



WOMEN WRITING NATURE

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*Guest Edited
by
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Sugar Mule Literary Magazine

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BARBARA ADAMS

BIO

An Unusual Charm

Year One

Toads struggle with public relations issues. Many people consider them wart-covered, flabby, ugly creatures, so I am often reluctant to discuss with anyone other than family or close friends the embarrassment of Woodhouse's toads that call my yard and gardens home. In passing I might comment briefly on some curious amphibian trait but never a word about how we first became acquainted or their escalating numbers around my farm. Such details are not for casual conversation but require a listener with an open mind and a kindness toward things that go bump in the night.

Our association began the year my husband and I constructed a ranch-style house in the middle of what had always been prairie. The process left a large area around the structure bruised and barren, a stark region of sand and clay stamped into the grassland. Woodhouse's toads love deep, sandy soil that is good for burrowing and occupy a wide variety of habitats ranging from plains to agricultural regions to residential areas, so it makes perfect sense that the toads would find the disturbed land near new construction attractive. Back then, however, when the first few moved in, I was unaware of their habits. They simply fascinated me. More than that, I considered them to be an omen of good tidings. They had chosen to be my neighbors.

When several of the little guys began to seek the cool shade of the garage to wile away the hot afternoons, I wondered at the gentleness of their nature. Unconcerned with my activities, they hung around in sheltered corners, apparently asleep. And since this was my first up-close experience with toads outside the pages of fiction-no stodgy characters complete with velvet vest and British accent were these toads-I thought it best to find out as much as possible about their true character.

My husband, the biology teacher, let me know right away the new neighbors were not frogs as I first labeled them. As amphibians, frogs live in water during the first part of their lives and in or near water as adults. They are good swimmers, and their skin is smooth,

almost slimy. But toads, also small tailless amphibians, have dry, rough skin and when grown, live mostly on land. So toads they were, landlubbers that liked to burrow instead of breaststroke.

The toads especially enjoyed my concrete porches at night and the glow that spilled from the windows. The light attracted bugs. Thousands of them. Plopping our house down in the middle of a pasture put us in close association with many of the original inhabitants. Flies, gnats, beetles, moths, centipedes, spiders, ants, mosquitoes and a host of others also found the new digs appealing. When I realized the toads lustily devoured all comers, I knew we would get along fine. As soon as the sun dropped out of sight, they emerged and took up stations along the porch and brick walls to spend the entire night feasting. They looked like fat hockey pucks until a long, sticky tongue flicked out and instantly made vanish whatever small invertebrate had ventured too close. Their action appeared so smooth and quick it seemed a mere figment of the imagination. And if you ask me, any creature so willing to lend a hand needs to be encouraged-offered the best in good neighbor diplomacy.

Googling toads, I looked through several sites that provided photos. My bumpy, irregularly blotched, gray-brown fellows sported a whitish line down their backs and a pale underside. Their scientific name was *Bufo woodhousii*. An intriguing label and I kept reading. It appeared my toads were so christened to honor the man who first collected the species somewhere in the mountains of northern Arizona, a surgeon/naturalist included in an 1851 expedition to explore lands acquired from Mexico. During the trip down the Zuni and Colorado Rivers the poor doctor suffered a rattlesnake bite and then later took an arrow in the leg. Perhaps his fellow scientists felt it only fitting that something be named after him. Whether Samuel Woodhouse was flattered they chose a toad was not addressed in the article.

As a curious side note, I also uncovered the fact that handling toads will not cause warts, either in the human or the toad. That story is myth. In truth, warts are nothing more than benign viruses, but they are mildly contagious and can be spread from person to person. Holding toads, then, seemed a safer bet than holding the hand of someone inflicted with warts, a nice thing to know. Folklorists believe the connection between toads and warts probably arose when some child of long-ago developed a wart after catching a

toad. The locals then made the mental leap that bumps on the creature sprang onto the unsuspecting child. Superstitions also flourished concerning the eradication of the resulting wart. One ancient theory advocated wearing a live toad in a bag around one's neck until it died. Another supported the idea of rubbing the wart with a toad and then impaling the unlucky creature on a thorn. As it shriveled in the sun, the wart supposedly did the same. All nonsense, of course, and this early attitude surrounding toads probably set in motion their problems with bad press.

Our toads stuck with us that first summer as we began to cultivate a yard. And although we had little to offer in vegetation, the over-flowing larder and damp soil associated with grass seedlings must have been sufficient for the toads. They grew fat during the warm evenings under my porch lights, and I grew fond of them. Further study alerted me to the fact that they would hibernate during the cold weather months, burying themselves deep underground, and had I been a good host, they would return to my yard in the spring. As the winter approached, I worried my role as toad hostess had been lacking in some aspects. Would the plentiful menu make up for the meager vegetation and sparse water supply in the mind of an amphibian?

I searched for more information and found some helpful ideas on a couple of Internet gardening sites. Should the toads choose to come again, I wanted to be prepared to operate a four-star establishment. Since many of the toads hung out near or under our big metal heat-pump unit on the shady side of the house, it seemed the best place to organize a habitat. Low plants in which to hide and keep cool, landscaping logs to burrow under, plenty of sand, some kind of shallow water source, and several toad houses (terra-cotta pots tuned on their sides) would make an ideal retreat according to those who already sponsored up-and-running toad hostels. I would have it all in place by early spring so any toad that might have hibernated nearby could not pass up such luscious accommodations.

Year Two

In the spring toads wake from their long sleep. The rumble of thunder and splattering of warm rain on the hard soil roof of their underground burrows serve as an alarm clock. The conditions call them out to the business of surviving and to the greater need to

ensure the survival of their species. And wake they did, coming back to my yard, my garage, and my new habitat in greater numbers than the year before. The welcome mat was out, and I think many of the former residents brought a friend along this time. Their choice to return seemed like a pronouncement of good faith. We would carry on in this new place and make it our home.

Why their return gave me such pleasure is a mystery. I had to take greater care not to step on them when walking almost anywhere outside the house, their rather large "leavings" had to be swept up regularly, and digging around in the gardens always gave me a shock when something the size of my hand sprang out from under the vegetation. In spite of the obvious "ick" factor, however, the toads were just plain good. Their manner suggested a quiet joviality, and they seemed to possess the patience of a saint. I never saw them fighting amongst themselves or picking on a weaker, smaller brother. They would share spaces, piling into a shady hole one after another, make room in the shallow pool for just one more, sit under the spray from my water hose like children at a water park. From aerating the soil to organically eradicating garden pests, everything they did contributed. I doubt I could say the same about myself.

These creatures excelled in their niche of the ecosystem without worrying about upgrading the cable channels, putting in a sprinkler system, or ordering a cappuccino maker. They also did okay without the stresses of not wearing white after Labor Day or making sure bridal showers were hosted by someone other than a family member. Having such examples close at hand seemed sensible, and they lent a certain balance to my outlook.

That second summer I inadvertently added a feature to the yard that triggered a new phase in our alliance-electronic pest control. The gadget was a gift to my husband, a half-joking-you might be a redneck if you think entertainment is a six pack and a bug zapper-kind of thing. He then did me one better by installing a six-foot pole in the back yard, running an extension cord out to it and mounting his new toy on top. We had a good laugh the first night we fired it up. It worked like crazy, too. Until one has experienced country living, it is impossible to imagine just how many insects I'm talking about here. We turned it on every night, all night, unaware that it would have any impact at all.

The toads always came out around dusk, making their way out of shallow indentions in the garden and grass, out of the mulch around the trees, from under every plant and log. Staking out a place to hunt evening insects was the goal, and they strung out in every conceivable piece of real estate around the house. I enjoyed watching their friendly jostling for prime locations. But a couple of weeks after the bug zapper installation, I began to notice a change in their pattern. Large numbers had abandoned the porch and brick wall stations to take up formation around the pole that supported the zapper. They formed distinct circles which fanned out into the yard. The smaller toads made up the inner circle closest to the pole, and rings of toads expanded outward in an ever widening arrangement.

"It looks like some kind of bizarre cult worship," I told my husband.

"Yep, they're waiting for the food god to light up and shower them with manna from above," he replied. "Go turn on the power."

Later that night we took a flashlight outside to observe the ring ritual further and were flabbergasted by the sheer number of toads in the gathering. It had more than tripled in size since complete darkness had fallen. The amazing sight was one I felt sure many people would find a bit disturbing. So how could I explain my growing enchantment without sounding more than a bit disturbed?

Year Three

The third summer started out wet and rainy, and stayed that way—a rare occurrence in southwest Oklahoma. I didn't worry the toads would not return. Our established relationship seemed on firm footing now, and my knowledge of their behavior had grown substantially. For instance, I knew that handling my little neighbors did not make them overly happy, and I only resorted to it when their safety or cuteness was a factor. All toads have enlarged glands that secrete a sticky white liquid, and the stuff gets smeared in the mouth of any predator that might want a taste. If I chose to cart them around, washing afterward was a good idea. They also had a tendency to urinate when picked up. Yet another natural defense mechanism I took into account often that summer.

The toads had a grand time during the unusually wet summer. The normally short breeding season spanned into several months, and each large downpour produced days and nights of intense

caterwauling as hundreds of love-struck amphibians gathered in drainage ditches near the house. The loud "waaaah" of their mating calls echoed across the open acres for miles in all directions. It was impossible to leave the windows open at night and expect to get any sleep. It was also unthinkable not to step outside just to listen. The sound resonating from the darkness rose and fell in waves of raucous abandon.

About a month later, hundreds of tiny toadlets made their way onto land. The explosive breeding season produced three such cycles, and our flashlight excursions revealed a yard that literally moved en masse. The baby toads were no bigger than my little fingernail, and they leaked from every crevice and crack. Cradling them in the palm of my hand, I marveled at the preciseness in which they matched their elders: perfect miniatures stalking the tiniest insects amid the jungle of our lawn. The phenomenon transpiring literally at my feet gave fresh perception to the words of Scott Russell Saunders: "How could our hearts be large enough for heaven if they are not large enough for earth?"

