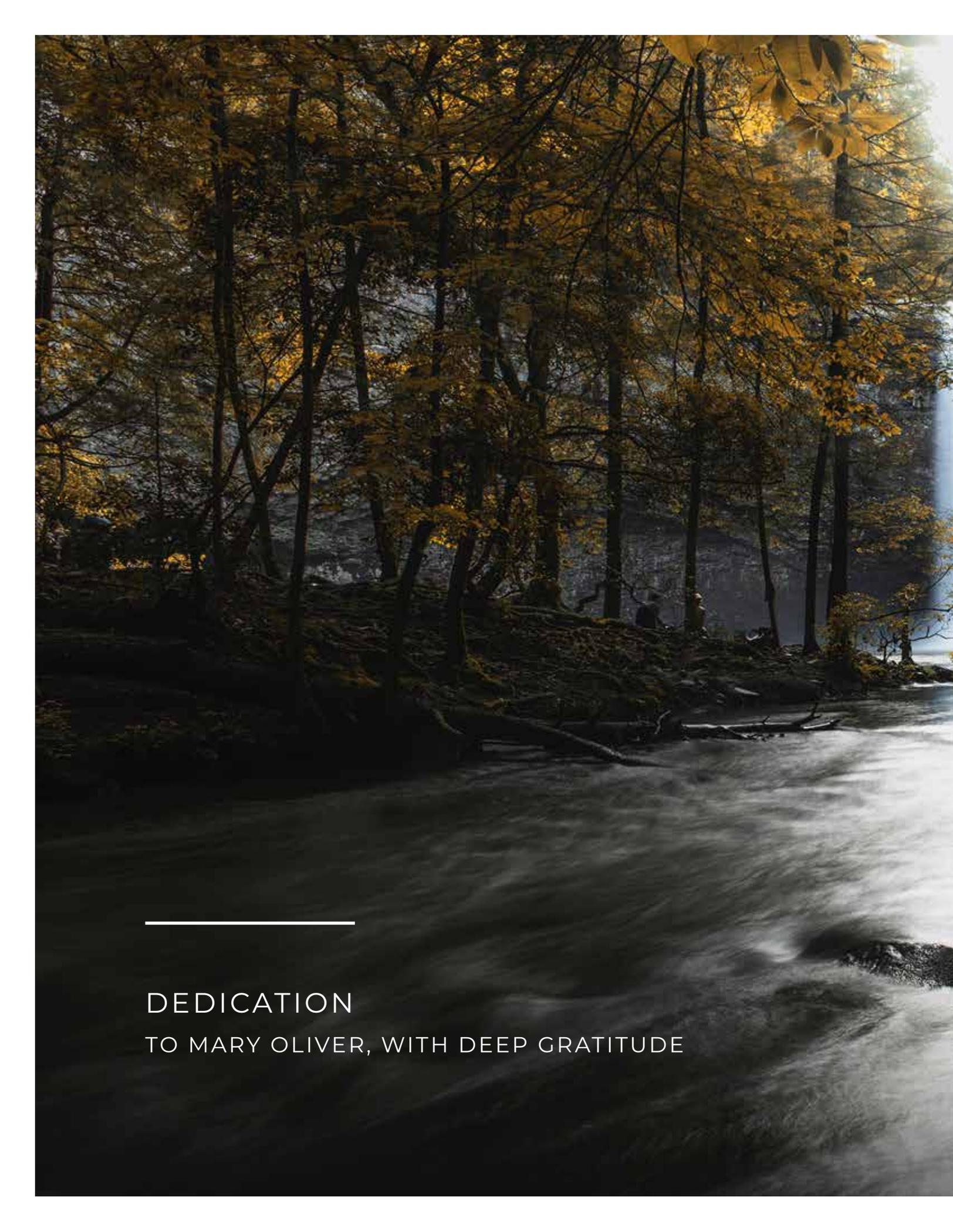




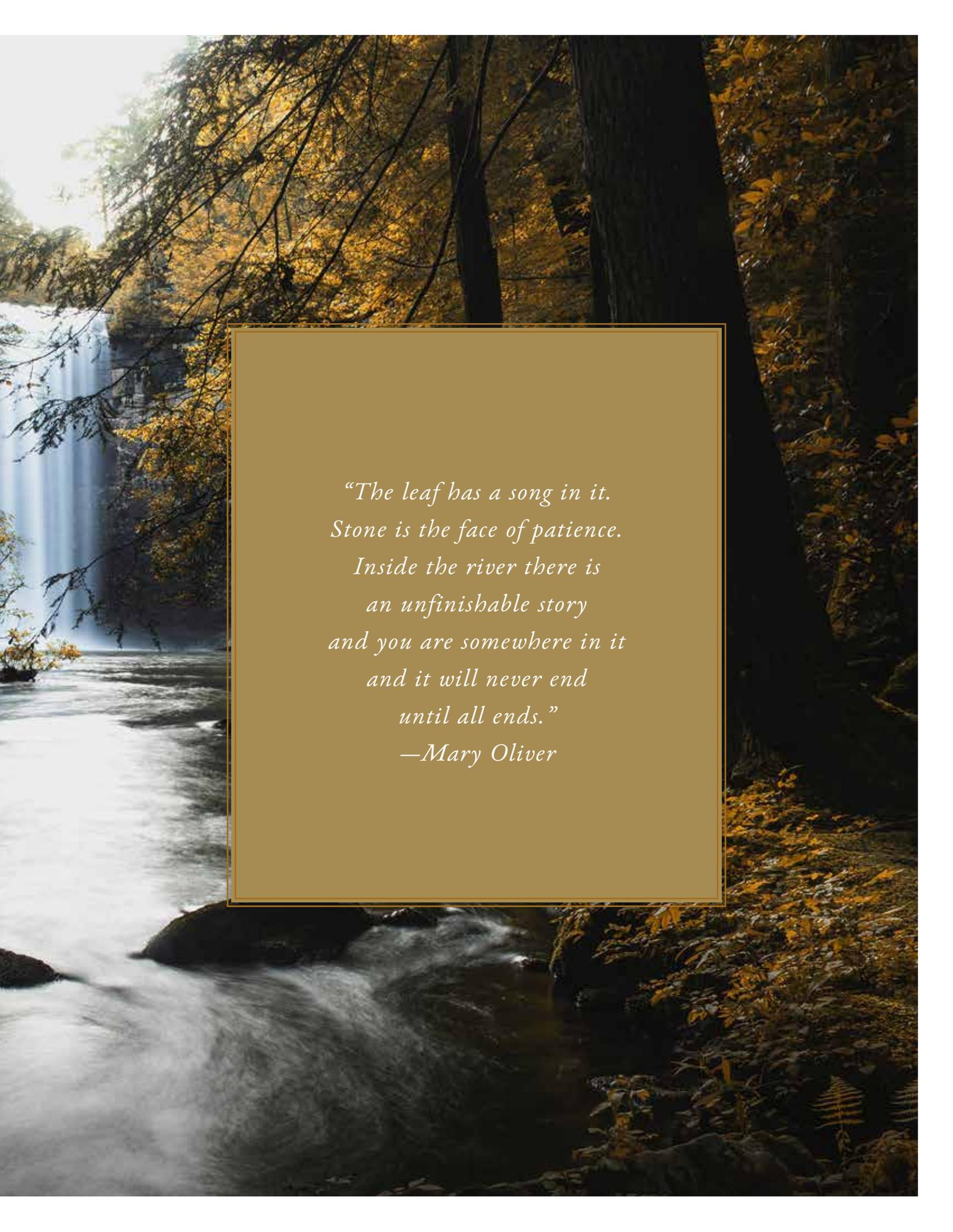
*The*  
WAYFARER

SPRING 2019 | VOL. 8 ISSUE 1

RE-IMAGINING THE POSSIBLE ✨ CHARTING THE WAY FOR CHANGE

A long-exposure photograph of a forest stream. The water is blurred, creating a sense of movement. The surrounding trees have golden-yellow autumn foliage. The scene is dimly lit, with light filtering through the trees. A white horizontal line is positioned above the text.

DEDICATION  
TO MARY OLIVER, WITH DEEP GRATITUDE



*“The leaf has a song in it.  
Stone is the face of patience.  
Inside the river there is  
an unfinishable story  
and you are somewhere in it  
and it will never end  
until all ends.”  
—Mary Oliver*





*The*  
**WAYFARER**

RE-IMAGINING THE POSSIBLE ✦ CHARTING THE WAY FOR CHANGE

Welcome to the spring edition of *The Wayfarer* magazine.

*Never doubt that a small group of inspired volunteers  
can change the world. In fact, its the only thing that ever has.*

—MARGARET MEAD

Since 2012, *The Wayfarer* has been offering literature, interviews,  
and art with the intention to inspire our readers,  
enrich their lives, and highlight the power for agency  
and change-making that each individual holds.

By our definition, a wayfarer is one whose inner compass is  
ever-oriented to truth, wisdom, healing, and beauty in their own  
wandering. *The Wayfarer's* mission as a publication is to foster  
a community of contemplative voices and provide readers with  
resources and perspectives that support them in their own journey.

As we move into our 7<sup>th</sup> year, in the face of these frightening times  
we must endure, we renew our commitment to our readers to  
be a space of solace and our pledge to advocate for marginalized  
communities, the arts, and environmental conservation.

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# *The* WAYFARER

RE-IMAGINING THE POSSIBLE ✧ CHARTING THE WAY FOR CHANGE

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White Sands National Monument. Rising from the heart of the Tularosa Basin is one of the world's great natural wonders—the glistening white sands of New Mexico. Great wave-like dunes of gypsum sand have engulfed 275 square miles of desert, creating the world's largest gypsum dunefield.



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As spring approaches and *The Wayfarer* enters its seventh year of publication, I am reminded that all things evolve—we are not static beings.

We are ever-shifting yet there is a core—a center—that remains the same even among the change. Some may call this center “the soul” while others “identity.” I believe it is a mix of the two composed of those things that we hold dear—our core values. Each individual’s values are different but there are some common needs and values most of us hold central: the desire to give and receive compassion, to find belonging, to be honest and receive honesty in return, to find meaning, to have purpose, to give and be given affection . . . . While all around us may evolve, this core holds steady.

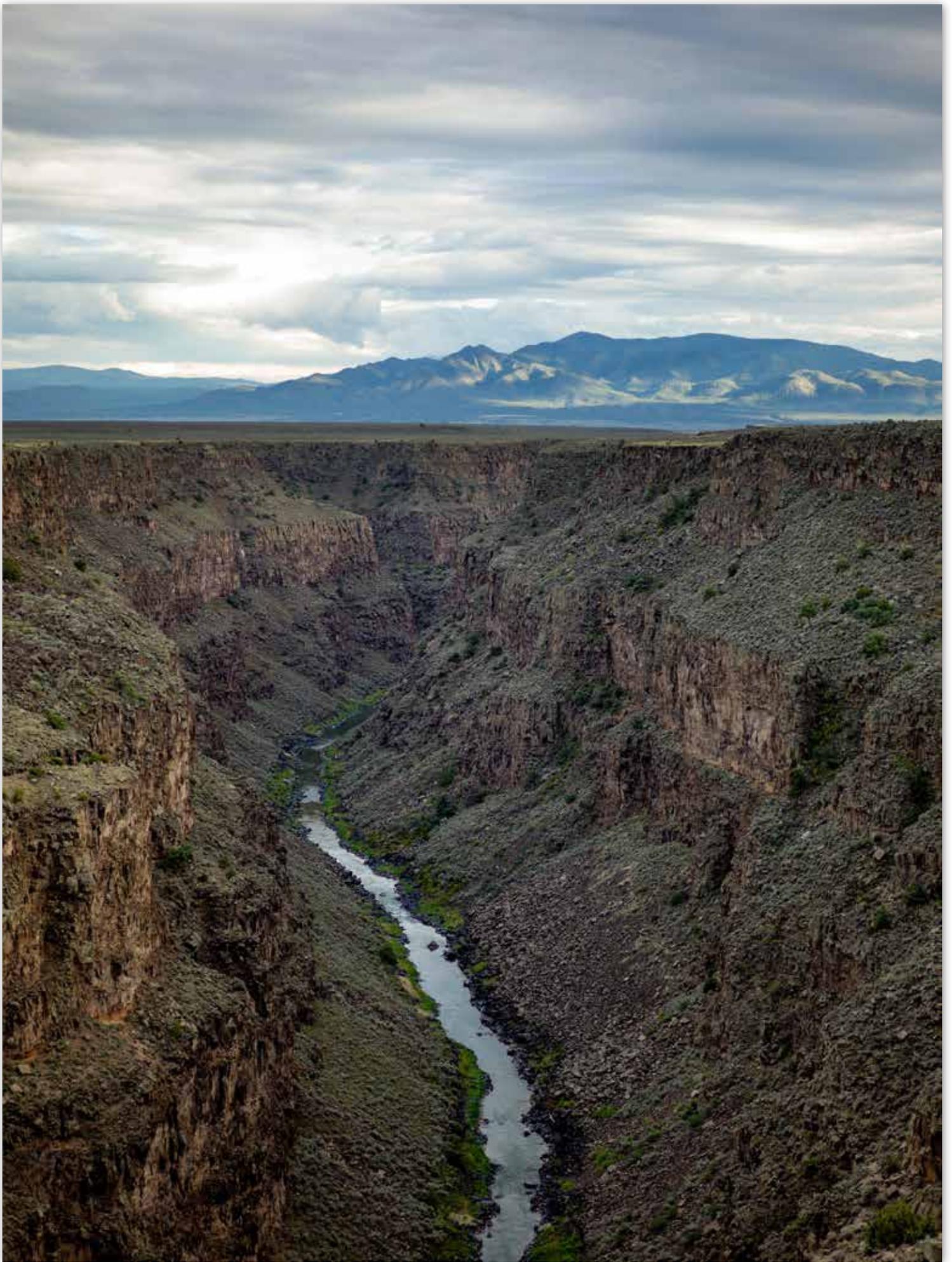
In the spirit of evolution, *The Wayfarer* has recently undergone its own metamorphosis. Our faithful readers will recognize a new look but the same resonant tone of social awareness, authenticity, and reverence of all things wild.

Healing, change, awareness—all these things are a journey, not a destination. We appreciate your company as we continue down the path.

With Gratitude



L.M. BROWNING is an award-winning author of twelve books. Balancing her passion for writing with her love of learning, Browning sits on the Board of Directors for the Independent Book Publishers' Association, she is a graduate of the University of London, and a Fellow with the International League of Conservation Writers. She is earning a degree in Creative Writing at Harvard University's Extension School.



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# RE-IMAGINING THE POSSIBLE

*A Deep Dive into the Creative Mind*

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THERE ARE CERTAIN PATH CROSSINGS that stay with you as fated moments—certain strangers who seem familiar to you—as though while walking through a crowded market, you brush sleeves with someone who knows you but doesn't know you. This was my experience meeting Frank LaRue Owen Jr. When last we sat together, it was in the dusty high-desert of God's country. We sipped hot sake and ate sushi made with New Mexico Hatch green chile in a hidden away restaurant at the base of the Sandia Mountains in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and talked of the strange trails we poets find ourselves on in life. Sitting across from him, he is a man removed from the ordinary, insightful yet unpretentious, who is ever-shifting in dimension and depth. He is a poet, descendant of cowboys, and a fellow traveler.

# EAST MEETS SOUTHWEST

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE POET FRANK LARUE OWEN  
BY LESLIE M. BROWNING

A large, vertical, cylindrical paper lantern made of textured, light-brown paper. It features bold, black Japanese calligraphy in a vertical column. The characters are '波切不動明王' (Nami Kiru Fudō Myōō), which translates to 'The Wave-Cutting Immovable Wisdom King'. The lantern is illuminated from within, casting a warm, yellowish glow. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other similar lanterns and what appears to be a restaurant interior.

波切不動明王

Exploring the origins of his work, Frank LaRue Owen's poetry is influenced by dreams, the energies of landscape and the seasons, archetypal psychology, the Ch'an/Daoist hermit-poet tradition, and Zen living. He studied for a decade with a Zen woman who—inspired by Ch'an and Daoist tradition—blended silent illumination (meditation), dreamwork, mountain-and-forest spirituality ("landscape practice"), and poetics into a unified path. Owen also studied eco-literature and eco-poetry with the late Jack Collom, a poet and professor in the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. His first book of poetry, *The School of Soft-Attention*, was the winner of the 2017 Homebound Publications Poetry Prize. His next offering, *Temple of Warm Harmony* is forthcoming from Homebound Publications in August 2019.

*Leslie: What would you consider your creative origin to be—what confluence of events came about to help you form your poetic voice?*

Frank: Some of the very first poetic language I ever encountered was the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*, the latter of which being an oracle from the ancient Chinese tradition. My mother studied the *I Ching* early in life as part of her Jungian studies and shared it with me in my pre-teen years. In addition to being among some of the oldest expressions of human literature, these works foster a means of thinking symbolically, poetically, oracularly.

On the heels of this, I came across a book in my father's study entitled *Black Elk Speaks*, which was already a classic when it fell into my hands. The visionary experiences of this Lakota holy man, and the mystical-poetic language Black Elk used to describe his experiences, were a formative source that shaped me as well. Additionally, Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* set me on a search early on as a kid.

Putting something to paper myself as a fledgling poet, to translate my own experiences, started in early high school. This was before the internet, of course, so I frequented libraries. Alongside my own poetic experimentation, I studied various sources that supported this endeavour, from the writings of Jung to Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*, an extended interview conducted by the

journalist Bill Moyers. From that I was led to the poetic language of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *The Upanishads*, and this stoked an early interest in world poetry, mystical poetry, and nature poetry, which then led me to the Japanese poet Bashō.

Like so many of our ilk, I've also been inspired by the works of Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder, David Whyte, Hafiz, and Rumi. The poems of Joy Harjo, fellow Mississippian Natasha Trethewey, Joseph Stroud, Jim Harrison, and all of the female and male poets of the Chinese and Japanese tradition are never far away.

As for a confluence of events, I would have to say the real crossing of the bridge from being a lover of poetry to a writer of poetry, in earnest, is inseparable from crossing paths with certain teacher figures in my life. They installed a confidence for diving in.

*Leslie: Speaking of teachers, you studied eco-literature and eco-poetry with the late Jack Collom, in the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, which was founded in 1974 by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman. What did you take away from your time at Naropa in a creative sense?*

Frank: Mindfulness, and coming into a firm allyship with one's own heart-mind, undergirds everything at Naropa, from the various psychology programs to the writing program. The main takeaway I received from Jack, in particular, was the practice of deep observation in creative work, on the one hand, and playfulness on the other. Jack was kind of a holy clown in my view, whose creative levity was contagious. He worked with people of all ages around poetry, including little kids in the Poets in Schools movement. Overall, though, what Naropa taught me creatively was permission to create.

*Leslie: Beyond traditional learning spaces, we all have mentors who touch us deeply along our journey. You speak of a "Zen woman" your path converged with out in the mountains of New Mexico—a landscape of deep magic in and of itself. Would you mind telling us a little about this meeting and the impact this relationship had on your creative work?*

Frank: Known as doña Río to some of us, Darion was a truly remarkable person who touched many lives in different ways. She was chameleon-like in her interests and in the methods she used in her guidance work with individuals and groups, which she loosely called “life path exploration”. She would take on different qualities and emphasize different approaches depending upon who she was working with, and this included various methods from Asian spiritual traditions, Mesoamerican sources, wilderness rites of passage work, and Jungian psychological models.

Reflective of this, for example, in my first phase of knowing her (the early and mid-90s in Colorado), we worked almost exclusively with Zen practice; namely silent illumination meditation, meditation on phrases (known as *huatou/wato* in China and Japan), and frequent knee-to-knee interviews that Japanese tradition calls *dokusan*. When I look back on that time, I think she was just setting the stage for things to come, along with trying to help me become more of an ally to my own heart-mind.

Later on in the late 90s and 2000s, after a life detour on my part to D.C., and a move to New Mexico by her, at which time she became more hermetical, her work with me shifted. With a firm foundation of meditation having become second nature, the work became more focused on landscape and dreamscape, and poetics was a means of processing experiences with both. I made frequent cross-country trips each year to New Mexico to study this Southwestern “green chile Cowboy Zen” with her, including whole months at a time, and “the classroom”, the “*zendo*”, so to speak, was a mix of time in an adobe house in Santa Fe, time in the forests of the Pecos Wilderness, and time out in the desert.

Despite knowing her as well as I did, she remains a mysterious figure to me. She was very much a horse person, was constantly doing dreamwork throughout the day (because, in her own words, “We’re never not dreaming”), but I only know small fragments about her life, which included her own experiences studying with Ch’an and Taoist teachers, and trips into southern Mexico to study with a *curandera* and a seer.

*Leslie: You follow in her footsteps as a “mysterious figure.” You seem a modern-day, reclusive, Zen hermit-poet more suited to the age of Ryōkan than that of this era. How do you see yourself within the current poetic landscape?*

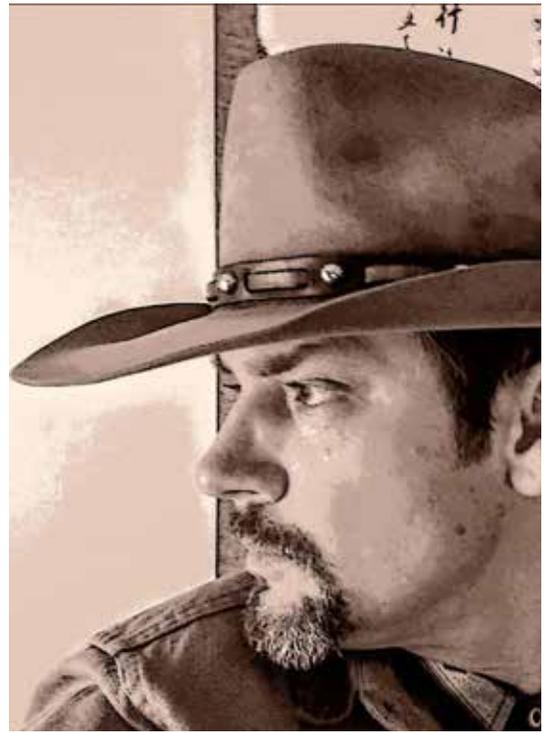
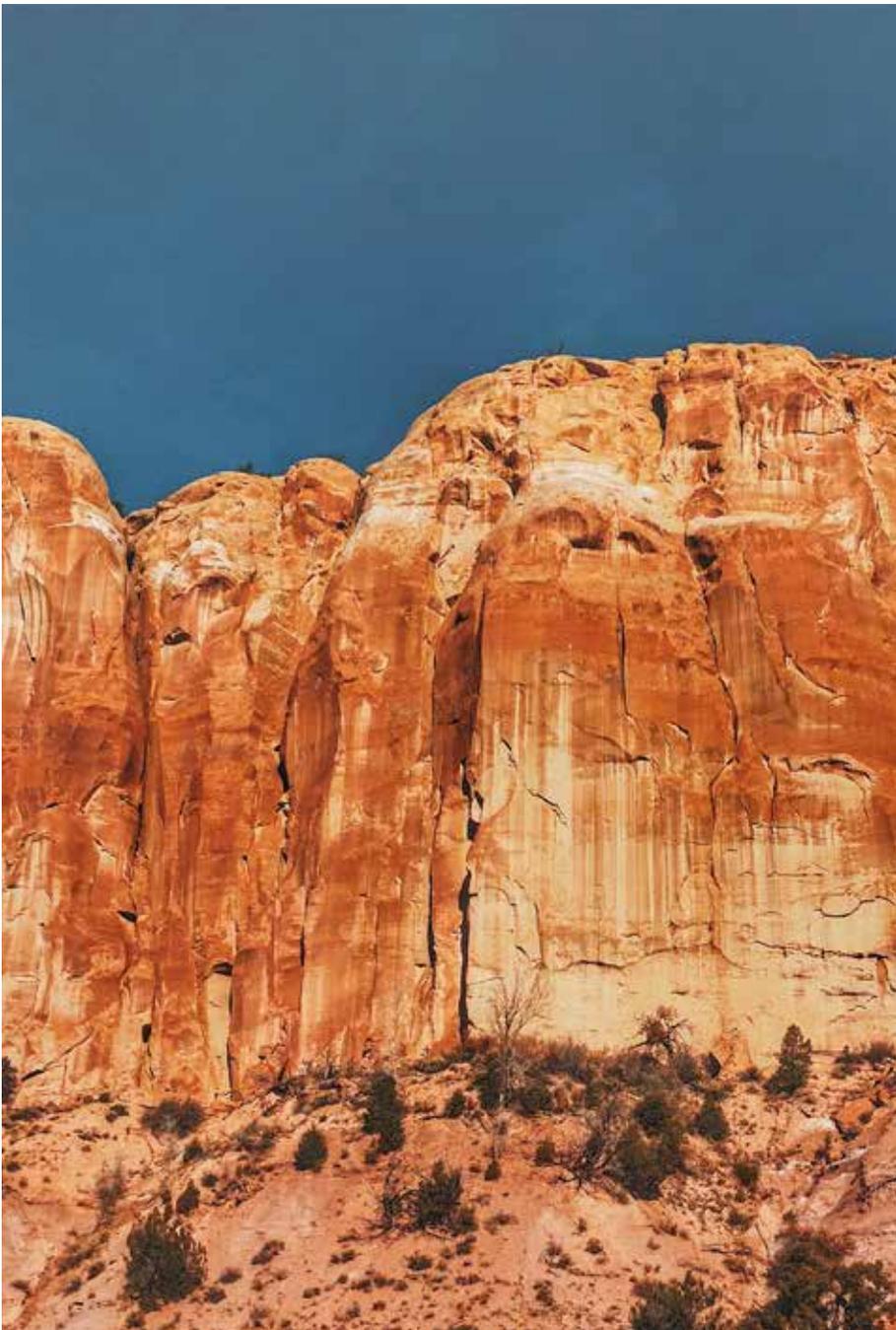
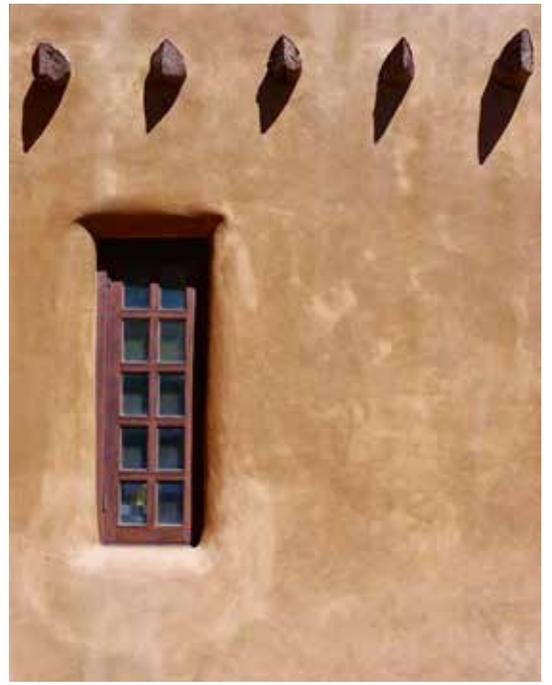
Frank: I definitely have a need and a leaning for solitude. It is how I refuel and solitary time is when I am afforded the potential to delve into the creative process. In general, I find many aspects of modernity overwhelming, if not downright insane, so there is a lot about the world I don’t engage with. But, that said, I wouldn’t call myself a recluse because I still enjoy being around people and have a commitment (at least for now) to stay engaged in the world and remain connected to community, such as it is.

I’m also not a true hermit by most people’s idea of the term, but I do live a pretty solitary existence, and, at times, have emulated the lifestyle of certain early Ch’an poets who lived in urban settings, held day jobs, but stayed to themselves at night and went on mountain retreats as often as they could to focus on their poetry and Zen practice.

A lot of this may be a natural leaning for me, since even in my senior year of high school I avoided typical high school activities. I would come in from the day, drop my books, and head straight out into the forests behind my mother’s house in North Carolina.

Being a solitary in recent years is also due to circumstance. From 1995 to 2005, I was very active out in the world. In fact, I was facilitating retreats along the themes of dreams, consciousness, contemplative practice, nature, and ecopsychology. However, in 2005, and especially in 2007 when doña Río died, I intentionally turned inward. Initially, grief was the motivator. But, then I began exploring the biographies of certain hermit-poets and felt an immediate affinity with how they had arranged their lives.

Some years I would put this exploration on the back burner and, for example, focus on relationship. Other years, my creative process has been the only thing for which I have held space. Both types of cycles have taught me a great deal.



*“As I age, living a slower pace becomes even more important to me; to connect with the land, to practice Zen, to explore ancestral energies, cultural streams, and heritage, and to write.”*

This year, I’m crossing into my 50s, and also clocking my fourteenth year of wandering down the same path I began walking with doña Río, spiritually and creatively. I have no idea where it is all going. As I age, living a slower pace becomes even more important to me; to connect with the land, to practice Zen, to explore ancestral energies, cultural streams, and heritage, and to write. But, yes, most days I feel like you could probably drop me in a Japanese forest or back behind a mesa in New Mexico, and I’d be okay.

Where this places me in the poetic landscape I’m not entirely certain. Perhaps one way of putting it is this. All poets are oriented to paying attention. They are attuned to the life around them. I am as well, but I’m also oriented to the life of nature, the inner life, and other non-obvious realities.

*Leslie: Delving into your practice of holding space, tell us about your creative process.*

Frank: My creative process is definitely a lived and living experience. Various natural images come to mind that express this. Climbing a mountain. Disappearing into a forest enveloped in clouds. A river that has its own particular flow but which also reflects, in some sense, what it encounters as it flows along.

At times, my creative process has felt like attending to a rather cosmic relationship; to what East Asian cultures call the Dao (Tao, The Way). As I say in the Preface of *The Temple of Warm Harmony*, “...’round and ‘round

the sun-like Dao.” Sometimes that is what my creative process has felt like.

Lately, the working metaphor for my creative process has been riding a horse. Writing has begun to feel akin to saddling-up, heading out on a trail, and journeying beyond known trails into uncharted territories. In some cases, the “horse” is the horse of memory, taking me back into childhood, or into the multidimensional muscle memory and memory of the senses that gets registered when visiting a place.

