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Camas

The Nature of the West



Spirit

Annick Smith

Sacha Pealer

Derrick Jensen

spring 2004

volume 7 number 2

five dollars

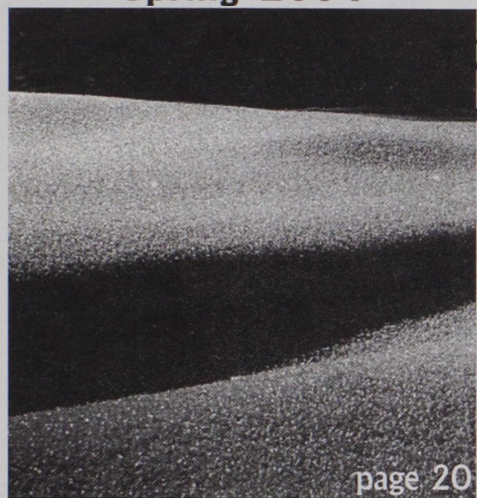


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inside photograph: doug greene
back photograph: nancy q. kirk*

The Spirit and Environment Issue

Features

Spring 2004



page 20

The deeper scientists probe into the inner workings of our cells and of the cosmos, the more we understand how small we are in time and space.

page 32



page 16

ISSN 1092-5198

Whirlwind in the Desert

Sacha Pealer contemplates ancient wisdom in the Utah desert
page 20

Walking on Water

Derrick Jensen inspires a class of miracle makers
page 12

Piercing the Crow's Eye

Katie Yale walks the line between waking and reality in crow time
page 16

Working Slaughter

PJ DelHomme questions the existence of animal spirits
page 24

Departments

First Person	<i>Tami Brunk</i>	4
Huckleberry Wine	News and Ideas	6
Perspectives	<i>Annick Smith</i>	14
	<i>Sarah Richey</i>	28
	<i>Becca Deysach</i>	32
Poetry	<i>Roger Dunsmore</i>	8
	<i>Laulette Hansen</i>	40
Interviews	Bill McKibben	10
	<i>by Allison Holt</i>	
	Jack Turner	34
	<i>by Adam French</i>	
Book Review	Out of Town	39
	<i>by Katharine Hyzy</i>	
Last Words	<i>Brianna Randall</i>	

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Darren Grayaz

PJ DelHomme started out scrubbing toilets and making beds inside Yellowstone's hotels and he hasn't regretted it since. He hopes to make a go of it in Montana as a freelance writer, but he's not averse to taking whatever job he can find.

Becca Deysach's brain continues to hurt from her home in Missoula, Montana as she contemplates and writes about the evolution of human consciousness.

Roger Dunsmore has taught in Liberal Studies and the Wilderness Institute at the University of Montana since 1963. A selection from his third volume of poems, *Tiger Hill*, won a Montana Arts Council Individual Artist's Fellowship in 2001. His first grandchild was born in December, 2003.

Adam French is an Arkansas traveler with a penchant for mountains. He currently lives happily in Missoula, trying to stay inside long enough to finish a writing thesis.

Laulette Hansen now makes Missoula home but was raised east of the divide, on the prairie below Square Butte where time and land extended in every direction, and there was no end to life.

Allison Holt is a graduate student in the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Montana. She writes about the desert Southwest, environmental change, and people who are impacted by environmental degradation.

Katharine Hyzy is the former editor of *Camas* and soon-to-be graduate of the Environmental Studies program at the U of M. She wants to be a baker, gardener, photographer, folk singer and naturalist when she grows up, but recognizes that being a writer may be satisfactory enough.

Derrick Jensen is an activist and author of *A Language Older Than Words*, *The Culture of Make Believe*, *Strangely Like War*, and most recently *Walking on Water*.

Sacha Pealer is an Environmental Studies student at the University of Montana. She's spent the last five years working as a field biologist in Maine, Alaska, and Wyoming.

Brianna Randall defended her thesis, an environmental young adult novel, this spring, and now plans to write, read, walk, and enjoy the world around her.

Sarah Richey now calls Missoula home, but loves reminiscing about fabulous years of desert wandering. This summer, she seeks harmony as she wraps up her master's degree in UM's Environmental Studies program.

Annick Smith is a writer and filmmaker who lives in Montana's Blackfoot River Valley. She was co-editor with William Kittredge of the Montana anthology, *The Last Best Place*, is the author of *Homestead*, *In This We are Native*, and *Big Bluestem, Journey into the Tallgrass*.

Katie Yale is originally from Madison, WI and is currently studying environmental writing within UM's Environmental Studies Program. Over the past several years she has worked as a wildlife technician on various field projects in Western Montana—honing her tolerance to cold water creek crossings, and getting dirty.

The Nature of Spirit

I live in Western Montana now, and no longer view the world through a Christian lens. Yet my spiritual character was irrevocably forged by a melding of southeastern Missouri landscape and backwoods Baptist religion. As a child, I dreaded church, where we'd sit in hard maple pews for long stretches and listen to sermons that all sounded alike. But I looked forward to our "association" service, held each year on the first weekend of August. On Friday night, families would arrive from all corners of Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Our church was too small to hold a large congregation so we'd hold the service outside—or close to it. We made due with a great, dilapidated old barn that the elders in the church—roofers, farmers, and miners—had dismantled, leaving only the barest frame and roof, in case of rain. Fresh sawdust was piled onto the floors for the event, and my father helped lug the big pews out under the sky, and into the half-open building.

On those long nights of singing and preaching, I'd braid my youngest sister Tasha's long blond hair into dozens of tiny braids. The air was a presence, hot and lingering on the skin as if night might have a shape you could feel but not see. I looked out into the darkness, where fireflies pulsed, punctuating the sky. On rare occasions, the lights inside drew luna moths—sea-green and larger than my hand—and they drifted above our heads. Shiny brown June bugs landed in our hair; their spiky black feet clung to our fingers when we tried to pull them off. Outside, a cacophony of love-hungry katydids and cicadas roared, lured in as well by the tempting lights. Late into the evening, the preacher's voice began to mingle with the others, just one more creature making itself known to its fellows, and to God. When the "spirit got into him," as mom would say, his careful intonation and measured words shifted into a sort of chanting, a melody, that harmonized with the wild multitude outside the tabernacle. When I remember those nights I see communion in the strange merging of human worship with the pulsing, more-than-human life around us, rushing in from every direction.

Over time, I came to know that the small church with walls was not my spiritual home and made the difficult choice to leave the faith of my family. Like PJ DelHomme, a writer in this issue of *Camas* who questions the presence of spirits in animals, I was faced with critical questions for which the church had no answers. And similar to Becca Deysach, who shares a vivid and timely account of the creation/evolution

debate within own her family, I lost faith in a fixed universe ruled by an omnipotent, distant God. Rather, I realized that my place of worship was out in the land, alone with Spirit in the shape of a leaf, the song of a thrush, or the smell and feel of electric air that carries a thunderstorm.

Here in Montana, I have traded humid summer nights for air of light silk, and exchanged vine-tangled hardwood forest for ponderosa pines and the honey scent of cottonwoods along a creek fed by mountains. Lately, I have begun to visit a favorite spot along Rattlesnake Creek where I find myself "moved by the spirit" when a water dipper alights to dive and forage a stone's throw from my feet, or as a full moon crests Mount Jumbo. Sometimes this spirit—the electric sensation of being alive in a good world—causes me to burst into spontaneous song, for the water bird, the cottonwood that holds my weight, and flickers

crying out from the boughs of tall pines. I find that my songs sound like old hymns, reminding me of the people and country I come from, while celebrating the place to which I have arrived.

In my new western home I am joined by a community of extraordinary writers who find sustenance for body, mind, and spirit in the wild world. In the following collection of poems, essays and interviews, you will encounter some of the finest writers among them. Several are Montana's own, by birth or hard-earned nativity, including Roger Dunsmore, Annick Smith and Derrick Jensen. Smith and Jensen speak in defense of the wild spirit found in a fellow human being or beloved river basin. Dunsmore shows how death can trigger the instinctual seeking of answers through observation of the natural world. The words of each writer are

an invocation for us to recover the deeply human ability to dwell humbly within the land—an ability Sacha Pealer eloquently describes in her essay, *Whirlwind in the Desert*. This invocation is coupled with models given in our interviews with Jack Turner and Bill McKibben. Turner's interview reveals a man whose "preaching" for wildness is matched by a practice of light living on the land. McKibben models a rare balance of hope in humanity and concern in the face of spirit-diminishing technologies like germline engineering. In considering the insights of each writer on the nature of spirit, I hope you find the kind of communion that comes from the merging of human and nonhuman, engaged together in celebration of life on earth.

-Tami Brunk



Ara Swanson

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Sacred Ground in the Cross Hairs

Threatened and endangered wild-life, cultural resource values and recognition of sacred lands are all at stake in the Rocky Mountain Front, as the BLM considers a new natural gas drilling proposal in the Blackleaf Area. The quantity of natural gas that might be found here is marginal—less than a few days worth, but the cost would be great.

For thousands of years, the old North Trail laced its way along the rugged east edge of the Rocky Mountains. Ancient peoples traveled this route along *Mistakiis*, the Backbone of the World, from Canada to the southern edge of the Rockies. Extensive development, though, has wiped out most traces of this trail along the ramparts of the Rockies—except in the Rocky Mountain Front of Montana, where fragments of the Old North Trail are still visible. The soaring walls of the Front run from the Canadian border to just north of Helena—over 150 miles of grandeur, where the rolling plains collide with sheer limestone reefs, towering thousands of feet above the grasslands.

The Rocky Mountain Front is sacred land to the Blackfoot tribe. Their wondrous creation stories were born in

these mountains. The warp and weave of the Blackfoot culture rests in these mountains. Rites of passage, vision quests, ceremonies, and medicinal plant gatherings are carried on today as they have been for centuries. In spite of this, in 1896 the Badger-Two-Medicine area of the Front and the east half of Glacier National Park was excised from the original Blackfoot Reservation.

In Badger-Two-Medicine, this may soon change. In 2001, despite 47 existing leases blanketing 90,000 acres, or 70% of the area, Badger-Two Medicine was declared eligible for listing as a Traditional Cultural District under the National Historic Preservation Act. The Blackfeet have recently demonstrated that the Traditional Cultural District is too narrowly defined, so another study is under way.

While the threat of drilling in Badger-Two Medicine is temporarily postponed, another vital portion of the Front—The Blackleaf—is under direct attack as a Canadian leaseholder makes his bid to drill three wildcat wells in short order. BLM is under tremendous pressure to expedite all energy development, cultural, and environmental values not withstanding. The drill sites are located in occupied grizzly bear habitat in an existing roadless area and a designated Outstanding Natural Area. Last spring, the largest grizzly seen in the lower 48 states since the 1950's was

found within a few miles of the proposed sites. Initial exploration efforts would require 100 semi-loads of equipment be delivered to a high-elevation plateau for months of round-the-clock drilling, likely driving the bears and other wild-life from the area.

Your voice is needed. Help us carry the messages from the early travelers along Mistakiis to the unheard voices of our great-grandchildren. This sacred land is too precious to sacrifice. Send letters to the Blackleaf EIS Team Lead, BLM Lewistown Field Office, P.O. Box 1160, Lewistown MT 59457; or e-mails to mt_blackleaf_eis@blm.gov. For more information, contact the Coalition to Protect the Rocky Mountain Front, info@savethefront.net or Gloria Flora at Sustainable Obtainable Solutions, ask_us@s-o-solutions.org.

-Gloria Flora

Broadway Road Diet

A growing number of Missoula residents support the Broadway "road diet," a plan intended to create a transportation system respectful of all efficient and safe modes of travel, not just automobile traffic.

Some of Missoula's highest incidents of motor vehicle accidents and pedestrian injuries occur along Broadway. Recently, a woman in a wheelchair was hit by a motor vehicle in broad daylight. By reducing the crossing distance where pedestrians are exposed to moving traffic, a three-lane street can create a refuge island where a pedestrian can wait for a gap in traffic to complete their route. Cyclers would be kept out of harm's way because bike lanes will be added into the saved space. Bus commuters would also be more protected as it would be easier to cross the street to get to and from the transit pull-outs.

Better pedestrian and bicycle accessibility, along with a safer street for drivers could add up to a more vibrant



Lane Coulston

downtown Missoula. Nevertheless, due to opposition from the Missoula Downtown Association, the proposed road diet plan has been scaled back. Instead of extending from California to Madison Street, the new project would only include the area between California and Orange Street. The Downtown Association claims that a slimmed down Broadway would create heavier traffic, yet this has not been the case where other road diets have been implemented. The data from cities such as Minneapolis, Duluth, Seattle, Billings and Helena show a tremendous reduction of 30-50 percent in auto accidents, while reporting no increase in congestion when a road diet was implemented. Results of similar lane reconfigurations from around the country also demonstrate that a road diet can enhance traffic flow, reduce accidents and better accommodate the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit users.

"While it may seem a little counter-intuitive, a four-lane to three-lane conversion almost always improves flow in commercial or high turning movement areas," Bob Giordano, Director of the Missoula Institute for Sustainable Transportation explained in a recent editorial in the *Missoulian*. "This is because a four-lane system clogs anytime a motorist takes a left turn - which often results in dangerous passing." Burning excess commuter bulk by converting two through lanes to one center turn lane is likely to help alleviate these problems.

"Our 1996 neighborhood planning survey revealed that most people in Missoula don't like Broadway because it is a hazard to life and limb for pedestrians," said Bob Oaks, Executive Director of the North Missoula Community Development Corporation. "The loss of life has been demonstrated by the body count, while the negative impact on downtown businesses is hypothetical and probably a figment of the imagination. How do you weigh economic loss against loss of life?"

To learn more about the success of road diets throughout the country, visit roaddiet.com.

-Margot Higgins

Sweat Free Missoula

From Los Angeles to Maine, states, cities, universities and school districts are working to end sweatshop labor. Students at the University of Missoula have joined this movement by forming the Sweatfree Missoula Coalition. As global trade agreements such as NAFTA have taken effect, manufacturing jobs have left the country, putting thousands of U.S. workers out of a job. As a result, nationwide labor organizing efforts are gaining more ground every day, and bringing together uncommon allies. Cross-border coalitions and grassroots efforts are successfully developing codes of conduct for transnational shoe and apparel corporations to help eliminate sweatshop-working conditions and establish minimum labor standards across national borders.

The Sweatfree Missoula Coalition will bring together local community groups, unions, and environmental organizations in an effort to make Missoula "sweat free." This initiative will promote a City of Missoula "sweat free" code purchasing policy which will ensure that all city staff apparel are obtained from responsible manufacturers.

Other such ordinances have included comprehensive definitions of non-poverty wage both within and outside of the U.S., provisions asking for compliance with labor laws and environmental laws, no forced child labor, freedom of association and termination with just cause. More information on efforts across the country can be found at www.behindthelabel.org/campaigns/sfc. Or contact Anna Swanson at annaewanson@htomail.com.