It was a bountiful year for everything: tomatoes, squash, even the ragweed grew ten feet tall. My days were consecrated with mountains of vegetables and stacks of toads.

Overabundance. Mother Nature at her pinnacle. And I wish I had stood in amazement longer, recorded what I saw more ardently, woven more poetry from the moment.

Epilogue

My expectations for the next summer's reemergence were high, but the tremendous eruption of tiny toads never came. Not only that, a large number of the adult horde were absent also. The dense population had vanished leaving only what looked to be the oldest and most mature toads. I can only speculate that many of the others did not survive the harsh temperatures of the winter. Were some too young to store enough fat to make it through the long months of hibernation, or too lean since the competition for food was enormous in the small area? Or did they simply move away to a place where the demands were less? For whatever reason, nature took back much of what she had given.

Toads have been known to live five to ten years in the wild, and I like to imagine the returning toads (at least the largest ones) to be

some of the original neighbors from four years earlier. They exhibit a comfortable familiarity within my presence, never fearful, even when I approach because they know I will step around them. They arrive well before dusk at the foot of the pole, secure in their safety, well versed in routine. Life continues, and their needs are few-to breed frantically in the sudden violence of the spring storms and feast under the benevolent light in my backyard. These good animals that dwell beside me have come home again.

SANDRA ERVIN ADAMS

[BIO](#)

At the Park

Clouds clot and thicken
above Bicentennial Nature Trail.
At the entrance, beetles' parasols,
tiny red mushrooms; one larger white,
its cap on the grass, slated for loam.
A path of rocks and pine straw spotted
with tiny leaves of brown and gold.
Rain sprinkles down on tall trees
that shake, tinkling bells that welcome
walkers to a peaceful woodland world.
Raindrops get bigger.
Ink on the page blurs.

CAROL ALEXANDER

[BIO](#)

Maroon Bells

Remorse was the flavor of the climb,
salt of our halting progress to the peak.
We'd been guaranteed such visions:
self-important marmot turning earth,
chill satisfactions of grim black bear
poised above a thread of crystal stream.

We needed smaller mountains, you and I,
having made due west in cautious silence
dizzied at these vaunted majesties thrust
by metamorphosis, through violent storm
smashing, wrinkling in old tectonic furies,
the fierce melting force firing the range.

Who knew we had it in us? Tired pair
taking the climb in measured breaths
eyes trained carefully past each other's eyes
neither the first to point out hawk or flower,

to beard the hazy Bells at purest dawn,
low mountains waking from primal sleep,
slopes greened by the late spring rains—
and then, the sighting of the unperturbed bear
feeding on young shoots, scattering berries
sweetly rank in ursine lumbering way.
Turning to you at last, I claim the bear:
familiar of our guarded days and nights
who rises up diurnally, it seems, to take
root and stock of the place—the cold range,
joined and broken and somehow joined again.

Submerged

Down at the pond
the long dock floats, submerged,
wavelets licking greedily
at a child's silver shoe—
not a shoe, but shadow of trout
or umbra of lichen-bearded pine
swaying in an unquiet wind.

Hampered with its parasite,
more somber gray than green,
the scrubby pine with roots submerged
meets the water in flood-tide
and the dock, below the lily pads,
shivers in the chill of early spring.

It is no fault of water
which, creeping to the silty shore,
robs the tiny spit of stones,
where girls grown up
some twenty years or more
slick and pale as minnows bathed,
keeping tree and dock in sight.
One, quicksilver cormorant,
dove into the wavering weeds;
another, crying out for fear,
was carried limply from the beach;
and one, elusive, silent,
knelt and cupped her fingers so,
fishing for shadow and flickering light.

May as well try to raise the dead
as raise that ghostly sunken pier
descending further with each year
until we see the pond, the child, the tree
in twilit scape of memory, keeping the dock
as measure of days too swiftly meted out:
until the last submerged hours end
and we are silt and water,
funneled to the wide engulfing sea.

DOROTHY ALEXANDER

BIO

O'DAI, LISTEN

It's a foggy morning in late November. Deep darkness that precedes dawn gathers itself around me like a black cloak as I rise from sleep. I dress quickly and set out on foot.

I walk west toward a stretch of grassy river bank along the Washita River where it winds around Cheyenne, a village in western Oklahoma that I call home. I am careful to stay in the grassy right-of-way along the pavement leading out of town, wary of the huge growling tractor trucks plying the roadways to and from gas drilling derricks that puncture the sky over these plains.

At the top of a low hill I turn right, then left, follow a narrow roadway running east-west along a ridge overlooking the winding river. The morning is chill but not icy, warmer than one might expect at this time of year. The mist lies thickly below me on the floodplain giving an eerie, mystical quality to the landscape.

At a trailhead gate I leave the road to take the worn path through shinnery oak, red clumps of Indian grass, soap weed yucca (which local farmers call bear grass), tufts of big bluestem (sometimes called turkey foot because of the appearance of its seeds), little bluestem, and sand sage, called sagebrush by local ranchers. I am now on property owned by the U.S. Park Service, officially known as Washita Battlefield Historical Site.

I follow the path across a strip of upland prairie overlooking the floodplain where I see signs of old river channels. I wonder how many times this channel has shifted in the centuries since it began its course through the rolling country seventy miles west bringing tons of water-borne silt.

To the north across the sluggish river, red shale hills rise slightly above the upland prairie to form a jagged skyline. Between the hills and the floodplain, lies a strip of bench land where woody species

dominate: wild olive, back willow, hackberry, soapberry, Chickasaw plum. Closer to the bottom, stately cottonwoods signal that water lives somewhere below the surface.

I reach the floodplain where Peace Chief Black Kettle's band made their village in November 1868. Where a Cheyenne woman whispered through the vapor of her breath one cold fateful morning, *O'dai, Listen*. Where the 7th Cavalry attacked without warning in the grey morning hours of November 27, 1868. Where men, women and children fell to George Armstrong Custer's swords and bullets. Where fifty-three women and children were taken captive, forced to trek north leaning into bitter cold wind, trodding deep snow for two days and nights to Camp Supply. Where Clara Blinn, a captive in the Arapaho village downstream, died the same day without knowing the fate of her small son, Willie. Where the blood of 900 slaughtered Indian ponies soaked the river sand. Where only a few years ago the young wife of a farmer who tilled this soil took her own life. Their farmhouse, now torn down, was built on ground near the spot where the young Cheyenne boy, Magpie, shot Major Barnitz in the stomach during the Custer attack.

Where day after tomorrow, 140 years after the sad, shameful event, native peoples and non-natives will come in solemn, reverent observance.

Today all is quiet. I can hear a mother quail calling to her young or to her mate. I see in the distance an old coyote trailing home after a night of hunting. His hair-filled scat lies on the path ahead of me. I reach the river bank, smell the odor of wet earth, pause to watch the slow moving water. Its quiet gurgling sound is musical. I sit on the ground near a clump of Chickasaw plums and wait for the deep quiet that comes when I am alone in this place. At times I imagine I can hear the faint sound of drums in the distance. The wind seems to whisper some promise to sadness

I am not the only one here. To my right is a white-tailed deer, a doe, standing stock still about fifty yards away. At first glance one might think her a statue. Then the first pale rays of the rising sun penetrate

the mist and shine through her thin delicate ears turning them a pale pink. Beautiful. She looks directly toward me, slowly lowers her head to browse moving quietly away through the tall grasses and sage.

* * *

For ages and ages, peoples lived, passed through or paused in this valley carved by a river that the Cheyenne and Arapaho call the Lodge Pole.

It flows gently from its source in the Texas panhandle through this small valley, east by southeast to the Red River, the Mississippi, the Gulf of Mexico, rolling through rough broken country, flat plains, savannahs, short-grass prairies, tall grasses, paralleled by ribbons of timber, where people without a history once roamed: nomads, Athapascan, Apaches, bison hunters, farmers of maize, beans and squash.

I.

The western end of this valley had reasons for stopping: wood, water, grass, game, fowl, whatever ripens, berries, roots, nuts. Coronado stopped on his quest for the fabled golden Cities of Cibola. Juan de Onate rode through looking for the mythical Quivera, seeking the one thing white men worship above all other things: gold.

When the *Subtai* and *Tsististas*, the Cheyenne Peoples, matched the buffalo and the horses, always the horses, to set their destiny, they left their corn patches near the great sweet water lakes, moved with the sun out across the Missouri, down the ladder of east flowing streams, moving ever south until their hunting parties and war parties reached the Lodge Pole. There they claimed a stopping place.

Peace Chief *Movda vi doi i*, Black Kettle, brought his band here in autumn 1868. Men, women, children, horses, following the bison, their livelihood, as snow deepened the northland. They set up lodges by the running stream, said prayers to *Mabeo*, petitioned for peace, waited for spring.

The prayers of the Cheyenne were not heard, were not answered, that November night. Destiny had set its net for the *Tsististas*. Once

again, conquerors were passing through, questing not for gold this time, but for glory, power and a thirst for blood that would be quenched by nothing less than killing of savages.

* * *

Old men, chiefs, like White Shield and Lone Wolf, watched for these places where owls had once owned the day. They remembered what happened on each of these streams, the stopping places. In the Cheyenne pattern of time everything that happens in a place remains in that place as a part of today. So it is here at this place now known, simply, as Washita.

Hundreds of people come here. Some out of curiosity, some to walk on ground that seems sacred to them. Others come to honor the ones who died here, perhaps to find healing for the hurt that each human being experiences. The presence of the past, the presence of past suffering, is powerful medicine, not only to native peoples, but to all who can sense it. They come to listen, to know again what is here, at this stopping place on the Lodge Pole River.