I’m currently working on my third book, *Stirrup of the Sun & Moon*, which is tethered to experiences of memory of mind, dream, and place. My heart-mindstream is awash in a cascade of images, insights, and impressions, so my creative process has become one of registering these impressions, sifting through them as if panning for gold. A few of these kinds of poems have made prior appearances, such as “Quantum Travel” in *The School of Soft-Attention* (2018), but now I’m following the thread more closely where mindscape, dreamscape, and landscape touch.

Practically speaking, I wake up with my creative process every day because the moment I awake I am processing impressions from the dreamtime. So, notetaking, journaling, and trying to pull dream vignettes and fragments through the permeable membrane of consciousness that separates the dreaming and waking worlds is part of my daily course. That, and talking out loud to myself. [Laughs]

I live alone so I may even talk out loud to myself as a means of conjuring flashes of the dreaming mind so as to bring through the images that were experienced in a dream, or that are still fluttering about at the periphery of awareness in the dreaming body (which, of course, extends beyond the physical body). This activity is really rooted in the technique of active imagination from the Jungian tradition. It works well with dreams, it works well with poetry, and some day I hope to apply it to the realm of fiction.

*Leslie: What do you think the role of the poet is in the current world climate?*

Frank: We are living in a truly disturbing time. Not to oversimplify current conditions, or add unnecessary layers of lathered-up fear, but the energetic reality we are in strikes me as a battle of wills, conscience, and consciousness.

There are some whose consciousness is on a destructive footing. Destructive of earth. Destructive of societal, economic, and governmental norms. Others of us reject this on civic, environmental, and humanitarian grounds.

The poet in such times is what the role of the poet has always been: serving as a collective conscience (not holding our tongue about injustice, for example), but also reminding us all that, despite the presence of despots of delusion and dysfunction, that the numinous level of reality—of beauty, of grace, of healing, of sacred mystery—still exists, and will endure.

In this way, the poet can be a healer, a transmitter of perennial wisdom, and a culture of harmony rather than degradation and divisiveness. Indeed, as both conscience and purveyor of elevated consciousness, the poet can remind us all who we really are, individually and collectively. It seems to me we need both of these functions now more than ever.

*Leslie. What words of hard-earned wisdom would you impart to those creative minds still seeking out their voice and getting ready to “saddle up” and head out onto the trail?*

Frank: Become an apprentice to your deeper self. This includes one’s dreams and the wise characters found therein. It also includes checking in with yourself multiple times during the day. Surface world technological distractions can be a real obstacle to such deeper attunement. There is a natural human wisdom inherent in the person that practices mindful attentiveness. Make it a practice.

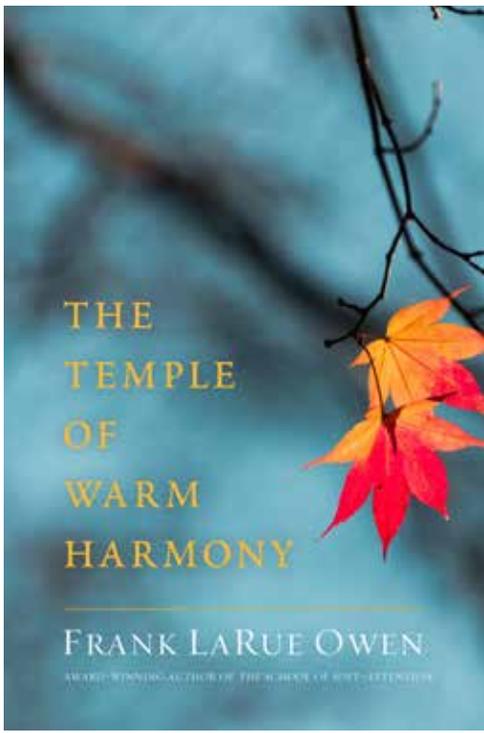
Trust that one’s own voice is linked to one’s creative process, which has a life of its own. It has its own flow; you’re just along for the ride. You can paddle and steer, but you can’t push the river.

Trust that one’s voice and creativity has a purpose that has its own seasons and rhythms. Live closely according to those rhythms. Live in attunement with the seasons of your creative life. Honor the fallow times just as much as the inspired and abundant times of creative harvest.

When it comes to creative writing, eject modernity’s cold, lifeless notions of writing being mechanical and product focused. If you want to do writing like that, get a job in advertising.

I would also add, try holding the notion that writing (or any creative endeavour) is not an exclusively intellectual exercise. Try on the experience of writing as a full-bodied somatic experience including giving voice to hunches, impressions, 24/7 lucid dreaming, like picking up flavours and aromas from the ethers. Creativity can be a multidimensional experience involving senses beyond just the five we usually rely upon.

Held in this way, there is no such thing as writer’s block. Even when you aren’t actively writing, you realize you’re working, or are ‘being worked,’ by the larger process; what I call “the poet’s dreaming body” is actively working, observing, recording, seeing. Learning to trust in that feels related to trusting one’s creative voice. Don’t dismiss anything in your experience.



### The Bouquet of the Last Direction

by Frank LaRue Owen, *The School of Soft-Attention*

When the soul becomes unburdened  
it's like a new saddle on a fresh horse.

Suddenly the trail feels right again,  
and the strong horizon line in front of you as you turn  
becomes its own form of soothing medicine.

Something of the sting and burn of the old poison may linger  
but having crossed over from the Shadowlands  
into new open territory, one can almost  
pick up the scent of blooming flowers within.

You start to notice all the things you hadn't been  
all because you'd been so bound up  
with the echoes of losses and hauntings.

You know you're ready when ghosts  
start chanting from the edge of your life:  
Traveler! Good Traveler!  
Your 'Crying for a Vision' Time is over.  
Time to re-inhabit the Human World!

Then, the simplest of the ten thousand things  
start to reach out to you to welcome you home again.

The Morningstar.  
The blue sky with its utter completeness.  
The serrated clouds coming over the rising pine-covered hills.  
Even the food tastes better in the Land of the Great Eastern Sun.

You may find the wandering wild animal of your heart  
is somehow more free to travel back through time...  
...to pick back up with sources of beauty  
and power you had put down.

And maybe, just maybe,  
you'll see yourself now  
through your childhood eyes  
and you'll stand forgiven and realize  
the magic you had then never left you;  
you just forgot how to listen.

### Instructions Hanging from a Weather-Beaten Branch

by Frank LaRue Owen, *The Temple of Warm Harmony*

To illuminate The Way,  
study the wayfarers of old.

Take up the Timeless Work  
of untangling the soul.

Align heart-mind  
with Nature's flow.

Journey into the dark  
to mine the hidden gold.

When the Lantern-Lit Mind  
abides in Silent Illumination,  
the wayfarer's poems bear the mark  
of the Great Transformation.

### Mountainwise Storehouse

by Frank LaRue Owen, *The Temple of Warm Harmony*

Ceaseless reminders.  
Worldly imperfection.

People,  
whole worlds,  
out of harmony  
with the Way.

Centuries of misalignment  
leave spine-jolting ruts  
in the road.

This is why  
we go to the  
mountains;  
to remember  
the Great Realignment  
always available  
to the supple-hearted.



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# EXPLORING THE DIVINE MYSTERY

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR MIRABAI STARR  
BY L.M. BROWNING

---

MIRABAI STARR IS AN AUTHOR, translator of the mystics, and a leading voice in the emerging interspiritual movement, using fresh, lyrical language to help make timeless wisdom accessible to a contemporary circle of seekers.

She has received critical acclaim for her revolutionary new translations of *Dark Night of the Soul*, by 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross; *The Interior Castle* and *The Book of My Life*, by St. Teresa of Avila; and *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*.

She is author of the six-volume Sounds True series, *Contemplations, Prayers, and Living Wisdom*; a poetry collection, *Mother of God Similar to Fire*, a collaboration

with iconographer, William Hart McNichols; *God of Love: A Guide to the Heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, which was named the winner of the New Mexico/Arizona Book Award for Religion and one of the Best Spiritual Books of 2012 by the website Spirituality & Practice, and won the 2014 Nautilus Gold Award for Religion and Spirituality in the Western Traditions, and her newest book is *Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation*.

Daughter of the counter-culture, Starr was born in New York in 1961 to secular Jewish parents who challenged institutionalized religion and were active in the anti-war protest movement of the Vietnam era. In 1972, the family embarked on an extended road trip that led them to

settle in the mountains of Taos, New Mexico. There, they embraced an alternative, “back-to-the-land” lifestyle, in a communal effort to live simply and sustainably, values that remain important to Starr to this day.

As a teenager, Starr lived at the Lama Foundation, an intentional spiritual community in New Mexico that has honored the world’s spiritual traditions since its inception in 1968. The foundation’s focus has always rested on the mystical heart of each path, and Starr was trained from an early age to recognize and celebrate the interconnections between and among all faiths.

Formerly an adjunct professor of philosophy and world religions at the University of New Mexico for 20 years, Starr is a certified grief counselor and speaks and teaches nationally and internationally on the teachings of the mystics, contemplative practice, and grief as a spiritual practice. Her talks and retreats incorporate silent meditation, interspiritual chanting, sacred poetry, and deep dialog. She blogs for the *Huffington Post*.

\*\*\*

*Leslie: So, let’s start at the beginning. What first sparked your earliest passions for mysticism and writing?*

Mirabai: Well, in some ways they were two different sparks. But, I was always a writer. From the time I could make letters, I made poems. And then short stories. And, I think that where writing and mysticism converge is around death. My older brother, Mattie, died when he was 10 and I was 7. He had a brain tumor. And ... you know, a child is so close to the original mystery anyway, but somehow his death blew that door back open. And I felt ... this access, of course I wouldn’t have described it that way at the time, it just was what it was. But, looking back I see that it gave me access to this vast realm of the sacred. And, I didn’t have any language for it. My family was entirely non-religious, maybe even anti-religious.

So, there was no context outside of my own subjective experience for what was happening. But that sense of proximity to the holy mystery. Then, because I was a poet and had a poet’s soul, I began to be more and more drawn as I became more literate, as I got older as a child, to other forms of poetry. My father would feed me poetry from the classics and things like the lyrics of Bob Dylan songs that were really...kind of, magical realism.

So then, I guess I would say that the big opening was, again, around another death actually. When I was 13, my first love died, Phillip, in a gun accident. And that totally catapulted me into a place of deep sorrow, of course, an almost psychosis. The grief was so intense that it shattered me and in that shattering, it reopened that doorway into that realm of holy mystery and that was it. Somehow, I conflated Phillip with God in some ways in my heart. So that my longing for my boyfriend opened up this longing for God. And around that same time, I was cast in the lead role in a school play about the life of Mirabai, the 16th Century Bhakti poet, Indian poet. And it was really just in the height of my grieving for Phillip, my loss of my boyfriend. And when I played Mirabai, I felt inhabited by her. I felt like she really came in to me and through me and sang her beautiful love songs to Krishna, the God of Love. Then I was given that name right afterwards, that summer. So it was the spring that I turned 14, and then that Summer, Ram Dass officially gave me the name.

And so Mirabai, who was an ecstatic poet devoted to the God of Love, became the inspiration, really, and guide and exemplar for my life ‘cause I so identified with her passion for union with God, but also for beautiful language. I mean, her love language was so exquisite. She was the quintessential poet, like Rumi. She was very connected to the natural world, so her poetry was just steeped in metaphors from the natural world, which really spoke to me. I lived here in the mountains of Northern New Mexico, which is, as you mentioned, such as sacred landscape. And so, even though it was a very different landscape from 16th Century Northern India, I really related to her love of the natural world.

*Leslie: What you’re saying, resonates with me on so many levels, especially the grief and the breaking open and the psychosis. I’ve experienced the same kind of alignment as well. I mean, it’s sad, and yet at the same time I understand what you’re saying on a level that can’t be conveyed really.*

*So, we’ve touched on your poetic inspirations. So, who were your mentors along the way, be they flesh and blood teachers by your side, or sages of art and literature?*

Mirabai: Yeah, right. Both, for sure. So many. I am, as I have confessed elsewhere, spiritually promiscuous. I have

intimate connections with multiple spiritual traditions. So across the traditions, I have my mentors both embodied and archetypal energies.

Let's see. In the realm of the living, once living ... I guess I would say ... And he is definitely still living. Is that my longest standing spiritual influence has been Ram Dass. I've never called him my teacher because he is my elder guru brother. In other words, we both have a devotion to the great Indian Sage Neem Karoli Baba. So Ram Dass has been for many of us the one who led the way in that he introduced so many of us to Myogi when he met him in India in the 60's and brought him to America. Many westerners went, in fact, to India to meet Myogi when he was still alive. Myogi is the sentient name for Neem Karoli Baba.

So, Ram Dass has been a huge influence on me and people have said to me that when I'm teaching, I sound like a girl version of Ram Dass. And I'm in no way trying to emulate him but I see how I cannot extricate myself from his influence because it's so much part of me, because I was so young. I was 15 when I started traveling and being with Ram Dass ... and over the years have maintained that close connection. And now, I teach in his lineage as one of the Dharma teachers. That's probably my strongest influence.

But our guru, Neem Karoli Baba is really the ... probably my strongest spiritual guide. And also, Neem Karoli Baba, right before he died, he gave his Dharma transmission, but they don't call it that in Hinduism ... he passed on responsibility for his devotees to a woman named Sri Siddhi who very quietly took up that mantle of Neem Karoli Baba in India. And she just died a year ago. And she was very important to me in that, in fact, the epilogue of my memoir, *Caravan of No Despair*, is about her. And my new book, *Wild Mercy*, is dedicated to her. So she's a huge influence on me.

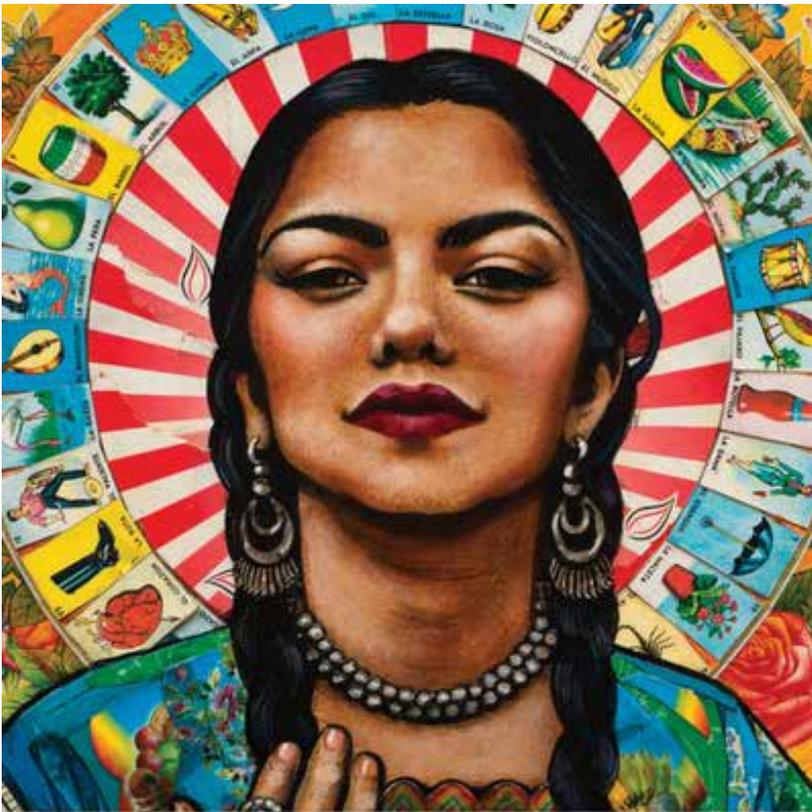
Another woman who I have always looked to is Anandamayi Ma from India who was an ecstatic teacher of devotion and non-duality. And she didn't claim any particular lineage. One of the things I love about her, is that she had an awakening, a spontaneous awakening in her 20's, and she initiated herself. Which is unheard of for a woman in India.

*Leslie: No, that's fantastic.*

Mirabai: My other early influences would be Rumi, who I connected with as a Sufi master before the new accessible translation spike. Robert Bly made him available to everyone. At the time, this was the 70's, he was a pretty obscure Sufi teacher, but I connected deeply with him. Which led me to connect with Saint John of the Cross when I was 20. So I was a Sufi as a teenager and always will feel close to the Sufi path. Very close. But then, through my residence with the poetry of Rumi and spiritual teachings embedded in Rumi, I found John of the Cross when I was studying Spanish literature in Spain when I was 20 years old.

Yeah. So I really fell in love with him. And back to Sufism for a moment, another, besides Neem Karoli Baba, Ram Dass' and my teacher ... guru, the other really strong spiritual teacher in my life has been Murshid Samuel Lewis, known as Murshid Sam, who was a great 20th century American Sufi teacher who created the dances of universal peace. They're done all over the world. They used to be called Sufi dancing. And he's buried at Lama Foundation where I lived as a teenager in New Mexico. Lama Foundation is also probably my single biggest influence as a spiritual seeker and teacher. Because Lama is a place, was then and continues to be, a place where all spiritual paths are welcome and studied and practiced. So Lama calls itself "a meeting of the waves" and that was a huge influence of Murshid Sam who was buried there.

So the meeting of the wave, Lama affirms the truth of all spiritual paths, and therefore there's no single leader or one spiritual tradition that claims to be "it". Leadership at Lama is egalitarian and it rotates on a lunar cycle. New moon to full moon, full moon to new moon, so everyone in the community has a rotating opportunity and also a responsibility of guiding the community spiritually. So whether you're a 24 year old first year resident or someone in your 60's or 70's who's traveled around the world and lived in monasteries, everyone has a chance to step up and hold the spiritual heart of the community. So Lama was my primary influence in many ways. I know I've already said Ram Dass was and Murshid Sam was but ...



mirabai starr  
**WILD MERCY**  
*Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom  
of the Women Mystics*



*Leslie: You don't have to choose one, as you've just mentioned. It's okay. Yeah, that's quite a concept that they have there. I'd never heard of them.*

Mirabai: Yeah, and I speak about them in my book, *God of Love*, and also in my new book, *Wild Mercy*. I have a whole section on Lama and how they operate. The actual structure ... the social and political structure, if you will, of Lama.

And so, the other two people I would say are Father Thomas Keating, has had a very strong influence on me. He really loved John of the Cross and he really illumined John of the Cross for me and centering prayer I think, has been such an important spiritual practice that has reached many, many people. And helped us find our way through the holy silence.

*Leslie: I was wondering if you could expand more on this central concept of yours, the inter-spirituality. And it kinda blends very neatly with everything that you've been talking about and the intersection that is your own heart and your own soul. This philosophy, I feel, is keenly needed at this time of polarization and this reemerging face of racism. Can you tell our readers a little bit about the premise of inter-spirituality?*

Mirabai: Well, yeah. It's a tricky concept in some ways and I'm also concerned that even naming it, "inter-spirituality or the inter-spiritual path," is going to turn it into another "ism". And the entire purpose of affirming the essential truth at the heart of all religious and spiritual traditions is to transcend the boxes that human beings like to put the truth in, and in which we kill the truth. So, in fact I've kind of distanced myself from the inter-spiritual movement, as a movement precisely because of this.

However, the concept is essential, as you say, during these ... divisive times. And I think, not only is it a remedy for the polarization and toxicity that we're seeing, but it's also a response to it. I think there's this deep grass roots response, especially among a younger generation that is from their 20's to their 40's. And ... let's see, how do I say this. In which there is this deep hunger for authentic and even rigorous spiritual practice and spiritual awakening. But an allergy to religiosity and to existing institutional religious structures.

So, this wave of people who do not subscribe to any religious tradition and in fact, are very suspicious of religion, does not coincide with a disinterest with spirituality. In fact, quite the opposite. Many, many people are really hungry for spiritual experience and are trying to figure out how to navigate that longing in this emerging landscape that doesn't have clear spaces for the way that they feel. So, the way that they feel is often what I would call an inter-spiritual impulse. They see, because of this globalized world that we live in partly. We're no longer in these little tribal spaces where we have to buy into existing belief systems and descend them. We've been exposed to many, many ways of seeing the world. And so, people feel I think, very naturally drawn to the living truths of all the world's wisdom waves.

And so, they will, at a time of transition in their lives, say a wedding or a death or a birth, especially those big life changes. People naturally will find a poetry of the mystics of various spiritual traditions and they'll look for rituals from all of the world's wisdom waves and incorporate them into these meaningful moments. And I think that people are also looking for inter-spiritual community. That is spaces and collections of people who also affirm these living perennial truths and are willing to investigate them and practice them. So practice spaces where people can do a Sufi dance and then a session of centering prayer and then read some Sufi poetry. And find all the rich resources that are available to us in this interconnected world in which we find ourselves.

So that's inter-spirituality. It's about harvesting the fruits of wisdom and awakening and social justice across the spectrum of the spiritual landscape. And not just for ourselves. Not just for our own private liberation, but for the benefit of all beings and the earth herself. And so it's the other thing that I'm noticing in the inter-spiritual impulse among younger people especially, is this lack of dualistic definition between action and contemplation. Between the personal, private, spiritual life and the larger world of social and environmental concerns.

So people really are starting to get that the reason that we gather these jewels from all of the spiritual traditions is so that we can have some kind of inner transformation that awakens us and resources us to step up and be a resource to others. To activate on behalf of the earth ... from a deep, grounded place of recognizing, in every cell of our

being, that everything is interconnected. And therefore, what else could we possibly ... what other response could we possibly have by turning inward than to allow the pain of the world to enter us and then step up and do what we can to alleviate suffering. Not from some intellectual idea or recognition of the brokenness of the world, but from a self experience of inter-being.

*Leslie: Before I let you go, I can't let you go without asking about your new book, Wild Mercy: Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of Women Mystics. It's set for release April 2nd and ... in this timely work, you fiercely declare the feminine mystic is one who gathers the pain of the world into her arms and transmutes it with wild mercy and emerging a fierce courage with the unstoppable forces of forgiveness, compassion, and love. She is needed now, more than ever. So, where did this latest book start for you? And what message are you hoping that it imparts to those who bring it into their homes?*

Mirabai: Well, it started with a course that I have been teaching for a number of years on The Shift Network on women mystics. The way of the feminine mystic, I think was one of the titles. It had several titles over the years, but it was always an exploration of women mystics across the spiritual traditions and also goddesses. Like ... Tara, Kwan Yin . . . all of those great feminine archetypes and the myths of the world.

I have noticed that I am a kind of blend of a non-dual spiritual seeker. In other words, I've experienced and I continue to cultivate states of non-dual awareness in which I allow my separate self to dissolve into "the one". And, I'm also this wild devotional being, like my namesake Mirabai, who is madly in love with a God who I don't necessarily believe in with my mind. But always have been drawn to this deliciously dualistic relationship with the holy mystery that I often refer to as "Beloved".

For years, avoided even talking about masculine and feminine in any kind of sense of the duality between the masculine spiritual path and the feminine spiritual path. I felt like enough time had been spent in academia, the people hashing out the ways in which men and women are different or not different, and that the masculine way of thinking or ... religiosity is different than the feminine. I just thought, let's leave that to the people who are interested in making dualistic proclamations. I'm not.

But then, of course, over the last few years, I have been unable to avoid speaking about and on behalf of the feminine. Simply because in this relative realm in which we all dwell, it is an issue. In five-thousands of years of patriarchy has attempted to crush feminine wisdom and feminine power. And it's time to ... heal the wounds that have been inflicted on the feminine. All of us, men and women, need to step up in that healing process, help find a balance, achieve balance by emphasizing and drawing out and calling on the treasure trove of wisdom of the feminine that has been hidden.

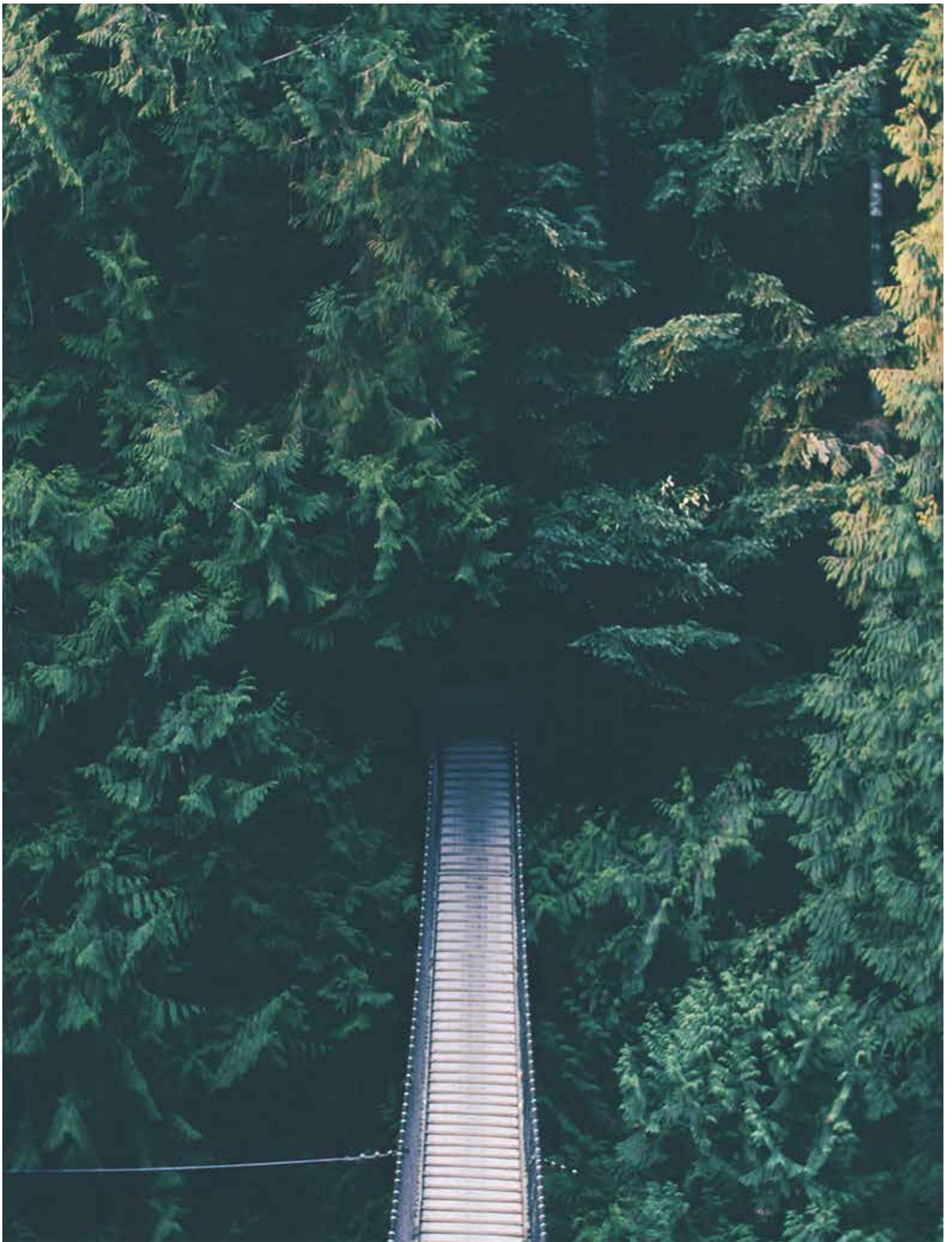
*Leslie: Thank you so much for sharing just a glimpse of what took place behind the scenes as you crafted this together. And I'm sure painstakingly over months and years.*

Mirabai: Years, yeah. And it's still happening, by the way. Just 'cause the book's gone to print, it's not the end of the story. Every day I'm learning more and more now that I've opened the door to this. So, I think that my upcoming retreats and workshops, I'm not doing this to sell them, it just totally popped into my head just now. That that's the space where I'm going to continue. We, together as a community, are going to continue to do this work. So, I'm doing a bunch of *Wild Mercy* gatherings across the country in 2019 and 2020. And I know that that's where the wise ones who gather with me will contribute to this tapestry of awakening that we, men and women, all need to do together.

So I'm really looking forward to who shows up at these gatherings with their jewels of feminine wisdom to add to the mix. Because that's the thing about the feminine, Leslie, is that it's not about one particular smart dude who's sitting up there on their throne dispensing their wisdom. It's about all of us, and I'm very much ... my way of teaching is very communal. It's about mining the jewels in the circle, whatever circles gather. So it's ongoing and it's a collective process of awakening to the wisdom of the feminine.

*Leslie: And I was just going to say, one final question is where can our readers learn more about those gatherings?*

Mirabai: Yeah, wonderful. My website, [mirabaistarr.com](http://mirabaistarr.com).