-Anna Swanson

Missoula County Food Assessment

As you were eating your breakfast this morning, did you think about the farm that produced your meal? Did you wonder where the cows that produced the milk for your cereal live? Are you able to name where your bacon came

from? If your answer was no, you're not alone. Most people don't realize that in the U.S., food changes hands roughly 33 times between the farm and supermarket and travels about 1,300 miles to reach the breakfast table of a family in the U.S. In the global food system—made up of fast food restaurants and corporate mega stores—we are increasingly disconnected from the knowledge of how our food is produced, shipped, distributed, and consumed. In Missoula County, a collaborative project made up of community members and students is working to change that.

The Missoula County Community Food Assessment began in the spring of 2003 when two University of Montana professors, Maxine Jacobsen and Neva Hassanein, formed a steering committee of stakeholders from the community. This committee included farmers, county planning officials, and food bank representatives.

First, the group set to work identifying the most vital research questions related to food and farming in Missoula County. Next, Hassanein and Jacobsen designed and launched a multi-disciplinary University course which put 21 students to work throughout the fall semester. They gathered information regarding food production, distribution, and consumption in the county. The results from this research are currently being compiled into a report that will show patterns and changes in the county food system over time.

Currently, the food assessment group is seeking input from agricultural producers in the county, regarding what they think it will take to keep farms in operation well into the future. The group is also talking with Missoula County residents of various income levels to identify their diverse concerns regarding food quality and cost.

When the project is completed, Missoula will become one of about 10 communities in the country to have undergone a community food assessment. Results will be available this summer of 2004.

-Melissa Matthewson

The Doors of the Earth

(for Jenni's father, dying)

The day after the equinox
a dark/light marked snake,
as long as I am tall, darts across my path like an eel
roving the hillside.
I jog alongside through the dried grasses and knapweed,
keeping myself
between it and the dog.
It stops and lifts its head,
alert as any hawk,
then begins to disappear
into the ground.
I reach out and touch its skin
sliding easily across
the tips of my fingers,
feel it quicken into its hole.
Does my touch
linger in its mind
as its quickening does in mine?

(Once, years back,
my brother and I chopped apart
a blue racer with a great
bulge in its body.
Out leapt a slime-covered frog
hopping on legs already dissolved
to their first joint.
We left them there,
the pieces of bleeding snake,
the frog rocking and blinking
by the beehives.)

You, old father, dying,
milk-sogged corn flakes
dried into your chin
wonder about the equinox:

"Is it an open or closed universe?"
you ask suddenly as you
slur your walker through pine cones
crushed into the sidewalk.

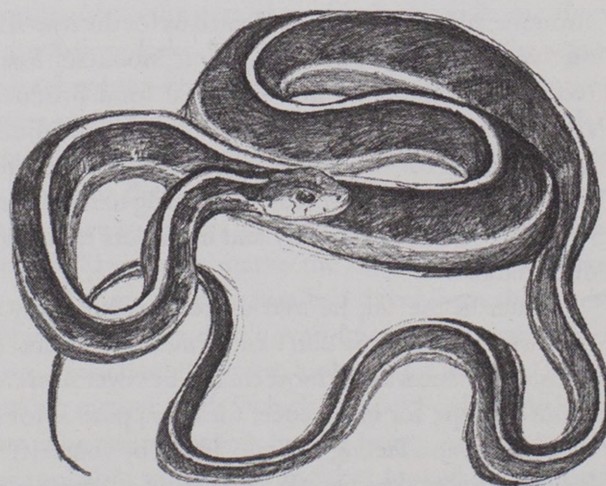
"Open," I say, without hesitation.
"I'd say closed."
How many stars are there?"
"More all the time."
"Can you prove it?"
"No."
"How can it just go on without end?"
"How can it not?"

You stagger up the steps
clutching the dark steel railing.

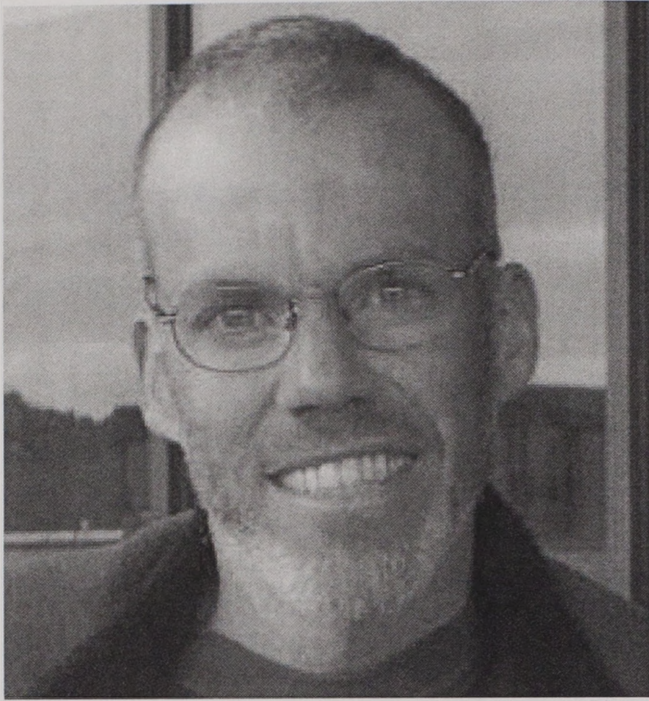
"I have a friend," you say.
"An astro-physicist, Chinese.
He says it can't be known,
open or closed."

But that wave of zebra light, zebra
dark among the dried grasses,
that striped snake
quickenning under my finger tips,
opens and closes
the doors of the earth.

-Roger Dunsmore



Sacha Pealer



Damon Ristau

When I read *The End of Nature* in college, I never would have imagined that seven years later, I would be walking around a commercial kitchen and food processing center in Ronan, Montana with Bill McKibben, watching him take notes for his new book—or that we would be wearing hairnets.

A former staff writer for the *New Yorker*, McKibben's *The End of Nature*, which brought global warming into the public arena, was the first of a series of bestselling books that have tackled the most pressing environmental issues of our day. When McKibben visited the University of Montana as a guest lecturer in March, I had the opportunity to travel with him from Missoula to his next stop three hours north in Kalispell, Montana. Ryan Newhouse and Damon Ristau, also Environmental Studies students, joined us for the ride. Along the way, we stopped at the Mission Mountain Market, Northwest Montana's hub for local food production and distribution. There, McKibben interviewed the market organizer for his new book. The book will profile people who are, in his words, "attempting to return things to a scale where community and neighbors regain some importance."

Later in the car, he told us he'd read recently that 75% of all Americans don't know their neighbors. That statistic, he said, was the most chilling he's ever seen. "Talk about a recipe for impotence, for unhappiness, for lack of context, and feeling like you are all by yourself!" He believes this makes people "easy prey to every advertiser in the world."

An Interview with Bill McKibben

by allison holt

"Do you think television fills in the gap?" I asked him.

"Not only fills in the gap but helps create it," he said. He's spoken with his neighbors in the Adirondacks about the arrival of television to the area. "They said that within a week the culture of visiting in the evening had dropped away." I told him I, too, had heard my East Tennessee family talk about summer days in the past when everyone in the neighborhood would sit out on their front porches and visit.

"Yep," he said, "and now we have air conditioning and TV's, and there's no need for anyone to do any of that. You can visit some neighborhood in southern California all night long."

"Or watch reality television," added Ryan.

"And it comes to seem more real than your own life sometimes," continued McKibben. I shared my personal belief that loss of community—along with the increasing disconnect between people and the rest of the natural world—is part of the cause for our society's increasing depression, mental illness, and dependence on prescription drugs. He added,

One way to ask the question is 'What were we built to do?' We have evolved this big collection of emotions and muscles and limbs and reason and so on, and what is the point of it? Presumably, we didn't evolve so that we could recline on the couch and use the remote control. We were built for contact with the natural world and contact with each other. And that we have very little of that anymore must have something to do with why it is that we are not so incredibly happy. In my own life, the more time I spend in contact with other people and in contact with the natural world, the happier, calmer, and smarter I get.

In McKibben's new book *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, he writes about the dangers of human germline genetic engineering. He asserts that it is only a matter of time before scientists are able to clone human embryos—a stepping stone to the alteration of genetic codes to produce children with higher IQ's, super-athletic abilities, or specially-formulated good-looks. In

Enough, McKibben argues that only the wealthiest Americans will be able to take advantage of these technologies, thus widening the gap between rich and the poor. And the worst outcome of this kind of genetic engineering, in his opinion, would be our loss of meaning as individuals. Having already lost connections to the land, the church, community, and family, he believes that our status as individuals is what gives us meaning in modern life. Human germline genetic engineering threatens to take away the meaning we gain from discovering who we are individually by causing us to wonder if certain traits are truly *us*, or if they were determined by our parents and their doctors before we were fully developed in the womb.

I asked if he thought we could take a few steps back, not only in retaining our status as individuals, but also in regaining some meaning from reconnecting with the land, spirituality, and community. He said that he thinks we can, and that this hope is the impulse behind his new book. When I asked if he felt our society's once strong reliance on religion and spirituality had been replaced with a kind of science worship he replied; "I think that if it was really replaced with a kind of science worship that we'd be okay, too. I think, though, that it's basically been replaced by consumerism and an idolatrous approach to the world."

As a United Methodist Sunday school teacher and one of the National Council of Churches' "Senior Sages" of the Human Genetics Policy Development Committee, McKibben believes that human germline genetic engineering, as well as other social and environmental concerns, should be treated as important spiritual issues. He sees hope in the steps some religious communities are taking to deal with them.

While he says that most mainline Christian denominations have "strong, good environmental positions on paper," he believes that as far as genetic engineering is concerned, "the conservative and evangelical churches have the correct intuition that something very important is at stake, and are taking the strongest stand."

I asked him how he would respond if he were labeled a Luddite. He said, "Luddite is a term that people use to end conversations so that they don't have to think about things. In fact, I think that there are millions of cool technologies. I have solar panels on my roof, which are as high tech as you want to get. I ride my bike everywhere. I think that bikes are one of the greatest technologies that anyone ever thought up, and they're getting better all the time. The graceful, elegant and smart thing is to pick and choose among the technologies and say, well, this one doesn't get me very far. I don't want a television. It lowers my quality of life. And I don't

want human germline genetic engineering *anywhere* in our world because it lowers our collective quality of life. Some people think that you either have to take all technologies or none. That doesn't make any sense to me at all. When you walk into a buffet you don't have to eat every single thing there. You choose the things that you think would be tasty."

He admires people like the Amish who, in his opinion, practice this kind of "graceful" technological decision making. "They're incredibly technologically adept. They use all kinds of ideas and technologies. They have simply found some that they think make life worse instead of better, and a lot of their list strikes me as very smart, beginning with television. You could not pay me to have a TV in my house." He told us about the day his daughter, Sophie, was watching a TV behind the counter at a restaurant where he and his family were waiting to pick up food. McKibben laughed as he explained; "she was just staring at it. I said, 'Sophie, what are you doing?' 'Oh,' she said, 'I'm watching the radio.' In that moment I felt, maybe for the only time in my life, that I had actually done something right as a parent."

McKibben shared his belief in the importance of environmental education for children. He finds hope in the continued human tendency to fall in love with the natural world. "I remember Ed Abbey saying to me once, 'Give me any child under the age of sixteen, and I'll take them out into the desert for a week or two and they'll fall in love with it. I know they will. Once they pass the age of sixteen or so, the silence of it all scares them.' But you've got to get some of that done early on."

He explained that he thinks that it may not be the lack of *love* of nature that prevents many from connecting to the natural world as much as a lack of *comfort*. "I think that a large majority of Americans are simply not comfortable in the natural world. It scares them. Even in the Adirondacks. I've taken students from the senior high school out on trips who have never been camping before, even though their town is eighty percent wilderness." He described one trip where he took the teens to an island in the middle of a lake in the Adirondacks. There, they gazed up into the night sky. He said that "you could see every star in the sky—it was just fantastic—and some of these kids had never been shown the Milky Way. They didn't even know there was such a thing. Now here they were looking at it, saying, 'This is freaking me out, dude,' which was cool—the right reaction. The point at which human beings became human was probably when some monkey looked up and said, 'This is freaking me out dude, look at all those stars.' And that is plenty hopeful."



Brianna Randall

Walki

by Derrick

It's the first day of the next-to-last week of the writing class. I say, "I have one final assignment for you." They wait.

"I want you to walk on water."

They still wait. They have no idea what I'm talking about.

"Ready to get on with today's class discussion?"

"No" one says.

Another says, "But,"

"Oh, yes, of course," I say. "There's one other thing. Afterwards I want you to write about it. Sorry for the confusion."

Somebody says, "I don't get it."

I answer, "You will."

The same fellow as always says, "But what's the point?"

"You'll get that, too."

I try to get on with class, but they won't let me. They keep asking what I want them to do. I keep answering the same way: I want you to walk on water, then write about it. Finally, a woman loses patience, and says to the class, "Everybody here knows the story of Jesus walking on water, right? What's the story about? It's about someone doing something impossible."

One of the more literal-minded students responds, "But if it's impossible, we can't do it."

"That's the point," the woman responds. "He wants you to do the impossible."

"But,"

"That word *but* is why you can't," she says, manifesting the trick of good dialog.

"Only Jesus could walk on water," says the Christian.

"That's not even good theology, much less psychology," says the woman. "The others could too, so long as they didn't doubt they could. So long as they didn't get self-conscious."

"So long as they kept looking at Jesus," countered the Christian.

"Forget Jesus."

"That's blasphemy!"

"I'm not a Christian, so that word doesn't scare me.

The metaphor of the story is that once you look inside and figure out who you are--and once you begin to believe in your abilities--you find yourself able to do things you previously couldn't even imagine. Like walking on water." She looks at me: "Is that about right?" I nod, and say slowly, "I think."

She cuts me off, "It's even better, because once you get to that place where you can walk on water, you suddenly find yourself on solid ground where before you thought there was no support. And this support comes not from you, but from everything around you. Once you begin to act from this place, the whole universe conspires to support you." She looks back at me, pauses.

ng on Water

Jensen

I say again,

“I think.”

But again she’s off and running,

“And that’s really what we need. The whole system is a mess. Everything is fucked. The planet’s being killed. We’re going into these awful jobs we all hate, and what’s required of each of us individually and all of us collectively is a miracle, or a million miracles. And that’s what Derrick’s asking of us, to go out and commit some miracles, and then write about them. That’s not too much to ask, is it?”

I say,

“I take it you’ve thought about this topic a little bit.”

“Just a little bit,” she says.