When the National Park Service started looking for the spot where the Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado took place, four years before Washita, they asked Cheyenne and Arapaho elders and descendants of those there in November 1864, to come and listen at the place where they thought it happened. They found more than 400 artifacts buried several feet under the sand, artifacts that would have been present at the site of the massacre.

I was born and reared some ten miles beyond the ridge to the west. I have roamed this river, walked this ground since I was a child. I hunted arrowheads along the river banks, as did my father, also born near this river, the child of homesteaders who came to claim for themselves bits and pieces of the prairie.

I come because I find a sacred knowing in this place. I come to experience the ineffable something that lives in thin places in the universe. I, too, have great sorrow that must be assuaged. The Cheyenne pattern of time sounds true to my ears. I am consoled by what I find here, by stories that breathe the essence of the past into

my presence. Past sorrow shows itself to me. My own sorrow is abated. I am changed. This is called grace

Buddhist teachers in the Zen tradition have little stories called koans they use to provoke their students to think about the nature of existence. Little puzzles that may or may not have an answer. One of them goes like this: If the world catches fire, will It burn up, too?

The question presumes the existence and nature of whatever It is. The first time I heard this, I was surprised to realize that I actually had a sense of what It is. Perhaps more accurately, rather than sense what, I sensed that It existed. It whispers to me here among the trees, the grasses, the wild creatures, the running water of Washita. *Behold, I show you a mystery!*

I suspect that if the world catches fire, It will burn up, too, because It lives in this world and in all things of this earth. That is why we, all people everywhere, are responsible for the survival of places like Washita. Indeed, the whole earth, our Mother.

Washita Morning

Come here early, before full light, and walk
on the ground, on the grasses, among the trees,
the cottonwoods, where the beavers are at work.

Listen.

Wind is moving in the leaves, the blades of grass.
Be quiet, calm, peaceful, and It may speak to you
from the dust, from bones of the dead beneath you.

It may come through the soles of your feet,
through the dampness on your face,
through a tingling in your fingers,
a shiver running through your body.

Like in a dream.

And you will know the smell of your own child
gone too soon from this plane, to a place you can
enter only in moments of forgetting, in that space
between breaths, when all creation is held
in balance between now and somewhere else.

OLIVIA V. AMBROGIO

BIO

On being solitary

There's a great weight hanging
over the clouds that turns them
dark, like a heavy iron pressing
its black shadow through layers of cotton,
like inked cream
creeping through cheesecloth

against the stained, low-leaning clouds
rises a cacophony, 3 Vs
speeding south, sounding
their horns,
sculling above a wind-rent tree
whose last leaf, red as a fresh cut,
whips free—a loosed flame darting
towards the ice-water light
wrung from the horizon.

a good fall

on the uphill trail the trees
are burning
all their leaves
in such an ecstasy
the sun arcs through the angles, setting
everything
alight
there is a shivering roar
thrumming under the surface
of the brittle air

call it entropy
call it the rush of blood
call it the way the apple

you bit spurted sweetness
 and, limned in gold,
 you licked the juice from your wrist
 there is a current running
 just below the surface
 of the brilliant day

if it should happen
 let it be
 swift
 as the trees' bursting
 into flame
 let it be
 blazing as the sky's
 flaring, gas-jet blue

and Icarus, and any of those angels
 falling, framed in and made
 of fire
 if it should happen
 let it

Summer Vacation

The fish die thrashing on the wooden pier.
 The men walk by with hooks and their cold eyes
 so we must act as if we didn't care.
 The swollen boards are soft and smell of sea;
 behind us waves lullaby on the shore
 and shower it with trinkets from the dead.

We watch them as they gather up the dead
 —For food, I tell my sister, as she peers
 beneath my shoulder, clutching me towards shore
 with one hand, though her widened eyes
 glue her in place above the sea
 on these soft slats. Right now she doesn't care

about the cold she cried of, doesn't care
about her fear (she screamed to wake the dead
at her first crab, its sharp scuttling through the sea),
but watches as the ocean fish appear
flapping, and twitching back-and-forth their eyes
to ascertain upon what savage shore

they've come, and see savages on the shore
who walk through crushing weight without a care
and lean down, with their bulging mammal eyes
intent, counting each gill-gasp 'til the dead
weight presses heavily against the pier.
Helplessly, I say, "Fish in the sea

eat other fish. And we do, too: the sea
feeds us..." my words trail off while the crashing shore
and waves divide their spoils against the pier.
A man casting a line growls out, "Take care
around those hooks, girls. Those fish are dead
and slimy. Don't touch them." Smirking, he eyes

our almost squeamishness. I grit my eyes
against his smiling, turn them to the sea
in which no fish that I can see are dead
and start to nudge my sister toward the shore.
In whispers I say, "I don't even care
about that guy." We wander off the pier.

The scales from dead fish dashed like tears from eyes
across the pier whose soft wood doesn't care.
On shore we turn: a gull cries on the sea.

Blood Ark (clam, *Anadara ovalis*)

They didn't need Noah
to save them, wedged
in their silent benthic sand
untouched by the sounds of tempests.

Just as well; how could he know
which two would make a pair,
the soft unreadable flesh locked
in their unyielding shells.

Named, then, perhaps
out of an awed resentment:
these denizens of an airless shore
to us unfathomable, impervious
to our beneficence, who build
from muscle and calcium
their magic chests,
their cryptic refuge.

And yet when their valves are broken
from their insensate bodies weeps
a liquid that is red
like ours
like ours
thicker than water.

LOU AMYX

BIO

Ode

to a bowl of stones
all that five pockets could hold
from one beach from one hour
transported here
twenty-seven-hundred miles
to this outdoor table
in a rainy inland city

my shallow clay vessel of you

rock of the cool Pacific coast
eroded how many years
colorful loaves from colorful
mountains broken down
rolled like dough
in the crusty seabottom's hands
sized and smoothed
to fit my hand

I rescued you
you grays and you greens
oh you deep seabluegreens
you eyes that reveal
a tormented geology
saved from the fate of diminishment
from becoming more sand

while the abandoned ocean
restless jealous weeping
sends across the continent
her lonely tears
they fall from the gray metropolitan sky
your colors darken
and we are there again

returned to our instincts
you waiting
I reaching down
to hold you
fill my palm with your ancient solidity
my fingers curl around your mute tranquility
still cool
and I whisper how no sea or mountain ever
did cherish you more

CLAUDIA ANDERSON

BIO

Wandering

My journey begins where the black gravel path meets the line of scrubs at the edge of the grove. I stand at the beginning of the woods, the magic just beyond the border calling my name. Two huge maple trees arch over the entrance to this world, sentinels that have been here longer than I have been alive. I stop at the imaginary gate and inhale deeply, opening my arms and bowing my head in reverence, listening. A dozen varieties of birds sing on the spring breeze. Through this choir I ask permission to enter this forgotten realm, promising to leave all dark energies behind. I wait...and the air clears. The first boundary has been crossed.

There is nothing more spiritual than nature. Nothing more invigorating as rekindling the fire between the breath of the earth and my own heartbeat. There are many ways to reconnect with the eternal spiral of life, and walking through the woods is one of them. As my feet crunch the gravel my senses begin to waken. I toss my first offering of the day – a green apple – down some well-trodden deer path, hoping it will please the powers that be. There are patches of green beneath my feet, little scrambles and tufts of grass struggling to push into the indirect light of Spring. Dried skeletons from last year's growth line guide my way, and Queen Anne's lace etch the landscape with their brown needle outlines.

The path beneath my feet follows the curve of the hill and disappears to my left. Trees scatter upwards, their dried leaves wind chimes in the distance. In the open field to my right a symphony of sounds serenade me: cardinals, blue jays, sparrows, all alive in this fresh morning sunshine. I see walkers in the distance, drifters on the wheat-colored paths that zigzag through the fields. I would love to wander the fields with them, but not today. Today my destination lies down a different path. I am being called to the heart of the sanctuary.

The first divergence of the path. Left, right or center? How reflective this is of one's life's journey? Always a choice. The left path continues to curl uphill, and the right one wanders downwards into the open field. Today my destiny lies down the center path, the

one that skirts the prairie for a bit before heading towards the borders of the deep woods. I have manipulated the first curve of time and space, following medieval paths well trod by other adventurers. I walk, the rhythm of my footsteps steady and comforting.

A jogger slips up from one of the diverging paths, her energetic Labrador keeping pace. We nod to each other, and then she disappears around the curling corner, leaving me alone again. I wonder if she found what she was looking for on her morning foray with her companion. These woods hold many answers, yet stirring the pot, bring even more questions to the surface. The vibrations around me dance on a hundred different levels. There have been many souls traveling down these paths; many prayers whispered, many conversations started. I hope the jogger found her answer.

The grassy path continues forward on a slightly upward angle, yet another path shoots out from the main branch some ways up. Where could that one lead? To monsters and mayhem? To magicians and monks? Oh, the adventures we could find, should we choose left over right. Night over day. Chocolate over vanilla. The shadowed path is tempting. Another day, perhaps. Another day, another daydream.

My final chance to change course appears to my right, guiding me southwards to find adventure on the outer rim of the prairie. A final glimpse of the morning sun dancing on the golden tassels of the field calls me. But no, the mysteries of the woodland lay just ahead, their siren's song calling me home. The path becomes a collage of woodchips and sticks, leading me to the gate of the inner sanctuary. This time the gateway is a real, three-dimensional creation, a chicken wire fence and wooden gate that separate realities, leaving just enough room for the curious to pass through. I feel the pulse of the woods just beyond the gate. Waiting. Waiting for me to add my own energy into the pot. I stand at the gate for what seems an eternity, feeling my pool of imagination filling to the brim. I again ask the powers that be for permission to enter their private world. I ask to be a part of the eternal swirl of shifting colors and emotions that emanates from a vortex somewhere inside. Permission is granted, and I leave behind a jeweled token to sparkle evermore for the gatekeeper.