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## COLUMNS

*“Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.”*

*–John Lubbock*

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*“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity.”*

*—John Muir*

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## THE LANDSCAPE AND THE ALCHEMY OF TRANSCENDENCE

THE TRAVEL COLUMN BY L.M. BROWNING

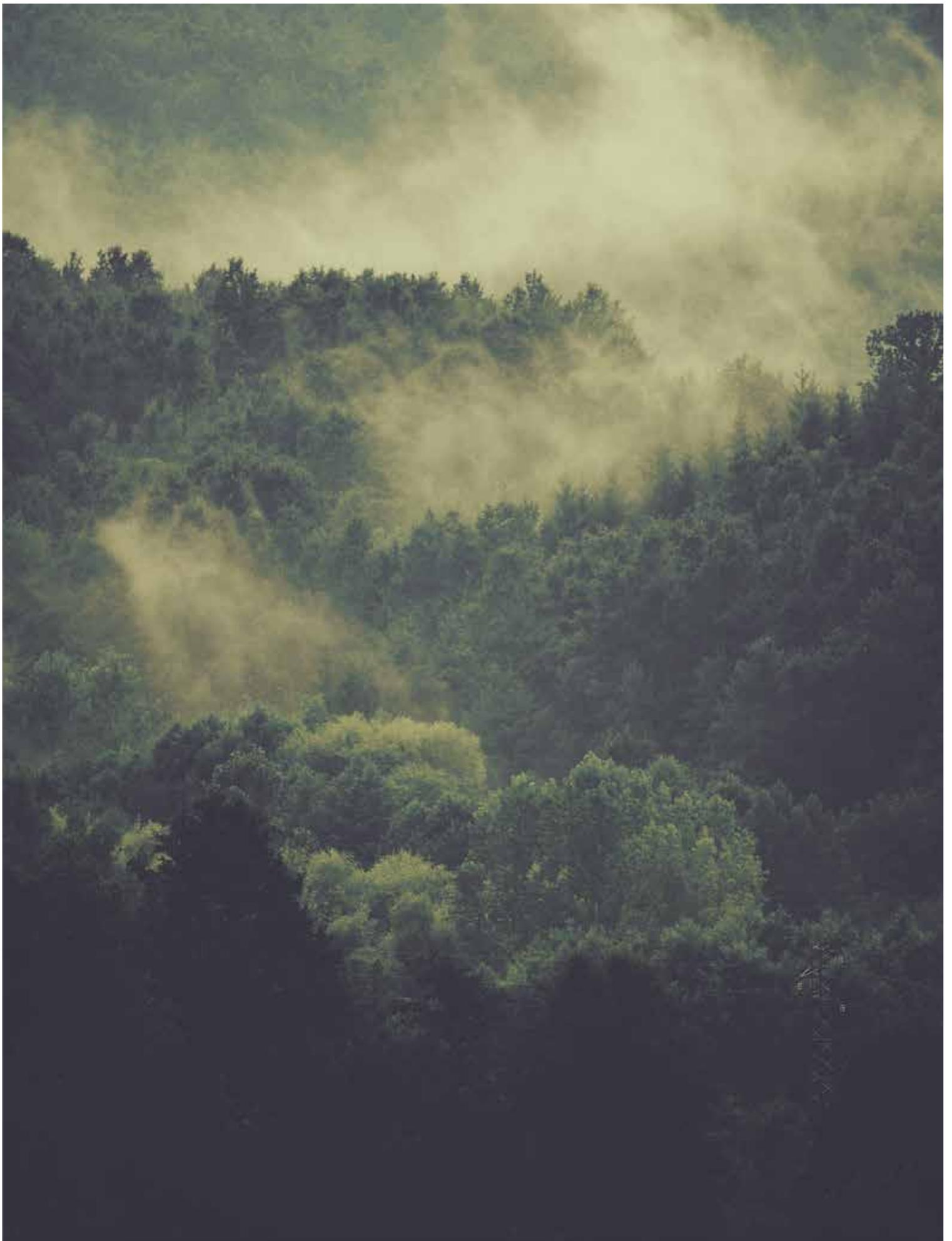
We’ve progressed as a civilization but not all advances add to our lives, and in our rush to move forward, we’ve left some vital things behind, the wild being one of them. They say when the body is deficient in certain elements, the deficiency will show itself in our craving certain foods—some instinctual part of us knows what we need and seeks it out even if we are unconscious of it. I believe, when the soul is lacking—when it is wounded or sick—it seeks out what we are deficient in, which will ultimately heal us, and so often the elements the soul needs to heal are found in nature. The role of the wilderness in healing from the cruelties of life has been documented by those creative minds who went in search of their own sanity among the still-wild places.

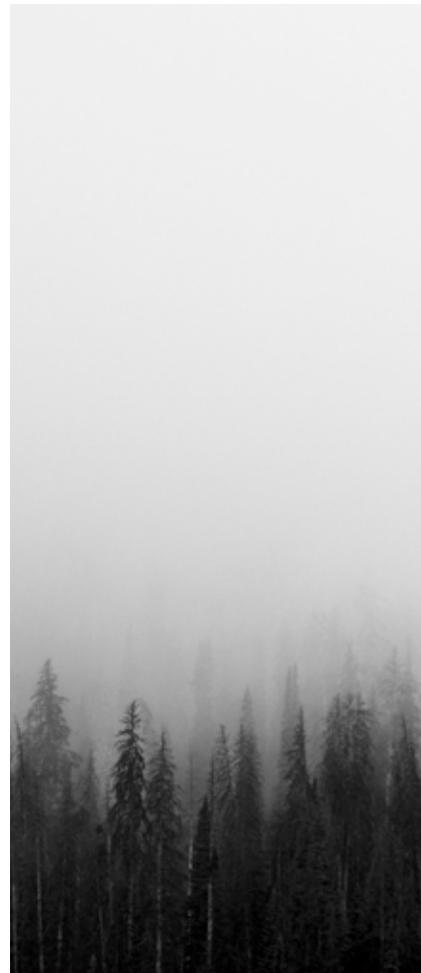
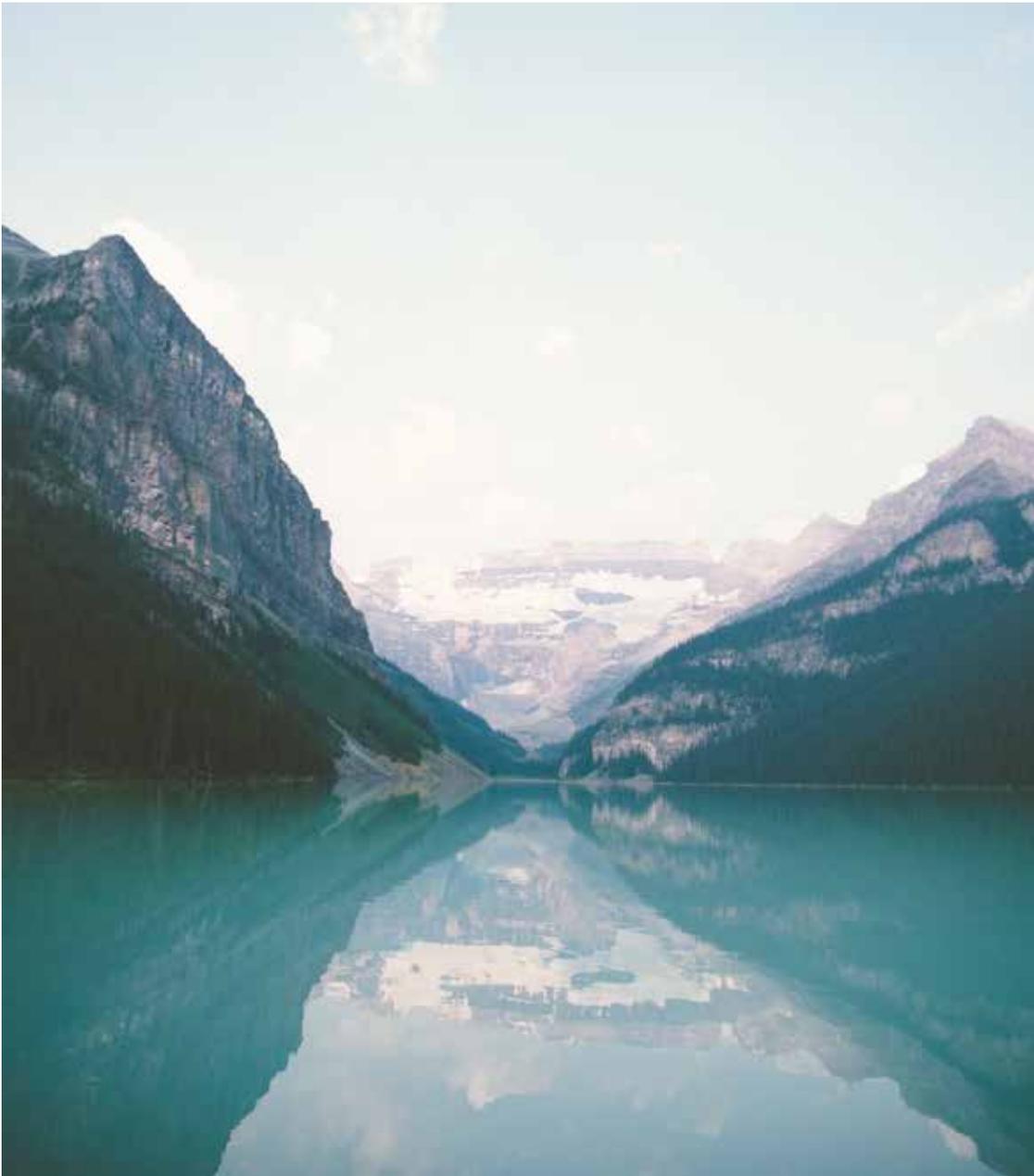
*What aspect of the natural landscape seems to bring about such a radical shift within our inner-landscape that time after time such pivotal moments have been captured by the minds of each generation?*

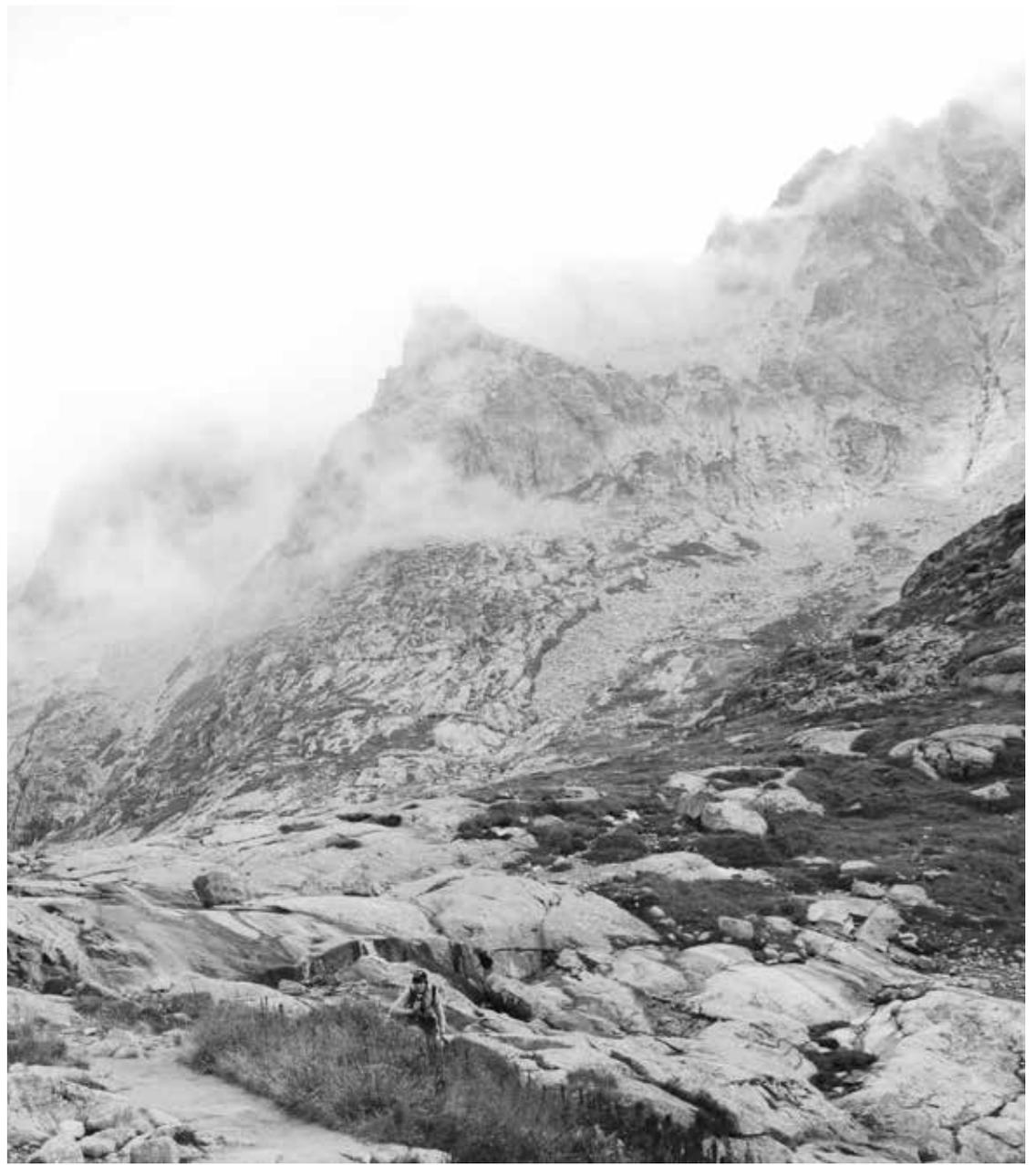
Make no mistake, these “deficiencies” we are suffering as the soul ails are not existential, they are keenly physical. With anxiety disorders rates peaking—“affecting nearly 40 million adults in the United States of America age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year.” ADAA and psychologists increasingly turning to “green therapies” the healing aspect of nature, so prominent

in the “old ways” (i.e.: nature-based religions) are mainstreaming. There is an entire branch of psychology devoted to exploring the connection between the mind and nature. It is called “Ecopsychology.” The term was first used by Theodore Roszak in his work *The Voice of the Earth*. Ecopsychologist Dr. Ginny Anderson, reflects, “Ecopsychology studies the relationship between human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles.”

Whether we turn to classic examples such as Henry David Thoreau, who found his solace following the unexpected death of his brother while living alongside Walden Pond; or Walt Whitman, who gathered his idealistic compassion for humanity among the leaves of grass only to regather his sanity in those same fields following the Civil War; or John Muir, who found his own balance in his first summer in the Sierras and who, long before the digital din erupted, foresaw the cure to our modern maladies in the wild silence. A contemporary example of the broken seeker can be found in the memoir *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed. Encapsulating the disillusionment and brokenness driving so many into the landscape Strayed writes, “I was a terrible believer in things, but I was also a terrible nonbeliever in things. I was as searching as I was skeptical. I didn’t know where to put my faith, or if there was such a place, or even what the word faith meant, in all of its complexity. Everything seemed to be







*“The role of the wilderness in healing from the cruelties of life has been documented by those creative minds who went in search of their own sanity among the still-wild places.”*

possibly potent and possibly fake.” It is this unmoored place many journeyers find themselves in when they set out into nature. Strayed’s quote perfectly describes the ache that drives us into the wild yet leaves us with the question: *when we are at our most vulnerable and go into nature to find that healing, what is it that we find there in the wild that soothes us so?*

Cheryl Strayed is a memoirist, essayist, a columnist with *The Rumpus* under the pen name “Dear Sugar.” Though is most well-known for *Wild* during which she chronicles her journey up the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) following her mental decline after losing her mother unexpectedly. Newly divorced, addicted to heroin, living morally askew, lost to herself and her family, Strayed set out to reclaim herself on the PCT. From a physical standpoint, her time on the PCT is a forced withdraw from her heroin addiction and a self-imposed isolation after years of risky behavior. From an internal—spiritual—standpoint the wilderness acts as a mirror bringing Cheryl face-to-face with the one thing she can’t face: the loss of “the love of her life” . . . her mother.

Beyond her story and into the wider scope of the world, *Wild* highlights the state we come to in this present age—it sketches out the archetypal “decline” and the journey of reclamation that follows. This journey seems to have phases, much the same way that grief does, only what we are grieving for is the person we used to be, which circumstance has brought to an end—broken, killed. As I observe it—and have explored below in my own adaptation of the Kubler-Ross model of Grief, the stages are:

- 1. The Loss and The Subsequent Denial and Shock: In this stage, we can face what has befallen us and often self-medicate as a way to avoid our reality.*
- 2. Anger and Guilt: In this stage, we become angry with the people, or the god, or the world who could do such painful things to us. It is also normal in this stage to point the anger inward and blame ourselves for what has happened to us, in a spiral of self-hatred.*
- 3. Seeking a Savior: In this stage, we go outside of ourselves, wanting someone or something to “cure” us. Whether it is God or a lover or a quick fix, we are desperate to find someone to “save us.”*
- 4. Depression and Despair: In this stage, there is a deepening of the sadness and despair, which is really at the root of the aforementioned stages.*
- 5. Radical Acceptance: the moment when you realize that your healing is your responsibility regardless of who or what is to blame for your decline.*



Throughout her journey, Strayed is grieving for her mother but also for the women her mother had raised her to be, and the PCT was her path to peace and back to herself. Strayed's journey brings into relief those moments that so many of us come to in life wherein circumstance has devastated us, and we must start clearing away the rubble to make room for the new. Her story speaks to the inner-state we have when we begin the journey: everything is in question and we go into nature seeking clarity. What exactly within us that pulls us inwardly into nature to seek that healing is another mystery all together, though seems to fall in line with a

lineage of "lost" seekers inherently pulled into the wild, as though a part of them knows that that is where their peace lies.

As these seekers set out, the journey takes place across the landscape and yet there is another journey taking place within—it is a dual journey.

For Strayed, being wild seemed the opposite of lost, making the reader ask: if in being disconnected with the wild, am I disconnected from myself. Wildness is authentic, it is raw, it is apart from pretending and denial



and doesn't allow for avoidance. Perhaps that is why it is such a great facilitator for truth—because it doesn't allow us to turn away—and acceptance of reality is a huge part of healing from trauma.

At the end of her hike down the Pacific Crest Trail, Strayed sat thinking back on her journey, ruminating on what peace meant. Did it mean finding forgiveness? *No*. It meant accepting herself—and her life—in all its imperfection and messiness. Nature didn't provide an escape from the pain or ugliness but a melding with it—a coming to terms. Along the path, Strayed realized she didn't have to explain why she had done all that she had done or justify why her insanity may have been the sane reaction to an insane situation, instead she just owned it all:

*“It was all unknown to me then, as I sat on that white bench on the day I finished my hike. Everything except the fact that I didn't have to know. That is was enough to trust that what I'd done was true . . . To know that seeing the fish beneath the surface of the water was enough. That it was everything. It was my life—like all lives, mysterious and irrevocable and sacred... .”*

In her book, *The Hour of Land*, Terry Tempest Williams, writes, “Wilderness is not a place of isolation but contemplation. Refuge. Refugees . . . Wilderness is a knife that cuts through pretense and exposes fear. Even in remote country, you cannot escape your mind.” Is the solitude inherent to the wilderness a mirror to the soul showing us all that we cannot otherwise see? Perhaps. Is wilderness the landscape where we face our internal hungry ghosts? Yes. But what alchemy happens there in the wild that is such a tonic for these wounds in us beyond modern medicine?

The Irish poet and priest, John O'Donahue, explores an idea that is seemingly at the heart of the answer we seek when he ruminates on the role of beauty, “We feel most alive in the presence of the Beautiful for it meets the needs of our soul.” Perhaps, the healing element of nature is the raw beauty of it. The mind/heart is damaged by ugliness—violence, vulgarity, poverty,

abuse, loss...—and that the absorption of this ugliness contributes toward the afflictions we live within our adult life—depression, hurt transmuted into rage, anxiety, despair, dissociation, denial, psychosis, weariness, pessimism—all those things that create mental and emotional strains (wounds) within us. In its simplest form, perhaps the ability of nature to heal the wounded parts of us is that we are traumatized by ugliness—ugly sights seen, ugly words absorbed, ugly actions done unto us, ugly experiences—and the remedy for this damage done by ugliness is beauty—those natural sights that seem enwrapped in an inherent grace that brings us to a moment of awe. The mind is scarred by inhuman ugliness. The salve for that wound is natural beauty. It is the balance of imbalance.

After exploring my own experiences of wounds and wildness, it seems to me that transcendence is the alchemy of transmuting pain into peace, dark into light, senseless into meaning, loss into growth, and death into rebirth. When the buildup of pain and loss amassed across our life is not transmuted it becomes toxic to the mind and body. Transcendence is the work of creating a meaningful life. It is the work of regulating the health of the soul. It is the work of redistributing the balance of the mind. It is the process of finding a way to gather the ugliness built up upon us as a result of cruel circumstance, and rolling it over into a triumphant renewal.

Positive outcome shouldn't be aimed for, meaning is the goal when trying to quell any despair. From meaning will stem peace, resolve, and healing. In the shadow of the suffering and senseless loss we face in this life, happiness is sometimes too far off to reach. Meaning, however, is achievable and will lead into the happiness we seek. The opposite of suffering is not happiness but meaning. The opposite of loss is fullness. The opposite of brokenness is not restoration to your original state, but a belief in betterment. The landscape provides the necessary silence. These two elements combined—ink and wild—save many of us when all else has failed.

At the end of her trail of personal reclamation, Strayed writes, “I'd finally come to understand what it had been: a yearning for a way out, when actually what I had wanted to find was a way in.” Answering her question



years before it was even written, Muir reflects, “I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

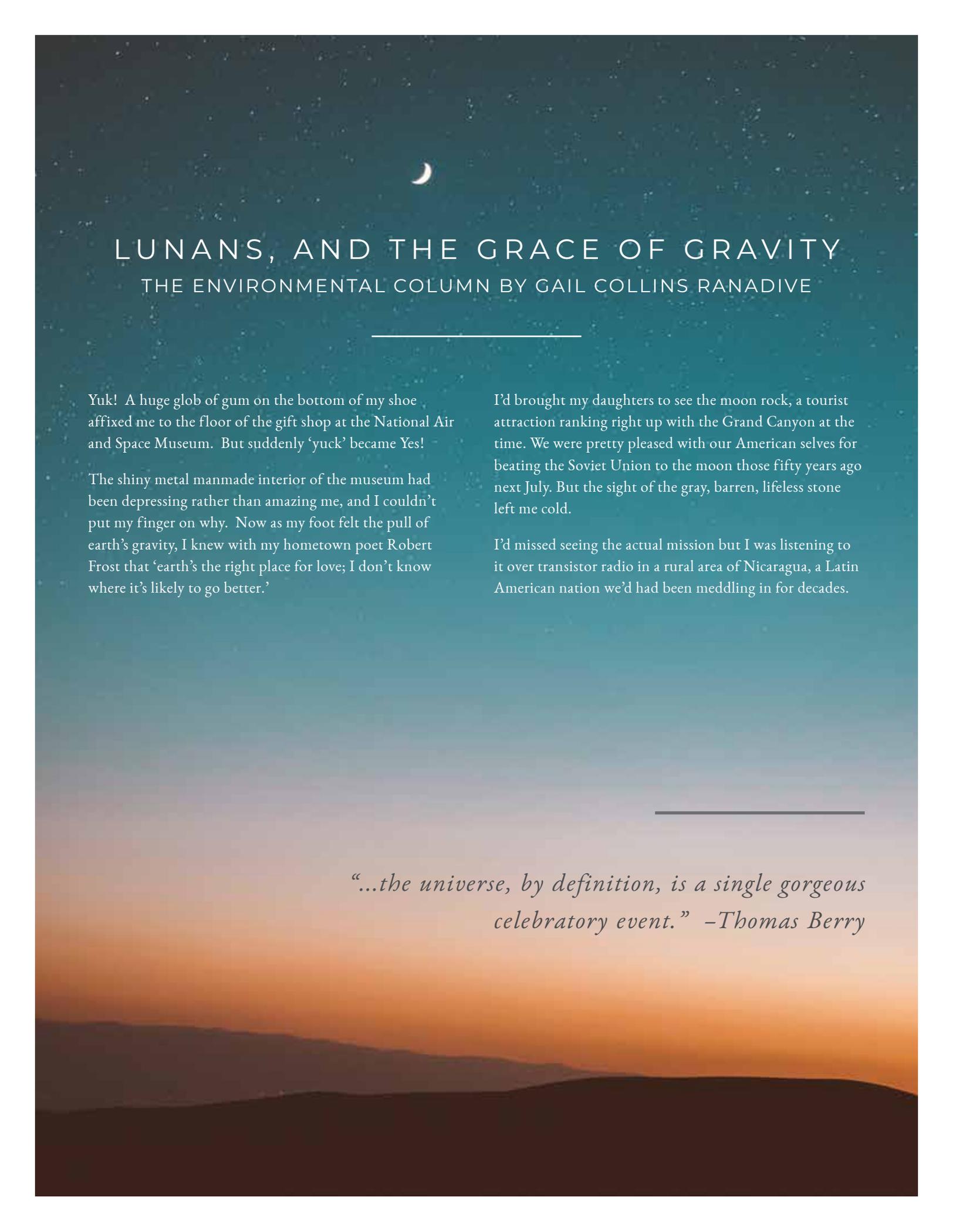
When in the mindset of trauma, it is nearly impossible to believe change will ever come; a belief in betterment is the hardest belief to hold. When the majority of what you have known is ugliness, the inescapable thought is that the entire world is ugly. We become so convinced of this in our depression and resignation, and are unable to live under the weight of it. To discover beauty in a world you thought only to be barren is to be reborn into possibility. Nature is the doorway. There, in the wild silence, we behold the beauty of redemption.

While we can convey certain aspects of this alchemy, many dimensions of the wild are ineffable. Along her journey on the Pacific Crest Trail, Strayed carried *The Dream of a Common Language* a poetry collection by Adrienne Rich with her as she attempted to understand what was beyond words—both within herself and the

land. Perhaps it is somehow fitting to look to the poets as our guides along the trail; for they are the word weavers who have the power to name the nameless and explore the intangible. American Poet David Wagoner captures the connection of the human-wild bond in the last line of his poem “Lost.”

. . . You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.

“The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you.” . . . Those who are lost want to be found—they want to be embraced. Someone once said, “In going into a forest, we go into an established community waiting to embrace us.” Perhaps that is why we outcasts, we fringe-dwellers, we who life has pummelled and broken go unto the wild, like orphans seeking a new family after life has wronged us so.



# LUNANS, AND THE GRACE OF GRAVITY

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COLUMN BY GAIL COLLINS RANADIVE

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Yuk! A huge glob of gum on the bottom of my shoe affixed me to the floor of the gift shop at the National Air and Space Museum. But suddenly ‘yuck’ became Yes!

The shiny metal manmade interior of the museum had been depressing rather than amazing me, and I couldn’t put my finger on why. Now as my foot felt the pull of earth’s gravity, I knew with my hometown poet Robert Frost that ‘earth’s the right place for love; I don’t know where it’s likely to go better.’

I’d brought my daughters to see the moon rock, a tourist attraction ranking right up with the Grand Canyon at the time. We were pretty pleased with our American selves for beating the Soviet Union to the moon those fifty years ago next July. But the sight of the gray, barren, lifeless stone left me cold.

I’d missed seeing the actual mission but I was listening to it over transistor radio in a rural area of Nicaragua, a Latin American nation we’d had been meddling in for decades.

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*“...the universe, by definition, is a single gorgeous celebratory event.” –Thomas Berry*

Standing in an airless, windowless dirt-floored dwelling while a woman gave birth and we tried to convince her to let us to put blindness preventing drops in her newborn's eyes made me wonder why we were spending so many resources to explore the moon when there was so much that needed doing on earth.

It was only much later that I learned the lunar landing had more to do with domination than discovery: why else would my partner's employer, a defense contractor, have been awarded the challenge to design and build the rockets that would put a spacecraft up there? Planting the U.S. flag first was the goal!

Ah, but alas, there was an unintended consequence! Pictures of our earth beamed back from the moon fired up the public's imagination and brought forth the first Earth Day, plus environmental regulations to protect our planet from ourselves.

And down through the decades, NASA has tracked and documented the changes being caused by human impact on earth's natural systems. Astronauts have reported on the receding glaciers, expanding deserts, changing coastlines, raging wildfires...and tried to warn us. And now things are so critical that the current government threatens to cut NASA's funding if it doesn't focus more on space than on home base.

When I ask my partner why the moon isn't more like the earth if it's just a blasted-off part of us, he patiently explains that the moon's small size means that it doesn't have enough gravity to hold onto a protective atmosphere. And without that, life can't take hold: there's too much radiation from our sun.

Yet this is the precious atmosphere we're messing with! "It's not rocket science!" my exasperated partner wants to yell at the deniers who deliberately delay and then block all efforts to address the oncoming climate catastrophe: "Burning fossil fuels releases CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. This thickens the blanket that protects the earth from the sun's radiation. Then the trapped heat warms the earth. So stop the burning! Period!!"

We both have rooftop solar on our homes, and drive an electric car on solar power. There really *are* clean energy alternatives to coal, gas, and oil, as increasing numbers of people are realizing. We know if we don't make the

transition soon, it will be too late to matter. Yet our government has 'doubled down' on fossil fuel exploration, exploitation, and exportation: its stated mission is world energy domination. As our so-called 'leaders' claim they don't believe in climate change, they fail to realize that the forces of nature, like global warming and gravity, aren't subject to their ill-advised opinions.

In my memory, I run out of the Air and Space Museum to scrape the gum off my shoe and kneel down in wonder at the lone dandelion poking up through a crack in the sidewalk. And I wonder with Father Thomas Berry "what it would be like if we had existed first on the moon and then come to planet earth. The experience would, of course, be so overwhelming that we could not absorb the impact of the earth's beauty!"

Indeed! What would we make of the great diversity of life flying, swimming, running, mating, birthing, breathing, being...? And had we just happened to land on the rim of a grand chasm that lays the earth open like a book, would we be able to see beyond the familiar-feeling rocky landscape and read the epochs of life's evolution embedded in those layers of stone?

Would we, as 'lunans,' stand still in awe as gravity held our feet to earth's surface, be amazed at what its force has brought forth: the sound of coyotes carried in on the wind, the sight of condors soaring overhead, the feel a brachiopod under our fingers, the taste of a pine nut, the scent of incoming rain?

What would our response have been? Would we have embraced the mindset of early earth humans who let awe hold human greed in check, or would we hone in on the modern arrogance that plunders earth's resources, destroys existing ecosystems, and in the process turning earth's wonder into a wasteland reflective of the moon?

Perhaps our lunan reaction would be one of such gratitude that the grace of gravity would become *gracias*, one of the many human words for thank you.

In fact, what if our gratitude for gravity could create a whole new species, one that is both human and lunan! In a way, that's exactly what Thomas Berry urged: "The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human... at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life-forms, in a time developmental context,

by means of story and shared dream experience” (i.e. creative imagination, vision).

Together as a Greater Self, we could stand at the dawn of a new era, and co-create a culture in which the new human/lunan will be placed within the dynamics of the planet rather than the planet placed within the dynamics of the human.

Earth *is* the right place for love, and for the Life that emerged over eons until such a thing as love became possible. Can we love this life on this planet deep enough to protect it from those who would trash it and treat it like another throwaway commodity to be left behind for someplace else in space? Even if we could all just up and leave earth (which we can’t...that option will be only for a chosen few) count me out: the overwhelming beauty of this planet has a truth claim upon me that is even stronger than the grace of gravity.