The papers come in. They’re good. A few people, members of the Literal-Minded Club put an inch of water into bathtubs and take a step across that. A couple more cross frozen ponds. But many students accomplish miracles. Not of the parlor-trick variety, accomplished with the aid of quick hands and misdirection; nor God-like miracles that we can safely disbelieve because of our notion that some great God lives in heaven and no great and small hosts of gods and goddesses live on earth; nor the miracles that surround us and which no one has to accomplish, the inspiration and expiration of every breath, the formation of fog and its condensation on the tips of leaves, the stripes of black and brown on the back of a ground squirrel, its quick movement, its conversion into food for other creatures after its death; love. Instead, the miracles they accomplish are no less than these and so much more because they are simple acts of courage and of stepping away from who they thought they were before, and who they *were* before into who they are now. One woman ends an abusive relationship. Another acknowledges her bulimia and seeks help. A very shy woman asks a man out on a date: He says yes. A Japanese man tells his

parents he doesn’t want to be an accountant, but instead an artist. Another man says that all of his writing that quarter counts as walking on water; writing had always before terrified him, but that is no longer true. Another says the same about thinking.

The people in my class, including me, do not need to be taught. We need simply to be encouraged, to be given heart, to be allowed to grow into our own large hearts. We do not need to be governed by external schedules, by the ticking of the ubiquitous classroom clock, nor told what and when we need to learn, nor what we need to express. Instead we need to be given time, not as a constraint, but as a gift in a supportive place where we can explore what we want and who we are, with the assistance of others who care about us also. This is true not only for me and for my students, but for all of us, including our nonhuman neighbors. We all so want to love and be loved, accept and be accepted, cherished, and celebrated simply for being who we are. And that is not so very difficult.

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Libby Hinsley

Wilderness and the



Tony Cesare

Good Life

by Annick
Smith

Over the years, wild nature near to hand has offered me, a Chicago woman, joy near to ecstasy, grief akin to the loss of a loved one, and solace more spiritual than comfortable. When I observe an elk herd grazing at dusk on the meadow of my Montana homestead or hear great horned owls hoot in moonlight from tall pines, I feel blessed and humbled, for I am a small creature sharing space with others who are not like me, yet are connected to me. Living on the edges of wild places has also offered close contact with wind, fire, blizzards, and drought—elemental forces that cannot be governed and cannot be experienced directly in cities and towns. But as I grow older, friends age, grow ill, and die, and so does the natural world around me. I fear that wildness itself—everything we have not been able to control or change or understand—may soon become the world's most universal loss.

When I was a child, I experienced my first taste of the wild from our summer house in the dunes bordering Lake Michigan. Running on beaches, gathering wildflowers, nestled within the maternal curves of the dunes, or swimming in waters that flowed to the horizon, I discovered freedom and solitude. The dunes were far from wilderness, but offered sanctuary nevertheless.

Seeking wild places and the emotional life I associate with them would become a lifelong quest. I moved from Chicago to Seattle as a twenty-year-old wife and mother and discovered the pleasures of back-packing

on the wilderness beaches of the Olympic Peninsula. A few years later, my husband Dave and I acquired our patch of back-country on a Montana homestead in the Blackfoot River valley. We recycled an old, hewn-log house and moved with our four boys into its rough shelter on Christmas day in 1973. A year and a half later, while the six-year-old twins watched, I witnessed my husband die of heart failure on the maple floor of our kitchen. Loss tempts a person to run, but I stayed on our land, raised the boys, completed the unfinished house, found the true companion of my later years, and reinvented myself.

On balance, I think I am leading a good life, and it is tied to wilderness. My freezer is filled with salmon, steelhead, grouse, and elk fished and hunted by my son Steve; we grow organic vegetables in our raised-bed gardens; there is homemade wine in the cellar, and huckleberry jam for pancakes. My sons, though scattered, remain close to home in their hearts and minds. I share my household with two dogs and two cats, and the ghosts of my horses keep company with black bears and elk, white-tail deer, coyotes, bobcats, even porcupines. Our skies are vivid with American eagles, red-tailed hawks, great blue herons; and flitting across the meadow and in the pines are bluebirds, tanagers, chickadees, and hummingbirds. Down in Bear Creek, a few hundred yards from our cattle guard, we have seen endangered bull trout, and fished for native cutts. And tonight, singing winter's end, spring peepers are courting in the cattail pond.

But a life in nature is not all wild roses. I used to have lush forests around me. Those forests were not pristine, for they had been logged, and in many places burned. Still, when my family settled here some 35 years ago, the foothills and mountains that circle our meadow were black-green with ponderosa pines, Douglas fir, and larch, and their density was broken only by chartreuse patches of seedlings growing back from clearcuts. For

What we call wilderness was every place before humans destroyed so much of the natural world that it seems nearly gone. Then wilderness became an idea.

years, we have enjoyed the gifts the forest gave, but as I watch logging trucks roll by carrying its trees away, I become sad and angry. Recently, I walked with my dogs in the woods above Bear Creek and found great swaths cut down, treetops and limbs scattered on the torn soil, and bleeding sap. Health and beauty had fled to become toilet paper, plywood, and the pages of this magazine. And because like a true American, I use those products, I am complicit in my forest's destruction.

Yet not all logging is equal or necessary. I believe forests that harbor rare and bounteous wild life should enjoy protection, even if privately owned. And I will do what I can to stop saws from cutting down every mature tree in my vicinity. But I doubt if I will succeed because the forest is not mine. It is owned by Plum Creek, a corporation that calls its huge woodlands "industrial." Plum Creek cares nothing for my environmentalist notions. If the forest is industrial, they reason, well then, it has one purpose, and that is to produce a cash product as efficiently as possible. As if calling something by a false name excuses the damage you do to it.

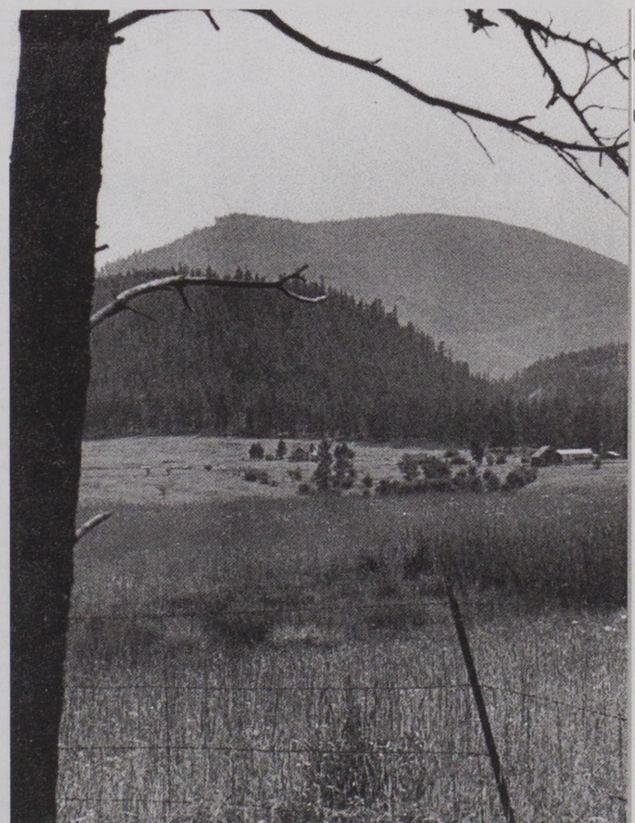
These days, looking west and south, I face logged off hills and peaks. And where the sun rises above my meadow's fringed horizon, I see the doublewides, SUVs, and barking dogs of creeping suburbia. Even the Blackfoot River, a mile and a half down Bear Creek, is being threatened by investors wanting to mine gold with cyanide at its headwaters. We fought that mine—we being local landholders, ranchers, fishermen, environmentalists, concerned mothers, and plain citizens—and through the initiative process, won a ban on all mining with cyanide in Montana. It was a victory, but perhaps not for long. The price of gold is up and mining interests with deep pockets are trying to overturn the initiative. It seems the good life so many of us prize,

which includes clean air and waters, wild and scenic rivers, and unpolluted watersheds, is as tenuous as the health of Plum Creek's forests.

Wilderness, as defined and set aside by the Wilderness Act of 1964, is an alternative to private holdings of natural resources. Wilderness areas belong to everyone. We may go there or not, and yet be assured they will not be destroyed. When I feel trapped in society, I use the escape valve I discovered as a child. From the height of my meadow to the north I see the peaks of the Bob Marshall Wilderness; to my east lies the Scapegoat. I might drive south to the Selway-Bitterroot, or in half an hour find myself a short way out of Missoula in the Rattlesnake. Whatever area I choose, I know I will step into a secure place protected in perpetuity, where the intertwined systems of nature are unhindered by human greed or need or desire to control. There, I may rediscover joy.

What we call wilderness was every place before humans destroyed so much of the natural world that it seems nearly gone. Then wilderness became an idea. The idea of wilderness is particularly American because it is embodied in our identity. Indian myths are part of the wilderness idea, also cowboy myths, and the myth of the frontier. Europe and Asia might claim advanced

Continued on page 38



Tony Cesare



Piercing

I recently dreamed of finding a dead crow upturned along the sidewalk. It was a short dream, just a fragment really, and the image passed without elaboration, leaving in its wake a fuzzy confusion. In reality, earlier that day I had seen the body of a tattered pigeon, lying on the dirty snow in the space between two buildings. Kneeling low, I examined the bird's curved pink feet, still clutching the air like tiny, twisted hands. The discovery disturbed me in that deep, uneasy way that makes you look behind your shoulder and glance around for some sinister clue, left just out of sight. Somehow the image became tangled in my sleeping mind, and pigeon became crow—the slick feathers of a broken snow angel leaching their dull shades from gray to black. The form was different, but the feeling was the same—a branch in the wind, scratching at my window; a tickle in my mind, just out of reach.

I have heard many myths surrounding crow and her twin cousin raven. I know of no other animals that convey such a varying range of emotion, meaning and superstition. Whether their presence heralds good luck or bad omen, a common thread tangles itself around crow lore throughout cultures, continents and time. The black bird is most often seen as a messenger, bringing words across worlds, cawing cosmic mysteries with an open beak, prophesying and proclaiming judgment. There is, as well, their association with death. As a carrion feeder, crow lingers with the dead beyond our sight, and feasts

of the Crow's Eye

by Kathleen Yale

Artwork by Kate Peters

on their earthly bodies. Crow is also a master of illusions, shape shifter. Perhaps it was crow that I saw resting on the gray snow, her true black feathers retaining their changeling sheen only in the garbled world of dreams.

In truth, I had nearly forgotten the dream. Just as focusing on the surface of a pond makes it difficult to see a shape beneath, and it is not until a golden cottonwood leaf floats by or a tiny mayfly grazes the surface, tearing the veil, that you can see deeper. And so it wasn't until I saw a real crow the following day that the airy cloak between dreams and wakefulness slipped out of place and the memory burst forward in a flutter.

I was walking through my neighborhood in Missoula—over the creaky Clark Fork River Bridge, down Broadway Avenue and past the motel with plastic spring flowers stuck between the birch logs of its street-side planters. I was less than a block from my little shaded house, when a motion caught my eye. It was just before noon, a Friday, and not my usual time to be walking home. From the distance of an intersecting street, I was surprised to see a murder of crows haunting my front lawn like stern, feathered sentinels. Some stood on the ground; some perched still as frowning statues in the big, leafless maple. *Twenty-one birds* I counted aloud. The number resonated in my mind—a clapper-less bell. Although I had often seen city crows overhead, I had never seen such a number congregated on the curbside—and for just a moment, I felt that they were waiting for me.

In many cultures across the globe, crows are seen as messengers of the spirit world. Used in Roman divination, they whispered warnings and advice from ancestors, carried through currents like invisible olive branches. Some say the birds congregate to relay these messages to those who search the past, seeking peace, seeking redemption. A common sight on battlefields, it is no wonder people thought



these birds listened to the dying murmurs of soldiers, voicing their last memories. I stood a long while thinking about these crows, wishing I could better understand their secret language. I pictured them, scrolling through the faces of the dead and wondering who had sent them.

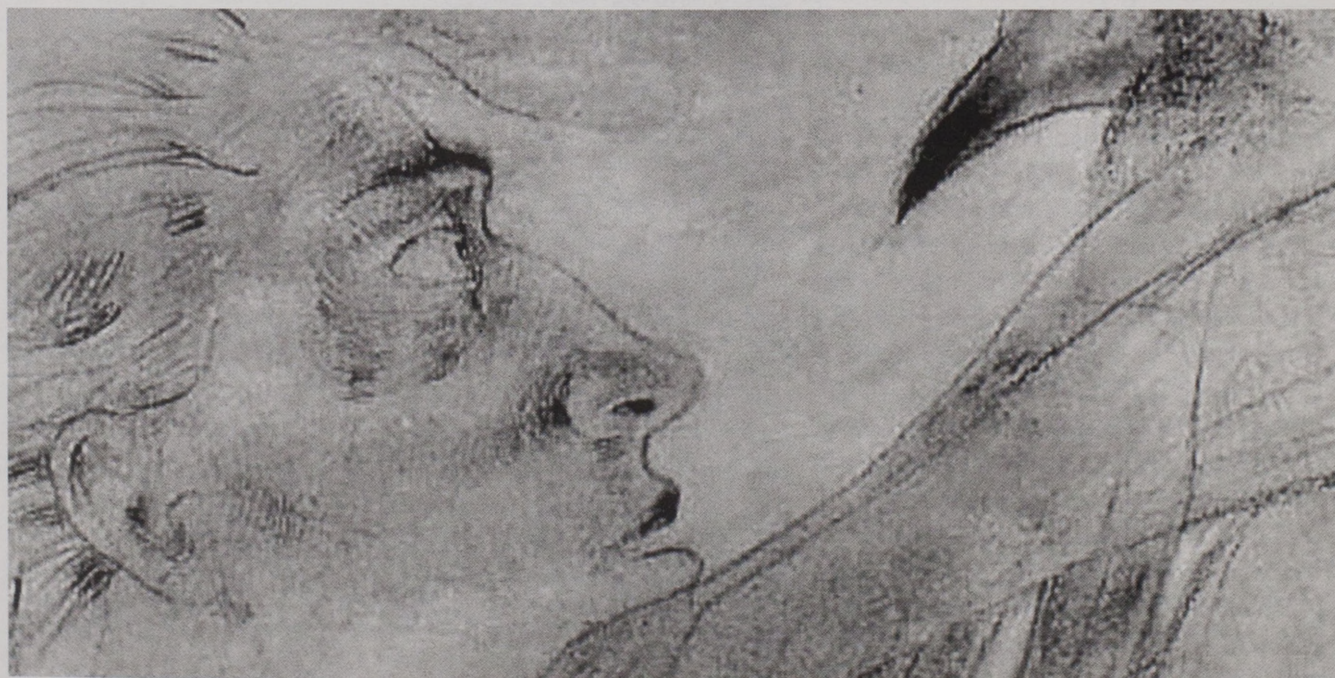
For centuries, farmers have tried to scare the clever crow from their fields—posting ragged human replicas to watch over corn rows like shaggy crucifixes. Perhaps it was not only the corn stalks and bean poles they fought to protect. Maybe the greater fear lay in what lessons the birds might bring, rather than the grain they might have taken.