I hear the squawks of sand hill cranes passing overhead, their figures blocked by the canopy of branches above. I enter the woods, letting its raw energy pour over me. The path curves to the right, then to the left, curling through the sun scattered branches. Two crows talk to each other somewhere ahead, most likely warning all others that there is a human in their midst. The path is now a carpet of brown leaves, spreading its thickness in all directions, only the slightest indentation to point the way forward. Only at this time of the year do the woods open up their secrets to those adventurous enough to wander through them, for in a month or two all will be thick and lush, every open space flushed and filled with greenery. My eyes search for the elusive dwarf or gnome, but the only movement is the scuttle of squirrels running up the tree.

Another right turn, then another. Left. Right. Always further away from civilization. Dried, empty logs point the way deeper and deeper into the heart of this living green body. Black butterflies with white-edged wings dance with me down the path, energized by the warm sunlight. Eventually the carpet of leaves turn into shreds of woodchips. My emotions begin to tingle inside of me, as familiar sights and sounds pump adrenaline through my veins. Brambles lay fallen along the path, reminders of my own empty dreams. How many times has my life gotten tangled in the troubles of others? How many times have I fought to be myself? How many times have I let my own desires fall to the wayside, spider webs of dead branches and brown leaves blowing in the wind?

A wooden footpath appears, saving me from the water-logged ground ahead. Twisting ever forward, each turn on the path reveals a new vista, a new experience. I remember walking this path, crunching snow bubbles with my feet one cold winter morning. Or picking up a dead branch that curled around and over one of the wooden slats, suggestive of an arm reaching out on yet another day. My footsteps slow as my mind reaches out to the memories that surround me. I started a new business or ten down this winding road: I became a storeowner, public relations director, a fashion designer and a world traveler, all within the confines of my mind and the changing seasons of the forest. I created story lines full of heroes and demons, poems bursting with angst and confusion, best sellers and personal journals along these paths. I role-played the part of a sorceress and a slave, a seductress and a faerie, all to the rhythm of

my footsteps. I began exercise programs and pagan rituals and new jobs down these quiet trails. Some intentions came to fruition, others burst as the snow bubbles did. But at least I gave my dreams a chance to breathe.

I pause to sit on a bench conveniently built for wanderers such as myself. The path ahead disappears around the next corner, but I decide to just sit and absorb the energy around me from this vantage point. I toss my second offering to the woods down the path, another red, ripe apple, hoping some wayward deer will enjoy my sweet treat sooner or later. I inhale deeply, memories vibrating my very soul. It is in these confines that I've talked and rambled to myself for hours on end. I have whispered dreams and secrets and spiritual revelations into the nest of these woods. The harmony of many levels of existence knit a blanket of security around me, making the tightening of light and dark, of life and death, a comforting feeling. I have built castles in this forest; I have found inspiration and purpose, focus and innocence within these hallowed halls. I have played with love and planned unreachable goals. I have been an orator, a wench, an explorer and a researcher, all from the vantage point of this wooden bench.

I hear the flies buzz down the boards, their droning making me sleepy. My soul finds peace in this world. Solitude becomes a birthing center for new ideas and emotions. I sit alone with the energies of thousands that have gone before me. How many others have sat on this bench, in these woods, looking for guidance? How many have spilled their tears over choices made and unmade? How many secrets still dance in the branches above my head? Their remnants still sparkle in the fresh air, electrical vibrations that refuse to dissipate.

I shake the sleepiness from my head. This is not my final destination. Standing, I follow the wooden ribbon deeper into the womb, letting the silence vibrate around me. The path seems to wind forever through the intricacies of medieval magic, through worlds felt rather than seen. I imagine this same patch of earth inhabited by Native Americans, by pioneers and prophets. A hundred years of inspiration beneath my feet — a hundred years, a thousand years. Who knows what the past promised? And who knows what the future will bring?

Soon the path narrows, the growth reaching out from its confines to hang limply over the path. The tunnel is claustrophobic. Where am I going? Where does this array of bramble lead? Another right turn and I find my answer. The path transforms back into a carpet of dried leaves, pouring me into the woods at the far end of the glen. I needle down the forest path to the glory I know lies just around the next bend. Birds play in the trees right in front of me, their rustling a staccato flurry of leaves and chirps. Grandfather logs spread horizontally along the way, gently nudging my direction off towards the left. I leave the directional signals, forging my own way between trees and branches, crunching leaves that have lain dormant for years. The path now becomes my own, the territory virginal. I wander deeper and deeper, no destination in mind, knowing the force will tell me when to stop. And it does. The backside of a giant oak tree becomes my refuge, my resting place. I face the woods, the infinity of its scope spread before me. I settle down into the private recesses of leaves and bark, and breathe. Slowly and deeply.

The pulsing heart of nature beats with a rhythm that matches mine. At this moment nothing matters. The reality of the now clears my head. In this moment all things are possible. Seeds of inspiration are planted in my soul. In this sanctuary I know who I am, who I have always been. And who I am afraid to be. I make myself a promise. A handful of promises, actually. I promise to remember this moment, this spot, this feeling. I promise to carry it back with me, and to let it infuse every part of my life. I open my mind to the gnomes and faeries, to the poets and the painters. And I promise to be all that I can be – *more* than I can be. I am more than fluorescent lights and vanilla cubicles and dirty laundry. I am more than a size of clothing; I am more than wrinkles and flat feet and the woman down the block.

I am a writer and a dreamer, a mother and a wife. I am a best friend, not only to others, but to myself. I am feminine and I am female. All I need to do is be what I am and others will understand. Every being has a purpose, every moment, an energy. All I need to do is reconnect with that source. I know that I am more than my three dimensional boundaries. I feel as if I have plugged into the cosmos; that the positive vibrations I send out will one day come back to me, fresh and new.

I know I can't always escape to these woods; I know it can't always be Spring. But the magic can manifest itself whenever I call on it. All I have to do is ask. All I have to do is *be*. In this moment of knowing my thoughts have no coherence. I sit in the realm of gods and goddesses, of kings and queens, of children and sprites. All of life's fragility flashes through my mind. A phrase from an old song haunts the stream of my thoughts — dust in the wind. All we are is dust in the wind. We are that and so much more. We are sunrise and sunset. We are lovers and we are gatekeepers. We have the ability to soothe hearts, to fight adversity, to turn water into wine. The unicorn really does exist, as do the dragon and the wraith. All we have to do is look outside the gate.

Time wanders forever forward. Sometimes it crawls, other times it moves at the speed of light. But we can never repeat the experience, the yesterday. Once a moment has passed it fades into the shadows of used-to-be. That is why it is so important to make the most of the moments when they appear. To link them together in a never-ending cosmic chain that stretches both backward and forward. To find our inner aura and bring it out into the third dimension. Our dimension. Breathe it. Live it. Remember it. Only in seeing our existence as one long chain can the past and the future mean anything.

All too soon I swirl back onto the ground, back into the world of trees and leaves and warm morning air. Time has crept back into my world. The head rush is gone, the moment of enlightenment seeping back into the ground. I open my eyes, and a smile comes to my lips. I understand. I understand the intention, I understand the puzzle. The cosmic flow of the moment recedes, leaving behind a quiet connection between who I am and who I will become. A bridge between where I have been and where I still need to go.

Domestication flirts at the edge of my daydreams. There is a whole world waiting for me outside of this sanctuary; a world that needs me as much as I need it. I stand and stretch, brushing off the dead leaves and tiny bugs that were a part of my cosmic voyage. My thoughts wander once again to the world of three dimensions: what I will make for dinner, where I will hang my wind chimes, which story I will work on this evening. I need to phone an old friend; I need to do a load of laundry, I need to kiss my kids. I need to pet my cats; I need to rub the Buddha for luck. The meaning of life is as simple as

chocolate and prayers and planting flowers in the garden. How could something so eternal be so simple?

Reality begins to assault my senses once again as I find my way back to the path, retracing the dreams to their beginning. Down the wood chipped path, past the bench, through the bog and back towards the gatekeeper. Morning is turning into afternoon, the energy field intensifying as I encounter other walkers, other joggers, other dogs. They disappear behind me, each on their way to their own revelations, their own daydreams. I stop at the wooden gate, thanking the guardians of the sanctuary for letting me share their sacred space. They ask when I will return. I tell them I'm not sure. But I will be back. I always come back.

I take the high path back this time, wide grass swatches swirling back down the hill. I am energized from a high only Mother Nature can give. My steps have an added bounce, my emotions bubbling over with anticipation. The heat of the day has crept into the woods, mingling with the fire that now glows inside of me. As I walk under the last canopy I leave a bit of my positive vibrations behind on the path for the next wanderer to pick up. After all, part of my soul sleeps in these woods, too. A never-ending fountain of inspiration and emotions and dreams exists right behind me, right in front of me.

I know I will never be free from its magical spell, nor do I ever want to be. For this is what magic is all about. Not the hocus pocus of wands and spells and lightning bolts shooting from fingertips. Magic is nothing more than believing. Believing in yourself; believing in the energy of the world around you. Magic is in the silence of a sunrise, or in the colors of a sunset. It is in the songs of the birds and the turning of the leaves. Magic is in a smile, in a tear, in a sigh. Magic is the delicacy of a snowflake and the laugh of a child. It is whatever we choose it to be. And I choose it to make it part of my life.

How can I not?