And I’m stocking up on chewing gum ‘in case of emergency.’



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*“Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt,  
and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen.”*

*—Leonardo da Vinci*

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## THE BROTHERHOOD OF ART

THE LIFE & THE ARTS COLUMN

BY ERIC D. LEHMAN

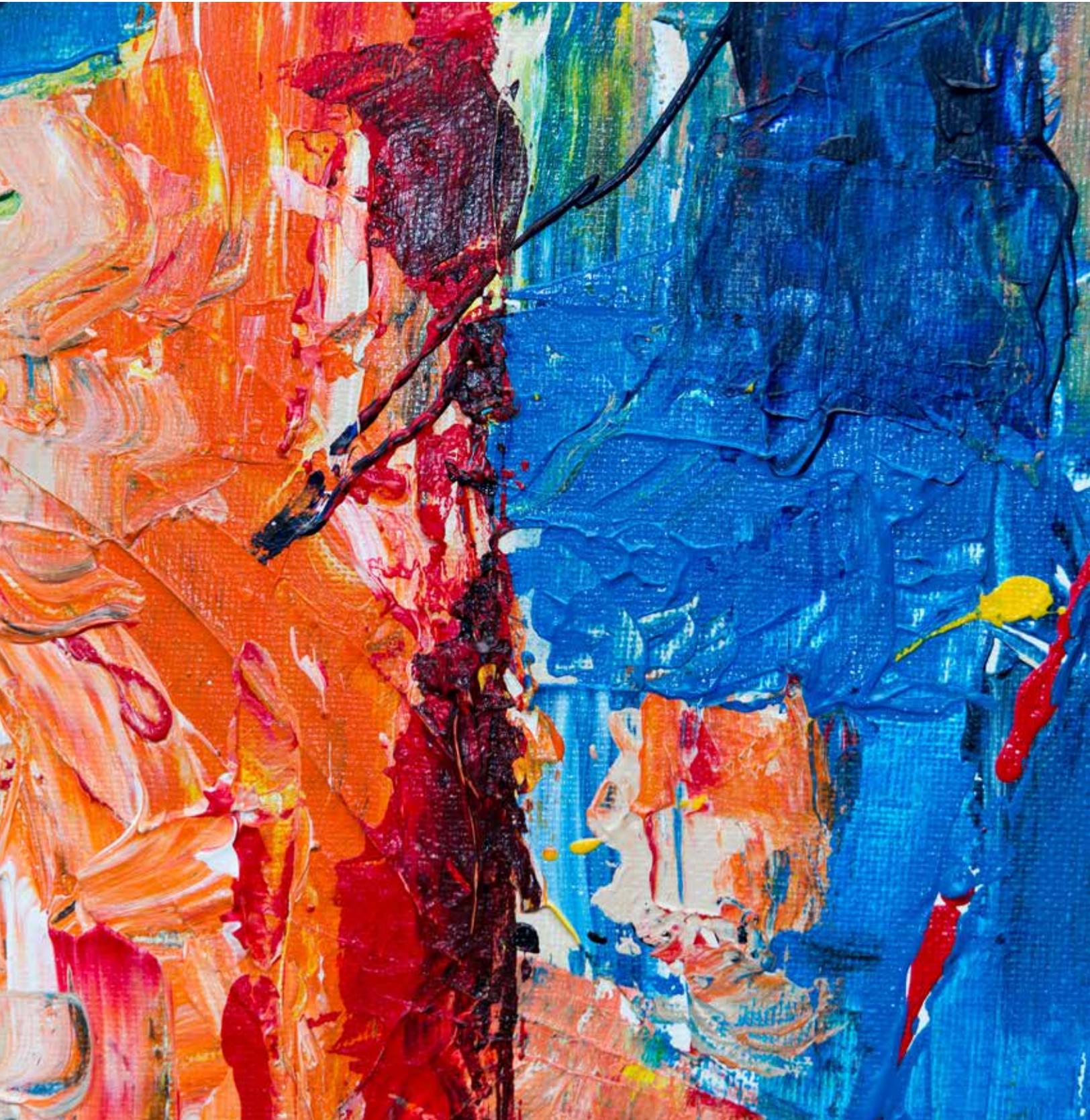
THE PROBLEM WITH LOVING ART IS THAT SOMETIMES YOU DON'T. As I glanced over one hundred paintings, sculptures, frames, sketchbooks, photographs, letters, and tools from Maurice and Charles Prendergast I was not impressed. The exhibit provided a wide scope of both their works, from Maurice's paintings of Europe in the 1890s to Charles's carvings produced four decades later in Westport, Connecticut. But after four decades enjoying art museums around America and the world, I had never heard of them. Worse, I just didn't like their work.

*Over lunch in the New Britain Museum of Art café, I mentioned this to my wife, and as usually happens, she put me on the right track. “If you just look at something closely you begin to appreciate it more,” she said. “Spend some time with it. Part of appreciation is just giving yourself time. Part is comparative.” She sipped her tea. “If I just look a little closer, I would find things in each piece that I liked.” That made sense, but what could I find to like here?*

As a storyteller myself, I can't help but have a strong connection to the stories I encounter in art museums. I don't think I'm alone in that—our minds search naturally for story, whether it comes from knowing about the technique or process like with Jackson Pollock, or knowing about the importance of the piece in art history like the “toilet” by Marcel Duchamp. Knowing a little bit about either of these things helps especially with abstract art, which at first glance seems to have no story. Most often, though, the stories that draw us are those that come from the biography of the artist. These allow us to empathize or even identify with the artist, as in the world-famous story of Vincent van Gogh.

So at first, I tried to appreciate the Prendergasts biographically. Born in Newfoundland, brothers Charles and Maurice moved to Boston's South End with their parents in





1868. Unlike many brothers, they remained close friends throughout their lives, even as they moved from place to place, beginning with Maurice studying fine art in Paris while Charles learned how to make carved, decorative wooden objects in Boston. Charles outlived his brother by two decades, and his wife lived another four, helping to preserve and protect their legacy. “We together were such a fine team,” Maurice told Charles in a letter from Venice, while recovering from prostate surgery. That teamwork is rare among artists, to say the least, and even rarer are those that can collaborate in such a symbiotic way. The frames Charles contributed to his brother’s canvases are some of the most tender and beautiful expressions of partnership we have in a world where the “falling out” and “rupture” of artists’ friendships is more often remembered and even celebrated.

As I learned more about them, I naturally began to appreciate them and understand their place in art history. Charles’s hand-carved mirror frames were typical of the Arts and Crafts movement, something I had only recently begun to recognize. Maurice’s almost pastel-like beach scenes are the ones most identifiable as “impressionist,” and often the small, faceless, loosely rendered people are what bring color to his landscapes. But most of his work was more truly “post-impressionist,” similar to European counterparts like Van Gogh and Odilon Redon. In recent decades American Impressionism has been given its due by critics and audiences, and it seems now the post-impressionists’ turn to shine.

In fact, I had recently been to four exhibits like this at “secondary” art museums across the country, and had noticed American post-impressionists taking their rightful place next to their European counterparts on the walls of first-tier museums. As a historian myself, I found it exciting that these artists were being rediscovered and reclaimed, and that their contributions were no longer being ignored in favour of more well-known giants. That fact alone made me happy, both as a citizen of America and as a lover of art.

After my first walk around the exhibit, I took a break and sat in the foyer of the exhibit listening to music with my eyes closed for a little while. My eyes were tired, but so was my brain. You must take breaks to let your mind absorb the art, to allow your eyes to adjust to new realities. My wife took a different approach, not yet halfway

through the galleries, sipping at the art like a vibrating hummingbird. I watched her for a while, and then surveyed the other museum patrons. There are a few bored people in art museums, just as there are bored students in my college classrooms. But these are some of the only places you can watch the faces of other humans as they are struggling to learn, to understand, to love.

Making my way a second time around the exhibit, I tried to appreciate the Prendergasts in comparison to artists I already knew. It was easy to see the influence of Cezanne in Maurice’s broad, minimal strokes and of Matisse in the numerous bright colors, which when examined closely should not complement each other. He made circular movements with his brush more than Cezanne did, a technique that produces startling effects. Occasionally it did not work, such as when it gave the people on his beach scenes an overly “cartoony” aspect. However, both his colors and lively sense of action prevented this from being too problematic, and few have married people and scenery in a more interesting way.

But I still didn’t really like his paintings, until I moved away from the beach scenes to pieces like *The Birches or Snowscape*, where a complete absence of humans helps to focus on his unique near-abstraction of lines and strokes. This was definitely an advantage to looking at such a broad selection of one artist’s pieces. His *Flowers and Poppies in a Blue Vase* are lovely still-lives, and *Woman in Green Dress and Portrait of a Young Girl* are built with thick, obvious strokes of paint, demonstrating how suited his technique was to larger portraiture, possibly more than to the earlier beach scenes. These paintings I really liked, if not loved.

Perhaps that was only my personal preference. Art appreciation is idiosyncratic, and I had learned long ago never to let a critic or even a friend tell me what to like, or worse, what not to like. Though we love visiting art museums together, my wife and I often disagree about our experiences there. For example, she has more admiration for the emotion or thoughts that a painting produces in her, and is moved by someone like Mark Rothko more than I am. I usually find emotion either in the gloriously anthemic or the tear-jerking absurd.

But I tried to look through my wife’s eyes, and in that way, Charles Prendergast moved me emotionally far more than his brother. His carved wooden objects were not the sort of

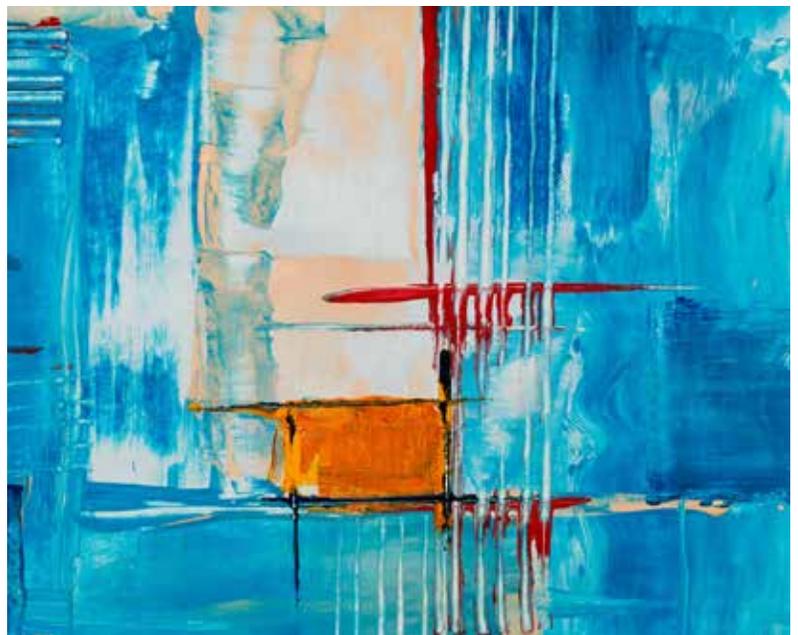
art I usually responded to, but I found myself drawn to a lovingly rendered angel worthy of a medieval sculptor. His carved panel paintings seemed located at some juncture of ancient Etruscan art and Paul Gauguin, with the most successful being *Donkey Rider*, delightful in its whimsy and touching in its motifs. I found myself grinning at its small, odd charm.

As we left the New Britain Museum of Art, I commented on how glad I was to learn something. And as I said it, I realized that the knowledge was not only about art. I had spent time and looked closely, finding certain things that I liked, and others I did not. I had made each piece a part of me, the same way I might sip a glass of bad whisky or a cup of good coffee. Either way the result was joy. Part of this joy is learning about individual artists, about

historical movements, about the logic and emotion of various works of art. But another part is simply the joy of paying attention. As the Prendergast brothers surely knew, understanding takes time, and so does love.



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## SMOKING ON MY DEATHBED

### IN CONTEMPLATION OF IMPERMANENCE & TRANSITION

BY THEODORE RICHARDS

MY FIVE-YEAR-OLD IS, IN MANY WAYS, my easiest child, overall. She's the kind of child that teachers love, the kind of child who people won't hesitate to watch. "Oh, I'll watch Calliope anytime!" they'll say. She can focus easily; she's kind; she pays attention and wants to please. There's just that one problem, that moment when it all goes left—*the transition*. When it's time to go, she might have a meltdown. When it's time for bed, she might have a meltdown. When it's time for a bath, she might have a meltdown.

When it's time to get *out* of the bath, she might have a meltdown.

Most parents will recognize this. It isn't a shock. After all, many young children have trouble with transitions and change. But why? What is it about us—human beings—that makes us so troubled by change? Usually, we adults think of ourselves as having outgrown this problem. But I have been wondering: Do we ever really outgrow our resistance to transition or do we simply have our own, grownup meltdowns on a larger scale?

And is it possible that an entire civilization could have a meltdown—a collective tantrum, if you will—at a time of transition?

\* \* \*

I recently turned 45. This, in itself, means little to me. Physically, I feel more or less the same as I did ten years ago. But I have noticed, recently, that this has been a time full of surprising changes, changes for which I really was never prepared. I am, like Dante in the famous lines in the beginning of the *Commedia*, entering the "*selva oscura*"—the dark wood—in "*il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*"—the middle of life's journey.

For me, this moment brought with it a new phase in my work, the end of a decade of working in the nonprofit world running youth programs and leading an organization. I have had similar changes before—I've moved many times, changed course many times—but this felt different. I've reached a phase in my life where the stakes are higher, and where the possibilities for the future seem to have narrowed. So it brought with it a great deal of stress.

*“Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”*  
*—Dylan Thomas*

But the stressful times in life always seem to occur during times of change. Moving. A new job. The beginning or end of a relationship. Even when these are good things, things we want, they bring stress. But I also wonder: how do we collectively manage stress in times of transition? And what happens when an entire species, an entire planet, goes through a period of radical change?

\* \* \*

News of the end has been unavoidable. Each day we are confronted with stories of burning forests, rising seas, superstorms. Ecosystems are collapsing; biodiversity is crashing.

The focus—understandably, I suppose—has been on how we can save ourselves. That is, practical, technological, political steps to live sustainably on the planet. The harder questions, however, have to do not with the practical steps we might take—these are fairly obvious if we can muster the common sense and political will—but with how we first have to transform our culture, our way of seeing ourselves in relationship.

But the situation is so dire that I wonder if it’s still even possible. Might it be that life, or at least our species, is just a blip, something like a perturbation on the quantum foam, inevitably fated to pass?

Is it possible that humanity is impermanent, our collective lives no different from the individual lives that we know will end? If so, how should we mourn?

What is certain is that the destructive human civilization of global capitalism is inevitably passing away. But we do have a choice as to how we respond to this transition. The easiest choice is to be like five-year-olds and have a collective, planetary tantrum, throwing all of our toys out of the pram and putting fascists in power.

\* \* \*

Perhaps part of the way forward is to let go a little bit of this idea that the world is something that humans can fix. I don’t mean to suggest that we can’t live better lives, less destructive lives. But perhaps rather than living our lives as though we are here to engineer a better world,



we, and the world, would be better served if we thought differently about the notion of our impermanence.

To begin with, we tend to think of the end in terms of abstract, linear time. The Greeks—and many other cultures—had more than one word for time. *Chronos* was linear time; *kairos* represented a special time, a time of transformation. As Jesus says in his first words in the earliest of the gospels (Mark), “The *Kairos* is at hand.” This is a time of transformation, a time outside of linear time. This is the moment when he emerges from the water, baptized and reborn, and the cosmos above splits. As Karl Jung points out, we are, like Jesus, at a moment of *kairos*.

When I worked for a Danish NGO in Zimbabwe, there was a strict schedule set for the adult literacy lessons I taught. Participants were expected to learn English and math at precisely 9:00 and 1:00. But there was a problem: we were living in a place without clocks, without even the concept of linear time. Time and events were intimately interrelated. People vaguely knew what 1:00 was—they knew that it happened after the crops had been tended, the water fetched, the children fed. The notion that it could come on its own, abstractly, was an absurdity. But this wasn’t simply about scheduling. Nor were the lessons merely about English or math. This, like most development aid, was about integrating people into the Capitalist order. Abstract time allows one to show up to work, to sell one’s time.

We know now, through modern science, that time doesn’t move along in this linear way. Time and events are intimately linked. And there is really no such thing as a universal, abstract time. Time differs depending on one’s place in the Universe.

So we also must ask the question: *what does this say about impermanence? What does this say about my own death? The death of our species?*

In some Buddhist traditions, our individual consciousness is depicted as a wave on the universal sea of consciousness. We can become attached to our selves—the individual wave—or recognize that we are simply a fluctuation in a greater sea of reality.

What does endure? If our death and destruction—both individually and collectively—are imminent, how should

we live? Should we simply lie back on our deathbed and light up a cigarette, knowing that we’ll die soon anyway? Or should we consider the words of Dylan Thomas?:

*Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

\*\*\*

I have two modest suggestions, somewhere between a tantrum and passive acceptance. First, let’s consider living for *joy*. I don’t mean self-indulgence, nor do I mean turning away from suffering. Genuine joy requires us to live more fully, more deeply, to experience the world for all its messiness and suffering.

Second, I think that the thing we all crave—the thing that actually does endure—is not some abstract, disembodied permanence, nor is it some shallow, materialistic permanence through the Capitalist consumption. I think we all yearn for *community*, to experience the world as our selves, our selves as the world.

In this way, it is possible to fall in love with the world, even in a time of transition. In this way, we might learn to live in the world in such a way that we don’t need to consume it, destroy it. We might just survive as a species. And even if we don’t, nothing lasts forever—individuals, species, planets. Resting in the joy of this beautiful world we share—for this moment, this little blip of existence that is both fleeting and forever—can help us through the hard times. Even bath time.



Theodore Richards (www.theodorericards.com) the founder of The Chicago Wisdom Project and the author of seven books and numerous literary awards, including two Independent Book Awards and two Nautilus Book Awards. His most recent book is *A Letter to My Daughters: Remembering the Lost Dimension & the Texture of Life*. He lives on the south side of Chicago with his wife and three daughters.



## BELONGING TO THE LAND | THE WAYFARER

A CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN TRIMBLE BY L.M. BROWNING

STEPHEN TRIMBLE TELLS STORIES—in words and photographs—about the land and people of the West. Trimble has taught in the Honors College and Environmental Humanities program at the University of Utah and spent a year as a Wallace Stegner Centennial Fellow at the University of Utah’s Tanner Humanities Center. Steve was born in Denver, his family’s base for roaming the West with his geologist father. After a liberal arts education at Colorado College, he worked as a park ranger in Colorado and Utah, earned a master’s degree in ecology at the University of Arizona, served as director of the Museum of Northern Arizona Press, and for five years lived near San Ildefonso Pueblo in northern New Mexico. Steve often serves as a

consultant and writer for the conservation community, including a year with The Nature Conservancy’s Colorado Plateau Conservation Initiative and a collaboration with the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance as editor of a white paper to support the protection of Greater Canyonlands. In a landmark effort by writers hoping to sway public policy, Trimble co-compiled (with Terry Tempest Williams) the essay collection, *Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness*. On March 27, 1996, Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) read Trimble’s essay from *Testimony* on the floor of the United States Senate during his plea to protect Utah wilderness. Feingold concluded with, “That short piece of writing is so powerful...because

it is a timeless statement about how people feel about natural places.”

*Leslie: Welcome, Stephen. Thank you for making space to speak with me. If one steps back and looks at the breadth of your work thus far, the signature of your perspective would undoubtedly be rooted in the intersection of the landscape and cultural significance of the West. You speak from a place of authority on ecology and culture, yet all this must have begun with a pivotal moment or realization that made you fall in love with and find purpose in these subjects. Where did this journey into the wild begin for you?*

Stephen: Whenever I trace my journey, I begin with my father. The pivotal event that propelled me on this course of engaging with the land wasn't just a "moment" but the first seventeen years of my life.

My dad, Don Trimble, grew up in the West, in the lee of Mount Rainier in Washington's Yakima Valley. He climbed the big Cascade volcanoes as a Boy Scout outfitted with hobnail boots and a Trapper Nelson wood-framed pack. He chose his profession—field geologist with the US Geological Survey—so he could spend time outside.

Each summer, my dad, my mom, and I would leave our home in Denver and head west for my father's field season. We rented homes in whatever Oregon or Idaho town lay closest to the quadrangle Dad was mapping. And on these road trips, my father kept up a running commentary about what we saw out the window. The stories of Lewis and Clark and the Oregon Trail. The big-picture geography of the West. Maps—always—were guideposts to our experiences and understanding. I've called maps our family scripture, and it's no exaggeration.

I grew up seeing the landscape as a place with endlessly rich content, a place to learn from, to revel in. How best to learn more? From books. For presents my father asked for Bernard DeVoto, A.B. Guthrie, David Lavender—the great writers and historians of the West. These books stayed in our home, and eventually I read them, too.

So I went off to college with a bedrock familiarity with the entire West. A checklist of national parks I'd visited.

A list of unvisited parks I yearned to see. A sense that the mountain men and fur trappers had been here not so long before me. An assumption that road trips were the first choice whenever any free time came along. And a course at Colorado Outward Bound—my high school graduation present—that took me deep into the Snowmass Wilderness.

In my college years, I took all this prep and became an independent actor. Taking my father's lead, I organized my little band of friends to venture out on trips and hikes and funky mountaineering efforts all over the West. These journeys led directly to my work as a writer and photographer.

*Leslie: During those early phases wherein we are still trying to find our way and our purpose, many of us are fortunate enough to have a mentor who guides us in our convictions, be it a flesh-and-blood teacher by our side or one whose voice echoes down the ages in art and literature. Who were your mentors?*

Stephen: I've had extraordinary teachers, generous mentors, and pivotal models. A high school English teacher who insisted we turn loose our imaginations. A Bureau of Land Management biologist who was the first true editor I encountered, the first reader to rip to shreds my wordy and passive writing and ask me to reconstruct my paragraphs with action, concision, and clarity.

My ecology professor at Colorado College, Dick Beidleman, taught me to pay attention. And this, as Mary Oliver said in her beautifully concise way, is the key to good work. This, from Oliver's "Sometimes":

*"Instructions for living a life:*

*Pay attention.*

*Be astonished.*

*Tell about it."*

The great nature writer Ann Zwinger was the first writer I met on equal ground. I was a junior in college and had published only a couple of mini-essays, but Ann—a generation older than me—treated me as her peer. We remained friends for the rest of her life. In my thirties, I was privileged to spend some time with Barry Lopez, who encouraged me to take myself more seriously as a writer.

Like all of us who do creative work, I've had more distant mentors. I'm in awe of those writers who consistently combine impeccable research, self-deprecatory humor, and glorious and exuberant language. Ellen Meloy and Annie Dillard come to mind.

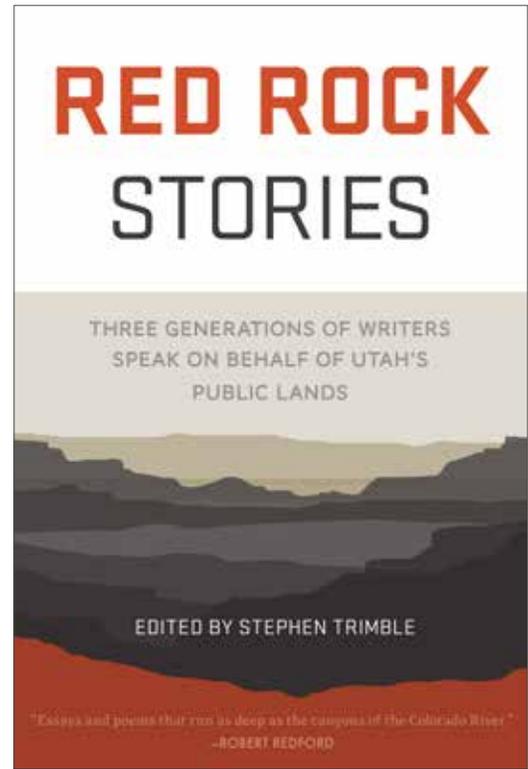
Ed Abbey and Wallace Stegner educated and inspired me through their books. I read *Desert Solitaire* in college just a couple of years after the book was published, and two years later I was a park ranger myself at Arches National Park. I read Stegner's *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* while continuing to work as a ranger on the Colorado Plateau in my twenties and had pretty much the same reaction described by Bruce Babbitt when he read Stegner's wise meditation on John Wesley Powell and the core truths of the West:

*"...it was as though someone had thrown a rock through the window. Stegner showed us the limitations of aridity and the need for human institutions to respond in a cooperative way. He provided me in that moment with a way of thinking about the American West, the importance of finding true partnership between human beings and the land."*

I also need to acknowledge the dozens of Native people I've interviewed for my projects in Southwest Indian Country, beginning in 1984, when I worked on a slide show and book about contemporary Native people (*Our Voices, Our Land*) for The Heard Museum in Phoenix. I've had the honor of listening to members of 50 Native nations in the Southwest over many years. They taught me about belonging to the land—our home—and added a spiritual dimension to my relationship with this home landscape.

*Leslie: Evoking an appreciation for the natural world not only in your written works but your photography, you take us by the hand and lead us through a wild doorway of magical landscapes. How did you first find your way into photography and what are some of the images in your portfolio that stand out in your memory as life-changing moments?*

Stephen: My dad gave me one of his old cameras when I was nine, and he critiqued my first efforts at snapshots. By the time I was in college, I photographed my travels, backpacking journeys, and mountain climbs—to make them real, to share my stories. I learned about design and light from poring over the work of the great photographers. Ernst Haas, in his 1971 book, *The Creation*,



showed me how to graphically revel in emotion and color.

Eliot Porter's and Philip Hyde's photographs in the Sierra Club's "battle books"—created by Sierra Club executive director David Brower in the 1960s and '70s to fight conservation battles—served as models forever after. Photos could change minds, inspire action, effect policy—and save wildlands.

And so I just keep striving to take better pictures.

Three images come to mind. . . .

1. I lived and worked at Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park when I was 23. That year as a seasonal park ranger led to my first "book" (*Great Sand Dunes: the shape of the wind, 1975*—and still in print!). The assignment (from a trusting park superintendent) to create the park's first 32-page general interpretive booklet challenged me for the first time to crisply capture the spirit of a place in words and photographs.

I photographed intensely, wandering the park alone with my camera—*paying attention*. This opportunity—and this place—launched me into my lifework. I’ve returned to update the book over the years, and this picture comes from one of these more recent trips to the highest sand dunes in North America, rising below the 14,000-foot peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Range.

2. When a publisher friend asked me to photograph for the University of Nevada Press’s Great Basin Natural History Series and to write the introductory volume, I knew little about the Great Basin Desert. This new territory wasn’t a single national park but an immense bioregion stretching across the entire Intermountain West. Like so many of us, I’d driven I-80 and US Highway 50 across the roller-coaster of basins and ranges, but I hadn’t ventured beyond, into the backcountry. I began criss-crossing the Great Basin, learning this new

place, and published *The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin in 1989*.

I fell in love with the unvisited space and silence of the Great Basin, and I’ve now lived in this desert, in Salt Lake City, for more than thirty years. Fieldwork for the book took me to remarkable places, and I’ve returned many times with my family. This photo of an autumn super-moon rising through an ancient Great Basin bristlecone pine snag at sunset comes from one of these power spots, The Table, high on Mount Moriah in Nevada’s Snake Range. I still feel like the Great Basin is my private playground.

3. Lastly, this photograph of Jeannette Larzelere at the climax of her Apache girl’s coming-of-age ceremony. I’ve often described this as the best photograph I’ve taken. I was photographing for The Heard Museum





project in 1984 (mentioned above) when I spent four days watching as the entire village of Whiteriver, Arizona, surrounded Jeannette with respect and love, dancing her into adulthood.

I have never seen anything more moving.

This picture captures what well may be the most important, most sacred event in this girl's life. On the last day of the ceremony, a young man dips an eagle feather and a spray of sage in a basket filled with clay dissolved in water. He covers the kneeling initiate with this earth paint, to give her the power of the earth, to keep her strong through a long life. With this clay, she acquires the power of Changing Woman, the great Apache heroine.

An entire Apache village gave unspoken permission for me to photograph this intimate moment. In exchange for this honor, I bear the responsibility of an ally.

We non-Native people romanticize Indigenous people while racism continues. We freeze them in 1880, a “vanishing people” with a “lost” culture. But of course Native people are just that—*people*, with an enduring and vital identity. And every missing act of empathy costs all of us, both Native and non-Native. Everyone loses out on mutual understanding, resonance, connection, respect.

Several weeks after the ceremony, I saw Jeannette Larzelere walking in jeans and a t-shirt at the White Mountain Apache Tribal Fair. She still looked transfigured. I'm sure she retains a little of that strength today, all these years later. She will need it.

*Leslie: Your support on behalf of the landscape is one that is deeply connected to your home region of Utah. In December of 2016, President Obama declared*



*1.35-million-acres in southeast Utah Bears Ears National Monument. From the nationally-acclaimed soapbox of the Los Angeles Times editorial page, you had the chance to thank President Obama for his actions.*

*In the wake of the 2016 election, you've had to move from celebration to defense as the Trump administration's merciless move against the public lands and environmental protections. Taking central focus on Obama's provisions, Trump signed an executive order gutting both Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante. You've been on the frontlines of the battle for Bears Ears, tell us about your actions and give us insight into the cross-section of issues at the heart of this matter (i.e.: racism, the perspectives of the Native American tribes, politics, corporate interests).*

Stephen: At the beginning of 2016, a whirlwind of threats to public lands surfaced in western wildlands. In response, the Salt Lake City writing community began to meet—all of us ready to leap into the long tradition of writing in support of conservation.

We had one remarkable campaign to support, the unparalleled Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition proposal. Five Southwestern Native nations had asked President Obama to proclaim a national monument on 1.9 million acres in southeast Utah, to protect extraordinary sacred lands from archaeological vandalism and destructive energy development. The tribes asked for co-management of the Bears Ears, honoring traditional knowledge along with western science.