The ancient Greeks believed that crow was white as a new swan until the day she brought Apollo news of a lover's death. As punishment, Apollo caused an inky black shadow to spread across her wings. Sometimes we do not wish to hear what must be said. We fear judgment, bad news, truth. There have been times in my life when I preferred to keep my ears muffled to the worlds inside, outside, and beyond me. Moments when I trained myself to hear only the soft whistling of marsh reeds or the thump of a rabbit's foot on packed dirt, and silenced the voices of my head and heart. But as I stood absorbed in front of the crows, there was nothing I wanted more than to receive their message and with it whatever truth or judgment they might proclaim.

I scanned the ground ahead, searching for some source or reason, perhaps a flattened squirrel that could have brought such a number to my

yard. A pair of birds pecked at a yellow sandwich wrapper and each shifted from one scaled foot to the next—an awkward two-step on the oil-stained cement. Another group took flight, a quick bend before take off, and flew so low to the ground I feared they might be struck by a passing car. The rest looked down from sky fragments cut up by the maple limbs that stretched wide, whittling out into hundreds of rough-barked capillaries. One opened its beak as if to cry out, but remained silent. Soon they had all vanished—in groups of twos and threes, across the street and out of sight, as if behind a pale blue curtain. Passing the exact spot they had visited, I looked around more carefully, expecting to find some dead animal or bread crumbs. But I found only their tracks scattered across the soft melting snow, mingled with the prints of mouse, boot and raindrop.

Still, I wondered if the group had taken something with them—something fragile, invisible even. Or perhaps left something behind. I searched the ground again, this time for a feather. I wanted a tangible sign that this was not a dream. I believed that if I could touch a piece of those crows I might understand my desire for guidance, and gain proof of my worthiness to receive such a message. Finding no feathers, I walked down the uneven lawn stones to my white porch and as an afterthought, scattered a handful of sunflower seeds from a blue bowl under the mailbox. I walked through the doorway, listening to the delicate chime of bell-strings tied to the knob, and thought about the prophet



Elijah and his crows.

Elijah, also called Elias, was a desert hermit outside of Israel. For years he wandered in the wilderness, preaching and praying, with the goat skin garment of piety wrapped over his bony shoulders, both hide and skin cracked from sun and wind. His callused foot bottoms were stained red from clay desert floors, and he could climb over rocks like a deer. But even when he wasn't fasting, food was scarce and he was often hungry. God promised to reward his servant with a miracle of food, and sent Elijah to a secret place near a great waterfall. In a shallow scoop of cave behind the howling falls, the hermit waited—for what, he did not know. The morning brought a fiery sun, red and victorious. In the distant air, the man could see with famished eyes two small shapes approaching. Some say they were ravens, others crows—Elijah saw bread and rejoiced. Concluding the morning's psalm, Elijah's hands unfolded and bread was dropped from curled talons.

Sitting on my kitchen floor, next to the red Formica table, I wondered about this story. Maybe it was bread that I wanted—an answer to the many mysteries I pondered, delivered in the grip of another world. I began to fear that as much as I wanted to believe, perhaps it wasn't me those lawn crows were waiting for after all. I wondered if to them, I was just another faceless human, and of little consequence. I worried that I had somehow made a mistake and was seen as unworthy or ill-prepared to receive their secrets. Perhaps I wasn't truly listening. Perhaps I had become too distracted to hear in the wind voices of the past—the whispers of stars and crows and gods. The Romans had a saying that referred to any nearly impossible task—they called it “piercing the crow's eye.” I wondered how we could re-establish those forgotten lines of communication, that ethereal awareness? I wanted to think that the door was not fully sealed, that the task was not yet impossible.

I wondered if this city I lived in might still hold its own hermits and prophets that shifted shapes like crow, praying to God and Earth and Beyond, and could still hear messages from our ancestors across cosmic worlds. Perhaps I had seen these mystics without knowing, walking down the alley behind my house or in front of that little hotel, grazing those bright plastic flowers with an open palm. I pictured a traveling man sitting cross-legged in the cleft between two buildings—space just enough for split knuckles to



touch both walls at once. He was thin but content, looking up at the ribbon of sky above his little cave, listening. He was waiting. Then I imagined the lawn crows—thieving warm loaves of bread, placed in doorways to cool. It was evening and the belt of sky darkened as gifts were dropped through the shadowy space between walls of stone.

This evening I fast and bake my own bread. I score the honey-gold crust with a trident shape. A footprint. At midnight I put my offering under the porch eaves, under the maple tree, under a thousand stars. I raise the dusty window shades, ringing the narrow bell-strings, looking past the glass. And I wait.



Eileen Flannigan

In the Desert

by Sacha
Pealer

The CD player skips and chokes on Johnny Cash as our Honda Civic zooms northward over the pavement seams of Interstate 15. I am curled up in the tiny backseat, a heavy blanket of southern sun thrown over my shoulders through the back window. My three companions and I are traveling back to our home in Montana after a spring sojourn in southern Utah desert. I lean my chin against the low ledge of the car window and watch the land stream past, just as I loved to do as a kid. As we leave behind open land and begin to navigate the urban jugular of Salt Lake City, a long procession of billboards blots out the snowy crags of the Wasatch Range. Their broad frames advertise pregnancy clinics and smiling crews of obstetricians, home construction services and real estate, shiny new SUVs and trucks, dirt bikes and ATVs, all reminding me of the urban apparatus I am so often troubled by, particularly in the rapidly developing West. The housing developments climb the hills, the yellow earthmovers belch forth black clouds of exhaust, and the sea of traffic rattles steadily past in high clearance gas-guzzlers. Consumption, a burgeoning population, economic growth—from the outside, these seem to be the laws by which people now live.

On the car's dashboard sits a dried out husk of one of last year's desert trumpets (*Eriogonum inflatum*—Buckwheat family), a spindly maroon piece of plant debris with a swollen hollow stem and a delicate radial system of branchlets. The seed capsules have long splintered off, and this nearly weightless skeleton looks more like an organic version of Sputnik than a plant. Matt, my brown-eyed partner with a habit of gathering earth's

bits wherever we go, picked this dead desert trumpet in the red sands of the Goblin Valley, where, in the glare of noonday sun, it seemed nothing could possibly grow. Twirling it now between my newly tanned fingers, I am moved by its beauty and the sudden contrast of such ephemeral and brittle flotsam with the culturally constructed scenery around me.

I begin to draw sketches of it in my journal, views from the side and from the top. I pause to hold it up against the light of the window, struck by the juxtaposition of its spidery red legs against the white blur of box stores and billboards as we fly by. I know I am a stranger to this complex landscape and its politics, merely gazing in on the surface appearance of what is at stake. But I cannot deny the contrast here between this single desert plant and the clamor of human icons that block out and cover over the land on which we live. Coming out of the desert, I realize more than ever that we have separated ourselves from the land, recognizing it only as *other*, forgetting our earth-given instinct and our own ancient wisdom.

The desert has long been a landscape in which humans have discovered wisdom. In ancient Israel, the desert was the realm where the prophets fasted and gained visions, where God was revealed to Moses in a burning bush, where the Hebrew people exiled and journeyed toward self-actualization. Jesus of Nazareth himself journeyed into the desert in preparation for his fate. In that wilderness, he wrestled with his identity, learning untold secrets from God and resisting temptation. Muhammad also journeyed into that wilderness and received the revelations of the Qur'an in a desert cave near Mecca. These leaders all dwelled in the desert for a time, and, through

relationship with the sacred in a barren land, they gathered the seeds of wisdom that would flower into the great world religions.

Before leaving for Utah, I had been rereading the book of Job, a scripture of eastern desert spirituality roughly 2,500 years old. And on our trip, as we explored the southern Utah desert and its canyonlands in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, this book of the Bible came back to me. I quickly sensed the power of this landscape, turning my thoughts to the sacred as I wandered upstream through icy canyon waters, my feet pained and raw, snake grass and box elder branches slapping against them along the banks. Later, I stopped to recline on slickrock along a side canyon and tributary of the Escalante River, where claret cup cacti and scarlet-tongued paintbrush were growing in crevices. As I craned my neck to watch a pair of nesting ravens skim in and out from beneath the lip of an arching flake in golden sandstone above, I thought of Job and God's answer to him from the whirlwind.

The story goes that God knows Job is righteous, blameless, pure. Job upholds the holy laws of the time and fears and reveres his God, and because of his goodness, Job's life is filled with wealth—thousands of sheep and camels, hundreds of oxen and donkeys, a host of servants and happy family. But then Job loses everything. In Job's dark days of despair, his three friends come to his side. As he watches his estate dissolve, children die, and his own body decay with "loathsome sores," the three friends sit beside him in the ashes and try to puzzle out what Job might have done to bring these calamities upon himself.

Here the book of Job wrestles with the ancient question of innocent human suffering, which is ultimately a question about the justness of God. The three friends suggest that God is just, and so Job must be suffering because he has done something to deserve punishment. But Job stubbornly maintains that he is blameless, that he has been a model servant of God. We know that he is right, for the text says that God himself saw Job as an "upright man." Encountering this discrepancy in human behavior and God's rule, Job curses the day of his own birth.

Let the stars of its dawn be dark; let it hope for light, but have none; may it not see the eyelids of the morning—because it did not shut the doors of my mother's womb, and hide trouble from my eyes (3:9-10).

Job becomes more and more agitated by the baffling nature of God's rule. He laments the loss of his former prosperity and the stature he enjoyed among his neighbors. He begins to frame a challenge to God,

desiring for some resolution to this puzzling injustice, some explanation straight from God.

If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot has hurried to deceit—let me be weighed in a just balance... Let the Almighty answer me! (31:5-6, 35)

I pondered Job and his suffering as we camped on a sagebrush-crowned sandbar, the olive waters of the Escalante running past. I did not completely understand why at the time, but the power of Job's story was working away in the far canyons of my mind, just as earth's raw elements were speaking to my emotions. I noticed my heartbeat and breath as I slumbered in soft starlight; I heard the canyon wren's call cascade down rock face and into the dark tunnels of my ear. I smelled clay, earth, moss clinging to a seep in the wall. The lessons from the holy were not black and white, just as they were not for Job. But a wilder celebration was taking shape inside of me.

After a few days, my companions and I decided to journey on from Grand Staircase-Escalante. We drove northeast to Goblin Valley, which is on the western outskirts of the San Rafael Desert in south-central Utah. Here the deep red umber Entrada sandstone has eroded away into a maze of pillars shaped liked chess pieces, mushrooms, and goblins. Whimsical and grotesque, these knobby forms are nearly barren of life. The wind moves silently among them. The spring rains collect in shiny slicks of pink mud in their shadows.

We climbed among the pillars in Goblin Valley State Park and camped beside a fortress of them on adjacent BLM land. A place so barren and silent is well marked with modern human culture: initials and dates carved into goblin heads and atop the mesas that arise among them, plastic picnicware and toilet paper strewn about unofficial campsites, white chalk graffiti scrawled on goblin faces, off-trail ATV tracks over delicate soils. Meditatively, I began to collect trash in the evening as the sun plunged into violet and apricot luminous clouds on the western horizon. To the north, the endless chop of the San Rafael Swell's listing mesas, cornices, and canyon rims caught the long cast of rose light. Again, I was reminded of Job's challenge to God. At long last, and out of a terrible whirlwind, God speaks.

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?... (38:4)

Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring

The power of Job's story was working away at the far canyons of my mind, just as earth's raw elements were speaking to my emotions.



rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life, to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass? (38:25-27)

God never provides the explanation Job seeks. He does not defend his own justness or discuss human concerns. He is exposing the narrowness of Job's view of the universe. Verse after verse of the book of Job recounts God's answer from the whirlwind, an answer that is concerned with the wild wonder of creation, a creation that is not centered around human beings, but in which humans are barely even mentioned.

I find this "new" biblical perspective on our relationship to God and to earth marvelously refreshing. So often, I have heard the passages from Genesis, where God creates humans last, as the endpoint and pinnacle of creation, and where God gives humans the edict to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (2:28). Throughout history, these passages have been used to reinforce the anthropocentrism of western civilization, because they are understood as license to *dominate* earth. Here in the desert of Utah, my culture has scrawled its name and class year upon the rock, sending the undeniable, unapologetic message that this rock is here for us, for whatever purpose suits our desire. But God's voice from the whirlwind asserts that, like all of wild earth, the network of canyons and the sea of open desert are unfathomably deep and broad in comparison to our human desires. The desert is a wilderness in the starkest sense of the word. And the vivid manifestations of life in the desert, like the fleeting

God's voice from the whirlwind asserts that, like all of wild earth, the networks of canyons and the sea of open desert are unfathomably deep and broad in comparison to our human desires.

yellow bloom of the desert trumpet or the secret nesting of the raven high in the canyon wall, or all manner of creatures rarely witnessed by people, are here not for our use, but *for their own wonderful sake.*

Our last morning on the fringes of desert near Goblin Valley and the San Rafael Swell, we awakened at our campsite in Temple Mountain Wash. Before breakfast, I stood in awe beneath another testament of desert spirituality at least as old as the story of Job. A pocket-sized notebook and ballpoint pen in hand, I struggled to sketch the petroglyph figures that danced and crumbled on the yellow ochre sandstone walls before me. Many artists had added figures here, purple and maroon superhumans, dogs, sheep. On the right, the figure of a shaman, looming tall and square-shouldered, stretched out his hand as he grasped the long sinuous body of a snake. I later read that this snake might represent lightning, the rendering of it perhaps in celebration of a storm or in supplication for rain. On the far left, the horned head and torso of another shaman remained, a layer of stone flaked away below him. He was peppered with round scars where bullets had bitten into the ancient sedimentary rock. Other figures had fallen away, too, the rock layers released with erosion, or simply blown away in target practice.

I imagined then who might have made these paintings and how their marks upon the rock had stood for millennia like many other petroglyphs throughout Utah. Across the seemingly endless canyonlands, in tight turns of ever-rising walls hung with mauve, peach, rose, black staining, early peoples painted and etched long processions of rams, sheep, strange human forms, spirals, heads, hands, birthings. These images still convey the power of an ancient people's mark and their desert spirituality, a spirituality that included animals and the stark natural elements of the desert and canyonlands. I was humbled

by the way these desert forces had ignited these peoples' wildest imaginations. Roughly two thousand years after the artists had moved on, I knew the presence of a people who had dwelled in the landscape. Even though these people probably only migrated periodically through the area, my instinct asserted that with such paintings, these first peoples were a part of this place. They had to be to survive.