JUDITH ARCANA
[BIO](#)

After years of graceful branches

At the end of one week, this wild river is fast
and loud; trees have become our familiars; light rushes over
morning's stones, darkening past the island

One of us writes, another stops, three read
where the wide porch floor is softening with dropped needles
the moving air is cool and the high sun is hot

While we work, the river streams through words
and trees crowd onto our notebooks; fallen rocks, silken moss
cracked branches write themselves into our pages

Here, where riverlight streaks past the porch
we study together, seeded by chance like cedar and hemlock
rising up out of the ground beside this river

How many of each grow in that deep stand?
we see ruddy cedar's dense green, shag of layered bark so heavy
those hemlocks are obscured, hardly visible

Until the bright gleam off the river shifts
grey shadows cross a thicket, making that cedar's rough trunk
disappear from sight: hemlock emerges

Looking away when the sun moves through
curly ferns dripping at river's edge—then looking back again
changes the scene: you see only hemlock

Surely one lesson where such trees grow together
(into lumber, pulp, tannic acid after years of graceful branches)
must be learning how to see that moving light

If I Walk There

The bells at St.Gregory the Great ring seventeen blocks
from the winter lake, where thin sunlight already
has begun to startle the earliest sky.

If I walk there I'll find ice caves glittering on the beach
light locked in water at the great lake's edge, cold
waves sucking softly at their frozen moat.

If I walk there the great sky will open in front of me
when streets stop, yellow sun will mark sky blue
and water will touch it. I'll see the lake touch the sky
out past the pumping station, tiny castle of the lake
standing like magic in my eyes from the shore.

If I walk there I'll wear a big coat, thick with feathers
from birds like the gulls riding iced air, sliding
where no snow covers concrete. My great coat will warm
my knees, my arms, blood will pump hot from my heart
to rise, meeting lake air cold on my face.

If I walk there the lake can drown this pain, pull it
from the gritty sand I stand on, face up, tears freezing.
I'll want the lake to touch me like it touches the sky
lift my heart with a great wave, open my locked chest.

The sun will be hot yellow over frozen snow, sky will
shine on the magic castle, ice caves will lock rainbows
inside their cold hearts, white birds will float on thin air
and I won't be walking away, if I walk there.

SUSAN AULD

[BIO](#)

Alone When the Silence Returns

A red smudge of a bird
calls from the bared tree
whistles waits

its voice—
vanishes in the sky scarcely blue
retreats into winter grass
rustic in repose

hearing no answer
the bird takes wing

its call stolen by the sky and grass
lost in the naked woods

was it a cry for help
a plea for companionship
a warning

I curb the urge to call it back—

to hear
my voice—
vanish and retreat

TARA BALDRIDGE

[BIO](#)

Serenade to the November Hued Highway

I. Illinois

There is beauty in the road. It beckons
us with fingers of withered corn, whispers
notes of welcome dispersed on floating specks
of harvested grain; the breezes are suspended
in expectation.

II. Indiana

Scales of light play against dark asphalt,
a glissando on tempered glass, warms skin,
loosens the soul through melodic interruption,
makes eyes heavy—weighted down with
the fullness of ripened gourds.

III. Kentucky

The trees speak to us. Pointed leaves mumble
moving syllables that grace the tips of
blue tinged mountains, wind toward us and
come together in shouts of coral and burgundy,
disrupt our mechanical solitude.

IV. Tennessee

After eleven hours we answer. Breathe in the
eruption of color; red leaf maple, violet sweetgum,
bright white ash. Fill our anxious mouths with the taste
of vermillion laced black walnut, a call and response
of human nature.

V. Alabama

We remember the names like natives, like the lingering
 lull of our ancestors' voices invading our day time dreams.
We are here, we sing back.
We are here.

Crawfish Season

Water, heavy with clay
 rises near the bank,
 climbs up the gnarled trunks
 of soaking trees

where Atchafalaya lies.

Deeper and still deeper—
 she falls.
 Higher and still higher—
 she rises.
 Clutching her dark red-fisted babies
 in the folds
 of her heaving bosom.
 She cradles them,
 sighing softly, foam-filled tears crash on their hard backs.
 The lull of her voice reaches us.
 It is Evangeline, returned.
 We stop.
 Watch.
 Wait.

She has to sleep.
 Then,

we will have her children.

CHRISTIANNE BALK

BIO

Killdeer

For days we drove to find this watershed of oak, grassland, birds,
Laguna Santa Rosa,
unseen yet felt, the distant roll of rock pools drained
then covered by the comings
and goings of waves we can't see. Listen. It's dark. Killdeer are calling
—

Charadrius vociferus

insistent as nighthawks in the prairie where you and I first met.

Remember how they swoop-whooshed
through incandescent street light orbs? Their flight made visible by
shadowed,

crisscrossed lines, chasing insects,
diving out of sight. No nighthawks here. Yet all around us,
as we walk tonight, killdeer
rise, screeching, perhaps to veer us from their nests. Or warn each
other—

surely our heavy-footed strolling
interrupts their tree-frog hunting. Trailing the raddled green
amphibious notes
without our awkward stumblings, they stalk just-hatched grubs in
trees too far off
for us to see, wiping their beaks
on rough-barked branches. If their cries having nothing to do with us,
still

I love how their skirling
follows us inside, tousled arias swinging, somersaulting me to sleep.

Such lullabies! Praising lawns,
driveways, grazed pastures, parking lots, sandbars—equally. They say
the male scrapes a shallow bowl
in the ground with both feet, lowers himself into the hollow,
and steps away when she approaches.

She takes his place, sinking. He leans from side to side, drops his
 wings, reveals
 his glorious, burnt-tangerine-
 terracotta back patch, and turns around, fanned tail raised, whirling
 fast
 and faster, turning
 into a banded blur of earth-streaked, raw sienna, trilling softly of
 furrows
 filled with larvae, beetles, worms,
 and marshes brimming with snails, minnows, and crayfish, asphalt
 roofs
 hot by dawn, the beauty of the barren
 gravel pits, and dung mounds holding clutches of pale buff eggs.
 Taking turns,
 one at a time, they stand
 for hours in the shifting light, casting shade on their rock-built nest.

Gold Creek Road

Thick fingered, we work clumsily, knotting
 scraps of nylon cord to right the rut-flipped,

 orange plastic toboggan, repacking the axe
 handles, bags of rice, two bottles of cheap
 Merlot, your Husqvarna, my crank radio.
 God, whose idea was this? Lift and haul,
 lash the duffels tight. I pause, breathing hard.
 City cribbed, a little stunned. We're just halfway.

One step, then another, graveling the grating
 sleds, knee-deep, all the way up Gold Creek's
 unplowed county road. Taa piic, Daaa Daaa
 my daughter calls, caa you bee lee wee've cliiii
 thi hiii? Winging away from us on skis
 hand-bolted to her steel turquoise pediatric

walker through the trees. The only other sounds
come from the creek bed— too cold to flow—
a sort of chime—barely edged—mineral—
thin feathered ice ringing the stones.

Gaze

Without a sound they surged uptrunk,
four raccoons, three of them small.
I wanted the glass between us gone.
They seemed to flow, searching
for the perfect dip within the long-ago-
topped trunk whose thick sucker limbs reach
like the prongs of antlers of some forgotten beast
awakened not with muscled bone,
but sky. Aloft, contained,
the striped kits and the sow revolved,
tail to nose, settling for a moment,
shifting, grooming, long-fingered paws
askew, sliding over one another's backs.
Their tick-bitten, cinder- gray fur
was haloed with backlight—

the silver stranded see-through fuzz
that shields the young. Around
they coursed, fitting themselves close
to the pith. They filled the empty
quickwood. They turned the crown

into a ball of moving shadows, restless
until the big one growled—
a ratchet chirrr, startling, long-ruckled
purr. Then they stilled, hidden
by the tree's peeling, mottled bark.

Old Growth

If you're the madrone, I'm the salvaged pine.

If you're the slope, I'm the wetland.

If you're El Nino, I'm the solitary flicker

swooping to perch on the madrone's scorched bark.

KB BALLENTINE

[BIO](#)

Ravaged

Yesterday's rain pummeled greening fields,
fists of irises, tulips now petaled on the ground.

Delta waters tip their banks, level yards
and neighborhoods with cloudy currents.

Swollen cows drift down streets, boats skim
attic eaves. Debris girdles posts and cars,

hollows walls, lives.

But this morning roses still pink the thorns, birches
silver the lightening sky. Robins flute the chilled air.

Mist hovers over the lake, mounting sun an echo in orange.

JULIE BROOKS BARBOUR
[BIO](#)

Starlings

While I rock my daughter to sleep,
fledglings try their wings
on the other side of the window,

flapping up and down so crookedly
it's as if they were on strings.
The phone rings. The timer dings.

The old desires rise up:
dancing, laughter, familiar faces from my youth.
I rock them to sleep with the baby,

back and forth, ignoring the phone,
the supper in the oven.
Let it all burn.

The young birds outside are learning
to light on tree branches and shoot toward
the clouds. The baby sighs and shifts

into slumber. I put myself at ease
admiring the birds' black feathers
as the sun shimmers them green.

JESSICA BARKSDALE
[BIO](#)

Bedtime Story

As I write the words
protest, obstructing and *battery*,
a slick black raven
flaps to the lowest
limb of the half dead
cypress and begins to
pluck clean a baby robin.

If I weren't on the phone
with a legal aide,
I would be more upset.
I might think *raven murderer*
and then laugh a dark little laugh,
thinking *we need more than one raven*
to make a murder.

The aide talks on.
My son has been bused to Santa Rita jail,
where the real criminals go,
that barbed wire-protected concrete block
I used to pass by in my 1968 Volkswagen
on my way to teach English,
my two little boys and first husband
back at home reading bedtime stories.

The raven one, two, three
stabs the limp body,
feathers flying.
Even behind the window glass,
I hear the *bop bop bop*
of his hard bill as he hits
branch through flesh.
My son is in a big box jail,
visitors from eight till noon.
I write *lawyer, Tuesday,*
arraignment.

If I were outside, I'd yell and scream
until the raven flew off.
I'd sweep the feathers
from the patio. But no matter what,
the chick would still be dead.