As writers, we asked: how can we effectively participate in these conversations, support the tribes, and affect these decisions with our essays and poems and stories?

Our concerned group of citizen-writers had a powerful model, a book that Terry Tempest Williams and I created at a similar moment of crisis in 1995, *Testimony: Writers of the West Speak on Behalf of Utah Wilderness*. And so, with this 2016 round of attacks on public lands—and the promise of the Bears Ears monument—the Utah writing community concluded that we needed a “Testimony II.”

Kirsten Johanna Allen, publisher of Utah's nonprofit Torrey House Press, asked me to edit and made the

commitment to publish a trade edition after initial distribution of a chapbook in the circles of power in Washington, D.C. With a bow toward the original *Testimony*, we called our chapbook of essays and poems *Red Rock Testimony*. We titled the expanded trade version *Red Rock Stories*.

We gathered a chorus of 35 writers whose lives span nine decades, a montage of poems and essays that includes Native and Hispanic voices, warnings from elders and challenges from millennials, personal emotional journeys, and lyrical nature writing. These pieces address historical context, natural history and archaeology, energy threats, faith, and politics. Together, they offer a nuanced case for restraint and respect in this incomparable redrock landscape.

In June 2016 Kirsten Allen and I took our cartons of books to Washington D.C. We distributed copies to decision makers—to staffers at all levels in the land management agencies, to the President's Council on Environmental Quality, and to a few key members of Congress. Shortly afterward, we sent the book to every member of Congress with a rousing cover letter from Bruce Babbitt.

We hope the book reached the hands and hearts of the Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and of Barack Obama. We hope these words helped to inspire their decision to proclaim the innovative 1.35-million-acre Bears Ears National Monument during the president's last month in office.

Of course President Obama's visionary act of conservation had no time to mature before the current president eviscerated the new national monument with his own executive order, shrinking the boundaries of Bears Ears by 85 percent. A coalition of Native nations and conservationists has challenged his action in court.

The tribes show remarkable grace and patience as politicians act with ignorance and arrogance. As Trump barreled towards his disastrous proclamation, the Inter-Tribal Coalition explained the essence of the monument: “The Bears Ears region is not a series of isolated objects, but the object itself, a connected, living landscape, where the place, not a collection of items, must be protected.”

*“Our belief in our community—human, animal, plant, desert, mountain, stars above—will prevail and sustain us.*

*“Now we know what we must do, a line from a Pueblo song. The land shall endure. There will be victory. The land will go on. We shall have victory.”*

*—Simon Ortiz, Acoma Pueblo poet  
and contributor to Red Rock Stories*

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The first step toward redemption came with the election results of November 2018, when for the first time in history, two of the three commissioners in San Juan County, Utah (which encompasses Bears Ears) will be Diné, members of the Navajo Nation.

Donald Trump also attacked Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. Though this preserve has been around for a generation, the president catered to the angry anti-Federalist elected officials of Utah who dream of coalmine riches. Trump reduced the monument by half.

These days I’m devoting most of my conservation energy to defending Grand Staircase. I’m on the board of Grand Staircase-Escalante Partners, the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit to restore the monument. I’m cautiously hopeful we’ll prevail in the courts.

Acoma Pueblo poet (and contributor to *Red Rock Stories*) Simon Ortiz agrees, and reassures allies with these wise words:

*“Our belief in our community—human, animal, plant, desert, mountain, stars above—will prevail and sustain us.*

*“Now we know what we must do, a line from a Pueblo song. The land shall endure. There will be victory. The land will go on. We shall have victory.”*

*Leslie: Your range of ability cannot be denied, your knowledge never seems stretched beyond its limit, whether you’re looking through the lens of a camera, penning op-eds, or crafting pieces on culture and landscape. It is easy to see why you were recently named one of Utah’s “15 Most Influential Artists” by Artists of Utah/15 Bytes Magazine; however, you’ve ventured inward into an even more personal space in the book project, *Leave Me Alone Forever*. The piece explores how mental illness has touched your family and ultimately takes a deeper dive into the woefully inadequate mental healthcare system. As an author of a radically authentic personal essay on a struggle with mental illness, I know the challenges of bringing such intimate details out into the world. Tell us a little of your family’s struggle with mental illness. What progression of events and realizations brought you into the mind-space of wanting to tell this story?*

Stephen: My mother divorced an abusive first husband after a one-year mistake of a bad marriage at 20, in 1942. But when she moved on, her newborn son, Michael, came with her. Five years later she married my father, who adopted Mike. I came along when Mike was eight.

Sweet as a kid, Mike was diagnosed as “retarded,” the acceptable word in those days. But in 1957, rage and psychosis overwhelmed him and threatened our family.

His new diagnosis: paranoid schizophrenia, capable of violence. Our parents had no choice but to seek Mike's commitment to the Colorado State Hospital. I was six. Mike was 14. He never lived at home again.

Mike's life mirrored the history of our treatment of mental illness in America in the second half of the twentieth century. He spent nine years in Colorado mental institutions. When he was mainstreamed back to Denver, he rejected our family. Ten years later, he died in 1976 in a Denver boarding home, and his body wasn't discovered for three days. *The Denver Post* used his lonely death as a hook to expose these poorly managed warehouses for people with mental illness. This brutal publicity exponentially amplified my mother's grief and guilt.

My mother saved the agonizing newspaper stories about his death in an envelope with old court documents, hospital records, and Mike's letters. That file, along with an artifact or two and a scatter of photos in our family albums, was all that remained from my brother's difficult life. Mom hated talking about Mike, whose story only brought her heartbreak. And I avoided any thoughts of Mike beyond the most superficial. "I had an older brother—a half-brother—who left home when I was six. He was diagnosed sequentially as retarded, schizophrenic, and epileptic. He died many years ago."

I carried fear and shame about my brother, just as nationally we carry these same feelings of disgust and discomfort about mental illness—what one psychiatrist calls "primal fear." Many years ago, when Mike rejected us, when he wrote to our mother, "leave me alone forever," I felt relief.

I want to do better.

Mike, the defining tragedy of our mother's life, has long been gone. My mother and father are gone. No one survives to tell me the stories I need to hear in order to resurrect the details of Mike's life. But, as a starter, I have the "Mike File."

It took me a year of distance from my father's death to open the envelope. It feels incendiary. But, finally, I open the clasp and spill the contents onto my desk. For the first time, I'm ready to grapple with Mike's life and death and to follow the story of our mother and her

lost soul of a son into the shadows of America's appalling response to mental illness, into the dark recesses of our family, and behind the doors I've barricaded in myself.

This time, when I look into my brother's eyes, I will not look away. And so I'm working away on a book about Mike, honoring his life and striving for the empathy I was too young and unformed to feel when he was alive.

*Leslie: As one who suffers under the labels of mental illness and has been confronted by the stigma's around such struggles, I feel a swell of gratitude for what you're doing.*

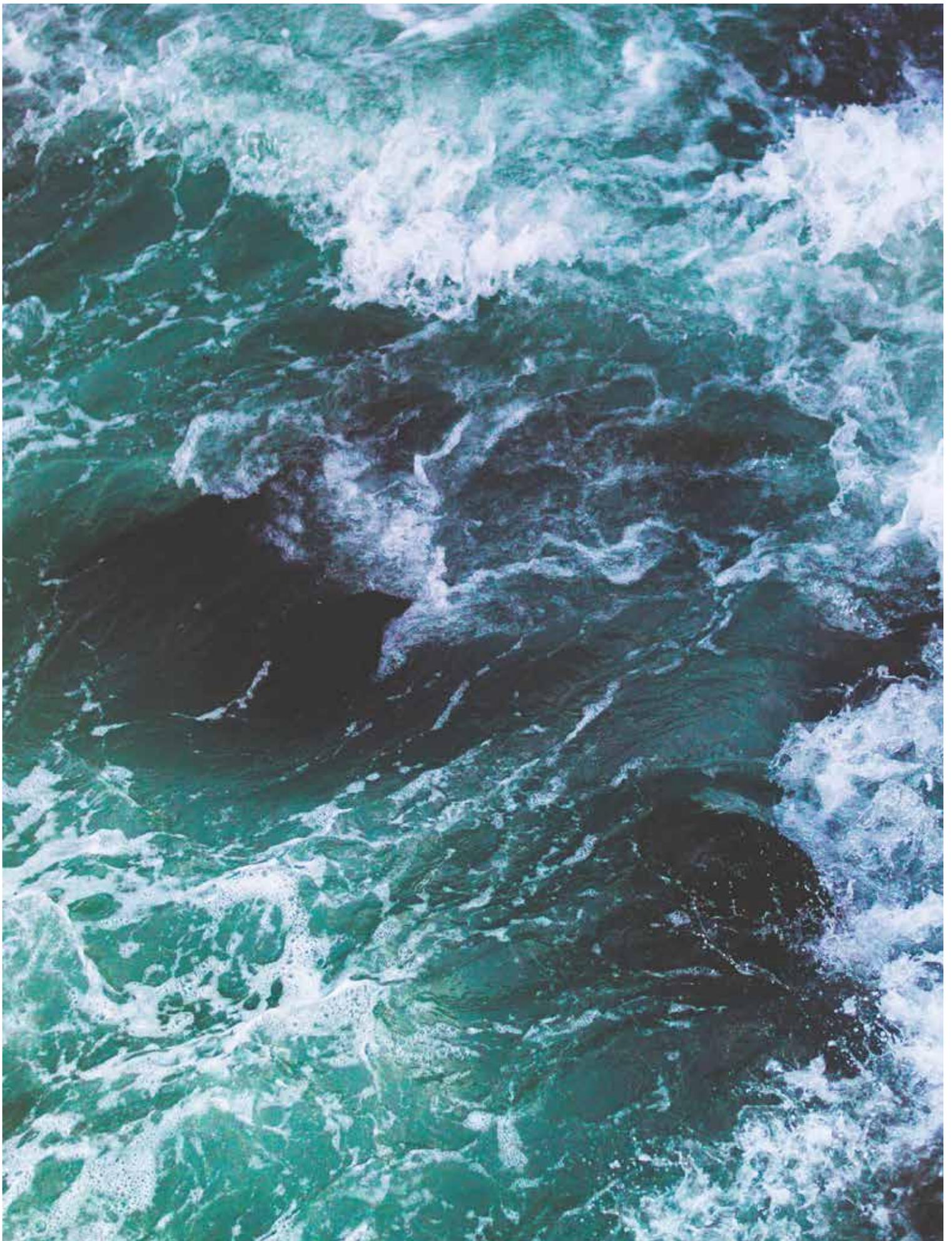
*. . . A question we all seem to be asking ourselves in this age of crisis-fatigue and mounting urgency is: How do we keep fighting the good fight in the face of rising political pushback. How do you keep going after all these years of struggle and setback on behalf of the land?*

Stephen: When Trump was elected, I asked myself the same question *The Wayfarer* asks in every issue: *how do we create change?* And in this moment, I figure my contribution is to write. Op-eds reach the most people—quickly, in real time, so different from working on books for years. That's what I've concentrated on, along with the everyday actions of any engaged citizen, attending protests, calling members of congress, canvassing for good candidates. Taking action feels so much healthier than staying home and whining and wailing.

In between rallies and protests and hearings, I make time to walk in the sun, on the earth. The Bears Ears tribes speak often of healing, and we surely find this in our revisits to the wild and our revels in community.

*Leslie: Finally, what's next on the horizon with regard to your work?*

Stephen: I worked on a novel for several years in the 1990s but didn't have the chops to finish it. I am eager to go back and get it right.



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## ESSAYS

*“After nourishment, shelter and companionship,  
stories are the thing we need most in the world.” —Philip Pullman*

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# A BAKER'S DOZEN OF WAYS TO ENDURE MARCH IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

BY IRIS GRAVILLE

HAIL SALTED OUR BACK DECK ON PALM SUNDAY last year. It nicked my cheeks as I dashed to the car, clutching the wool scarf wound around my neck. The next morning, gray skies again released a curtain of rain, pooling in the already-waterlogged yard. Flipping the calendar to April couldn't come too soon for me.

March, in this upper left corner of the United States, torments me with its fickle combination of all four seasons; I think of it as its own time of year—*fawintsprisum*. Don't get me wrong. One of the many reasons I love living in the Pacific Northwest, particularly this region on the Salish Sea, is its climate. We're blessed with distinct seasons, but temperatures year-round generally fall in the range of low 40s to upper 60s. We experience just enough cold (and a day or two of snow) in the winter; crisp, sunny days in the fall; bursts of color and birdsong in the spring; and enough warmth on summer days to shed sweaters and polar fleece—at least until sundown. More than once I've worn wool gloves and hat to watch Fourth of July fireworks.

I genuinely enjoy what winter brings to my small, rural island—a slower pace with fewer tourists and events, candle glow many hours of the day, hearty stews and soups, snuggling under a hand-woven afghan. I know not all my neighbors indulge in or enjoy such semi-hibernation, though. Many tend sheep and cattle in the muck or scrape windshields and dodge flooded potholes to get to work

or school. Some escape, retreating to warmer, sunnier climates, returning in April with their skin tinged pink or darker brown.

Most years, I stay put. Rain drips off my hood on walks with my dog. I spend many hours curled in a chair by the wood stove, a cat purring on my lap as I make my way through the teetering stack of books I neglected in previous months. Some days I wear fingerless gloves as I write in my journal or tap my laptop keyboard. A shot of single malt Scotch before dinner, or a glass of port after, raises my internal thermostat. Best of all, I give in to the season's permission—perhaps mandate—to turn inward.

Late sunrises and early sunsets, shuttered shops and restaurants, and the hibernating garden support the contemplative mood that often eludes me other times of the year. The pressure to accomplish eases, opening empty moments—even hours—for reflection and daydreaming.

Although I'm comforted by the gray, wet, Pacific Northwest winter, my contentment never quite lasts until spring. When I've reached my limit of damp and dreary, I draw on a Baker's Dozen\* of ideas to sustain me through the last days of March; feel free to try any of them (or add a few of your own) if you find yourself struggling when winter oozes into spring.



“...*Baker’s Dozen*\* of ideas to sustain me through the last days of March.”

1. Toss another log on the fire and drink a second cup of coffee.
2. Listen for the rhythm when hail tap dances across the wooden deck.
3. Slip on rain boots and stomp through four, five, sixteen puddles.
4. Look lovingly at the garden spade, rake, and trowel, relieved you don’t need a snow shovel.
5. Don’t apologize for wearing long underwear to a Spring Equinox party.
6. Feel gratitude for a roof over your head, a car with a working heater, and a sump pump in the crawl space.
7. Locate sunglasses so you’ll know where they are when the sun unexpectedly shines longer than fifteen minutes.
8. Take a ferry ride for a change of scenery—from green and gray to... gray and green.
9. Remind yourself that when it’s cloudy and rainy, dirt streaks and the dog’s nose smudges aren’t visible on the windows.

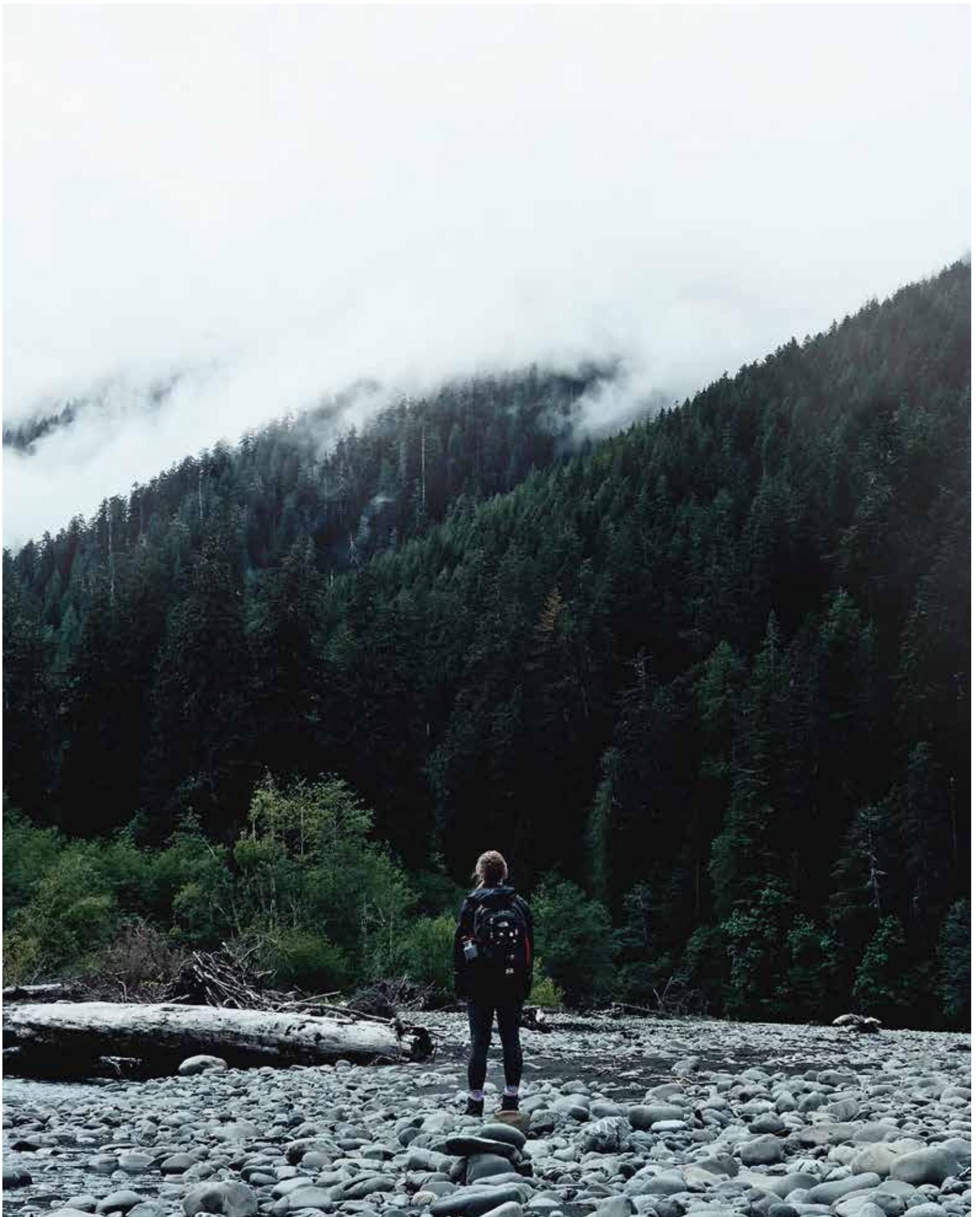
10. Celebrate that March in the Pacific Northwest doesn’t (usually) include snow.
11. Remind yourself that it’s the rain that keeps firs and cedars, well, evergreen.
12. Look at the world through rain-splattered glasses.
13. Make a baker’s dozen of chocolate chip cookies.

In March, a trip to the compost bin is like walking on a field of saturated kitchen sponges. But one day, it will turn firm and dry (at least most of the time). Until then, I’ll make my way through my baker’s dozen. For now, excuse me as I search for my sunglasses.

\*Most people likely know that a “Baker’s Dozen” equals thirteen. But do you know why? I put the question to “the great oracle” (Google), and learned the most likely explanation relates to medieval laws when bread was sold by weight. Bakers who short-weighted customers encountered strict punishment (fines; flogging; an ear nailed to the bakery door; a hand severed), so they avoided these dire consequences by adding an extra to a dozen.



Iris Graville is the author of three nonfiction books: *Hands at Work*, *BOUNTY*, and a memoir, *Hiking Naked*. She lives on Lopez Island, WA where she publishes SHARK REEF Literary Magazine, writes essays and blogs, and teaches. Sometimes you’ll find her on the interisland ferry, working on a new essay collection about the Salish Sea, climate change, and Washington State Ferries. [irisgraville.com](http://irisgraville.com).



*“God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from fools.” –John Muir*

## THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

BY WILLIAM HUGGINS

Three nights in a row coyotes wake me. In our tent, the thin membrane that allegedly protects us from the wild outside, my wife and daughter and three rescue dogs slept through the howls. Several times I fell back to sleep, briefly, only to rise with heart pounding to their wild calls. They ran and sang at least a mile away, carried on the cool night air, moving counter-clockwise around us.

Once, half-awake, at the edge of a dream, I thought they were calling to me. Perhaps they were. Only they know.

Now I hang in a hammock between two piñon pines, a light breeze moving over me, fine morning hike behind our crew. I scribble in my journal. There’s something about a hammock after a good, long walk—life elevated, but not in the sense of a silly hashtag. A respite well earned, with a view.

Our Forest Service campground soothes, relatively silent. Of the fifteen sites in our circle, only three are occupied. The quiet would be a bit more comforting without my 5 ½-year old daughter playing with her dolls and body-slammng the hammock every once in a while, still full of energy even after a 5-mile hike above 9,000’. But this is her wild place, too. It’s a tried-but-truism to say we protect these open spaces for coming generations, a sentiment I like except that it ignores the obvious reality that there are other beings here, as well, just beginning their feral life journeys. Some we see, most we don’t. This space might be our playground, but it’s their home.

Last night as the sun’s rays ebbed, while my daughter and I watched Venus emerge, leading the star parade in our expansive Nevada sky, the coyotes again set up a howl. They started to the northeast and southwest of us, carrying on all night, voices drawing a circle around our human enclave, cries of joy and maybe defiance. Dangerous as it is to anthropomorphize, I always hear coyotes’ whooping howls as an act of insubordination to human development, human ambitions. A kind of feral, We’re still here. I slept fitfully but well as they broke my sleep with their calls for another night.

Truth is, they wake something deeper inside me.

I’m out here with family to enjoy our public lands. I find it pointless to work to defend something and not spend time there—I’m no armchair social media slactivist. I stand for what I stand on, as some say. I’m out on the land as much as possible. In the summertime that means heading for the hills and woods to get away from southern Nevada’s broiling heat. On our walk in the dry, pine-laden morning air, we caught the view from a ridge approaching Ward Mountain: to the west the landscape was occluded by smoke from California’s wildfires. A fifty-mile vista hidden in haze. Our current Secretary of the Interior blames these fires on “extreme environmentalists” (Canon). I would laugh if the rhetoric weren’t so precarious: like coyotes, those of us who speak up for the land are being singled out as dangerous. All around the American West our National Forests burned well past when they normally do, and the only climate not changing is the one in Washington, DC. In this challenging political moment and assault on our



treasured public lands, I think we could all take a cue from the coyote: make our voices heard for these landscapes we love and use. Be wild. Be loud. Be proud. If loving the land is considered extreme, then be extreme: let voices of joy flood the offices of those suit-bound politicians who spend too much time in air conditioning.

But we need to get out on the land, too. Remember what connects us. Wild Nevada calls me, and whenever I can I answer. I live in the desert but I'm addicted to mountains. Some ranges in Nevada house the oldest living things on the planet: bristlecone pines, gnarled, twisted beings that can live over 3,000 years. They've lived through changes before, but what's coming might be different. Time will tell. In Nevada's forests the air gets so dry you can smell the pine like it's an aroma in your home. I rub my fingers on a piñon's needles and let the smell play through my sinuses.

### Wildness.

Though some areas are closed for military purposes, most of the rest of my state is open public land, with almost 3.5 million acres of Congressionally-protected capital W Wilderness—which means that it is open for you, dear reader, to explore. Many of the wilderness areas and National Forest campsites are free. Many Americans don't even know these areas exist and, better yet, that they own them. They're yours, ours—part of the public trust, one of the best things about being an American. I remember the words of the rapper DMX when he saw Yellowstone National Park for the first time: “I had no idea any of this was even here.”<sup>1</sup>

Well, it is, and I'm lucky to live close enough to be able to enjoy our public lands as often as my schedule allows. But the rapacious forces of greed and power can never seem to get enough to satisfy them. Two of our Nevada—“our” as in We the People's—National Monuments may be scaled back from current protections, not to mention what's happening to Bear Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah next door. An entrenched resentment exists in some Americans who already have and own too much over the word “public,” as if it's anti-American—and that those spaces designated “public” should by necessity and tradition be privatized. Many of us Westerners know too well what happens when private interests take over public

lands, especially in dry climates like the southwest: roads, clearcuts, cryptogamic soil disruption, oil and natural gas development, mining—scars in desert ecosystems that can take a hundred years or more to heal.

No, thanks. I'll keep my open space public, please—for all of us, human and not.

So far as forest policy goes, the economic arguments of the past don't make sense any longer. In 2016, for example, the outdoor recreation industry “made up 2 percent of the national GDP—more than mining, oil and gas extraction combined.”<sup>2</sup> Here in my own state of Nevada, outdoor recreation generates 87,000 jobs, a \$12.6 billion economy<sup>3</sup> in its own right, with some of that feeding into state and local tax coffers. That's three times more jobs than created by the mining industry here. And perhaps more importantly, those jobs are sustainable, so long as we have healthy landscapes—potentially forever.

But far more important than economics, the restorative effects of time in wilderness reenlivens, reenergizes—good and necessary things in a world whose politics seem to wear those of us who care about the health of the land down to the bone. I need this break to hike and hang in my hammock because when I get home, like many of us it'll be time to get back on the phone and email and work to keep these spaces wild and free and open. On our beautiful, lessening blue/green planet, we lose an area of forest the size of a football field every second,<sup>4</sup> an annual total the size of Italy. Deforestation may increase now that Brazil has a President who says development of the Amazon will be a primary goal of his administration. The Amazon acts literally as the lungs of our planet. Worldwide, our leaders can't seem to see the forests for the trees they allow to be sacrificed for their vision of progress. And with a future planetary human population potentially pushing 9 billion or more, who knows what environmental issues loom before us.

One thing seems pretty obvious: we should keep our remaining forests wild and undeveloped, from Alaska's

<sup>2</sup> Kutz, Jessica and Dan Spinelli. “Public Lands Attacks Sway Voters.” *High Country News*. October 29, 2018. P. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Outdoor Industry Association. “Nevada Outdoor Recreation Economy Report.” July 26, 2017. <https://outdoorindustry.org/resource/nevada-outdoor-recreation-economy-report/>

<sup>4</sup> Carrington, Damian, Nice Commente, Pablo Gutierrez, and Cath Levett. “One football pitch of forest lost every second in 2017, data reveals.” *The Guardian*. 27 June, 2018.

<sup>1</sup> Blakeslee, Nate. *American Wolf: A True Story of Survival and Obsession in the West*. Broadway Books, 2017. P. 40.

Tongass to Maine’s White Mountain to my own Toiyabe here in the heart of Wild Nevada. As Americans, we can use our voices to keep them protected and wild. I think future generations will thank us.

This morning we walked through a healthy mix of piñon, juniper, ponderosa pine, with lots of ground cover plants, birdsong, and signs of plenty of fauna. The day before we walked under a pair of circling ravens and peregrines, turning on thermals, on the hunt. Not a climax ecosystem, but a reasonably healthy mix of biodiversity. And there’s so much more that we can’t see. In his astonishing book *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben stresses time and again how “people rely heavily on sight, and so we are particularly influenced by this sense....The diversity of animal life plays out mostly in the microscopic realm, hidden from the eyes of forest visitors.” We have four days here, so we slow down, settle in, begin to notice what’s around us. We need stillness and silence to learn to see and hear with the eyes of a forest—time, deep time. Capitalist

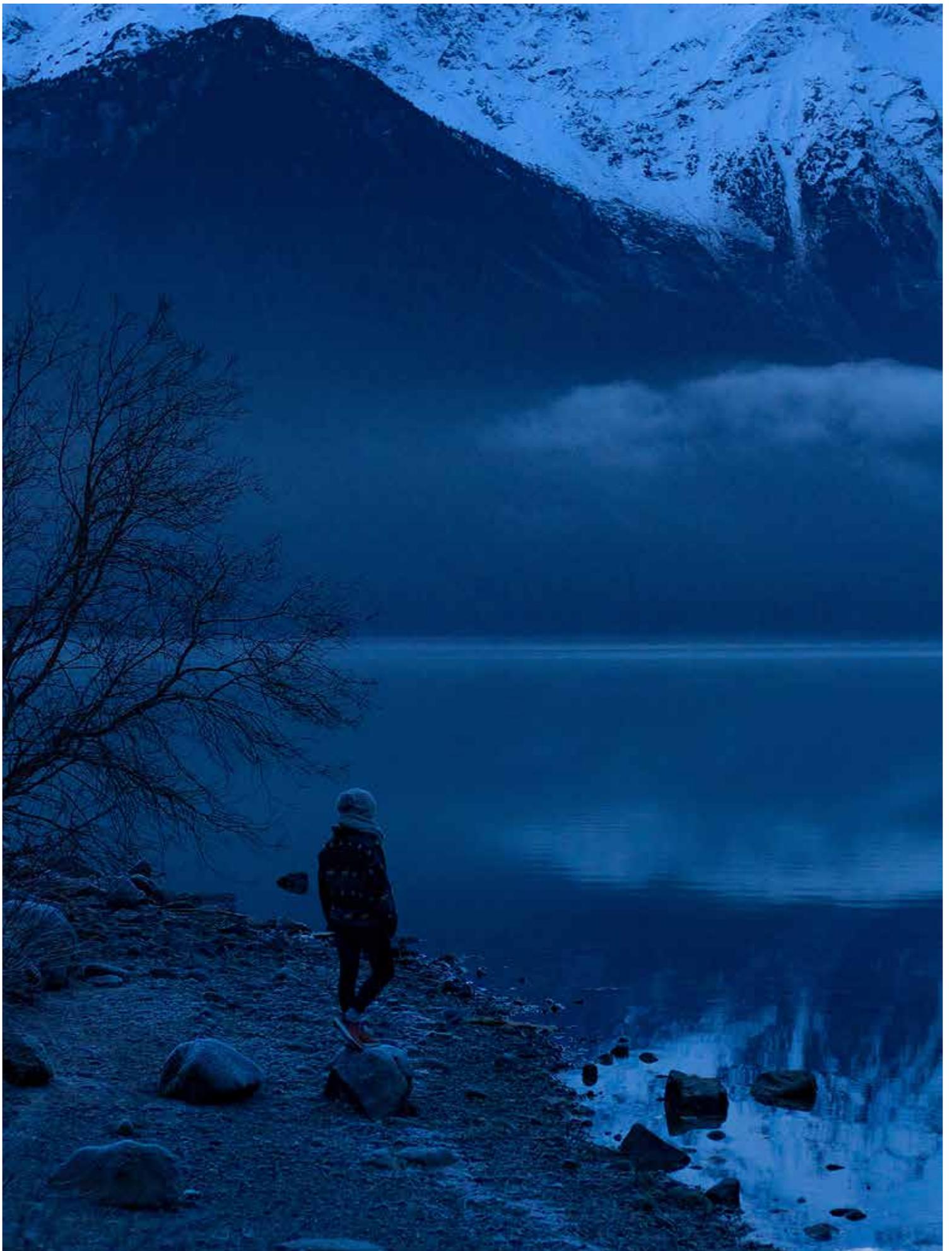
macroeconomics has little patience for such pastimes. Still, I try to impress this in my daughter: wilderness allows life here to thrive, all the diverse beings we see and hear, without much more human development than some campsites and a water tank.