When I was finished drawing, I considered the marks of more modern humans—the initials, the dates, the bullet marks. Clearly, these marks are just another sign of people passing through, not unlike petroglyphs. But these later marks imply a people with a profoundly different view of their place in the universe and their relationship to earth. A people whose marks suggest no other power but their own—their own names, their own era, their own guns. Something is missing. Something the desert has long stirred inside us. For we no longer dwell *in* the landscape, but apart from it: special, perhaps lonely.

I thought then of Job, who hears the voice in the whirlwind and at last answers God's magnificent and terrifying teaching. Job demonstrates a new humility, as he concedes the smallness of his concerns in the scheme of the wild cosmos.

*Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know...
I...repent in dust and ashes (42:3,6).*

The desert wisdom of both Job and Utah's first peoples are reminders of the people we once were. As I prepared to end my sojourn through this landscape, I sensed a deep remembrance of desert wisdom within, if only with the clumsiness of nonpractice. In those few days of exploration, the desert had wrapped around me—rusty cocoa and cinnamon earth encrusted in my toes, up my shins; sun pouring in dry waves of heat over my arms, hands, back; evening or morning winds stirring in my hair and in the scraggly oaks beside me; lightning igniting the red dust clouds over the pale green mesa

I was filled with a longing that I might have known what it was like to dwell in the desert all of my days, in the violet-rimmed canyons, in any land, as I imagined those early rock painters in their yucca and dogbane-fiber sandals had dwelt.

above me. I was filled with a longing, that I might have known what it was like to *dwell in* desert all of my days, in the violet-rimmed canyons, in any land, as I imagined those early rock painters in their yucca and dogbane fiber sandals had dwelt.

The story of Job, like the petroglyphs of Utah, is an ancient mark upon the rock walls of time, a spirituality from an eastern desert people, who perhaps remembered that the wonder of the universe in which they lived was outside of themselves. Such wisdom is not merely archaic. I see in the jugulars of modern culture, like that in Salt Lake City and almost every city that I've lived or visited, an extreme and increasing human-centeredness in all of this push for growth. It seems my culture has stopped asking God to answer for our suffering, and as a result we have lost touch with the wild wisdom we might uncover in the process. Maybe we've looked instead to human innovation to produce our own solutions, with the promises on those billboards meant to mask our loathsome sores. Like petroglyphs, these billboards say something about what we as a people prize and who we are in danger of becoming. But out in the desert, I have discovered that the high quarter moon still rises, ivory against indigo just over the honey scalloped canyon rim, recreating the wider splendor and wildness of the universe. And I feel the power of the whirlwind again, sand between my toes.



Doak Heyser

Working Slaughter

by
PJ

DelHomme

On the loading dock of a slaughterhouse just on the outskirts of Bozeman, an early winter storm swirls snow and dust around the animal carcasses. The sun has been up for only an hour, and yet the dock is lined with hunters sipping coffee standing next to their kills. I step over the bodies as I struggle to adjust the plastic apron that has frozen stubbornly to my chest. I kneel down beside a mule deer whose tongue sticks out of his mouth, as if to mock my situation.

"Nice one," I say to a camouflaged man nearby.

"Better be," he says. "Been stalking that boy for three days in the Bridgers. Just got him about an hour ago."

I believe him. The deer is still warm on the inside. I take the man's name and put a tag on his buck. When he leaves, I begin to skin the deer. I work hastily to keep warm. I cut into the hide and muscle of the buck's thick neck, puffed up from the rut. I make a wide circle until I hit the bone of the spine. With a few rakes of the saw his head hits the concrete. I start on the legs and cut the tendons below the knee and elbow joints—a little technique I picked up that makes it easier for the hooves to snap off over my knee. I'm about to cut around the last hoof when the wind blows a shot of dirt into my eyes. The skinning knife slips into the muscles of my hand. I squeeze my wrist to slow the flow of blood, but this only seems to encourage it. Blood drips onto the concrete around the deer's muzzle, and I rush inside to clean up. Jackie takes a break from chopping elk steaks long enough to scoff at my clumsiness.

"Why you drippin' blood on the floor?" she asks.

"I'm fine," I say. "Thanks for asking."

Jackie and I had just finished a season with the Forest Service working in the Gallatin Range outside

of Yellowstone. Her folks leased out some coolers and space in the old Lehrkind Brewery building on the north side of town where they ran the slaughterhouse in the winter and a concrete business in the summer. Somewhere along the various trail re-routes and campfires she mentioned that her parents were always looking for help around hunting season in October. By the end of the summer I was broke and out of a job. The slaughterhouse paid better than anything else in town.

I stick my hand under the faucet in the cutting room and watch the blood swirl down the drain.

"You know," Jackie says. "When they bring them in still steaming like that, the spirit hasn't had time to leave the body. Looks like that deer wasn't ready to let go."

"You really believe that?" I ask.

Jackie looks up from her table of steaks and shakes the knife at me while she talks.

"How can you not believe it?" she asks.

I'm trying hard not to pass out from the sight of my own blood, and I honestly don't know the answer to her question. I stare past her and feel myself getting pale. She goes back to cutting steaks. I take a deep breath and my nostrils fill with the smell of fresh blood and wet animal fur. Her dad, Buzz, tells me to go home until I get some color back. On the way to my car, I weave my way through the carnage. Bison, elk, deer, bear, goat, sheep, moose, and antelope are being tossed onto the dock from the back of pick-ups, Subarus, and El Caminos. I look across the street at the gymnastics studio where an after-school tumbling lesson is cut short as the children press their faces up to the window to watch us bring in animals. Their parents do the same.

On my way home, Jackie's question gets to me, simply because vanity won't allow me not to have an

answer. Spirits in animals—I'd never given the idea any thought until now. My foundation in spirituality was built upon the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. My Sunday school teacher never mentioned animals having spirits. And since I wasn't raised a hunter my dealings with animals never extended beyond playing in the woods with the family dog. So I decide to spend the rest of the afternoon of my day off at the library looking for some ideas, some beliefs, anything to find an answer to her question. I type the words "nature" and "spirituality" into the card catalog and get "0 items found." I wander the shelves to see what catches my eye. A blood-red book lying on its side with the simple title, *Cheyenne Indians*, stops me. I thumb through the pages looking at pictures of people and ceremonies, and they remind me of a woman I met in college. She taught a Native American literature course and turned me on to books like *Waterlily*, *Ceremony*, and *The Surrounded*. The books had intrigued me; they had given me only a taste of another culture's take on life, and I wanted to learn more. I tuck the book about the Cheyenne under my coat as the snowflakes come down big and slow as I walk home.

That night, the stories I read about Cheyenne ritual and medicine dances help me to forget my throbbing hand. I learn that the Cheyenne believe that animals of the Northern Plains like deer and bison possess what they call *hematasoomao*, or spirit. This spirit is freed only through physical death. When death comes from a hunter, he must perform a ceremony giving thanks in order to free the animal's spirit. Once freed, it may return to give its physical life to the people. I understand that this is only one culture's worldview, but I like it. Since I left my home in Alabama to wander around the West years ago, I have developed a habit of treating cultures of the world like a buffet table, taking only a little of what I like and leaving the rest behind. In the back of my mind I have always wondered if this is okay. Do cultures have an unwritten patent against letting me borrow a belief or two? And what about this belief that animals have spirits? For the moment, I store the stories away regardless of what the rules on belief borrowing are.

I come back to work early the next day with fresh ideas in my head and a fresh bandage on my hand. Cars with their motors running and heaters on are lined

up outside of the dock. I go in to find Jackie; I want to tell her what I've learned, but she has taken the day off. Not being sure how the guys I work with will react to my newfound ideas about animal spirituality, I keep my comments to myself. I grab the saw and dive back into the butchering.

We save all of the horns from the unwanted heads and I've drawn horn duty today. I grab the head of a juvenile elk with a shiny pair of spikes that need to be cut off. The job takes longer than usual because I am daydreaming about a Cheyenne who was a member of a band called the Elkhorn Scrapers. He wanted to impress a hard to get, beautiful Cheyenne girl but didn't know how. A powerful man told him to rake a piece of bone across notches made into the horn of a yearling elk. He did and the girl fell in love with the Elkhorn

My foundation in spirituality
was built on the Father, the Son,
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animals having spirits.

Scraper.

When I'm done sawing, I decide to save one of the spikes for myself. I figure there's enough time between now and Christmas to make a knife handle out of it for my dad. The idea snowballs. I grab a handful of mule deer antlers out of the barrel and stuff them into my work locker. I'm going to make my ordinary wood-peg coat rack into a conversation piece thanks to a few discarded antlers. I doubt my new coat rack is going to attract many ladies, but it should add that "earthy" quality that I keep hearing about to my apartment. By this time, I'm feeling good about my resourcefulness in using things that would otherwise find a home in the garbage dump.

I look around the slaughterhouse with my slightly new perspective and I feel better about what I see. Next to the barrel where I grabbed my horns, we stack the elk hides. Every Wednesday, a flatbed comes by to collect them. Eventually, they'll be tanned and shipped away to places like Venezuela and Brazil. I don't want to acknowledge that in South America children with tiny, nimble fingers will tie industrial amounts of elk-hair caddis, marabou muddlers, and royal humpies for distribution to box stores and local fly shops in Bozeman and around the world.

The bones of the animals are all dumped into barrels as well. At the end of each day, we try in vain not to slip on the ice in our rubber work boots as we hoist the bones into the dumpster out back, except for Thursdays. On Thursdays, a pick-up comes from a place in Bridger Canyon where they raise everything from lions



Tom Baker

You should have seen the herd take off after that. The guy was so happy after he shot it that he gave us a \$100 bill just to skin the damn thing. Not bad for half a days work.”

While I listen to Jesse tell the story, I bring in the quarters and piece together the morning’s hunt. The guide from the ranch points out a trophy-sized bull from the herd. The hunter props his rifle on the truck and takes a bead. Slowly exhaling, he glides his finger over the trigger. The first shot rings out like it had thousands of times in the past, from trains, from horses, for hides, for tongues, for fun. Dust kicks up. Thunder begins to run, but the bull I now handle lay on the ground. His saliva mixes with blood and stains the dirt. The hunter excitedly throws his rifle across the backbone of the bull and poses while Jesse snaps his picture.

With one-half of the ribcage from the bison in front of me on the cutting table, the stories from yesterday tug at my apron like a hungry dog waiting to be thrown a bone. I trace the exposed vertebrae with my finger. The bison’s massive hump that had once arched toward the heavens now waits to be turned into hamburger. As I trim the fat from the ribs, I overhear Buzz say that the meat will all be delivered to the Food Bank. It turns out that the hunter only wanted the head for his restaurant in Ohio. I picture the bison head perched on a wall, watching Midwesterners eat the daily special. In my head, fermenting in stark contrast are the stories I read about the sacredness of the skull in the Medicine Lodge ceremonies of the Cheyenne. They would tie bison skulls to skewers that were embedded in their flesh and then they would dance. The pull of the heavy skulls would rip the flesh from the dancer’s backs, and they would either collapse or continue to dance.

I stare at the slab of unwanted bison meat and realize I shouldn’t compare the beliefs of two distinctly opposing cultures, but I can’t help it. I wonder where I belong. I don’t practice the Cheyenne religion, nor do I need to kill for decoration, even though I like the idea of my antler coat rack. I want to meet these cultures somewhere in the middle, but I’m not sure if I can do that. I go to bed that night thinking about what I’ll say to Jackie tomorrow at work. The next day I’m relieved that she forgot about the question or just didn’t care, and we make small talk. We chat about how the skiing was at Bridger Bowl but not about spirits. I don’t want to bring it up because I don’t have an answer. I haven’t decided yet if I can believe.

My question about animals and spirits, though always looming, stays in the recesses of my thoughts as the season moves toward winter. Weeks blend together,

to bears to wolverines—anything that eats meat—for appearances in movies and as subjects for nature photographers looking for a close-up. I feel good that everything doesn’t end up in the garbage.

“Hey PJ,” Jackie yells into the cutting room. “You need to see this.”

A flatbed truck has pulled up to the dock with a bison carcass cut into quarters. Jesse, Jackie’s stepbrother, is unrolling a bison pelt on the frozen concrete.

“Where’d you get that?” I ask, trying to subdue my envy.

“Some guy out on Turner’s ranch shot a bison and he didn’t want anything but the head.”

“He just gave you that?” I ask.

“It’s gonna make a great rug,” he says as he spreads himself out on top of the hide.

Earlier in the morning a few of the workers from the slaughterhouse rode down the Gallatin Canyon to quarter and pick up the bison from Ted Turner’s ranch at Spanish Creek. This isn’t the first time they’ve made a house call to the ranch, but it is the first time they bring back anything but the meat. We kneel down and comb our fingers through the hair.

“Look,” he says putting his finger through a hole near the shoulder. “Just one little hole.”

“I didn’t think you could hunt bison,” I tell him.

“Oh yeah, but you can only shoot the one the ranch guy points out,” Jesse says as he begins to roll up the hide. “One shot and that bison went down like a rock.

earmarked only by unique hunting stories like the tale of the elk popsicle. One evening, a man pulls his pick-up to the dock with four cow elk legs reaching to the sky. We go out to slide her out, but she doesn't budge. He tells us that when he shot her just west of town by the Madison River, she didn't go down right away. Instead, she ran into the middle of the river and dropped, leaving only her bobbing ears for a lasso target. From the time it took him to drive from the river to the slaughterhouse, she had frozen solid to the bed of his truck. After a good laugh and a few minutes with the hot water hose, we hang her half-frozen body in the cooler to thaw out.

On a Saturday after the season is over, Buzz puts me in charge of receiving animals that are still coming in. I write the hunters' names on little manila tags and attach them to the last of the harvested animals. I get Jackie to help me drag the carcasses into the freezer where the pile has grown too high for us to toss them on top anymore. We paper-rock-scissors for the luxury of crawling on top of the pile to shift the bodies and make more room. Paper covers rock. I always throw rock. While I adjust a few stubborn bodies, the phone rings and Jackie leaves me alone in the cooler while she answers it. As she closes the steel door behind her, I sit on top of the stack of bodies for a minute and watch my breath mix with the frozen air.

I think I should leave, but the cold air of the freezer feels good on my warm and tired body. I look around. Hides and hooves are illuminated only from the glow of one caged light bulb from above. My skin starts to crawl. A few deer have cocked their hornless heads my direction and their glassy, sunken eyes stare at me. The hair at the base of my skull comes alive. On shelves by the door are two moose heads stacked on top of each other. I try to stand up, but my rubber boots have nestled into the chest cavity of a deer. I grab two fistfuls of fur from a nearby body to keep from falling deeper into the pile.

When Jackie comes in to toss up another she sees me on top of the heap.

"You been in here the whole time?"

"Yeah, just taking a little break," I tell her as I wiggle my boots out of the deer.

She struggles with the frozen body of a whitetail doe as I climb down from the heap.