LORI BECHERER

[BIO](#)

The Order Of Things

A clearwing bee moth flurries
across a flourishing buddleia
as a Monarch nervously flits
the perimeter. I stumble through
my garden, camera and tripod in hand,
like a damn fool that's never seen
bug nor bird nor beast;
while somewhere a scope is anchored
on me and my silly antics
as I futilely migrate from task to task
in my restricted habitat;
a peculiar specimen.

Red Oak Sunrise

October sun massages my shoulders as the chilled air bites my ears. Staring into the amber crest of a distant tree line, I recall venturing on woodland hikes with my mother and younger sisters on the sunny, brisk autumn days of childhood. I was raised in the Illinois heartland on a farm flanked with twenty acres of timber. Donning my fluorescent orange backpack and filling my canteen for a long walk was a sign of the season. The backpack served as a carry-all for perfectly formed fallen leaves, colorful small pebbles from the creek, an occasional lost feather and always a red oak branch thickly adorned with small-capped acorns. Those walks have fostered my lifelong respect of nature, both in form and in practice.

After we were packed and ready for an expedition, the first steps on the journey required crawling under a barbed-wire pasture fence and tromping down the gritty strip-mined hills that led the way to the woods. The land had been mined of its coal in the early forties. A fine shale salted the manmade hills intermingled with upturned fossil fragments and sandstone heaved from deep beneath the land. Miniscule shells and lost lake creatures lay entombed in plain rocks

from the flatland of Illinois. Grey ashy residue from blasted stone and collected coal washed the stark hillsides; white and black in its natural form. Young cedars peppered the area, but the mature woods lay farther ahead where man had not scathed the earth.

We meandered down the hills that rolled toward thick pasture. My big feet tangled through the tall fescue that grew too ample for even the Herefords to manage. Our temperamental black bull stood perched on a nearby ridge, watching me stumble through his domain. I tauntingly hollered, “Yaw!” or some other confident bellow. He ignored me, but I made sure he knew I was not afraid.

Soon we crossed over our creek that ran north and south through the core of the woods. The creek bed exposed itself in autumn, displaying deep crackled clay from an absence of late summer rain. A blanket of freshly fallen leaves, not yet matted into the earth by the mellow rains of November, rolled in the dry breeze. The face of the creek had changed in comparison to the hot summer days when my sister Sharon and I sloshed through its murky waters to keep cool. My youngest sister, Jeri, clung close to Mom as we walked past the “big bad tree”; a cockspur hawthorn encrusted with two inch gouging needles. She developed a tremendous fear for the tree, which she still carries today, because Sharon and I taunted her about its evil power and instigated trouble in her mind. The prickly branches hung low as it bared itself for the impending winter stance.

Our Rat Terrier, Rascal, tugged me forward on his green nylon leash snorting out nature’s path like a hound on a hot trail. Upon arrival deep into the timber, we stood surrounded in all directions by a familiar and comforting view. The rich colors of the changing leaves flooded the woodland; opalescent mustard with a fiery glow, the rich popping red of boiled cranberries and the ample orange and brown of pumpkins and chocolate. It was there in the depth where Mother led us, where we dared not venture on our own. Crispy leaves crunched and churned under our feet disrupting the hushed echoes of the solemn afternoon. The racket we imposed onto the day unnerved me and I sought solitude that I could not find. Rascal wriggled deep into a burrow as Mom ordered him back to topside before he latched onto something or before something latched onto him. His fearlessness impressed me. Rascal simply followed his inherent instinct to hunt; Dad taught me that important aspect about the balance of nature.

We finally arrived at our destination; a stately red oak with oversized limbs reaching to shade us on an eastern slope. The oak once had a companion tree standing tight at its west side, forcing the branches to grow in one direction and crowding their ability to reach to the warm sunsets. The shadow tree had long since died and the huge red oak remained with limbs stretching only to the sunrise, greeting each new day into its arms. There we dropped our cotton blanket and ate summer-sausage sandwiches on fresh white bread with butter and salty potato chips. Sitting under the massive and protective limbs of the oak, we somehow completed the lonely tree as we filled its shade with love and laughter on those enchanting afternoons.

My mind trails back to those journeys; gathering gifts provided by the dense woods, seeking comfort in my own hollow and never knowing the world outside of my own clutch.

KIMBERLY L. BECKERBIO**At Walasiyi**

Finally here but the view is ruined:
 thick fog packs the wound of the divide
 The frog in your throat of uncried tears
 Aganunitsi found not what he'd been seeking
 but something else Isn't that the way it is?
 Sometimes on the way to find one thing
 we discover something else more rare

Sweat prickles and trickles your salted skin
 Your glasses fog with steam, blocking your vision
 All that blindness in your family may soon
 enough be your fate as well Fate? How quaint
 You could ditch the car and walk the Trail
 You'd be gone a thousand miles You'd be gone
 They'd find the bones No not that Trail, this one

Build no booths but don't walk away just yet
 If you can stand it, stay at the gap
 this halfway mark, this in-between, this pass
 You've made it this far Rest a moment in arrival
 At the noon of your decision this gauze
 of fog will be unbound will set you free
 from what you thought you would fear most

Like the time in the oxygen tent when
 your hair was plastered like bandages in the damp
 Stay Stay in the denseness Stay at the gap
 Don't forge ahead just yet Don't rush Don't go
 Now steam rises like ghosts from the asphalt
 (asphalia: you've always wanted certainty)
 Now the fog burns off You can see how far you've come

The Uktena has been vanquished farther on
Here only the bear comes close to assess
your intent You both stand, appraising
the other You make yourself bigger
The bear backs off It could have easily
gone the other way and ended in blood
Now you know what it is you have to do

LYTTON BELL

[BIO](#)

Don't Say Desperation is Unlovely

Can anything match the generosity
even in cruelty, of these woods?
Every surface covered, crawling
The forest never says: I like you, but not YOU

It spreads itself open and cries out
Come on, if you have the guts
There's enough here for everyone
and it's not always beautiful
but it is always beautiful
blossom and thorn, carcass
and creature, in equal measure

Have you ever cried for the exquisiteness of
the perfectly ripe wild cherry
that falls to the ground, splits open –
glistening fruit that would taste
all the sweeter for its hint of decay –
but it will never be eaten
will rot here
though it gave its life for the taking?

What about the withering flower
twice as vibrant for its dying
pushing out everything in one last
gasp of color, bright, shriveled, tenuous?

Birds, cats, squirrels, spiders
run to me, follow me
scent of decomposition and fragrance
of untamed mouths opening
wide, breeze of wild breath
I'm surrounded and filled by hunger
The roots of the trees reach up to my shoe soles
The dirt of the path coats me, clings to me

purity of absolute, unanswered yearning
unsatisfied till I surrender willingly
or am taken
whole where I stand

The Irony of a Meat-Eating Plant

God help me
I have lived a life
of hollow things
of fallen logs' decay
cicada's brittle husk
Form is never substance

When you came, I felt it
the sudden, subtle flutter
My quickening

Each beat of your heart
shakes every atom
of my frame

Can it be that I am real?
I breathe what you exhale
I weep nectar sticky as glue
My roots grip the hard ground
My skin, a moist and hungry
carnivorous flower
closes over you

Spring Fever

In like a lamb these breezes sweep
right up your skirt, displaying your pink panties
You are pleased
Passing by the golf course, you think
how golf is all about sticks and balls and holes
and long shots

And let's not even mention the college lad
at the bus stop with the baseball cap on backwards
the one who won't stop smiling
Dear God! You pray, please keep
my dumb ass and my hard, hard
nipples out of the seasonal coatroom
at this annual beer and fertility fest
Spring
is coming like a frat boy

ANN BEMAN

[BIO](#)

Dune Complex

If you lie in the saddle between two dunes, day pack propping your head, sarong shrouding you knee to crown, you can imagine feeling the Earth's movement around her axis. It helps if you close your eyes and if there's a breeze, which there almost always is. Think of yourself on a carousel horse, or better, a carousel camel. Don't think of the grotesque expression on the merry-go-round creature's face. Stop when you get dizzy.

January. We should be skiing Eastern Sierra powder, but everything's all catawampus. It feels more like Australian January to my husband and me. But not to Christine, Marc's mother. We've brought her into the desert to camp and to hike to a dune complex at the north end of Panamint Valley, one of two geologic basins that make up Death Valley National Park. Until only a few minutes ago, Christine was dressed for an Arctic expedition: puffy down jacket, black gloves, a tasseled ski beanie, scarf.

Born in Belgium, Marc's mother emigrated during World War II to Venezuela. She attended boarding school and college, then married and had children in the United States, subsequently moving with her fledgling family to Canada. After seventeen years in Edmonton, Alberta, she divorced Marc's father, took a teaching job in Libya, eventually married a fellow teacher, and moved to North Queensland, Australia. The second marriage didn't stick, but Australia did. Christine's been settled Down Under for twenty years.

We hike three-plus miles through creosote-brushy desert flats toward the Panamint Dunes, our shadows migrating with the sun shifting in the mid-winter sky. In response, we shift our turquoise paper parasols accordingly. Like many useful things these days, the parasols were made in China, their bones a delicate wooden construction, sewn and

bound with gossamer nylon twine, the handle a sturdy bamboo, smooth to grip.

Our movement is steady, as we have only to negotiate the scattered tufts of desert vegetation. We pause to note shards of green and pink and grey rock from the striated Panamint, Cottonwood, and Nelson mountain ranges rimming the dunes. Eroded from nearby canyons and washes, these shards will erode further, become sand, perhaps sand dune. Lifting our gazes, even with rugged ridges framing our right-now world, we can see for miles.