Wildness and biodiversity thrive in a vigorous ecology where fearless voices cry out. Silence implies consent. In order to keep what wild remains intact, let’s not be afraid to be like the coyote and make joyous calls of our own to any that can hear—to howl with both rage and ecstasy, let them know we’re still here.



William Huggins lives, writes, and works in the desert southwest with his wife and daughter. He has an MA in Literature from UNLV. His short fiction and essays have appeared in multiple books, magazines, and journals. His first book, *Ghosts*, is due out autumn 2019.





*Understand, I am always trying to figure out  
what the soul is,  
and where hidden,  
and what shape—  
—Mary Oliver, “Bone”*

## WHAT THE SOUL IS, AND WHERE HIDDEN

BY TYRA OLSTAD

I know it sounds ridiculous, impossible, more than a little absurd, but I found the place where my soul resides. The exact location. A bit of braided delta at the end of the Nigliq Channel at the mouth of the Colville River on Alaska’s North Slope; a mudflat half-submerged in the Arctic Ocean and half-exposed on the far edge of North America; a piece of land so riddled with rivulets and pocked with sky-mirror pools that it’s more water and air than sure, solid earth—that’s where I found my soul.

Of course, you may be thinking to yourself, that’s just rhetoric, meant to imply how beautiful the landscape is or indicate how deeply it resonated with me. Even if you do believe that people have something we call “souls”, they’re certainly not tied to any particular geography. A ghost-world of spiritual essences doesn’t hover unseen around the planet, spread across every continent and sea or coalescing around so-called vortexes. Right?

That’s what I would have thought, too, until I happened to find my soul. Invisible, ineffable, but undeniably there, at that conjunction of Arctic mud, sea, and sky.

\* \* \* \*

I hadn’t gone looking for my soul. For thirty-seven years, I’ve been living on this earth more or less happily, never giving much thought to whether souls exist much less prowling far-flung places in search of mine. Granted, I’m a geographer, with special interest in “place-attachment”—the ways by which people fall in love with landscapes—and “place-identity”—the ways by which a person may become so strongly attached to a location that she or he comes to see it as a part of her or his sense of self. But I’ve focused on psychological and socio-political dynamics rather than on spirit-searching: how people develop place-identity; how we express place-attachment; and what the implications are, especially in the context of land management and wilderness preservation. “[T]his is not hard to understand,” Terry Tempest Williams summarizes: “falling in love with a place, being in love with a place, wanting to care for a place and see it remain intact as a wild piece of the planet.”

I, for one, am drawn to austere places—plains, deserts, tundra. I knew I’d find the Arctic beautiful. But I wasn’t expecting much more than that. It takes time to go beyond immediate attraction to or superficial appreciation for a landscape. Only after we’ve layered meanings on landforms and accumulated significant place-based memories can we feel a sense of rootedness. And only



after our biography has become inextricably intertwined with our geography can we claim that where we are is who we are. “[I]t goes beyond mere preference,” humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan articulates the depth of place-identity; “the desert is my geographical double—the objective correlative of the sort of human being I am when the shallow, social layers are stripped away.”

I realized this years ago, when I fell in love with Northern Arizona’s Painted Desert—an expansive labyrinth of colorful clay hills and sandstone ledges, fossil trees and phytosaurs, petroglyphs and pottery sherds, great swaths of sagebrush, and, best of all, the biggest horizon I’d ever seen. That magnificent, turquoise-skied space is where I first learned to wander, learned to breathe, felt fully and wholly alive. Looking back, I feel I didn’t truly exist before I met the Painted Desert; but before I met the Painted Desert, I had no idea that I was missing anything—that a wild, sunburnt, sage-scented me hid beneath my social outer skin.

Post-Painted Desert, I’ve focused my personal life and professional career on trying to experience, understand, and articulate the exhilaration of seemingly “empty” landscapes—the “marginal” ecosystems and “boring” scenery that many people undervalue, ignore, and/or outright malign. I see grandeur in open horizons and find intrigue in subtle lifeforms, but am well-aware that spaciousness isn’t photogenic, and sparseness appears to offer few resources or amenities. “If you gotta drill somewhere,” I was once told regarding energy development in Wyoming’s seemingly-barren Red Desert, “might as well be here”.

A quote (attributed to Willa Cather) that became my mantra: “Anybody can love mountains, but it takes soul to love the prairie.”

“Soul,” as in moral depth. As in holistic sensibility—awareness of a place’s gestalt or, better yet, one’s own *umwelt*. As in a touch of rhythm. “Soul,” from *sawol*, Old English for the “spiritual and emotional part of a person.”<sup>1</sup>

Not “soul” as in a gasp of surprise and recognition; an immediate connection with the greater world. A glimpse of enlightenment. “Soul” as in something and somewhere in me—part of my me-ness—that happens to reside in far

<sup>1</sup> N.a., n.d. “Soul.” Online Etymology Dictionary. [https://www.etymonline.com/word/soul#etymonline\\_v\\_23918](https://www.etymonline.com/word/soul#etymonline_v_23918).

northern Alaska, where the pull of the ocean exposes the muck of low tide, a lone mosquito-crazed caribou runs helter-skelter, white walls of sea-ice loom far offshore, and mirror-calm water reflects an infinity of clouds.

\* \* \* \*

I hadn’t gone to the Arctic to examine the aesthetics of the North Slope (though I was eager to experience the “Northern Great Plains”.) Nor was I there to research Iñupiaq perceptions of place (though, in talking with residents, I was struck by how strongly they identify with their landscape and how exponentially they’re affected by climate change and fossil fuel extraction.) Mainly, earlier short-term plans and longer-term dreams had unexpectedly fallen through, leaving me with three empty months, planless and dreamless. When a friend mentioned that he was thinking of attempting to packraft down the Anaktuvuk and Colville Rivers from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean—a journey he wasn’t quite sure was even possible—I jumped at the chance to join him. I don’t mind mosquitoes, or being cold and wet, I told him (not entirely honestly), and can learn to paddle. I’m comfortable with extreme remoteness and can deal with the possibility of polar bears.

What I didn’t tell him was that I needed remoteness, unknownness, an expedition into what is as close to true *terra incognita* as possible in the modern era. Yes, it would be nice to see superlative scenery and to encounter untouched natural splendor, but, like most other wilderness-goers, mostly I needed to get away from the exhaustion, trammels, and heartbreak of humanity for a while. I needed to reconnect with spaciousness and solitude, freedom and belonging, landscape and self. Unsaid to my friend: I needed to go to the Arctic to remember what it’s like to feel a part of the wild world.

We scrambled to arrange travel dates, get equipment, and, not quite as thoroughly as we ought to have, consult maps. We planned to meet in Anaktuvuk Pass—a Nunamiut village located near the headwaters of its eponymous river in the heart of the Brooks Range—in early July, float one hundred thirty-five-odd miles to the confluence with the Colville, then another ninety-ish miles to the ocean. From there, we’d paddle back to village of Nuiqsut’s airstrip. Thirteen days, my friend budgeted, giving us a few more days than strictly necessary. (I deferred to his

judgment, as he's relatively experienced at packrafting in Alaska. He chose the boat; he told me what gear to get. Life jacket, drysuit, definitely a bug net. GPS? Check. Emergency satellite communication device? Check. Bear spray, air horn, flares? How I hoped we wouldn't encounter bears.)

Anaktuvuk Pass is mostly surrounded by the roadless, trailless Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). The only ways to get to the village are by plane or foot. My friend made plans to fly, but, as I looked at maps and scrolled through websites, I came up with the hare-brained idea to hike in alone—to take a shuttle up the Dalton Highway, get dropped off close to the Arctic Divide, and make an eleven-day, seventy-plus-mile solo traverse of part of the Brooks Range, some of the “ruggedy”-est, most remote mountains in the country.

As soon as I began thinking of backpacking, I assumed it would be a revelatory experience. “[N]o invention, no brilliant thought which the modern world ha[s] to offer c[an] provide half the elation of...days spent in the little-explored, uninhabited world of the arctic wilderness,” Bob Marshall promises, “Out there—in a place where the mountains are “sharp,” “colossal,” and seem “to rise infinitely into a world beyond the world”—surely, I'd find “peace and strength and immensity and coordination and freedom.”. Day after day, with no one to talk to and nothing to think about but the terrain, the wildlife, and the nightless summer-in-the-Arctic skies, I might even find “the familiar sense of expansiveness, of deep exhilaration...summed up in a single Eskimo word: quviannikumut, ‘to feel deeply happy’”

*Praeter solitudinem nihil video*—“I saw nothing but solitude,” Barry Lopez writes, quoting an early Arctic explorer. Eleven days of misery, exhaustion, and terror, steeped in beauty and punctuated by occasional awe. Interminable hours of snow-swept mountain passes, rain-swollen rivers, ankle-twisting tussocks, disorienting wind and fog, ubiquitous mosquitoes, and explosions of wildflowers. Although I'd been to Alaska several times—my friend and I had met while working at Denali National Park six years earlier, him as a backcountry ranger, me as a paleontology technician—I'd never been that far north, nor that alone, for so long. Moreover, I'd forgotten and underestimated just how big Alaskan

landscapes are, how very tall the mountains and deep the drainages; how rock, rivers, weather, and wildlife conspire to render maps useless and plans meaningless. Places like the Brooks Range make foolhardy visitors fight for survival, with only our soft, breakable bodies and whatever equipment we can carry to wield against pure wildness.

By the time I managed to stumble into Anaktuvuk Pass, cold and crying, I was very grateful to be alive, but not in an inspiring, affirming manner. I was exhausted. Cowed. Rather than elated or a touch transcendent, I felt brittle and near-broken. Acutely mortal.

All this to say: I had no desire whatsoever to pack up an inflatable rubber boat and head north into even more unknown territory; to voluntarily expose myself to rain, wind, rapids, bears, bugs, and who knows what else, all over again. Anaktuvuk Pass was my chance to ditch romanticized notions of Adventure or Truth, catch a flight back to civilization, and return to my quiet little house in a quiet little town in a place that gives me no joy but that also isn't likely to swallow me whole.

Of course, the raft trip would be different. We didn't really know what to expect (especially on the Anaktuvuk), but I shouldn't have to lug around my backpack or cross any mountains. Moreover, it would be safer and not nearly so lonely with two of us. My friend has trained as a Wilderness First Responder and, at least, would be capable of activating the emergency beacon if anything went terribly wrong. With him there, my thoughts wouldn't have to rattle and reverberate around my own head; moments would accumulate in his memory as well as mine. He's the only person I know who'd propose this packrafting expedition, much less let me tag along.

How could I not go? After two short but pleasant days in town, safe and warm, we packed up and headed off, aiming for a little lake near the Arctic Divide which we hoped would connect with the rivers, the ocean; adventure, joy.

\* \* \* \*

It began with a rill—a trickle weaving through the tundra, crystal-clear to the cobblestone bottom, barely wide enough to fit the raft. I thought the rill would get swallowed by sedges, but instead it picked up a current, widened around corners, and carried us through to the



lake; from there, the river. We were flowing, on our way—all the way to the end, as we’d told an astounded village resident.

Or maybe it began when we left Anaktuvuk Pass earlier that afternoon, heading down the gravel road to the landfill, then out across the tundra. While we deliberated how best to pack and inflate the raft, the sky alternately crumpled with clouds and broke into sunshine—was that a glimmer of rainbow? Were we really doing this?

Then again, maybe it had begun days earlier, when I’d trudged across Ernie Pass and gazed into the icy headwaters of the Anaktuvuk, relieved to reach the final stretch (not knowing that I’d nearly be swept away by rain-raging drainages before reaching town.) But the whole backpacking exploit had begun with me facing the willow-fringed Dietrich River, staring at huge wolfprints, and immediately, deeply regretting what I’d gotten myself into.

Of course, that ill-advised, overeager trip had begun with a flight to Fairbanks and, before that, purchase of a ticket to Fairbanks. Discussions about dates and gear. Mention of the possibility of packrafting, entertainment of the possibility; the decisive moment when I hit “send” on an email reading “I’m in.”

Leading up to that, the collapse of other plans, preceded by the ascent of hopes. Years mired in a meaningful but demanding job, far from my beloved plains.

Or had it begun with a copy of Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*? Picked up sometime in college, first read while working in southwestern Wyoming. (Scribbled in the front pages: “Blue sky filling with clouds, birds, wind; all movement, all joy”). Re-read the summer in Denali. (“Mountains, forest, layers of grey. Cool, drizzly, happy.”) During a lonely stretch in Colorado. (“[Black] Canyon, swallow me whole.”) The Adirondacks, Upstate New York. (“Loon, loon, my life in the call of a loon.”) With each

reading, more underlines, scribbles, and folded corners; deeper desire to visit the Arctic. “The beauty here is a beauty you feel in your flesh,” Lopez describes an effect that can’t be simulated in words much less photos, “You feel it physically, and that is why it is sometimes terrifying to approach. Other beauty takes only the heart, or the mind” (1986, 361).

I’d read *Arctic Dreams* to try to understand Imagination and Desire in the similarly-maligned, seemingly-barren plains. Yes, there’s something special about “distant landscapes”, which, more so than mountains or forests, cities or suburbs, “provoke thoughts about one’s own interior landscape... The land urges us to come around to an understanding of ourselves.” Maybe my pilgrimage to the Arctic—the long, unintended and unexpected journey to find my soul—began on the morning sixteen years earlier when I stepped to the edge of the Painted Desert and first experienced wild space.

\* \* \* \*

Farther back, several socioeconomic factors and political decisions have shaped today’s Arctic: the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, which created the 8.5-million-acre GAAR and declared most of it Wilderness; construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System and Dalton Highway beginning in 1974, both to access oil at Prudhoe Bay, discovered in 1967; the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, meant to acknowledge and allot ancestral lands; Alaskan statehood in 1959; return of Nunamiut peoples to their homeland in the 1930s; creation of Naval Petroleum Reserve Number 4 in 1923, now the 24-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPRA); collapse of the caribou population in the late 19th-early 20th century (due, in part, to overhunting by whaling crews, forcing Nunamiut peoples to leave the Brooks Range and join coastal Iñupiat peoples; purchase of Alaska (“[Secretary of State] Seward’s



Icebox”) in 1867. Whaling ships. Fur trade. Expedition after expedition, filled with “courageous, bewildered, and dreaming people” who sought fame, glory, wealth, and/or “fulfillment of some personal and private dream[s]” in the cold, unforgiving Far North.

For generations beforehand: inhabitation by Alaska Native and Canadian First Nation peoples. To tolerate the harsh, extreme conditions, they’ve come to “accept fully what is violent and tragic in nature” and, not unrelatedly, celebrate Nuannaarpoq—a quality “of taking extravagant pleasure in being alive” (Lopez 1986, 180 and 181).

Layers of earlier cultural and natural history: Thule, Dorset, Pre-Dorset artifacts. Taiga, tundra. Glaciers melting back into the Brooks Range, leaving moraines, kames, and kettle ponds; allowing for deranged drainages, pingos, and other periglacial features. Farther back, glaciers advancing and retreating throughout the Pleistocene, affecting all but an ice-free refuge between the Brooks and Alaska Ranges: muskoxen, mammoths, short-faced bears.

No, no. It’s all much older. Some 160 to 105 million years ago, during the Late Jurassic and Early Cretaceous Periods, a proto-Pacific tectonic plate carried an island arc north, crumpling it into North American continental crust—the Brookian Orogeny. As the convergent forces uplifted and deformed rock layers, erosional forces carried sediment into the North Slope basin. Despite subsequent orogenic events and geomorphological reshaping, the land has held its basic shape since the age of the dinosaurs. (Also, mosquitoes. Phylogenetic analysis indicates that mosquitoes emerged in the Mesozoic.)

That’s how it really began—mountains rising, sediment flowing, slow coevolution of lifeforms. That’s the start of the journey that led me to my soul.

\* \* \* \*

Eleven days from the Arctic Divide to the Arctic Ocean, powered not by foot or fuel, but water and the long, low pull of gravity.

Right from the start, the Anaktuvuk was surprisingly fast and clear, burbling us along at a good clip. The first afternoon, there wasn’t much steering to do, just watching: stormclouds clearing, sun softening, blue

shadows swallowing mountainsides laced with snow. The river carried us to the center of its valley’s great “U” and gave us a gravel bar with a perfectly-framed view back toward Anaktuvuk Pass and onward to the North Slope.

The next morning, mountains receded into purple-blue distance while green-carpeted foothills rolled on. Ground squirrels chattered from the banks. Tundra swans soared overhead. My friend and I basked in sunshine, talking of physics, phenomenology—was this real? (YES, I believe in the world and that it is beautiful, I wrote in my notebook that night, under a sky still ringing with sunlight, BE HERE NOW.)

The river picked up momentum on day three. We’d been warned and worried about a stretch of rapids on the Anaktuvuk (well, I worried; my friend was looking forward to it), so weren’t entirely surprised to find ourselves crashing and spinning through glacial debris. Although the wetter-than-usual weather had increased discharge, inundating boulders that could have proved problematic with lower flows, we (and by “we”, I mean my friend, who steered the whole time) still had to pay attention. Rocks were still exposed; the river unknown. To my untrained eye, it seemed nearly impossible to tell where to go or what to do, but my friend could read the current in riffles and gauge characteristics from glints. He swirled through eddies and foresaw sweepers, trusted the raft to bounce or scrape over just about anything. Meanwhile, I was caught cloud-watching more than once. “Paddle!” my friend would bark, and we’d pull to avoid a boulder or aim for a better flow.

Churning sky on day four: layers of grey coalesced and curtains of rain swept across the flattening landscape. With no topographic features to guide it, the Anaktuvuk meandered haphazardly, dividing and recombining a hundred times into a thousand passages. My friend constantly had to gauge the best option—could we curl around the inside of a cliff or skootch over a gravel bar?; should we aim for that riffle or wait for the next?—but I wanted to talk about avian dinosaurs, wilderness, work; the meaning and marvel of this huge northern land. Mid-afternoon, tired of navigating both my relentless conversation and that roiling grey river-lake, he asked for peace and quiet. Silence, the rest of the day. Gulls.

Scribbled the next night: What do I want from this trip, this place? Why can't I just enjoy this moment, these low bluffs and changing clouds? It hadn't been a fun day. Mid-afternoon, my friend dashed off to climb a ridge while I stayed with the raft, collecting rocks and feeling more alone than I had on my hike. Later, we passed a gosling separated from the rest of its brood, cheeping pitifully. I couldn't stop thinking about it, the fragility of life here. Rain moved in early evening, casting the landscape in an eerie glow. Disconcerting, to not know how to read the skies.

Day five was miserable. Cold, wet, and windy. We discussed waiting out the weather, but were only halfway to Nuiqsut and worried that there might not be a current in the Colville. Off we went. No talking, just staring at the grey river, grey sky. Gravel bars. Willows, lupine, Labrador tea. Mid-afternoon, the wind shifted and the temperature dropped even more. Mindless paddling. Shivering. Numb fingers and toes. Onset of a stupor I should have recognized as near-hypothermic. When we finally stopped to check out a potential campsite, I tried to step out of the raft, but my frozen feet couldn't connect with my slushy brain. I fell in the mud. Miserable.

Brilliant strips of blue the next morning. Less than an hour after we'd put in, the Anaktuvuk spread and swirled as if unsure where to go, then spit us out into a huge, turbid channel. The Colville! Its wide waters cut into a tall, sandstone-, siltstone-, and coal-stripped bluff, which also featured sizeable wedges of dirty white ice. Meltwater trickled and gushed through gullies. Not infrequently, chunks of ice and rock crashed down into the river in great celebrations of noise and gravity. Camped on a gravel island that night, with the rumbling cliffs on one side and a prairie-sized horizon on the other, I finally felt happiness pull at my heart. This was the arctic I sought—a place where, as Lopez promises, the land is not simply beautiful, but powerful, bound together with darkness and light (1986, 351).

The next morning, we climbed the bluff for a view of rolling tundra to the west and a tangle of sinuous streams and ox-bow lakes to the east. Although we were standing in the NPRA, there wasn't anything to indicate it. In fact, there wasn't a sign of humanity anywhere: no structures, no litter, not even the drone of a distant engine.

That afternoon, we were reminded why people don't readily venture forth across the North Slope: a furious wind whipped wavelets into whitecaps, threatening to capsize us into cold, churning water. We paddled and pulled, exhausted and exhilarated. The river had finally come alive—we were earning our passage, not just riding along. Peregrines screamed at us from the cliffs.

More wind on day eight, but the rain began to pass. Late afternoon, the biggest, brightest rainbow I've ever seen arced horizon to horizon, glowing in double glory. Light—the landscape was suffused with color and light. And mosquitoes—the tundra was buzzing, whining, droning, alive. Sandhill cranes. Fresh grizzly tracks fifty yards from where we'd chosen to camp. As Rick Bass writes of Montana's Yaak Valley: "Tourists, beware, go back. There is nothing to see here, only mud and insects and large biting mammals...rain and snow and sleet and wind. This is a place of the spirit, no place for the flesh, and a place of the imagination, but no place for a real life. Believe in this place, and pray for it, but turn back, do not come here..."

The bluffs flattened out the next day, leaving a few mini-volcano-like pingoes as the only topographic relief. We climbed one early-afternoon, fighting insects and brush up to its summit, earning a view across a vast, Serengeti-like scene: lush, green tundra teeming with pools and pimpled with pingos. Brown river. Blue sky. Blazing sunshine. Squinting into the distance, my eye snagged on an odd vertical to the northwest. My friend used his zoom lens to verify—a tower at Nuiqsut. Buildings. Electric poles. Oh.

From that point on, we were unavoidably and rather jarringly back in a human-inhabited world. Airplane. Motorboat. Another boat, another. Oil pipelines, unnaturally straight even against the flat horizon. Hoping that it was too shallow for motorboats, we camped on a sandy side channel that the GPS told us should connect over to the Nigliq. Calm water—gleaming like mercury. Gazillions of mosquitoes.

On day ten, we floated slowly past Nuiqsut, then by a bright orange oil rig, and, of all things, under a giant bridge. (ConocoPhillips completed construction on the \$100-million, 1420-foot span in 2015, providing "a thoroughway for access to [oil development sites]" and "an

opportunity for future development in the [NPRA].”<sup>2</sup> Our little red raft must have been an unusual sight—truck drivers stopped to stare and honk hello. Motorboats were common, though, full of Nuiqsut residents going to fish camps and/or just enjoying the relatively balmy weather. Across from another rig under construction, a couple of locals pulled up to chat: we’d come from Anaktuvuk Pass?

Aiming not to camp too close to the coast (in case of polar bears), we fortunately found the perfect spot a few miles inland: a small island, a couple of hundred yards wide and twice as long, rising no more than ten feet out of the water, carpeted with tundra. Thousands of mountain avens bobbed in the breeze, heliotropic faces beaming in the early-evening sunshine. After pitching our tents and enjoying a breezy, relatively mosquito-free dinner, my friend and I embarked on a circumnavigation. Treasures!—caribou skull, squirrel burrows, metal drums; the skeleton of a pine tree, carried in from god knows where. Three quarters of the way around, we paused at the island’s southern tip, scoured by ice heaves. Everything we care about, my friend said, gesturing south. An oil refinery, Nuiqsut, nearly all of North America.

Everything? I thought.

That’s when I first sensed it. Standing there, on that little scrap of land, looking not toward the continent but at the sky, feathered with the pastels of an Arctic midsummer non-sunset, I began to realize that everything I cared about—family, friends; my house, my job; the Painted Desert and other beloved places—was not everything. There was an edge of something, I could feel, something there, farther north. Something magical, something true, some missing piece of who I am and who I want to be.

The next morning, I woke early and re-looped our little island, pausing again at the southern tip and even longer at the north. (The ocean!) Soon after we packed and put in, the wind calmed, remnants of clouds cleared, and the channel spread into a half-dozen different outlets. East, we aimed, clinging to a shallow bank—what we had of solid ground. Mirages shimmered in the sun-drenched distance. But for the ripples radiating out from our paddles, all would have been utter calm.

<sup>2</sup> N.a. n.d. “No. 2 - Colville River Nigliq Channel Bridge.” Roads & Bridges. <https://www.roadsbridges.com/no-2-colville-river-nigliq-channel-bridge>

The mudflat. The ocean. Land blended into water into sky, nothing left. The rivers and the journey down them, past. Mountains gone, forgotten. Anaktuvuk Pass, Fairbanks, anywhere else no longer mattered, no longer existed. No hopes, no dreams, no things.

Pause between tides, between breaths.

A vast blueness.

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According to some etymologists, the word “soul” traces back to Proto-Germanic *saiwa*: “sea.”<sup>3</sup> The original meaning may have been “coming from or belonging to the sea”, as it was believed that a person’s soul paused in the sea before birth or after death

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Of course, I was neither born nor died on the edge of the sea—on a mudflat at the end of the Nigliq Channel, with its rivulets and pools, its white line of ice far offshore. From there, my friend and I still had to paddle back to Nuiqsut—past the island, past the oil rigs and that preposterous bridge. From Nuiqsut, to Barrow, Fairbanks, the bustling, blaring, human-made and -messed-up world.

But that’s where life paused for a moment, and I found my soul.

Ludicrous, I know. I stood on the shore for less time than it took for the tide to turn. Had it been windier, greyer—had it been the middle of winter, dark and dangerous—what would I have seen? Had I just been plunked down there—ridden one of ConocoPhillips’ helicopters to that spot, without the month-long backpacking/rafting preface—would I have felt the same? Had I not gone—had my original plans worked out—would I have ever realized what I was missing, or that I was missing anything at all?

Writing of his desire to be with icebergs in the North, Lopez muses “I do not know if I had had this wish for years...But when I saw them, it was as though I had been waiting quietly for a very long time” (1986, 184). Similarly, I do not know if I had had a wish to be with a mudflat on the end of the Nigliq Channel, overlooking the blue-

<sup>3</sup> Barnhart, Robert. 1988. *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*. H W Wilson: Hackensack, NJ.



white Arctic Ocean for years, but when I felt it nearing, I knew that I'd been waiting for it my whole life. And I hadn't expected to find my soul, but there it was: a feeling of lightness, of wholeness, of Nuannaarpoq—"extravagant pleasure in being alive." Something that glows within me, and yet exists entirely separately from me: a bit of land, more water, ice, mostly air.

Now that I know that souls exist—that the world is perhaps full of them, in the most unexpected places—I can't help but ask: Where is your lightness, your wholeness, your joy? Your soul is out there, too—go find it



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## CLIMBING THE SACRED BEAR

BY BURT BRADLEY

It is called Noavosse, “The Good Mountain,” by the Cheyenne, Mato Paha, “Bear Mountain” by the Sioux, and Bear Butte by the United States Department of the Interior. A sign at the base of the mountain reads,

“Here through the centuries the Plains Indians received spiritual guidance from the creator.

Here the Cheyenne prophet, Sweet Medicine, received the four sacred arrows, the four commandments and a moral code.

Here the Sioux worshiped Wankan Tanka and paid tribute to the Spiritual Ruler.”

And here, I find myself before dawn on the day after summer solstice, a man who has spent the first half of his life living at thirty-two feet above sea level with little knowledge of mountains and less knowledge of the sacred, ready to ascend.

I’ve come to know mountains better after first living in the Sierra Nevadas and now for the past twenty years in the Big Horn Basin in Northwest Wyoming surrounded by their rough namesakes the Absarokas, Big Horns, and Beartooth Mountains. Yet, I’m still a novice when it comes to the sacred.

Mato Paha, Bear Butte is a place of prayer and centering that is not just solitude but a meditative, vital space. It is not a place to merely relax or camp out. It is an environment in which to experience that rarest of human feelings: rapture. It is a sensual place, too, in the visionary sense of fully listening, seeing, and engaging with one’s entire being. “Things” are to be experienced differently than what one experiences of life from one’s front window or favorite fishing hole.

And what is it exactly that one perceives? Or, to phrase the question more accurately, not what, but how does one experience a difference, an intensification of one’s senses, of one’s thoughts about the nature of things, about one’s life in the deepest sense?



Standing at the base of Bear Butte, I think about Black Elk, the Oglala Sioux holy man, who over a century earlier on a mountain top fifty miles to the south had his great vision of the world:

“And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell, and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.”

Visions are an inquiry into the larger questions, beliefs, and ideas in life regarding one’s way of being in the world, one’s direction, one’s knowledge, one’s relationship to others and to the whole overall. Not that the little, everyday life is ignored but it is to be seen through a wider lens, *in a sacred manner*.

You can photograph the mountain from the parking lot, or you can camp out at Bear Butte Lake two miles away. But to experience the sacredness of the place you need to climb. I decide to walk up just before sunrise. It is a pristine summer morning and my mood has already been enhanced by the lingering atmosphere of religious ceremonies conducted the previous four days as part of a summer solstice celebration.

I was allowed to stay in the empty camp at the base of the mountain. I pitched my tent among abandoned sweat lodges and communal fire pits with various “altars” of stones, feathers, and prayer cloths—not to mention the campsite of an old Lakota man, who sang until midnight accompanied by a drum.