"Remember how you asked me about animal spirits the other day?" I ask as we both grab a pair of legs.

"Yeah," she says. "You got an answer?"

"Maybe. I don't really know."

"You've never not had an opinion about anything,"

she laughs. "Now help me toss this one up."

The fact is, I did know; I just didn't know how to tell her. I realized, sitting on top of a stack of dead animals, that my gut had given me an answer to my question. I had believed in some sort of animal spirit all along, but it wasn't until I was alone with those bodies in the freezer that I became aware of it. If I didn't believe, I doubt I would have felt anything. I had been looking too hard for something that could have only found me.

The stack of bodies from the freezer slowly makes its way to the cooler and finally the cutting table as the season ends. On my last day in the slaughterhouse, I walk into the freezer and look at the gray concrete slab where I recently sat on a mountain of spirits. I wonder where they've gone. Down to Venezuela with their hides or in the muscles of a grizzly bear starring in a new Disney movie? They could still be in the freezer for all I know. Before I leave, Buzz offers me a few horns for the road, but I decline. I've made enough dead animal trinkets for one season.

With nothing but cold beer on my mind, I hose down the cutting room floor with hot water for the last time. The hooded sweatshirt I have worn for the entire season gets tossed into the dumpster with my cutting gloves. As I take off my rubber boots, I notice the tiny scar on my palm left by the skinning knife. I wonder if the spirit of that mule deer had something to do with my scar. I want to think he was fighting until the end, getting in one last jab for bragging rights until we may meet again.

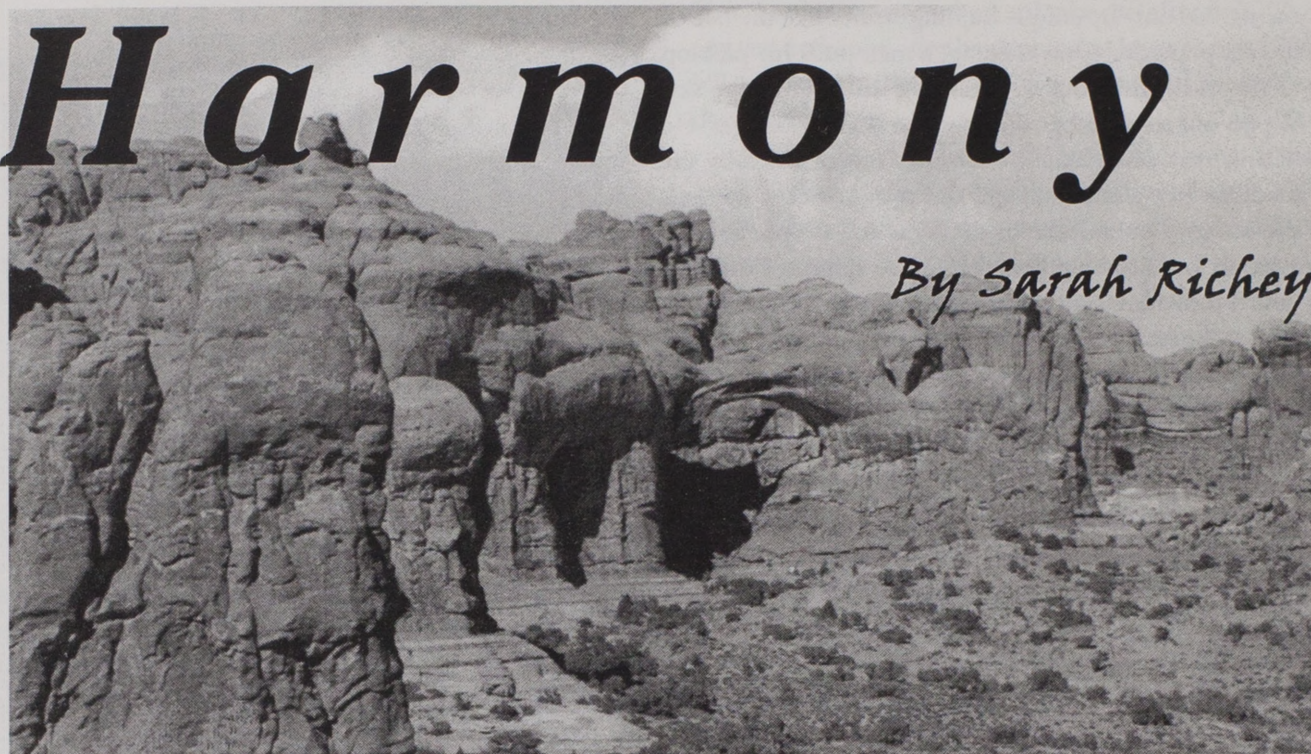
I had been looking too hard for something that could have only found me.



Pedro Marques

Harmony

By Sarah Richey



Libby Hinsley

A carnival was the last thing we expected to stumble upon on our backpacking trip into the remote Utah desert. Fourteen days ago, our Outward Bound group abandoned the vehicles at Lunar Landing, a vast expanse of sand and dirt which indeed felt like the moon. In the long days since, we hadn't seen a soul. No trails, not a single human footprint. We were basking in our isolation until we rounded a bend where the deep, carved canyon broadened into a valley—and beheld forty people milling about on the shores of Muddy Wash.

An older man and two teenagers were erecting a teepee. A few women sat in camp chairs with small children in their laps outside a giant mess tent complete with a rainbow colored flag that read "Café Splendor." At the far end, I could see three women chopping wood and stacking it beside a makeshift sweat lodge. From what I could remember from my map, the fleet of Dodge trucks and Volvo station wagons scattered before us must have endured quite a 4x4 desert traverse to get to this particular bend in the wash. We were at least 20 miles from any maintained road. We stopped in our tracks, completely taken aback.

"Hey Co," I said. "What do you make of this?"

My co-instructor, fondly known to me as just "Co," was a longtime desert rat who knew most of the nooks and crannies, habitants, bandits, and desert wanderers in these parts.

He paused, "Well Co, (he too called me such) the

way I see it, either we've found ourselves a cult, or a drug fest, or some sort of gathering I've never before heard of on remote BLM lands and, truth be told, I think I've heard of them all."

It was late in the day. The diffused sunlight had begun to set the canyon walls on fire. The students were behind us, probably just a few bends back. We were nearing the end of our trip and by now, the students could function all right without us. Sometimes Co and I would trail behind them, lingering in the canyon awhile to listen to the call of a wren. On this particular day, we'd skirted wide around them on the slickrock ledges and passed by secretly. It was nice to be ahead of them, away from their mindless teenage chatter.

I reminded Co that this was the same spot our students were planning to camp. Student/outside-world interaction is always a source of stress on an instructor. Our students weren't *At Risk Youth*, as they call them. However, according to my experience with 19 and 20 year olds, deprived of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll long enough to endure an Outward Bound course, they are all *at risk*. Upon initial encounter, this scene was straight from a Dead show parking lot. Our students' eyes would most certainly bug out of their heads when they rounded that bend.

I was still staring, jaw open, when a man from the camp walked past us, carrying a plastic cooler to a rusted

brown suburban. He gave us a brief nod when he saw us, and I shut my jaw. Co snapped out of his shock quicker than me and greeted him, asking him what this was all about. The man smiled and told us that this was a Harmony Dance gathering. We were witnessing the preparation for a ceremony to be held in three days time, one derived from a blend of various spiritual traditions and a sprinkling of modern day societal rebellion. He beckoned for us to join, then moved on. Co looked at me. "We could wait here for the students and march them through—no dilly-dallying, no interaction, no opportunity for trouble," he said.

I resurveyed the scene. Interesting—quite the spectrum of characters—not at all the homogeneous array of tattered flowered skirts and dreds that you'd see a Dead show, actually. I saw Patagonia fleece and a New York Yankees hat; long braids and tattered wool; Wranglers and cowboy hats. I glanced back at Co, who was also gazing at the bustling scene with curiosity, and a hunger for some sort of interesting adventure gleaming in his eyes.

"Or," I said, with such exaggerated annunciation that the word was filled with possibility, "We take this as an opportunity. We dive in. We brief the students as best we can, and together we check out this gathering. We can always abort mission when the drugs come out."

I thought about this suggestion, surprised that I had said it. We both knew we were hired to teach wilderness skills, not expose our students to strange desert gatherings. Our expertise lay in managing risk in technical canyon terrain, not in managing the outcome of mixing impressionable young students with a group of societal recluses who might tempt us to join their cult, smoke their opium, or worse...

Co's voice brought back rationality.

"Hey Co..." he paused, pondering, "did you ever notice how much Outward Bound instructors avoid social scenes with students?" He didn't wait for my answer. "I think we just get scared because it feels out of our control. But what we forget is the incredible learning tool it could be." Co nodded towards the Harmony Dancers, who still hadn't taken much notice of us. "These folks, like us, are just another example of people who value the remote desert. Why bother hiding them from the stu-

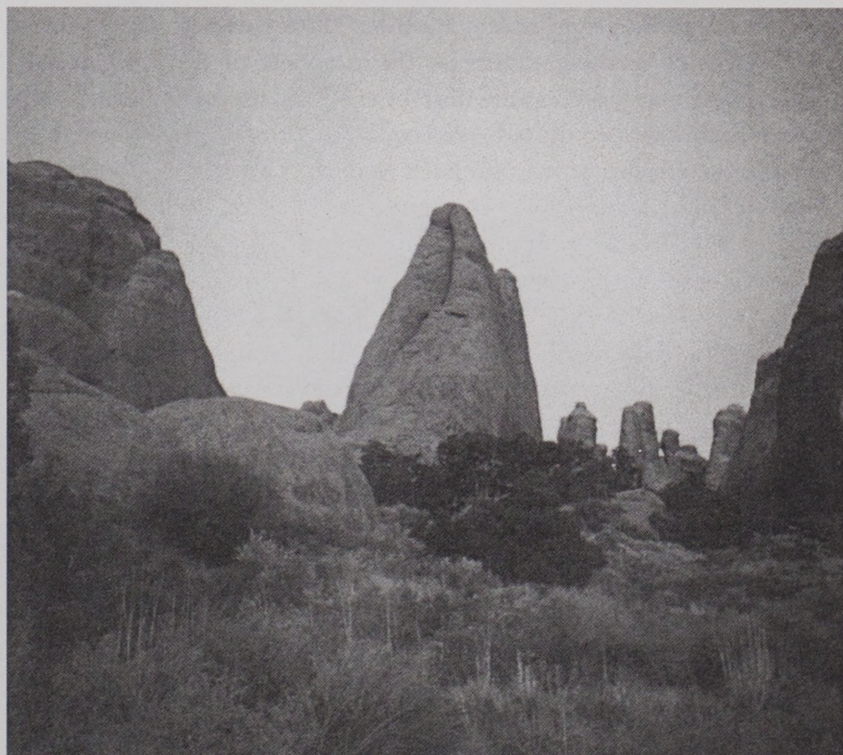
dents?"

He had a point.

I thought back on our time in the canyons. Our lives had felt simple out here. On waking, we'd make tea and breakfast and go about our tasks. The grumbly students would grumble and the talkative ones would talk, all the while breathing the dry desert air and feeling the pink sand underfoot. Sooner or later, we'd all have our packs on and gather in a bunch to scrutinize the map and the landscape and discuss our route for the day. Some days we traveled up curvy canyons carved deep into the sandstone; others, we crossed open, windswept plateau tops; and sometimes we ventured down tight chimneys and sheer cliffs into secret cuts in the redrock earth.

The best part was showing them the intense beauty of the landscape. Even Nicky, the L.A. waitress, sometimes paused from her complaining to silently take in the layers of red earth towering around her. The hardest part was feeling like I wasn't getting through to them; telling them the whole story of cryptobiotic soil, how incredibly old and fragile and important it is in the desert ecosystem, only to hear Nicky gripe about having to go *all the way around* to avoid trampling it. There were times I questioned whether they cared at all. Still, as a native to redrock country, I took great pride in showing them the remote, stark beauty of desert lands. The Harmony Dance Camp was not part of that.

Or perhaps it was.



Sacha Pealer

The students loved the idea of joining the Harmony Dancers. Their dirty faces perked up as we told them about the scene.

"A café?" J.P. exclaimed. He stood up straighter under the weight of his pack. Then, "what the hell is a *Harmony Dance*? This isn't some oovy-groovy hippie thing is it?" J.P. was a frat boy from Atlanta.

They were as curious as Co and me. Together we set our camp back in the cottonwoods, then wandered over to Café Splendor. The Harmony Dancers coaxed all ten of us to gather around the fire in the chill of the on-coming dusk. They began to inquire — what were we doing out here? And the students inquired about them, until we were all clumped around the fire, in little groups of two and three, caught up in conversations. A few times, I overheard my students explaining our course, our mission and our adventures thus far. Some of their descriptions made me smile. I heard Nicky explaining cryptobiotic soil, and how we avoid it by walking on rock or tiptoeing where there are no rocks. She spoke very matter-of-factly, as though the concept was quite obvious. Of *course* we avoid the crypto, her tone seemed to say. She loved impressing these people. She loved teaching them. Satisfaction glowed from her face as she realized that these folks didn't know about crypto and that now, because of her, they might look for it on their desert walks, and know to protect such a delicate life form.

One eclectic group meets another. Two cultures, each probably seeming strange to the members of the other, intermingle; discuss the nearly full moon, the best way to keep warm on the sub-zero nights, favorite meals cooked on a camp stove, life back home... The fire drew us in as darkness fell. The stars came out and the conversations turned to constellations and myths.

All that evening, we waited, my Co and I, exchanging glances. We waited for bizarre, cult-like behaviors, for the pipe to be passed, for *something* that would be inappropriate for a patrol of students. They invited us to dinner — fed all ten of us a whole mess of chili and bread. They seemed more interested in learning about us than explaining the roots and principles of the Harmony Dance. The students trickled off to bed when they could no longer keep their eyes open. Nobody was used to staying up so late.

Co and I lingered. We drew closer to the fire, next to Elder Bob, a plumpish white guy from Kentucky, a trained shaman, and also the leader and organizer of this

annual gathering. He explained the ceremony of the Harmony Dance to us. Elder Bob had been going to Harmony Dances across the country for six years now. He'd been studying shamanism for 10. He was a plumber back in Louisville.

"So why here?" we asked the Elder. It seemed an awful inconvenience to get here and wasn't particularly scenic compared to many other parts of the desert.

"It has very little to do with location," he said. "Only this: the remote desert offers little distraction. People can come here and focus on the ceremony. The winds can clear their minds in the same way they have scoured the desert, leaving only the firm, resolute essences of the landscape mindscape."

I knew what he meant. The desert scoured me too, each time I came to it. The wind and the sand would lash my skin. The air would dry my lips. The clear cold night sky would occupy my mind. Sometimes it seemed my being and the pink, curving landscape were blending into one ...