This is nothing like yesterday, the three of us wandering among black, Suess-like basalt forms, our progress and our horizon line continually interrupted with columns and walls, knobs and hollows. En route to Death Valley, we had detoured to Fossil Falls, which formed when the Owens River was dammed by an eruption and cascaded over the basalt flows. The water's gone now. Desert.

The sagey scent of salt bush drifted about us as we explored Fossil Falls, meandering up and over volcanic rock sculpted and polished by the antediluvian lake's overflow. Our quest: Find the spot where Native American bands chipped obsidian to manufacture tools and weapons. These roving Coso people would mine the black glass from the nearby Coso Mountains, transport it to Fossil Falls, and trade it with other tribes as far away as Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. When we finally tripped upon the spot, glassy black scatters of obsidian waste flakes littered the ground, sparkling, catching the mid-winter sun. Prehistoric rock carvings marked an adjacent boulder. Bighorn sheep, strange sun-reminiscent shapes, weird four-leafed clover patterns, and snake-like waves decorated the prominent wall, possibly the ancients' version of the billboards posted along Highway 395: Eat here, sleep here, bighorn here.

Indeed we did eat at Fossil Falls, picnicking on sandwiches from a well-billboarded Subway shop on 395. But to sleep, we chose Panamint Springs Resort, a gas station/restaurant and motel/campground complex within view of the next day's sandy destination.

One or two snowbirds had chugged their bus-sized RVs into the campground, but mostly, it lay quiet and empty. As we pitched camp, guylining our tents to rocks, bolstering the structures against the wind, we noticed a preschooler's shoes and socks, forgotten on a boulder. The socks were sandy, creased, and stiff, as if they had been wet and were set here to dry. The water's gone now. The shoes and socks, deserted.

We too deserted the forlorn footwear as the sky darkened and we shuffled across the road for beer and pizza. When we returned, our grocery bag had been knocked askew on the campsite's picnic table. Later, we would see the petite, gray-coated kit fox attempt to come back for more. Later still, we would realize that Ears, as we called him, had made off with an entire bag of bagels. I hoped Ears wouldn't eat them all at once. Kit foxes are tiny, weighing no more than 6 pounds. Their enormous ears help them lower their body temperatures. What's more, they're non-migratory. Just like bagels.

Sand dunes, on the other hand, they migrate. For dunes to exist, you must have sand, prevailing winds to move your sand, and a place for your sand to gather. Sand moves up slope, then slumps down the slip face until it crests, having reached the angle of repose. It crests when it's so steep that it collapses under its own weight. Sand avalanches down the slip face, the process repeating, repeating, and repeating. Dunes roll like oceans. Imagine their desert-colored waves.

When Marc, Christine, and I finally reach the Panamint Dunes, we have gained more elevation than we expect. Our silver Toyota truck is but a speck beyond and below. As I run along the ridge of a nearby crest, I can hear the muffled roar of the sand collapsing down the slip face beneath my feet. Marc and his mother remain on the first dune. They watch, smiling at me, silence between them, wind chattering the parasols at their shoulders.

CAROL BERG

[BIO](#)

The Woman's Chant to the Moon

Let me illuminate the comet's wish
 the asteroid's complaint, the corona's
 heartache. Let not some sexy
 constellation propel me into supernova
 heat. Let the harmonics of each planet
 sing within me. Let me keep my occultation
 tempered with revelation. Let my dark
 half know the lick of joy. Let me not struggle
 against tide's tug. Let me resolve to follow
 my own celestial rotation.

Self Portrait with Nude Moon

How does desire know
 to swirl in such an aching

darkness? The *Mare*
Tranquillitatis holding kisses

of spirals, of seaglass.
 Spidery blue veins riding

the moon's surface.
 How open her hewn

craters. How her spectral
 ribbons ripple

along her creamy back.
 How I paint myself

in among the dizzy
stars and with them,

stroke her murmuring
sidereal whorls.

The Gray Fox In My Father's Yard

In this heat I am constantly
panting and the furious flies find
the inside of my ears. The sky flaps
its wings, cicadas hum.
In my gullet are the chicken's
feet I plucked. In my cheek's
I carry the still warm eggs, careful
not to crack before I reach my pups,
hidden in his yard. I chose this as home,
although I do not do this for you, Daughter,
who cannot stand the way this house
decays without your mother's careful
hands to clean. I know how many days he spends
inside. I will be the something he needs, since you
cannot. I will be the something he feeds,
the something he knows will return.

DENISE BERGMAN[BIO](#)**Inside Their Migration**

Inside their migration before *en masse* they took off
 I was their rest stop, grounding, belvedere.
 Bone-bare branches scratching the roof
 suddenly leafed with black chattering starlings.
 The light must have slanted just so on the window
 reflecting them thousandfold back on themselves.
 Pinpoint-eyes darting, bodies waddling, heads
 cocked and wings rustling and humming—
 time to move on, whisper, murmur, thousands
 thousands, not me.

Parallel on a Toklat Trail

Timing is everything

and what precision
 to come upon the licked-clean rungs of a ribcage

rank smell of appetite,
 dangling snags of flesh too tough to trouble with
 too mere to pull, to snap from the bone

The caribou's back an arc of torn tawny skin,
 its limbs twisted in bramble, head sulking in mud

Pods of scat crossing our trail still soft:
were our footsteps a warning? pups nearby?

You'll never see a wolf here, they said,
reclusive and few but an hour later, three
pace beside us along the riverbed

not fast or slow, just on their way, parallel,
coats tinged pink

while in the cave of carcass left behind,
the heart of coincidence beating

ELIZABETH BERNAYSBIO**Caterpillar Story**

“Look here, Bub,” I called, “a whole lot of them. Fantastic, we might get all we need here!”

I was with my newfound companion, Sam, collecting woolly bear caterpillars in southern Arizona. It was mid September, and peak season. Being early morning, the woolly caterpillars were sunning themselves at the tops of bushes. As an entomologist, I knew that later they would be crawling around near the ground, searching for their favorite small food plants, and then they would be much more difficult to find. This was the hour.

Sam pushed through the undergrowth to see, and her familiar voice rang out as loud as ever—“They’s what you wanna get a hundred of? They’s big ass bugs. Geez, do I need to touch the suckers? Look at this one crapping on his self.” She looked at me with her bright eyes wide, “Can’t do it, Babe.”

I took out a few vials from my pack, removed the cork from one of them and gently edged a caterpillar into the vial with one finger. Replacing the cork, I held it up for us to look at.

“See—easy.” As I worked, Sam observed and quietly began to collect her own specimens. “I’s a scientist too now, hey?”

“Well, I’m lucky to have your help.”

“It’s real *naarce* out here Babe.”

It had taken me some time to get used to the loud voice with a strong nasal accent, single syllables becoming two, new words and phrases. She talked about work in stain glass, woofing down food, that religious politicians should be shutted up (or maybe it was shuttered up). But Sam fascinated. She was smart and funny, and though she spoke in a way my mother would have despised.

From time to time I heard a loud, “*Sons of bitches*,” or “*Fuck*” as Sam searched. She had encountered a spiny plant, an unexpected grasshopper, a spider, or a stick vaguely resembling a snake. For me the work was automatic. How often had I collected insects of one sort or another: setting up experiments, beginning a laboratory culture. I think of racing over the outback plains

collecting Australian plague locusts in a net flying behind the Land Rover; wandering in Saharan Mali, searching for the grasshoppers seen with radar the night before.

We came across big numbers of caterpillars that were already down from their roosts and running around on the ground. “Geez Babe, they’s haulin’ ass over here!”

Sam’s interest in helping began to flag, or perhaps she was getting tired in the heat. And it was, after all, our first trip together into the field.

“Break time,” I called, as I fished sandwiches out of my pack.

“What’s that crap?”

“Havarti cheese and spinach on multigrain.”

“Oh *Garwd*, foo-foo food—I don’t need it Babe.”

I smiled. She was like a child in some ways and so smart in others.

We were silent for a while as we sat under the shade of a mesquite tree and a Mexican jay scrabbled noisily in an oak up the hill, but Sam is not the quiet type. As I ate, I heard about her adoption, childhood in Texas, and photography with the fire department in Dallas. I lay back in the grass and watched small puffy white clouds rushing past the feathery leaves above me. They reminded me of my childhood in Australia—summer days spent lying under the jacaranda tree in our back garden with the same little white puffs against the same deep blue.

Eventually, hunger got the better of Sam—“Give me a bit of that bread crap Babe.”

She ate warily, spitting out the larger grains, but she suddenly burst into a fit of coughing. I did the usual things—bang on the back, water to drink—but it took some minutes before she could answer my “Gone down the wrong way, Bub?”

“*Fuck*, that’s what happens—bits get stuck at the back on my hangy-down guy.”

We lay back again in the long grass.

“This woolly bear we’ve been getting is amazing you know,” I said. “The caterpillars eat these poisonous plants and pick up the chemical for themselves so that predators don’t eat them.”

“Cool.”

“Yes, and it’s even better than that—when the moths mate, the dad gives his toxic stuff to the mom so she can put them into her eggs and protect them too.” I wasn’t sure she cared much, so I pulled my last card. “And guess what, the same chemicals are used by the male to make a scent that excites the females to have sex with him.”

“You work on that? Geez! I did tell Judy I was going out to get caterpillars with you, and do *field* crap, but are you going to study sex or what? Do they have weenies?”

“Well, the sex story is more or less worked out, and now there is a guy in North Carolina who is concentrating on that. I will send him and his students some eggs when we get the next lot.”

We rested in silence for a while. Sam was the first to speak. “Well, what you gonna do with these guys?”

“You’ll see, if you want to come up to my lab in a couple of days.”

“Oh you clever little sarcophilous, sincopsy.”