I spent the night by a fire, listening to him talking to some friends, low, good friend talk, barely audible, no louder than the occasional bird whistle, the loon clarinet in the distance, the murmuring creek, the slight breeze whispering through the trees.

So, the hike itself is charged before I take my first step. I am a mixture of eagerness and slight apprehension. Should I? Am I worthy? Can I do this right? I carry with me a gift of prayer tobacco from my friend Jenny who said it is for homage, adding with a smile, “And a little insurance.” For or against what, I wasn’t sure. The sun slowly appears, first as a mere lighting of the far sky, and then on the furthest plains, the last long shadow of night shrinking its way toward me at the foot of the mountain.

I begin to walk up the mountain, keeping the same pace as the retreating shadow, eventually letting it overtake me, the gray air becoming light, revealing the rocky incline, talus cracking under my feet. I am met with the sweet scent of purple and yellow flowers and especially the white capped aroma (slightly sour at first then sweet) of wild yarrow. Brightly colored prayer cloths flap from buffalo berry bushes and ponderosa pine. Soon it is mountain sparrows and robins and luminous yellow gold finches come to greet me. And here, a butterfly planted on a bush, wings opening and closing in a slow, halting, silent applause.

It is a walk that also becomes a heaviness in my thighs, a shortness in my breathing, until I must pause, a respite, my hand timidly on the burnt bark of a dead pine (remnant from the devastating fire of 1996).

Half way up the southern slope, with still another 700 feet of hiking around to the east and up to the peak, I look back down. There spreads the Great Plains in a series of sloping undulations of new summer green, some places clotted with stands of cottonwood trees, the rest grass—presently green. But come the first full week of rainless, wind-scoured sunlight, it will redden for a day or two then gradually fade to a brownless brown, its natural, “Great Plains” coloring. For now: green space, seemingly endless, that is somewhat shocking from this first view a thousand feet up and away from the flat stretch of highway.

A flicker of color nearby—a bird or flower or prayer cloth alive in the wind, a spirit reminding me of where I am, of what this mountain has been all about, and personally, what the task is before me.

Onward and upward, I march, not Boy Scout style or as a strolling tourist with the proverbial camera banging my chest. The sign at the trail head suggested, “Whisper when talking to others.” I take this to mean a deeper task for one alone. For me, this means trying to hush my “monkey mind” as the Buddhists call it, the incessant chatter in my head of all that life I left back down the hill. Like a crazed short-wave radio operator late at night who can’t just listen to one signal for more than thirty seconds, my mind still “broadcasts” snippets of conversations, some overheard, some still engaged in. They range from the previous night to the day before that, some a month old, some ten years earlier— an old argument, a miscommunication (“What I meant to say...”), a lingering critical judgment (“If I were

her, I'd...") —until it all runs together to become, finally, nothing but static.

Immediately, almost angrily, I remind myself to pay attention.

Pay attention. Pay as in giving something. A tithe, a donation, an offering of respect, of consciousness, of mindfulness. Attention as in listening. To the chirps, the buzzes, the crunching under my shoes, and the pockets of silence in between, reminding me where I am, not who. And what I am doing at this very moment, not before or later. Pay attention to the rock I've just stumbled over. To the next step. And the next. To the sharp light splashed on the bearberry bushes. To the sudden sweet scent of some mountain flower or the odd oil-burnt smell of creosote on the logs lining the path. Shhhhhhh. Walk, breathe, sense.

I resume, quieter somewhat, slower. In no hurry. The pace of my ascent now coinciding with the rising sun. I look at the fiery orb, a hand rubbed, polished apple—Golden Delicious—hanging from a branch of sky just

above the horizon. I feel its first heat and strip off my lined, flannel shirt. Immediately, I grow thinner, lighter, more flexible, but also more vulnerable as I ascend. I try to fight off the nagging thought of unworthiness, of being spiritually "incorrect." I stop, turn, and see that the plains are now brilliantly lit, and incredibly, have grown larger, greener.

I stand next to a stone outcropping with yellowish lichen marbling its north face. I pull out the Kinnick Kinnick, traditional ceremonial tobacco of bearberry, red willow, osha root, mullen, and yerba santa—friend Jenny's gift. I hold a pinch of it out before me and realize I'm at a loss for words. I feel intimidated by the responsibility of the act. I wish to do this right. Me, some middle-aged, would-be apprentice without a master.

I begin by thanking the mountain directly for allowing me to be here. I offer a blessing which I hope doesn't sound too much to me like my father's terse grace at Thanksgiving, Easter, and Christmas (terse because the act reminded him of his Southern Baptist heritage which



he had abandoned long ago). I toss the tobacco out like a farmer scattering feed, and surprisingly feel more valid, though still unsteady. I move on.

Finally nearing the peak, I stop again, mainly to resist my European heritage of “having to get to the top.” Why? What is the point? “Because it is there,” declared the first white man (with Sherpa guides) to scale Mt. Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary. From what little I know about him, he was a man who seemed to have had a reverence for mountains.

I try to think of his statement from a Zen Buddhist’s perspective. “Because it is there” does not connote climbing simply for fun or fame or ego gratification. If declared with a spiritual meaning, then the statement cannot be equated with an insidious notion of, “I conquered the mountain,” or “I claim this mountain...” Rather, “Because it is there” is a wonderful Zen statement, filled with meaningfulness, yet completely understated, to the point of irony, even absurdity. “The sword that kills the man is the sword that saves the man.”

“Because it is there” beckons to me. It is a spiritual challenge for me to experience this mountain more fully than I have. To put it another way, “Because it is there,” I must. Or, “Because it is there,” and I am not. It is a challenge for me to grasp what it means to “get to the top.”

With such thoughts, I climb the last fifty feet to the peak. My first decision is to avoid the large wooden, designated lookout platform. Not without some trepidation, I follow a barely discernible footpath that traverses the ridge to the south. There’s one of those Park Service trail signs with a figure with a walking stick and back pack hiking inside a red circle with a red line through it. One thing I am clear about: I am not hiking. I step out on the path already lined with prayer cloths and offerings with as pure an intention as possible: I’m here to offer a blessing, to give thanks, to sprinkle some ceremonial tobacco, and to practice zazen, sitting meditation, (my only “formal” praying).

And sitting among the prayer cloths, the small stone “altars” and cairns with various offerings adorning them, I am most mindful of the space I inhabit, the heady wind, the girth of mountain beneath me, the brassy light, and an odd species of flies. They are as large as small bees, but they don’t zoom all about like the common house fly.

Instead, they hold still in mid-air, much like a dragonfly, buzzing as they do, seeming to watch me. After awhile, a couple “bump” me here and there, on an elbow, a forearm, the top of my head—Am I spirit or flesh? Am I being respectful? These are the guardians I think—maybe even the spirits of the ancestors themselves. I try to stay centered as long as possible...longer. This means losing my “I.” Instead, be here and nothing else, but present in the sharp rocks, the ponderosa pine riffling with color, the prayer cloths alive in the stiff breeze that remind me I will not fool anyone here, especially myself.

This isn’t a game. This isn’t “cool,” or a “Wait until I tell somebody” opportunity. This is, for me, my practice, my best effort at faith, which Katagiri Roshi says is neither something given by somebody, nor is it something coming from you. Rather, “Faith means tranquility, and complete tranquility is the source of our nature and our existence.”

I gradually move out of silent, sitting meditation to consciously ask for blessings—for my daughters, my son, my wife, all my loved ones, friends, family, past and present and future—as heartfelt and mindfully as possible. My heart is moved to ask for a blessing for “all sentient beings,” as the Buddhist vow puts it. I take vows and offer prayers for the earth itself. I ask for nothing in return, except for assistance to honor life in all of its manifestations, to continually cherish life with clarity, conviction, and courage.

I manage to meditate about twenty minutes I guess, maybe thirty. I’m not that strong spiritually yet. It takes great strength to worship—to surrender to that which one barely comprehends, to give up one’s intellect, one’s reason, to “think,” instead, with the heart, to open oneself up to intuition, to intimation, to a felt sense of the world, to the energy of the world, to the spirit of the world. This is the kind of spiritual strength one finds in the figures of Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Crazy Horse, Black Elk and, our own times, in a Gandhi, a Martin Luther King Jr., a Mother Theresa. Giant shoes to fill, I know, but footsteps, nonetheless, to follow.

Still, though I have meditated only thirty minutes, the act feels thorough, focused. As my ego dissolves, I experience this mountain as a site of the earth’s power, a spiritual capitol of the world.

Later, on the South Dakota State Park observation platform, I find I am unable to write poetry. I can't "stop" experiencing the dynamics of the place—though writing, poetry, is often a way of connecting for me, of becoming an integral part of the process of being in a place, or of consciously participating in an event, never with the "objectivity" of a reporter or scientist, but subjectively, sympathetically, intimately as a poet. At the moment, however, this is just not to be.

But I do have another way of praying. Laying down my pencil and notebook, I began to dance Tai chi. I practice a version called "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain" that incorporates the five elements (fire, water, wood, metal, earth) into the dance. Dancing Tai chi brings me physically into accord with the movements of wind, trees, prayer cloths, flies, sun, and space—the feeling of being on top of a mountain, of moving in a slow circle following the sun, east to west. Afterwards, I am inspired to write.

Atop this great wave of earth, I dance,  
 the ground below humming roots.  
 These feet rise and fall slowly  
 to a song of breathing, falling  
 and rising within this wooded space:  
 this body becoming tree, pine fleshed,  
 arms branching into the blue air,  
 where these hands grow wings  
 and circle in the fledgling light.

A half hour later, the sun, a young ponderosa pine higher, I see far down the mountain. Ranger vehicles already in the parking lots, and a mile away the first visitor at the gate, and a half mile further back turning off the main highway another visitor's car. I estimate they will be up here within an hour. My time, alone, with the spirit of the place is ending. And yet I linger not ten feet from the steps of the platform on the way back down. There's one more task I need to perform.

What is it? I sit, listening to the wind sighing through the blackened bones of the pines. Later, Bear Butte State Park Ranger Chuck Rambow tells me the Native Americans

say the Great Spirit saved the mountain from being completely burnt. But it was a terrific fire, devastating. Approximately, ninety percent of the trees on Bear Butte were either consumed by the fire or scorched to a point where recovery is unlikely. The Lakotas I spoke with the night before insinuated it was "non-native people" who started it—accidentally.

But it seemed, to me, something was a bit askew with their tale and with all "accidents." The emphasis shouldn't be on who is to blame; it doesn't have anything to do with blame. Even the Lakota seemed uncomfortable with their own explanation. I heard an uncertainty in their voices as they told me about the "campfire that wasn't extinguished properly." They spoke with more conviction when they mentioned "a big wind," and that there had been a drought.

Finally, everyone agrees in hindsight—Cheyenne, Lakota, and Ranger Rambow. It has been a purification wrought by the Creator. Everything is better today, despite the loss of ponderosa pine and the frequent mud slides; there is much new grass, even an abundance of the precious "June" grass used in Sundance ceremonies.

The day before, I met a blithe, young woman, who worked in the information booth at the Bear Butte trail head. She was chatty, spilling over with youth's sense of its own vitality. She informed me the journey up the mountain was an "easy hike" of about an hour and a half, and a half hour down. "You could be done in no time."

Recalling her statement, I laugh quietly and am tempted to say to the sky, "Out of the mouth of babes." But, I don't. As I begin my descent, however, I assume a "no-time" attitude and begin walking mindfully one step at a time. In step with my breathing. I center my concentration in my hara, my lower abdomen below my navel. Centered and centerless, this is kinhin, slow walking meditation one practices between periods of formal sitting meditation in the zendo.

I walk, neither stuck in my own thoughts, nor attached to the phenomenal world about me. If anything, my focus is somewhere between both. For when I am feeling particularly right, out there and inside are indistinguishable. During such clear moments, a pebble glinting in the sunlit path at my feet, glistens inside me. Again, to use Zen phrasing, I walk mindfully.

Not I am walking down the mountain, but I am the mountain's walking consciousness. I am its slope, its talus, its altitude, its gravity in my calves and thighs, its eyes—seeing a mountain sparrow nearly invisible, mottled brown as the tree limb on which it perches. I am the mountain rose, the wild yarrow that rings the top in clusters of white cupped flowers. I am the mountain's ears, its listening to the wind, to the birds, to a jet 35,000 feet overhead, and to a single car winding its way toward the visitor's center a mile and half below. I am also the mountain's fingers and feet. As well as the mountain's mood of serenity and expansiveness, its warming beneath the rising sun, its lingering coolness in the shade on its unlit north side. The Zen Master, Dogen uses the term “whole faith-like body,” which means your whole body and mind are exactly faith. It is with this kind of “whole faith-like body,” that I descend the mountain.

I notice a butterfly moving alongside of me, moving as I move. It has black wings with splotches of white. It stays with me for twenty, thirty yards. I can't help but think of it as escorting me on my way, a guide, a guardian, a fellow sentient being. And then just as it stops, landing on a white flower on the up slope, another butterfly appears, tangerine colored with black spots, and immediately begins to escort me for the next twenty or thirty yards. It is one of the most simple, silent, and subtle of events, and yet beaming with awe and gratitude for the attention

I halt, again perhaps halfway, my hand against calcite rock. There a fly an inch from my index finger. I move ever so slightly toward it and it moves minutely toward me. It walks onto my fingernail. I make no motion to brush it off. In fact, I carefully move my hand back to its kin position over the other folded across my lower belly and continue walking meditation.

Nothing misses my attention and, yet my attention holds onto nothing. Each flat stone step every twenty-five feet or so, strategically placed where the path switchbacks, traversing its way back and forth down the hill. Each twig, each scattered leaf, the peppering of shade and light across the rock-strewn path.

For the Lakota, this mountain (particularly the southern slope) represents the bear of the Devil's Tower myth, who after futilely attempting to reach the young princesses (or warriors depending on who tells the tale), gave up and wandered the fifty miles to this part of South Dakota, where it lay down to become Bear Butte. But I'm still on the eastern slope, which is the “Cheyenne side” of the mountain that they see as a great sacred lodge where their folk hero, Sweet Medicine, received the Four Sacred Arrows, the medicine laws of the tribe.

In the past, these myths seemed historically and culturally so far away from me. Yet, here I expect at any moment during my descent to meet one of the Old Ones, maybe



Sweet Medicine himself. I wonder what sort of sacred bundle I might receive? Is there something I can take back to America at the beginning of the Twenty First Century?

I descend, my body and mind attuned to the details of the place. I glance down at the fly still sitting on my hand, silent, motionless. It waits too. My spirit guide? This insignificant, even reprehensible creature, what truth could it carry? I know the common attitude. But, I still resist swatting at it and choose instead to walk with it as my guide. In and out of the dappled light and shadow, I inhale the subtle and rich scent of pine and flowers I cannot name.

And the colors! Here and there in certain patches of bright light, a burst of magenta and fuchsia and deep purple, splashes of creamy yellow and sky blue. I can't imagine what the fly sees with its magnified sense of seeing, but to me, the colors are so vivid as to be fully meaningful as simply color for its own sake.

As if on cue upon reaching a certain boundary, the fly tickles my hand as it moves for the first time, perhaps not more than a millimeter, before flying off. Thirty seconds later, I encounter the first humans of the day, a young couple, walking fast, but quietly. We pass without eye contact, wordlessly. The mountain gives us permission to do this without guilt or feelings of uneasiness.

Then not long, three men, middle-aged, loud talking, kicking rocks, stumbling, laughing. "How's it going?" the first booms. Cameras around their necks, sweating already, no doubt in a hurry to get to the top, take their pictures, remark about the view, then scramble down to where next? Devil's Tower to the west? Mt. Rushmore to the south? A casino in Deadwood?

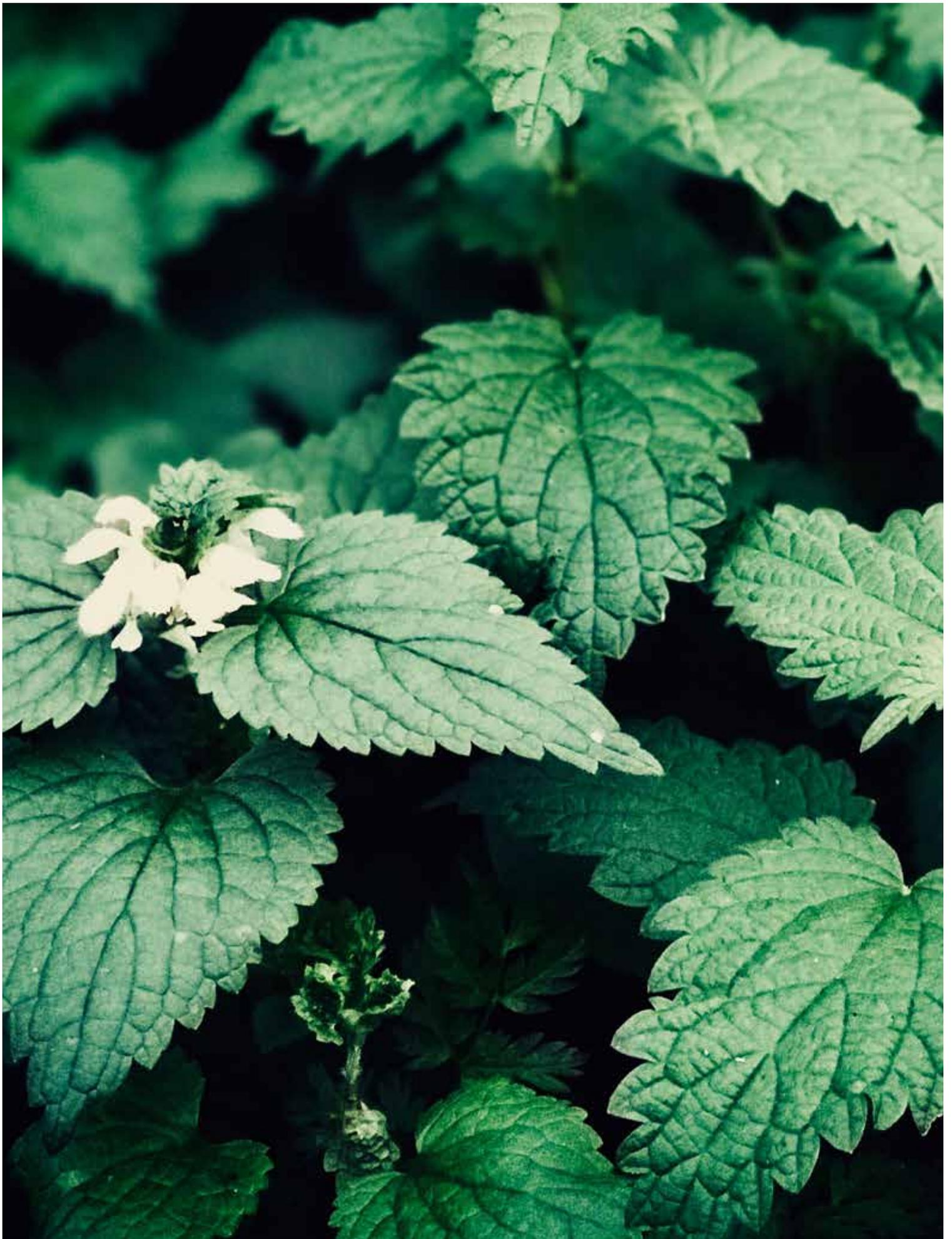
The last fellow erupts, huffing to me, "Bet it's easier going down!"

I steel myself, trying to not pass judgment (though I already have). They will receive what they bring in their hearts. The mountain is ancient, imperturbable, mysterious. Spiritual responses—whether rewards or repercussions—are unfathomable. Those who believe, who have faith, and who act accordingly, are astute and will be the first to recognize the movement of spirit. Life begins with suffering, says the Buddha, and yet he is often depicted smiling. He's not amused by distress, but at peace because he understood the cause (ignorance) and the cure (knowledge) and the result (enlightenment).

Here, back in my living room, I'm smiling, too. Not because I know what the Buddha knows, but because six months have passed since that predawn hike and I have not left Bear Butte. Or, rather, Bear Butte has not left me. I don't mean, however, just in the sense of memory, of mentally recalling that time on the sacred mountain. Rather, practicing sitting meditation looking out the window, I am again experiencing a feeling of centeredness. The Buddhists declare, "Everything is Mind," or as Dogen puts it, "The entire universe is the human body." My feeling of centeredness when climbing Bear Butte and my feeling of centeredness looking out my window are the same feeling, the same insight, the same center of this entire universe. As Black Elk explained his vision atop Mt. Harney: "I saw myself on the central mountain of the world, the highest place...But, the central mountain is everywhere." Everywhere being Mt. Harney, Bear Butte, and Heart Mountain four miles from this living room floor here where I am sitting gazing out the window as winter begins to solidify around my house *in a sacred manner*.



Burt Bradley lives on a bluff in Northwest Wyoming seventy miles from Yellowstone National Park. For over thirty years, with his wife Janet, a photographer, he has delved into the wild serenity of the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. His writing has appeared in *Ring of Fire: Writers of the Yellowstone Region*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Best of Writers at Work*, among others. He is currently professor emeritus at Northwest College in Powell, Wyoming, where he taught Writing in the Wild classes in Yellowstone and the Southwest Desert. This first poetry collection, *After Following*, won the 2018 Homebound Publications Poetry Prize and is now available.



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# THE MINDFUL KITCHEN

*Seasonal · Mindful · Delicious*

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*“It is spring again. The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart.”*

*—Rainer Maria Rilke*

## SPRING IN THE MINDFUL KITCHEN WITH HEIDI BARR

IN THE NORTHLAND, sometimes spring isn't sure how it wants to show up - like the year it tried to make an early arrival one March, and we were out in the fields running around, relishing in the warmer weather while the snow melted with abandon. The seasonal ravine stream flowed freely, the moss turned vibrant green, and the robins returned. A new beaver family started swimming around on our side of the lake, and the swans and bald eagles visited with more frequency as the lake opened up.

But then, a few weeks later, it was back to freezing at night and only got up into the 40s during the day. The lake ice stopped melting, and the sun took a little breather before coming out again in full. The tiny blue flowers that always pop up first in at the edge of the woods decided to bide their time instead opening too soon.

It can be like that for us, too, right? We get super excited about all of those New Year's resolutions as the calendar turns over, but then a month in, it's back to the same old habits, and we're wondering what happened to all of that energy. It's like we ran around in the sun for a time,

but then slipped in the mud and froze to the ground. That's what happens when we try to do too much too soon. Because here's the deal. January isn't the time to make changes. (Cue the hallelujah chorus) I mean, think about it - everything is frozen solid, the days are dark, and our instincts say hunker down and survive. On the other hand, spring is the time to make changes - subtle, gradual ones, even when the season seems to get a false start, because the sun is regaining strength, the days are lengthening, and it's time to plant seeds. But seeing those changes stick, well, that takes patience.

So, as this spring takes hold (whatever that looks like in your part of the world) identify what your life wants more of, and add just a little bit. Then when you feel good about what you've added, add just a little bit more. And so on. Small things have power when they are coupled with intention and persistence.

Here's a recipe to help you practice mindfully welcoming whatever you need more of in your life this spring, one little bit of it at a time.



Author of *Woodland Manitou* and *Prairie Grown*, Heidi Barr lives in Minnesota with her husband and daughter where they tend a large organic vegetable garden, explore nature and do their best to live simply. As a mother, spouse, gardener, and wellness coach, she is committed to cultivating ways of being that are life-giving and sustainable for people, communities and the planet. Heidi holds a Master's degree in Faith and Health Ministries, and occasionally coordinates with yoga teachers and organic farms to offer nature-based retreat experiences. Visit her at [heidibarr.com](http://heidibarr.com).







## Risotto with Foraged Spring Greens

Serves 4 as a main dish

Time to prepare: 45 minutes

### Ingredients

1.5 cups arborio rice

2 TB olive oil

1 cup chopped onion (or wild ramps if you've got 'em)

3-4 cups vegetable broth (warm)

½ cup dry white wine (optional)

1 TB butter

½ cup parmesan cheese

1-2 cups (packed) dandelion greens or nettles

Salt and pepper to taste

Wash dandelion greens or blanch nettles, leaves only, in a pot of boiling water til just wilted and set aside.

Heat the broth on the stovetop on low - keep warm for the duration of cooking.

Saute the onion in the olive oil until softened, 3-5 minutes.

Add rice to the pan and stir to coat with oil. Keep stirring for 30-60 seconds.

Add wine if using, stirring until absorbed. Add broth ½ cup at a time, continuously stirring, adding more broth when the last addition has been absorbed by the rice. This step will take 20-35 minutes, and it's a great opportunity to practice patience and pay attention to your breath and posture. When rice is tender, add 1 tablespoon of butter and the cheese. Stir to combine until cheese and butter have melted. Add the greens and serve with extra parmesan.

Enjoy the rest of the wine with your meal if you desire.



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# POETRY

*“And your very flesh shall be a great poem.”*

*—Walt Whitman*

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## L.M. BROWNING

## THE LAWS OF GRAVITY

Expectations are sheer cliffs we cannot help  
but climb. The perfect, plumb ground too easy and expected  
bears no liking for those beings without wings  
but for whom heights hold draw.

*Hope is a thing with feathers*

but does it know how to fly?

THE ROAD FROM SANTA FE  
TO CIMARRON

Red dust,  
sanguine from Sangre  
bleeding into the snowy roads  
that lead to the hidden mountain  
where the lone buffalo waits.

## THE LOST HORIZON

Souls age in thousand-fold nights, wandering  
across internal landscapes to desert's  
edge. At the corner of a crossroad, a  
blue tail flicks and slicks as the lizard  
slides through dust, around adobe wall, and  
disappears in the cracked door, cadmium  
yellow deep. Landscapes converge, coyotes  
howl and the rattlesnake shakes, recoiling.  
Milky way rivers run above sandy  
scape. Daylight drown, watching stars emerge to  
teach the cure that lies in the slow silence.  
I had a vision there—in the land of  
thick heat and shifting sheer shapes. Rocks  
stacked higgledy-piggledy by tired Gods  
long-evaporated under midday  
sun. They walked off down trails erased by winds  
that keep secrets from time and memory.  
It was there star-crossed and awe-struck my path  
joined with a dark-eyed Delila seeking  
my soul and the doorway into my world.  
Trickster, temptress, bride, I can only hope as  
I abide by the heart's pulling, following  
her through trees, unto silhouetted horizon.

## GWENDOLYN MORGAN

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 “AND ALL RAIN IS HOLY WATER”  
SHE SAYS

three raccoons came to the bird feeder this morning  
 before she had her first cup of hibiscus tea  
 before it started raining  
 a woman was taken off a TriMet bus  
 yesterday by ICE  
 on her way to work, she was late  
 she is in the detention center in Tacoma  
 her children in custody in Portland  
 it is raining between them  
 the fog rises from the Columbia River  
 a Great Blue Heron lifts her wings  
 rises along the mud flats  
 her family in *Oaxaca, Otavalo*  
 her family in Rose City Park  
 her family in detention  
 her family in deportation proceedings.

She fingers the rosary in her pocket  
 Our Lady of Guadalupe  
 Rosewood prayers  
 “I will never forget you”  
 she says to her children, *niños*

segregated by fear  
 immigration regulations  
 she cannot see the clouds  
 behind the wall  
 the grey edges of sorrow  
 remembers the flight feathers of the heron  
 the silver chain of the rosary  
 rosewood, rose water  
 the deer eat the wild roses in the backyard  
 a doe, two fawns, black-tailed  
 she will be black-listed  
 is black listed, dreams of the three sisters  
 black beans, corn, delicata candy stripe squash.

Her daughter has roses on her rain boots,  
 splashes in puddles, sings the alphabet song  
 in English, in Spanish, waiting for the no. 2 bus  
 dreaming, she walks through the waters  
 of the Rio Grande again  
 raccoons gather at the river  
 “and all rain is holy water” she says.

## HELOISE JONES

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DECEMBER 2018  
KENYA, THE MARA

*Dedicated to Simon Metekai Masago and Jackson Kayionni Letiol*

The bleached bones of buffalo,  
wildebeest.  
Their skulls, chin forward,  
a line of white strung behind.  
Nuggets of vertebrae that once held  
sturdy backs.

I see their necks stretched forward,  
their bodies as an offering  
to the lions who feast on their organs,  
their flesh.

As if they say, here, this is how  
I live on. In your pride,  
in the packs of hyenas that follow,  
and those of the jackals  
behind them. In the final gleaning  
by the gray-backed vultures who  
polish these bones into clean, stark  
markers

like flags, reminders of the great  
migration that rides with the seasons  
and rains, by no clock but the turn  
of the earth.

Saying, as the sun sears them white,  
my horns remain strong and black,  
curved, evidence of my own mighty  
passing though brought down and  
devoured.

Can you see us?

Where grass with rise rain-ripened  
and green, caress the ghosts of  
our backs in the sway of the breeze.  
Rise through and around these bones,  
and wait for the next crossing,  
the great safari from the Serengeti.

White flags, here forever,  
on The Mara. The last trace  
of this pact we made to life.

## JASON HINCHCLIFFE

## THE FIRST TIME HE SAW THE OCEAN.

He pulls the blanket down to swipe a mosquito from his neck.  
Goosebumps slither across his skin and he's not sure if the  
air is cold, or only compared to the heat trapped  
under the blanket by their bodies pressed together.  
The flicker of headlights teases them to watchfulness  
until the lights pass safely above their heads,  
disappearing when the car turns at the crossroad.  
Their little hideaway remains undisturbed.  
Wind rustles the trees, pre-autumn leaves scratching the branches.  
He remembers when he was young, driving to the coast with his  
family.  
It was the first time he saw the ocean. He remembers the waves,  
and his memory isn't much different from the sound  
he's hearing from the trees. The ocean frightened him that day,  
the wind so strong it tried to carry his slim body forward,  
ballooning his clothes in front of him as  
he stared out past the end of the sky.  
He remembers clinging to his mother's hand,  
afraid to let go, fearing to be swept into  
the angry fathomless deep.  
His hand flings up, the bites not even hurting anymore.  
He can tell she's still awake beside him by the unevenness of her  
breath.  
Sporadically, they attempt conversation but it's just reflex, too.  
All the words they spoke earlier  
make it difficult to find the right words now.