"We dance atop an old mine site," Elder Bob pointed to the enormous divots in the slope above us, bleeding long tailings piles out below them. "That's how the road came to be here. Mining. This is the sort of wilderness people need to be paying their respects

to. It's scarred. There's a story here that needs to be heard, respected, and understood. Just because a fellow human being comes with injury and emotional baggage doesn't mean we discount them and label them 'damaged', 'un-intact', 'not worthy of care.' Yet that's what our society tends to do with lands. So we dance here. Maybe next year we'll go elsewhere."

I thought of the "condemned" lands I knew. Clearcuts, mine sites, the polluted shores of the Great Salt Lake. I thought about my often surprisingly intense desire to show the students only wild, pristine places. Sometimes this drive to show them real beauty was what fueled me as a teacher. I suppose it is just an effort to show them an ideal—a sharp contrast to their Chicago, Houston, L.A.. But I had never considered showing off scars. I took their impression of the wilderness personally, and naturally I tried to give them the best possible impression. Perhaps that's too limiting.

The next morning found us gathered up on a large flat section of bank, up above Muddy Wash. We were helping to prepare the dance site. It was an opportunity to thank the Harmony Dancers for includ-

This is the sort of wilderness people need to be paying their respects to. It's scarred.

ing us so kindly in their evening feast and fire.

We gathered rocks of varying shades from the old mine debris and arranged them in a circle on the slickrock. In a small way, we were taking part in their ceremony. The sun, at full strength in the early March sky, almost warmed the still-winter desert landscape. I pushed up my shirtsleeves and selected a rock. Truly, I thought to myself, how often these days in our shortsighted culture do people go to such lengths as these Harmony Dancers for the sheer pleasure of ceremony? No drugs, no publicity, no attempts to convert new members, no plans to change the world. Just fellowship and ritual to reflect on and strengthen their own inner beliefs. The simple value of ceremony, faded and often forgotten in our society, glowed from these people.

My Co, placing a black rock next to my yellow one let out a little chuckle and stood, hands on hips, to take in the scene.

"Look at this, Co," he said. "Just look."

We watched as J.P. questioned Elder Bob about the idea of karma. Normally, J.P. liked to stare at the ground when spoken to and give an adolescent shrug and mumble in response to any suggestion, idea, or opinion. Now he nodded almost enthusiastically to Elder Bob's insights. Ah, the irony: frat boy meets shaman on the banks of a desert wash. Other students were drawn to the karma discussion and soon, all were circled around the Elder. Whatever shyness Elder Bob had the night before about sharing his beliefs dissolved in that moment. He knew we were listening. He paced before us on the banks of Muddy Wash, framed by red rock for-

mations, the sun so bright we were all squinting as he waved his hands and preached. Elder Bob spoke of living with intent, and being able to control your destiny by doing so.

A rich moment. It made me smile.

Here were preposterous contrasts of people and desert and multi-colored rocks that formed a circle. Here we were all learning the value of service, the kinship of human beings. This eclectic bunch of folks was among the most genuine, generous group of people I had ever experienced. At this point, I knew that my students and I understood how good it felt to sit down on a cold desert night and tell our story to someone who is truly fascinated by it. And to hear another's take on the desert, our intimate home for those weeks.

I felt totally engaged in the desert, plugged into the Harmony Dancers' lessons, as I stood there sucking up the whole experience: ceremony in the desert, the new sides of the students, Elder Bob, the Muddy Wash mine scar.

We left at mid-day. Shouldered our packs and followed Muddy Wash out towards the town of Hanksville, Utah. The noise of the busy camp faded behind us and the stillness of the desert took over again. Co and I walked with our students, and followed their cue of silence. We turned the pieces of our desert journey over and over in our minds. We resumed the rhythm of our trek, our ceremony of walking.



Libby Hinsley

SMALL IN TIME AND SPACE

BY BECCA DEYSACH

Thirty of our aunts, uncles, and cousins are talking to the beat of Jimmy Buffet in the two-story cabin above us, while my brother, sister, and I barely murmur against the dark silence of the stellar landscape. We are lying on a rickety dock over one of the tens of thousands of little lakes that spill out of Northern Wisconsin, into Minnesota and explode into vast waterways as they penetrate Canada. We pass around a pink metal pipe filled with crummy Midwestern pot, stare into the punctuated sky, mistake satellites for shooting stars and searchlights for the Northern Lights. And we giggle.

My mom's husband, Frankie D, walks down the mossy wooden steps and hands us a pair of binoculars for a glimpse of Jupiter and three of its moons. When we offer him some of our smoke, he declines, but points out the Northern Cross, identifies the frog species serenading us, and heads back up to the cabin.

Shortly after his departure, Seth, Searah and I return inside where everybody is eating Chex Mix, playing cards, and drinking frozen margaritas packaged in a gallon-sized pail. It takes a minute for my eyes to adjust to the light illuminating the shag-brown carpet, the beige couches, and plastic-covered needlepointed clown faces that decorate the fake wooden walls. A couple of my aunts are discussing the particulars of seven-layer Jell-O over a game of bridge in one corner of the room while Uncle Pat declares in another that people of color marginalize themselves because "they are always creating new names just to get attention. Negro. African American..." Unsure of where to go in the maze of conversations and activities, I stand frozen against the sliding screen door.

"But John, how do you explain the diversity of life forms on this planet?" From my vantage point, I overhear Frankie D arguing with Uncle John, my mom's brother who owns a cell-phone tower company and wears the same aviator-style glasses his father wore in the fifties. When I hear John say, "God can do amazing things," I laugh.

"Did I just hear you say you don't believe in evolution?" He snorts as he condescends to laugh at me. "That's right. It's a *theory*. There is no proof of its existence."

The only boy in a family of eight children, John had privileges growing up that his sisters did not, including the opportunity to go to any college he wanted, even if it was private and out of state. He chose MIT and was trained, as my grandpa had been, as an engineer. Shortly after college, he got an MBA from Harvard and has been making a lot of money ever since. Although he never strayed far from the religious path his parents set him on, he was Reborn sometime in the '80s.

"What?" I say, not sure that I heard him right. I am shocked that someone educated at two of the best schools in the country could question this basic scientific tenet. I pull up a wooden chair, sit down, and assault him with questions. "How do you explain the layers of rock that reveal fossils of increased complexity as you rise from past to present? How do you justify human embryos' shocking likeness to amphibians, and the similarities between a baby chimpanzee and a human infant?"

John smirks, "Because God wanted it that way." He is excited that he has incited me, and smug in his knowledge that he is right and I am wrong.

"Why is our bone structure so similar to a horse's, a dog's, a sea lion's? Why did God give us appendices, wisdom teeth, baby toes, and other parts that serve no purpose?"

"God can do what He wants. He is creative."

Frankie D, a botanist by passion and as obsessed with evolution as I, elaborates on the empirical evidence science has for that process. His voice is high, impatient, and hard to hear over John's ego. My voice gets louder, and acquires a tone reminiscent of middle-school arguments. None of us lets the other finish a sentence.



My four aunts who were sitting at the end of the dining room table have left their game and migrated into the living room. They are sitting on the couch, watching us and whispering. The women of this family share not only coarse, dark hair and a pronounced “Bunce butt,” but a discomfort with conflict and a bitterness towards their brother. While they spend delicious moments ranting about his self-promoting funeral speeches and the shocking discovery that he has decent friends, my mother and her sisters rarely exchange anything but surface pleasantries with John. They love seeing him challenged. But they have already learned that it doesn’t work.

As I roll my eyes and take a breath, Frankie D lays into him. “John, how do you explain bacterial resistance to antibiotics and Darwin’s finches?”

“Well, I do believe in evolution within a species.”

“Is it just a coincidence that we share 98% of our DNA with chimpanzees? And what about Lucy and all of the other extinct hominids? Are you saying we’re not related?”

“When I was at MIT in the 70s, scientists said they would find the missing link in the next decade. Well, they didn’t find it. They STILL haven’t found it. And do you know why? Because there IS no missing link,

there is no link! We are *not* related to the apes!” John is shaking his head at Frankie D and me as though he feels sorry for our ignorance.

With a knot in my stomach, I chime back in, “But, *Australopithecus afarensis*... and the landscape that we evolved in is not conducive to fossilization...but...*Homo habilis*...and...and...arghhh!”

We go back and forth for over an hour, our eyes and voices getting bigger with every exchange. Finally, I have exhausted nearly all the evidence I have in support of evolution but my uncle’s refrain has not changed, “God wanted it that way. There is no missing link. God is creative.” Stoned and tired, I give up. How can I argue with God? No fossilized bones that link us to a wild and arboreal past will convince John of our connection to chimpanzees and ancient carbon chains.

I spent the rest of that summer replaying our argument in my head. I remembered so many facts that I had forgotten in the moment, that I wished I had said to further my case. Frankie D sent John a book about the Creation/Evolution debate, and I outlined my points for the next year’s controversial

Continued on page 37



Wild Practice

An Interview with Jack Turner

by Adam French

On the last day of February, I found myself skinning along in the toothy shadow of the Tetons, en route to interview Jack Turner. It seemed right that the mountaineer and philosopher of wildness was holed up beneath his home range, several miles from the nearest ploughed road, working on his upcoming book about the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. In the introduction to his first book, *The Abstract Wild*, Turner describes himself as “a man whose joy is inseparable from the continued existence of wild things, but who is as responsible as anyone for their destruction.” I was drawn to this honesty and could relate to his sense of complicity. Still, it seemed “*mea culpa*,” minus a commitment to might be too easy a way out, and as I read his eloquent and critical rants, I wondered about the practice that lay beneath Turner’s preaching.

I followed the track of the sled Turner uses to ski in his sundries up to a modest one-room log cabin. Turner was waiting for me on the porch. He was tall and broad, ursine in stature, with wise, weathered eyes that appeared to study the natural world at least as much as the written word. I liked him immediately and we fell into easy conversation about the Tetons; the place was a passion for us both. I could have happily passed the whole afternoon sipping tea brewed from melted snow and listening to stories from over forty years of exploring around the world, but eventually I dug out my list of questions. What follows is an excerpt from our discussion.

AF: *In the introduction to The Abstract Wild you say that, “a saner relation to the natural world must end our servitude to modernity by creating new practices that alter our daily routines,” and, “that no resolution to the crises facing the wild earth will achieve more than a modicum of success without an integration of spiritual practice into our lives.” Can you talk a bit about how you envision that ‘saner relation’ or ‘spiritual practice?’*

JT: I still believe that, but I think if I could write it again now, I would use the word ‘mature’ instead of ‘sane,’ and something like ‘grounded’ instead of ‘spiritual.’ As Paul Shephard and others have said, we seem very childish in our greediness and neediness and in wanting all of our toys and fun. The entire fun hog phenomenon is really the talk of children. I think we need a more mature population, especially here in the U.S.

With respect to the spiritual, the lines along which you can perceive some progress don’t have anything to do with Buddhism or Christianity, or any other religion. I don’t see that any religion has cornered the market on a ‘spiritual practice’ that’s going to help the natural world. I think that there are aspects of all religions that are not inherently destructive to the earth, but because of their traditional interpretations they turn out to be pretty destructive.

AF: *You go on to say that “any spiritual tradition worthy of the name teaches the diminishment of desire.”*

JT: It comes down to greed; capitalism is just organized greed. The concept of ‘more’ is inherent to

our economy and our society, and until we reverse that I don't see that we can do very much. But then who has the slightest idea how to replace capitalism? I don't. I'm not a communist. I don't think they did very well. Marx was quite insightful in his critique of capitalism, but what he wanted to put in its place was even worse. You can find people like the Amish—who Wendell Berry likes so much—that simply have a more thoughtful and humble attitude towards what they need and what they take. And, of course, you'll find some Buddhists and Christians and Muslims who may have this same kind of attitude. It's not about condemning or embracing the major religions, but rather finding a more modest, thoughtful, less greedy approach to life, and spiritual traditions often provide the structure of such an approach.

The actual practices that might evolve from this approach are something I think a lot about, and I think they have to do with the fundamental aspects of our lives, like food and sex, how much land we own, and how much water we use. I'm sorry, but I don't think it's responsible to have six kids, particularly in the United States. To have six children grow up with this level of wealth is very destructive to the natural world. I think as much as possible we should get our food close to home. That means we hunt, we fish, we grow gardens. I like to point out to my friends who are such avid vegetarians and pacifists when they talk to me about not killing an elk that the organic rice they eat from California was grown with hydrologic systems that have led to the loss of two dozens species of fish. This has to do with the object of our compassion, is it the individual or something larger? I'm not entirely clear about this, but I think it is a question people ought to dwell upon and have affect their daily lives.

AF: *You speak a lot about how vital it is to have experience or 'gross contact' with wild nature, and it seems that increasingly our culture's contact with the natural world is through recreation, the 'fun hog phenomenon' as you called it. Despite working*

as a mountain guide, you're critical of this phenomenon in The Abstract Wild, and I wonder if you see any potential at all for 'gross contact' through recreation?

JT: As far as I can see, there is simply no inherent connection between being deeply involved in the sports I know something about—hunting, fishing climbing, skiing—and any kind of more sophisticated understanding of the natural world. There just isn't any connection. This valley is full of backcountry skiers and climbers who could care less about the plight of big-horn sheep, and fisherman who prefer introduced rainbows to native cutthroats just because they think they're a better fish.

What is truly astounding is the level of ignorance of most Americans with respect to the natural world. For example, the Pew Foundation released a survey result recently that stated only 28% of Americans believe in evolution. Until we can combat this kind of ignorance, we have little hope. Recreation doesn't do this.

AF: *What about the guiding you do here in the Tetons? Do you attempt to facilitate some kind of 'contact' or emotional connection for your clients?*

JT: My main concern there is with kids. They're far more reachable, and their experiences can be very emotional. A lot of the outdoor education that is going on—taking young people out for a month at a time—undoubtedly has a huge

impact on them, and it is a noble and useful thing to do with your life. One of the more amusing things that happens in this valley is when billionaire Republicans' kids go out and come back and bad-mouth their parents. If you can get people out there and teach them even a little bit, something will make an impression. You can't expect people to support and love something if they have no contact with it. Contact is not a sufficient condition in itself, but there is simply no substitute for personal experience.



Photo Courtesy of Outside Magazine

Kurt Markus

AF: On the other hand, in *The Abstract Wild* you say there is a “need for more inspired art, literature, myth, and lore of nature.” Do you think that these things may effectively reach people who have little or none of this personal experience with wild nature?

JT: The case that I like to mention to people is that we have Yellowstone because of art. When the vote came to Congress it was Jackson’s photographs and Moran’s watercolors that were shown to Congress, and now we have a national park. Reason and science are limited in their capacity to motivate people. I’m not saying they’re not important—they’re extremely important—but art and literature, in the broadest sense, obviously have great influence on people. How many people have read Abbey and been motivated to have a greater role in the environmental movement? I would say the same of Terry [Tempest Williams]; Terry has had an enormous influence on conservation, particularly how she has radicalized women in an absolutely wonderful way. I have tremendous respect for Matthiessen, Nabhan, Bass, Terry, Abbey, Lopez, and Snyder among others. They are my heroes. We just need a lot more of them

AF: Is this kind of influence what you’re shooting for in your book about Yellowstone?



Derek Goldman

Do we leave the natural world alone and risk losing it, or do we manage and re-engineer it, turning it into an artifact in the process—the ‘natural artificial?’ I want to rub people’s noses in this conundrum. That’s my cause.

JT: What I’ve noticed is that while everybody talks about the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, damn near nobody’s actually wandered around in it. I’ve been through most of it, and my idea is to inject something personal into the discussion. Instead of having abstract arguments with lots of maps and charts, which also serve a purpose of course, I want to write something personal. I also want to draw attention to the problems the ecosystem faces.

My ontological position, that is my desire to live in a natural and wild world instead of an artificial one, places me in conflict with a variety of measures including wildlife management and genetic engineering. These are difficult decisions. Do we leave the natural world alone and risk losing it, or do we manage and re-engineer it, turning it into an artifact in the process, the ‘natural artificial?’ I want to rub people’s noses in this conundrum. That’s my cause.

Suiting up for the hour-long skin back to the truck, I reflected on the life Turner has chosen for himself. Years of experience in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem had woven his life into these mountains. In his relatively simple existence out in the snowy woods of Wyoming, I thought I saw his version of a “more modest, less greedy approach to life.” And through his continued writing and ranting on behalf of what he loves, critics and contradictions be damned, there was a real vision for change. In light of all this, “*mea culpa*” seemed an honest recognition that we are all complicit in the shaping of our world and that we ought to dwell on this complicity as we craft the practices of our lives.



Pedro Marquez

tion of life. I wish I had asked John why he needs a God so predictable in form.

Maybe next summer I will. And if John abandons his ego long enough to answer my questions truthfully, he might tell me that life is much easier with a belief in his omnipotent God. His Creator takes away the edgy fears that grow out of too many quicksand-like questions, and provides a comprehensive guidebook for living. Unlike a belief in the messy and interdependent process of evolution, his God elevates him above the beasts and extricates him from the realities of ecology. A separation from the life around John makes him feel special and relieves him of any responsibility to our ailing planet. John's God is right because He allows John to live a comfortable life while making sense of it. We all believe in whatever we need to feel safe in the universe. John calls it a God who points him down a well-marked highway paved long ago.

If I am equally candid in next summer's conversation, I will admit to John that he and I are not as different as it seems. I will tell him that I, too, depend on a story to make sense of myself. If I can let down my guard long enough, I will tell him my own directionless creation story. I will tell him that it is based on the faith that 13.8 billion years ago *something* caused everything to explode into being. I believe in an inexplicably begun, mysteriously ordered, dynamic universe. Everything that is *only* is because of eons of trial and error, failures and successes. Nothing is permanent. I will tell him that it scares me to see life this way—as uncertain, chaotic, and ever-changing. And yet I love that the deeper scientists probe into the inner workings of our cells and of the cosmos, the more we understand how small we are in time and space. The more I feel how blessed I am to knowingly pay witness to this moment in time. Next summer, if I am brave enough to let down my guard in front of John, I might even call that feeling *God*.

Continued from page 33

conversation. I kicked myself several times for failing to show John just how wrong he was.

But now, sitting in an old Missoula coffee shop a couple years later, I have a different kind of regret. I am sorry that I reacted so aggressively, excited to prove to my Ivy League uncle and all the spectators how much I knew. I regret that I did not take the time to find out why the idea of evolution is so unpalatable to John. I wish that I had asked him why that theory is incompatible with his God. I wish I had said; "Is God not the name we give to the irreducible mysteries that permeate the universe? Then isn't every unzipping strand of DNA, God? Isn't the intimate communication between the enzyme *helicase* and a nucleotide chain laden with more mystery than a superhero God who created this big blue planet for the people who invented Him?" The other day, someone left a colored newsprint booklet on my door asking, "Aren't you lonely without Jesus?" To John, I might have said, "Aren't you lonely without the knowledge of the savannah in your muscles, without the memory of the primordial sea in each of your cells?" I wish that I had forsaken my ego long enough to find out why John is so uncomfortable with the idea of a dynamic Earth caught in the sun's gravitational field at just the right distance and angle to sustain the prolifera-

*Isn't every unzipping DNA strand God?
Isn't the intimate communication
between the enzyme helicase and a
nucleotide chain laden with more mystery
than a superhuman God who created this
big blue planet for the people who
invented him?*

civilizations, but the United States boasts the Grand Canyon, giant sequoias, Yellowstone's geysers, and the grizzlies of the Great Bear Wilderness.

To leap from idea to practical reality, Congress enacted the Wilderness Act forty years ago this fall. Its purpose was to recognize certain wild and undeveloped regions as vital resources of great value to our society, and to define such areas in ways that could make their preservation actual and consistent. Previous definitions of *natural resource* referred to raw materials such as precious metals, minerals, trees, water, and land, which became valuable only when transformed into commodities. While Plum Creek's definition of its forests as *industrial* allowed the corporation to abuse its lands, the Wilderness Act used its powers of definition to make preservation and conservation a permanent part of America's national policy. Section 2(a) explains the rationale:

In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.

The Wilderness Act designated over 9 million acres to be protected in its first year. Since then, citizens concerned with saving their special wild places have helped to increase the Wilderness System to a total of 105 million acres. This is less than 5 percent of the nation's land. The beautiful, remote areas

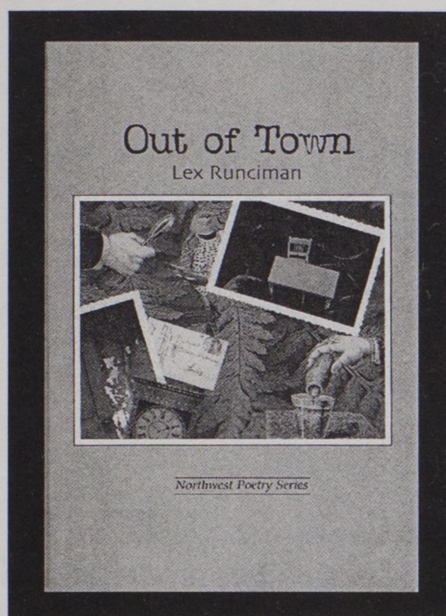
that have been protected include mountains in the Northern Rockies, the swamplands of Florida's Everglades, deserts in the southwest, the wooded backlands of the Smoky Mountains, redrock canyons of the Colorado Plateau, Idaho's Salmon River country, and Alaska's Denali Wilderness. Many more roadless areas are listed, and we will fight for them to be added to the whole.

As for me, I have put a conservation easement on my 163 acres that will protect it from subdivision and development. Whether it stays in my family or passes to someone else, the meadow and its old growth forest will stay wild. In the larger neighborhood, I will work to keep the watershed of the Big Blackfoot River free of cyanide, and beyond that I will join with those who are trying to protect the Rocky Mountain Front from energy exploitation. All this is preventive. On the active side, over in eastern Montana, a group of us prairie lovers are collaborating on a project to preserve grasslands and reintroduce native species such as bison. In such collaborations, notions of how to lead a good life get married to the idea and practice of wilderness—a coupling that should last as long as wildness exists in the natural world.

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Pedro Marques



Out of Town

by Lex Runciman
Cloudbank Books, 2004

help the reader explore the overlooked avenues of daily existence, and the lyricism of the common—no easy task. Yet what greater gift could a poet offer than a reminder that even our mundane moments are worthy of wonder and filled with the singular grace of living?

The poems in Lex Runciman's latest collection, *Out of Town*, are filled with such gifts. Once a student of Hugo's in the University of Montana's writing program, Runciman's poems reflect the sensibility of someone who has lived life purposefully--that purpose being to pay attention, ask questions, and revel in the continuous thread between the past and present. There is a gentle, measured pace to the poems, one that reflects Runciman's approach to writing: "I'm not eager to be finished with a poem; let it take an unhurried and provocative year or two." Unhurried, to be sure: it's been fifteen years since Runciman's last book of poetry, *The Admirations*, won the Oregon Book Award.

In "One Thing," the first poem in *Out of Town*, Runciman chooses to begin at the very beginning—before the Fall of Adam and Eve. Eden is a fitting opening for a collection that moves easily between the innocence of childhood, the richness of parenting, and the beauty of nature. The opening stanza celebrates the oneness of the living world before the discovery of knowledge and sin: "In the garden / Before everything fell into its separateness, / Before everything fell apart, / The mute and noisy world sang—it was one thing— / And we had no need, no need for speech."

Mourning the loss of wholeness, the poet wistfully concludes that, "we had to learn to speak to learn / How clumsy we had become." Yet this wistfulness is more complex than a mere yearning for perfection; if anything, it is an unhesitating acceptance of the elemental struggle of knowing how inadequate we humans are for the task of perfection.

This theme recurs throughout the collection, but particularly so in many of the poems about his two daughters, reflecting a peculiar balance between guidance and helplessness that is likely to resonate with any parent. This

Richard Hugo once wrote; "never write a poem about anything that ought to have a poem written about it." He urged the poet to tension is clearest in "Arrowood House," where the poet is teaching one of his daughters to ride a bike: "Running along, I can tell / what needs to click at the center of balance / is for you only envy, will, a trust / in mystery, in what you cannot find. We try / again, again, again, until you're fighting tears. / I can no more do this for you than fly."

Though these poems are intimate and personal, they do not fail to include the wider world in their scope. Recalling the working-class men of the Willamette Valley in Oregon, where Runciman grew up and lives today, "Like Men" captures the bittersweet experience of families in the post-war era, whose fathers discovered the price of providing a better life for their children was often alienation. "The paycheck—never enough—was proof / of love, that word they could not quite / get in their mouths. They saved / for education for their children, who / if successful, they did not understand, who / thinking of them, wished them ease / and thanksgiving, and thought pity."

Poems such as "Green," "The Moon," and "Day Litany" rely on a steady flow of imagery rich with color and texture to draw the reader into the natural world. They are a sacramental testimony to the beautiful intricacies of landscape, "whatever it means." But "The Waiting," a poem set in the languid heat of late summer, pulls against the peace of the pastoral vision. Not content to merely observe, the poet wonders what it would be like to be reunited with the world of Eden: "If we could say the name, the perfect sounds / for ground we love. That, and the common litany— / how this becomes mango / and bird of paradise, cocoa bean, skunk cabbage. / If we could say why. / ...If we could rouse and tease the dead / of ourselves unborn. / But we are not met." The reader feels abandoned by a higher power—the one who could undo the Fall and reunite all living creatures. But the loss is mitigated by the revelation that the poet is not alone as he muses. Someone sits next to him watching the twilight fall, talking, a comforting salve to the loneliness of being a creature of language.

This is a book to leave sitting on the breakfast table for weeks at a time, readily available as an alternative or antidote to the newspaper. The poems pull the reader into the poet's life without forcing them to leave their own world, serving as a reminder that every life harbors poetry, and even the unanswerable questions are well worth asking. "Out of Town" is the third book in Cloudbank Books Northwest Poetry Series.

Reviewed by
Katharine
Hyzy

Stella's Place

My father and I stood once
on a piece of bluestem prairie, Stella's Place
Under a cold sky. Today
my father is dead.
The prairie's eyes, its mouth
stopped with earth;
of those who were there only sky is left,
distant as ever and the marching clouds—
as if landscape were a god
who might speak, the wind
returning old breath for new:
tell me now what to do—
but you were here also and the sky
will answer if it speaks in the only way it can
using your breath.

by Loulette Hansen

last words

The Value of a Footstep

*The future of all life, including our own,
depends on our mindful steps.*

—Thich Nhat Hahn

by Brianna Randall

Heel to toe. I walk across the Higgins Street bridge, meditating on the space between my breaths, the space between my toes, and the space between myself and the world. Suspended over the Clark Fork River in Missoula, Montana, I keep my head up and watch a great blue heron stalk its fish dinner. Unconsciously, I try to mimic its slow, precise footsteps, watching the deliberate thrust of its beak and the grace of its stride.

Lifting, moving forward, putting down, pressing the ground. So many pieces of a single footstep. On my daily practice of walking meditation, I attempt to find the balance between counting the parts and seeing the whole. I fear sometimes I am too reductionist, too rationally entrenched in my scientific background. How can I stop dissecting every word or scene and instead step back to appreciate the flow of life in its entirety? By concentrating on my steps and engaging my senses, I am able to release my little fears and my looming tensions. Each part of a single footstep represents the whole of life. I reconnect with movement, breath, and gravity.

I discovered walking meditation alongside a Tibetan monk who carefully led several students through downtown San Diego. She showed us the art of focusing. I asked her then if the noise of the traffic and milling people distracted her, as it did me. She smiled slightly, and shook her head. *It is not a distraction, but simply the backdrop. I absorb it, and move through it.* Now, in Missoula, I cross the one-way streets, 5th and 6th, hoping no passing cars force me to break my rhythm. I welcome the sounds of the city around me, acknowledging the movements other than my own.

I let my thoughts go, focusing on the miniature movements within each step. While walking, I recognize the value of the pieces--the clouds, my heels, the honk of a car horn--for their contribution to the beauty of the whole. The rhythm of my feet, the swing of my arms, replaces thought tonight. Rain is on the wind and the river is heavy with spring. The smell is so unique, indefinable. I walk without trying to define—and confine—the smell, the sights, the sounds. Instead, they seep into my skin, absorbing me into this swollen spring evening.

Buddhists believe that meditation allows humans to remove attachment and craving for objects by comprehending the three characteristics of existence—impermanence, suffering, and the non-self nature of things. Meditation shows us that mind and matter, *nama* and *rupa*, arise and disappear—they are insubstantial. By concentrating on separating the “continuous” step into four physical segments, walking meditation allows us to focus on the impermanence of each movement as it originates and disintegrates. The four stages of a step correspond to the four elements, each a necessary part. The lifting of the foot is perceived as lightness-- a characteristic of fire. Moving the foot forward represents the air element, since air is inconstant motion. Putting the foot down reminds us of the heaviness of water, the trickling oozing element. Lastly, pressing the foot to the ground connects us to the earth.

Water below me, sky above. The waning crescent moon sits cupped in space, Venus winking shyly to her only inches away. Two celestial bodies locked in separate spheres by gravitational forces. This cosmic force of attraction is strong, and I feel Earth's gravity tugging at my steps, at my core.

Heel to toe. I close my eyes and feel the breath originate and disintegrate within my breast. I am balanced. I am strong.

I am the great blue heron and the smell of spring.

I am insubstantial, made of nothing and everything.

I am walking.

Camas

EVST / Jeannette Rankin Hall
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