## THE PHONE DOESN'T RING.

The phone doesn't ring, no matter how long he watches it.  
For three days he's been waiting. He called the few numbers  
scrawled in his address book. Listened to the voices  
quiet with pity, that wanted to help,  
but hadn't seen either of his children in years.  
Each day the lady with the clipboard comes back,  
sits in the chair nearest the open window,  
and watches him watch the phone.  
Age has taught him many things,  
but not how to deal with her patient kindness.  
The pictures on the mantle show the family that even  
then had forgotten how to smile. Most of the haircuts in  
the photographs went out of style twenty years ago.  
His eyes linger on the smoke-yellowed wallpaper,  
the stained and filthy carpet under his feet,  
the table strewn with old crinkled newspapers that  
he gave up reading when reading started to hurt his eyes.  
The mess had accumulated in recent years because he  
gets tired so easily anymore. It never bothered him  
because it was his own mess, his own house.  
It was just a dizzy spell, he wants to tell her, not even  
truly believing his own untruth.

## CHRISTOPHER NYE

## PATH TO A DISTANT SHORE

I look out over  
 a landscape in ashes—  
 truth a casualty,  
 beauty perverted,  
 compassion in short supply.  
 But here at my feet  
 a green thread.  
 I pick up the end  
 and follow.  
 It parallels highways,  
 crosses rivers,  
 climbs mountain passes,  
 till I arrive  
 at another coast.

The thread ends in the needle  
 of a grandmother with gentle eyes,  
 quilting.  
 Each square shows a scene  
 of forgiveness and reconciliation—  
 the Prodigal Son,  
 Arab and Jew  
 making music together,  
 an anger demon  
 departing a resentful wife.

When finished, the quilt  
 will show the way  
 to heal families  
 and raise children.  
 And every stitch  
 a blessing.

## THE POND

*Poems Out Of Music: Mozart, Sonata for Piano and Violin in C (K296), second movement*

What draws them to this place,  
 the quiet pond like a parenthesis  
 in the landscape, an eye for the earth?  
 Willows drape the banks and shadow the shallows.  
 The still surface is punctuated with pink  
 and white *nymphaeas* like the ones Monet  
 loved and painted. Just now they begin  
 to close for the night as if to put  
 their heads down on their round pads.  
 A dragonfly, iridescent green,  
 arrows across the pond,  
 and a kingfisher from a branch  
 eyes the water for its next meal.  
 Seeing the bird, the young man  
 tells the story of the Fisher King.  
 She takes his hand. They reflect on how  
 for centuries myths and traditions  
 sheltered people from having  
 to think for themselves, but now  
 our only cover comes from cloth  
 that we alone can weave.

Mirrored in deep water the two see  
 cottonwhite clouds, a deepening cobalt sky,  
 and they savor the moment,  
 making a memory  
 that loosely braids two strands  
 that may grow to become one.

## MARK TAKSA

## SILENCE IS LOUD

Shoes stop shuffling. The eyes of the crowd  
inspect, as if to witness doves fluttering  
from my lips. I remember the rebel  
who looked over the clouds and complained,

with a vulture's shriek, that the sky  
did not shine where he stood.  
Ground cracked and swallowed this complainer.  
People who gathered to hear his complaint

burnt in sky's flames... My silence  
is loud. I am not a prophet, too brave  
with complaint to be questioned. Silence stays.  
No person stands longer than the wind.

## HISS

Looking at love emerging like sunlight  
on the faces of workers sharing lunch and plans  
on a park bench, I wait by my window.

I get a call to fix plumbing. Hearing the hiss  
of the spraying pipe, I see fog  
blocking the sun over rifles on a boulevard  
where any song is of a bird busted.

Though I wrench a kitchen pipe,  
my feet race. I howl for a woman to run,  
fear that she, hustled to a hissing box—  
not feeling the ripping of her finger—will scrape  
a message against walls I will not read.

I pull her to an alley where we could have hidden.  
Her hair, wire tangled, once curved  
like a scarf ridding a waterfall.  
Her whisper fills the hush of my home.  
Beyond my window, the world converses.

## ROBERT HIRSCHFIELD

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### THE RIVER

You carried your bag of sins:  
a wedge of moldy rye,  
a poppy bagel with the mote your dentures made.  
You asked me where the river was.  
You forgot it was Rosh Hashanah,  
but you remembered the river,  
the Jewish river of Andre Breton  
where for the new year  
sins masquerade as sacrificial bread,  
whining to have their old lives back.  
Every day you were thrown like the bread.  
I stopped trying to catch you  
when your emptiness bent my arms  
into the wet sizzle of air  
untouched by God.  
Walking together, the space between us  
was the space between the bread and the river  
that neither of us could find.

### ADVENT

She looks inside the mail box  
as if maybe a new life has arrived  
in an old aerogram from Plonsk.  
She sees a sparrow carrying her father's voice  
in a hat box.  
Her bunions blaze like Jerusalem  
between the thumbs of Titus  
astride the fake sun.  
God wakes in a foul mood  
from her fisted bed of tissues.  
He just brushes past her.  
He used to be a gentleman.

## C.M. RIVERS

PILEATED WOODPECKER,  
EARLY APRIL

He prances.  
Snow still clings  
to the elbows of branches.  
Sapsucker's cousin,  
he throws a glance.  
Well-trained in his craft,  
he is listening  
for what he inherently knows.  
He seeks the essential,  
what is necessary  
to sustain life,  
what he knows to be  
the inflexible schedule  
of survival.  
Maybe that is why he works  
the way he works: assertive,  
and with such verve.  
Perhaps he is strutting  
his hard-won recognition  
that things are what they are,  
and nothing more.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Live an aesthetic life  
or a theoretical one. Just live.  
Shred your records  
of ancient matters.  
Investigate your resilience, your softness –  
you contain more of both  
than anyone thinks.  
Protest sentiment, be less academic.  
More delete key, more nectar.  
Burn concepts.  
Compost duality with singularity.  
Exhale clutter, inhale clarity.  
Take some lateral drifting  
to contemplate structure, what form  
you might work to serve next –  
you are still in a world  
of forms, after all.  
A pilgrimage, perhaps.  
A walkabout.  
Go, elucidate.

JESSICA MARTINI

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EXACTLY HALF

Exactly half a moon  
beams at me silver  
and it is my total occupation  
lying on this sandstone mesa  
watching clouds  
migrate across the sky  
I have been running from my enemies lately  
afraid to see the spark  
of mercy  
in their hearts

AND BE MADE WELL

You can't think or say  
or pray  
yourself well –  
well is my father  
fresh from catholic charities  
laughing at my boy-cut  
my ballcap  
telling me he'll make it big  
in silicon valley  
telling me he'll live  
to one hundred and ninety  
asking me  
you playing for the yankees now?

## RICHARD SCHIFFMAN

## ALMOST CLEAR

Shredded like pennants  
 after the storm  
 clouds scudding low  
 over the scalloped bridges  
 grazing skyscrapers  
 rushing out to sea  
 in boils bolls mounds hillocks  
 a roiled geography of vapors  
 passing gray white golden overhead  
 streaked with rills and rivulets  
 of half light shot through  
 with pools almost blue  
 where clouds have thinned  
 to almost sky  
 where soon ten billion suns  
 will almost pierce  
 the jaundice-yellow haze  
 of city lights and almost  
 but not quite  
 the unquiet cloud  
 of this body of this mind  
 which is also a storm that passes  
 which is also a sky in motion  
 and I will almost  
 remember  
 to remember  
 that I am starlight too.

## CHEMOTHERAPY

Trees also lose their hair  
 from the chemotherapy of winter,  
 but wear no wig to hide  
 the missing foliage.  
 Leaf change is a spell of nausea  
 before the long prostration,  
 when bare, but unashamed,  
 they bear the icy blasts  
 that cauterize their veins  
 and freeze the swelling cambium,  
 arrest the unchecked spread  
 of summer's green disease.

Not that trees are stoic or heroic.  
 Nor should you be, Jane,  
 as, in these Arctic months ahead,  
 you wear the wig of human hair  
 that I promise not to stare at  
 when you comb it as your own,  
 when you press it down  
 against the gusts.  
 And do what all trees must—  
 sink sap to root, bend  
 without breaking.

## KAY MERKEL BORUFF

## PAINTING THE ELEPHANT GOLD

“Hell, we just wanted to see the show.” –W. C. Williams

The hay is mown and rolled, my summer dreams asleep. The child ascends to dance. In the grayness of gray, each step an entrance, I arrive at the window, you have just walked out the door. Wings shining, eyes bright, you smile your love to me. Wind chimes catch the breeze. Honey bees nestle flowers blanketing fresh dirt. Morning washes over me. Chords from the sonata float with the clouds. Luna moth circling through blue spruce echos greetings. Trees sway, speckled light refracting on lichen and moss. Smooth rocks celebrate the dawn. Breath lifts me—

I am floating  
I am flying  
I am once again with you

The red dirt road snakes among chinaberries, ocher fruit of poisoned passion. The child dances in winter. Day rests on the window sill. The strength death brings frees me. The powerless is the powerful. I resume the baci, ceremony of embarkation, my altar stacked with hai blossoms and bhat, blessings from the monkey king, music for the dead, light for the living. I set my sights home, home to the red dirt: to the state of grace in wornness, to the Wabi-sabi, shards of pottery, cracks in gold paint, dissonance in the moonlight—

May I be a well filled  
May I be a song sung  
May I be a dream remembered

## DON RUSS

## NOT NOTHING: AN AFFIRMATION

Even light is not nothing  
 unless everything is nothing and here  
 but not-here inside my head.

So too with the secrets of the moon,  
 or—multiplied, subdivided—of the moon  
 in mirrors.

So too the sun's work: comets wind-  
 socked out in solar breezes, green curtains  
 stirred across a ghostly polar sky.

Fretted with golden fire, a roof,  
 a Hamlet's canopy, a "brave o'erhanging  
 firmament" —nothing but words.

But if nothing myself,  
 I can be satisfied thinking nothing  
 but that alone.

THE RETURN OF THE SANDHILL  
 CRANES: A LOVE SONG

Lake Panasoffkee, Florida

From somewhere above, behind,  
 this one blue world we know, it comes again,  
 the one unbroken sound of thousands  
 sounding close and far away.

You turn to me in blue-eyed wonder,  
 not a pilgrim beside me, but another world,  
 tugging at my own world's wonted path.

I catch your heartbeat and feel  
 you breathe with me the wordless breath  
 of all creation, I know our mortal flesh  
 yet has its chance at blessedness.

## KEITH MOUL

---

### RUST HONORS A BLOOM

Cool water would hit the spot, yet, abandoned,  
a water tower rusts above a desert highway.

Further, a settler misplaced trust in a friend  
for a quit claim shack. History marks the event  
with a sign among rattlers facing their survival.

I have water handy. I refresh. I check the tower  
for lessons: always leave footprints in the dust,  
burnishings and sweat. Dehydration threatens,  
paint wears and chips in wind from inside out,  
wind whipped in Death Valley to wreak its worse.

An unknown flower blooms, enough to turn me round  
and linger, to sniff its scent, oxidized, greased and oiled.

A fuel stop welcomes me to rapidly diminishing supply.

### SHOREBIRDS

The great blue goes bronze in wait  
of prey, so erect as wind tickles surf;  
the gull flies past, too impatient;  
the heron moves to attend an object  
beneath the water's surface; the gull  
flies past.

The earthworm hugs  
the trail in the same direction  
at the same deliberate heron speed:

the sunset transforms a bird to art.

## HEATHER KIRN LANIER

UPON LEARNING THAT OUR  
DAUGHTER CAN SWALLOW  
HER OWN SPIT

Victory in the pot hole,  
the pedestrian, the tractor-trailer all  
averted, our rickety old model cruising  
north in the right-hand lane.

Victory in the black brush-stroke  
branches that this morning  
are still glued to their trees. They did not crack off in the night

and shatter our windows. Likewise, the sky  
whose birds for the most part stay  
afloat. Crisis averted. Come spring

they'll carry—most of them—twigs  
for the nests for the little ones, worms  
to drop inside the beaks  
so small they could pick locks.

Victory in the millions  
of un-extinct species, this day  
an added ho-hum page to turn  
in the reference book of their Latin-  
named histories. That's you,

redbellied woodpecker, and you,  
Spanish lynx, greetings to  
your non-demise. Let us go on, all of us,

our inhalations a billion  
little clouds of molecules that haven't killed us,  
not in this  
moment, not in the last,

our eggs and sperm still sniffing  
toward one another to rewrite the world, a world

in which sometimes a child  
is born  
with the incapacity to swallow.

## MAX STEPHAN

## SHIITAKE (LENTINULA EDODES)

The name alone makes your mouth water.  
 Go ahead—say it: *shee-TAH-ke*  
 The acoustics – foreign, curious, tempting...  
 its first syllable, *shee*—  
 soft, subtle, like a whisper;  
 but the second, a strong, bold AHHH  
 as in *Abbb*, *NOW I get it*—  
 a class, a breed in a different league  
 far, far above  
 the Button diced on pizza pies.

When you think of the Shiitake,  
 the taste glands fancy  
 Katsuoobushi, Kombu, and Iriko in Dashi...  
 the bold, brash savor of Miso Soup... Buddah's Delight.  
 The imagination scribbles monks in saffron robes  
 foraging through the forest,  
 picking only those found mature, ready.

To some, this gem has forever been  
 the *Donko*—the Winter Mushroom;  
 to others, the *Huagu*—the Flower Mushroom;  
 yet no one yearns to know  
 the plainness, the utter simplicity  
 of the name the world holds tight:  
 scattered beneath the *shii* trees,  
 it is the *take*, the fruit, that calm hands pluck.

But, *abbb*, *the Shiitake*—  
 to the palate, the chef,  
 its name translates as  
*triumph*, as  
*unsullied merit*, as  
*desire*.

## AFTER THE WILDFIRE, 2017

Like gypsies, nomads, drifters—  
 the foragers arrive under moonlight  
 pitching tents, parking trailers,  
 eager to weave their way  
 through virgin soot and cinder—  
 to trek between the black, barren pillars  
 in search of the elusive.

Laid off lumberjacks,  
 Asian immigrants,  
 traveling bands of Deadhead wanderers—  
 some seeking challenge,  
 a handful drawn by delectable want,  
 others seeing nothing  
 but the dollar sign of Manhattan;

their lure, at times  
 the Chanterelles, the Matsutake  
 tucked away in shaded nooks  
 beneath thick, healthy greens—

but here  
 in this ghostly apocalypse,  
 in Montana's mad aftermath—  
 with all shades of thriving life removed,  
 with splendor wiped clean,

the Black Morels wake  
 and rise  
 triumphant.

## DOUGLAS COLE

## TULLIANUM

Every moment between these walls  
I flinch at crows dawn-cawing  
apples falling through leaves  
branches scraping the rooftop  
with someone sleeping beside me  
in some other fabric of stone  
that creeps up the nails of my fingers  
and into my light-deprived skin  
the walls within walls I live within  
the layers of muscle I've trained  
by blind hours in solitary motion  
in a two foot by two foot room  
going nowhere in bones wrapped  
in winter fire built out of need  
what can I tell you about  
the glowing walls of mystery  
you who can only go so far  
restricted by visiting hours  
and institutional rules of contact  
other than a note left after the fact  
I say I am here and I am free  
how else to give this to you  
an answer for why and how  
I can speak quietly into your ear  
when you arrive and find nothing  
but an empty cell

## FAST AWAKE

I am reaching for the amethyst  
center of the sea  
trying to name every tree  
on the peninsula  
but in the back of my mind  
I'm still worried about money  
and calculating if I don't eat  
I can save enough for school  
how many pounds must I shed  
to clear the cobwebs of hunger  
while the dog scratches at the door  
with that deep-woods look  
room consumed by drinking rounds  
crows collecting as time shifts  
and I am back in this brackish  
current between a falling apple  
and a puff of smoke  
so I ripple my way  
and sometimes come up for air  
sometimes eat the earth  
with eyes like meteors  
burning in a green bay

## AMY NAWROCKI

## MOUTHBROODERS

With no mind for words, no voice  
to echolocate underwater, no sinkhole  
to burrow or free unforgivable limbs  
from pen caps whose plastic scratches  
leave no trace of helpful blood,

I take on the company of cichlids and catfish,  
mouthbrooders who clutch their young  
in hopeful jaws, and search for a more  
buoyant form of the art of persuasion.

Send me one of those fry harvesters  
who coax the unspoken out from  
worried tongues without harm,  
without sugar pills or counterarguments.

## CORNSTALKS AT DUSK

I take the long way,  
passing cornstalks in the cusp  
of twilight. Kernels  
are months away, but dormancy  
doesn't come to mind when moods

tiptoe from cold to mild,  
from seasonal to expected  
for late February,  
this strange bridge between white  
and green, when skies are quiet

and day—if it had a breath to hold—  
sighs with relief. The farm is fallow,  
silos closed up; I drive past  
the field which has no resolve  
fenced as it is

by reflective white paint  
and curb lines dividing six o'clock  
from one minute past.  
It has been a while since  
I passed through, since

I unwrapped the husk  
of hometown, where in the blue silk  
of twilight I see spaces  
that I've seen before, but never  
like this, and never so bright.

## FEATURED POETS



Kay Merkel Boruff lived in Viet-Nam 68-70 and was married to an Air America pilot who was killed flying in Laos 18 Feb 70. Her work has appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, *Vanity Fair*, *Texas Short Stories 2*, *Suddenly*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Adanna*, *Stone Voices*, and *Paper Nautilus*. She is the author of *Z.O.S. A Memoir*.



Douglas Cole has published six collections of poetry and a novella. His work has appeared in anthologies and journals such as *The Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Bitter Oleander*, and *Slipstream*. He has been nominated twice for a Pushcart and has received the Leslie Hunt Memorial Prize in Poetry. His website is [douglastcole.com](http://douglastcole.com).



Jason Hinchcliffe spends his days working at a legal publisher in Toronto, and most of his nights either writing or thinking about writing. He relies way too much on coffee. Jason's poems and stories have appeared in *580 Split*, *the Nashwaak Review*, *94 Creations* and the *River Poets Journal*.



Robert Hirschfield has appeared in *Salamander*, *Descant*, *Tears In The Fence*, *Jewish Review of Books* and *The Writer*, as well as many other publications. He is also putting together a book of Alzheimer poems that will include "Advent" and "The River," the two poem appearing in *The Wayfarer*.



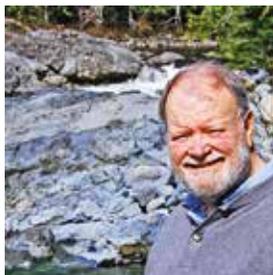
Author, Speaker, Consultant Heloise Jones is founder of Fierce Heart™ Productions. Her book *The Writer's Block Myth* is described as the best book about what being a writer is. Heloise is intensely interested in culture and how it shows up both in works and a writer's voice. Visit [HeloiseJones.com](http://HeloiseJones.com)



Heather Lanier is the author of the nonfiction book, *Teaching in the Terrordome*, and two award-winning poetry chapbooks. Her memoir about raising a child with a rare chromosomal condition is forthcoming from Penguin Press. She lives and teaches writing in Vermont.



Jessica Martini writes poetry inspired by the Arizona landscape, meditation on the body and nature, spiritual questions, and illness. She received her MFA from Northern Arizona University.



Keith Moul is a poet of place, a photographer of the distinction light adds to place. Both his poems and photos are published widely. His photos are digital, striving for high contrast and saturation, which makes his vision colorful.



Gwendolyn Morgan earned an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Goddard College, and an M.Div. from San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union. She is currently the Clark County Poet Laureate 2018-2020 in Washington State.

## FEATURED POETS



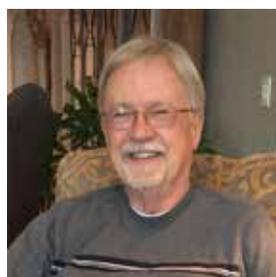
Amy Nawrocki is the author of *Four Blue Eggs* and *Reconnaissance*. Her memoir *The Comet's Tail: A Memoir of No Memory* has been awarded a Gold Medal for the Living Now Mind-Body-Spirit Awards. She is the co-author of three Connecticut history books as well as the poetry editor of *The Wayfarer*. She is an associate professor of English at the University of Bridgeport and lives Hamden, Connecticut.



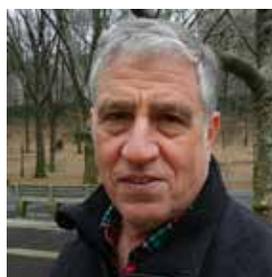
Thirty-seven years ago Chris Nye helped start the magazine, *Orion*. Now retired from a career in higher education, he serves as Chair of the *Orion* board. His work has appeared in *Shark Reef*, *Pegasus*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Berkshire Review*, *Cut Throat*, and other journals. His most recent book is *Poems Out of Thin Air*.



C.M. Rivers is a student of practices: writing, cooking, yoga, etc. His work has appeared in several literary magazines and online journals. He is surrounded by stacks of manuscripts, none of which have been attended to properly, and all of which threaten to topple over at any moment, leading to sudden death by paper and ink.



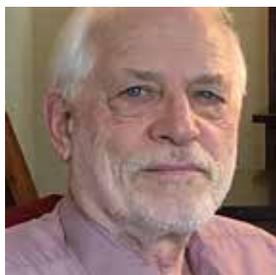
Don Russ is the author of *Dream Driving* (Kennesaw State University Press) and the chapbooks *Adam's Nap* and *World's One Heart*. His poem "Girl with Gerbil" was chosen for inclusion in *The Best American Poetry 2012* after it appeared in *The Cincinnati Review*.



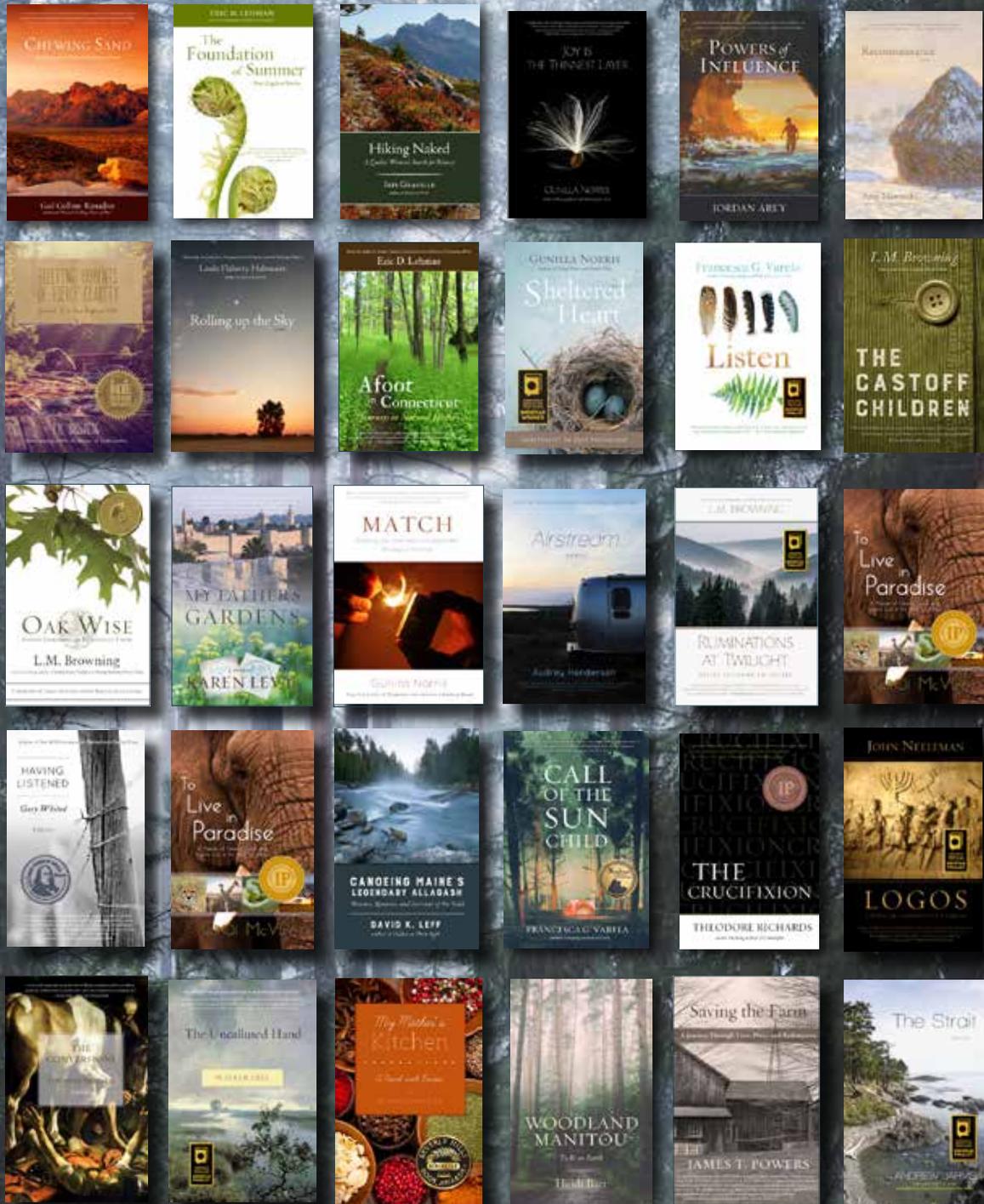
Richard Schiffman is an environmental journalist and author of two spiritual biographies. His poems have been published in various publications including the *New York Times*, *Writer's Almanac*, and *This American Life in Poetry*. His first collection of nature inspired poetry, "What the Dust Doesn't Know," was published in 2017 by *Salmon Poetry*.



Max Stephan's writing has appeared in a broad scope of journals ranging from the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Potomac Review*, to *Appalachia* and *Slipstream*. Stephan teaches at Niagara University, specializing in Contemporary American Poetry. Learn more about Stephan at: [www.maxstephan.net](http://www.maxstephan.net)



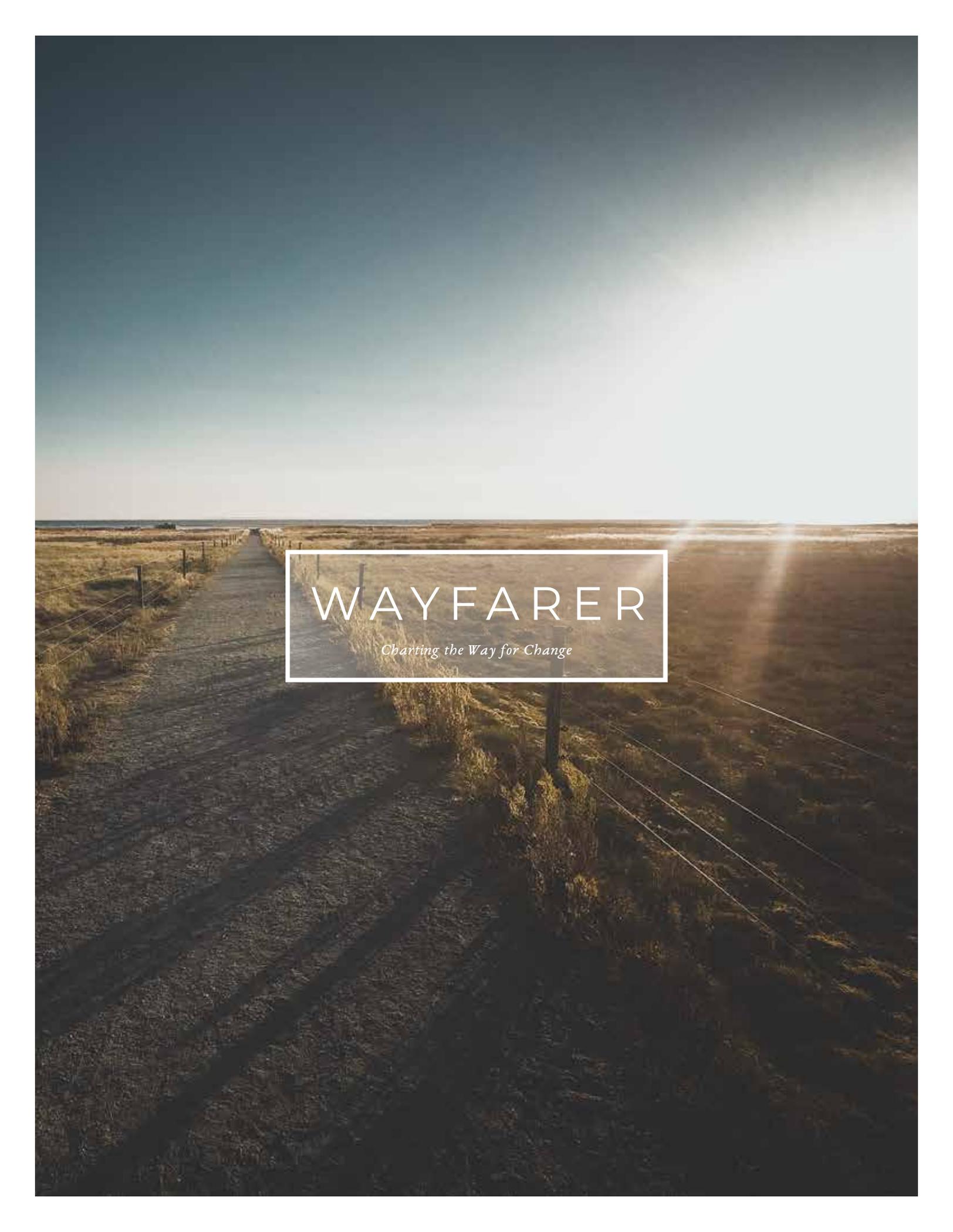
Mark Taksa's poems are appearing in *Cardinal Sins*, *Bryant Literary Review*, and *Isthmus*. He is the author of ten chapbooks. *The Invention of Love* (March Street Press), *Love Among The Antiquarians* (Pudding House), *The Torah At The End Of The Train* (first place in the *Poetica* chapbook contest), are the most recent.



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