I wasn’t exactly sure where to take her next. I sensed her attention wavering as she flicked small flies from her arm and face and started on her third bottle of water. She had already warned me she had ADHD and I decided to leave it at that for the time being. And just the day before, after I had tried to explain my experiments on grasshoppers, she had said, “OK good, you just get on with your shit while I watch the Ellen DeGeneres show.” She called all my work shit, whether it was science or reading for classes or working on an essay, and I quickly realized it was not a pejorative, but in some sense an affectionate expression of my interest in all the things she didn’t share.

We met at a support group eight weeks before the field-collecting trip—people who had lost partners exchanged experiences and there was something that appealed to me about Sam. Looking back I think it was just the intensity of her emotions, most closely matching mine on that day. I asked her to come for coffee and discovered she didn’t drink coffee, tea, alcohol, fruit juice or soda.

For some minutes we had nothing to say.

“Where are you from?” I asked eventually.

“Texas—Dallas, and you? You got a weird accent.”

And I found myself where I often was, “Oh well, I am Australian really but lived in England for twenty years. Been in the States since 1983—hybrid.”

We were looking each other over. Sam is about my height, has a boyish figure, fine brown skin, very bright dark eyes and black buzz cut. She certainly doesn’t look her fifty years. She didn’t smile that night, but she has one of those smiles that lights up a face like magic. Seeing her that evening with an evident ache in her heart made me, with my own deep ache, feel close. But I didn’t foresee that we would pair up later and come to love one another.

We parted that evening with awkward goodbyes. Everything about us seemed opposite. She said she had been a freelance photojournalist but dropped out of school in seventh grade. She had never worked for an organization, had a regular job, or been responsible to anyone. She told me in what I now knew to be a Texan accent, “And you know I was stoned outa my mind for years and years.”

Sam was adopted by a couple not given to minding if she skipped school. Her birth mother was a slut she told me, and her biological father unknown. Her siblings, when she tracked them down, were in one form of trouble or another, the boys in jail. By contrast, I had a family history of pioneers in Australia, a family with a dreadfully strong sense of class superiority. Sam’s interests involved sports and news, bowling, fishing, and animal shows on TV. And there was I, a professor, nerd, a traveled culture seeker, and certainly uninformed about the things that made up Sam’s life. And much older. That night, I thought about her and our different lives, but didn’t envisage any impact on my desolation.

Sam had been surprised and flattered to be invited out into the field, and it had been an adventure—certainly a novelty. But she was pleased to get home without encountering snakes or biting insects or bees or any other danger in the unknown world. She did complain of scratches and inexplicable red dots on her skin, and felt sure she had worse allergy problems, but she had a whole lot of stories she would exaggerate about me, the *doctor-doctor*, and field adventures to tell the folks where she lived—people whose lives

were consumed with casinos, spas, and tidy living in a retirement resort.

I took the caterpillars we had collected back to the laboratory and put each one in a small cup with a block of synthetic diet. Two days later, I brought Sam with me to see the next stage of the work, which was to record how the caterpillars' taste buds responded to particular chemicals. There was one in particular that responded with incredible sensitivity (one in a trillion parts of water) to a group of chemicals called alkaloids—toxic chemicals they take up from plants for their own defense, and they like to eat those plants containing such chemicals.

The new experiment was to complement earlier work indicating that the alkaloids protected the caterpillars from parasitic flies. Could it also be that caterpillars with parasites had greater sensitivity to the alkaloids and make them feed more on alkaloid-containing plants? It was a somewhat wild idea, but that is where biology is such fun—wild ideas sometimes turn out to be true.

So Sam came to help. I prepared caterpillars for testing their taste buds. Each was held in a small water-filled vial with a halter round the neck and head sticking out above.

"See Sam, this stops air getting into the breathing holes down the sides of their bodies, and they get anesthetized."

"Cool."

When the wriggling stopped I could trim the hairs round the taste buds with tiny scissors, set the vial in a clamp with all the thin recording wires ready. Finely machined manipulators reduced my hand's actions to minute movements, and the testing solutions could be brought carefully to the particular taste bud. It becomes routine of course, but for a novice there is a certain amount of awe.

"Babe," Sam insisted, "It's too *small*!"

"You can do it, let's get the eyepieces in the right place for your eyes."

"*Sons of bitches*, there's no way of seeing stuff."

"Look, its only a matter of magnification." I adjusted the focus, "Take a look down here."

"Fuck."

We laughed of course, as she made fun of my ignorance or my knowledge, and our laughter became the important part of our affection for one another. I knew too that she enjoyed telling stories about it all, and about me, to her friends and neighbors back at her resort.

To me she would say, "You little *sarcoptifus*."

"Of course the little electric currents from the taste cell, that indicate sensitivity, are small. It has to be magnified, cleaned up, and examined later with a computer. One hundred spikes per second is a big response, five spikes per second is small and almost impossible to determine against the background noise."

"Yeah Babe, sure."

"Well, you wanted to know."

"It's had it for now, its not like *Animal Planet*."

Every insect that Sam and I had collected was tested with alkaloid solution on the relevant taste bud.

"*Sons of bitches*, what's next?" She said at the end of the first day.

"It will take a few weeks," I said, leaving her to wonder. But she tuned out quickly and regaled me with tales of TV stars. Eventually she realized I was not paying too much attention.

"Hey Babe, do you actually know who Siegfried and Roy are?" And I had to admit that I had no idea.

"What? Not *heard* of them? Ever heard of *Vegas*? Eh, *doctor-doctor*." And she loves to tell people we meet, and people at her resort, how little I know, how I don't watch television, and I don't *know* who Siegfried and Roy are for *fucksake*, and that I am an *opera* freak, a *symphony* freak. She is still figuring out my strange lifestyle without television, minimal *stuff*, old-fashioned house wares,—never mind the total lack of interest in shopping.

I see all these italics, meant to imply emphasis, and that is the way things are. Sam speaks with emphasis as I sit back knowing that I am not going to buy anything, change anything, enter the consumer world. Still, so far she has got me to buy a clock with luminous numbers, a boom box, nightlights, coffeemaker, pruning clippers, lights for the porch, new tires and a new computer.

After testing each caterpillar, I removed it from its watery vial, dried its hairy body with a tissue and placed it on a warm plate to recover “consciousness.” I kept them back in their little cups. I waited to see which ones gave rise to moths and which gave rise to parasites. Individuals that housed fly parasites didn’t make it to the adult, moth stage. Before the caterpillar could even think about getting ready for the change, the flies rapidly completed their maggot lives inside, burrowed out of the caterpillar, leaving just a caterpillar corpse.

For a lot of the time I worked alone. Sam didn’t have the interest to persevere with what it was all about. But it was good to have time to think about the work as I went through my routines. I already knew that the special taste cell that responded so sensitively to the alkaloid could shut down altogether, that feeding for too long on a plant containing high levels of the alkaloid caused a loss of the response. From daylong field observations, my student Mike, and I found that caterpillars foraged actively on the ground all-day and only stayed for modest lengths of time on the alkaloid-bearing plants. Mike’s work later showed that too much of the alkaloid reduced growth of the caterpillar, so the amazing thing to me was that this small insect with so small a brain had the capacity to regulate the amount of alkaloid eaten by controlling the actual taste buds.

I put together the results of my electrophysiological recordings and the parasite history of the caterpillars. It was one of those moments of excitement at the possibilities, impatience to know if parasites made a difference to sensitivity of the taste buds. If they did, it would be such a novelty. Sam doesn’t share this enthusiasm. She looks at me with amazement when I wax passionate about some small biological observation, but she also likes it that I am this way. It’s as if she has her own protégé who has developed a crazy interest—a guide, pleased that her pupil is involved in something.

Well, insects with parasites were much more responsive to the alkaloids and that made them feed more on plants containing them. They would be sensitized in such a way that they would be likely to gorge on alkaloid plants and in this way kill some of the parasites within. In short, it was a change that could enhance self-survival, albeit with a slight reduction in growth rate. Such a

change in taste receptors is not known in humans, and still remains a rather novel idea.

Sam was fascinated, not by the findings but by my responses to them. “Geez Babe, you really get into this shit don’t you?”

“I love it.”

“You so passionate you little *doctor-doctor*, you siphilus, sincopsy.”

In the long haul it is a small finding, but for me it is the bread and butter of being a scientist—finding something new and unexpected, something that will surprise some one.

Sam knows about the published paper. She feels part of the enterprise in some way, but she had no real comment except to say, “I love you Babe, you animated simlotty, boboligoff.”

And I laugh, “I love you too Bub, you little raccoon.”

New caterpillar questions keep coming but I don’t bother to tell Sam. My former students are continuing the research and fascinating a broader audience, but Sam is only marginally interested in my research. On the other hand she has a much quicker grasp than I have of much of the world of technology in which we live. And she makes me laugh with crazy jokes to forget the dark side of my life. Most surprisingly she immediately seizes the meaning of my surreal poems when my colleagues are polite but mystified by them. *Serrilingualis*. Sam is my strange love in the interval before my life ends.

LORRAINE BERRY[BIO](#)**Making Bears Dance**

Ursa Major (the big bear) stealth-rises on the horizon these December nights. My breath condenses in the thirty-degree temperatures as I pull my fleece closer to my body. I crane my neck. No clouds, a nearly full, waxing moon casts copious light, and the Milky Way wafts a trail that invites me to follow it.

If only I could.

Each day, I find a different area to hike. On this new day, my dogs, Hannah the hound and Audrey the terrier, bound ahead of me 100 yards or so, and then circles back. They like to keep me in sight, and it's a joy to watch them off-leash. Bred to tree raccoons, Hannah prefers to chase squirrels, and I laugh to watch the fat, nut-bearing cheeks and the plush tails zip up trees long before she has caught up to them.

Still, she returns to me, tail wagging, pleased with herself. Happy to know that she has done her job. Audrey lets Hannah lead her, but she travels farther off trail long after Hannah has returned. Both dogs wear their hunter's orange vests; the hunters are out for a few more weeks, seeking to bag the bucks that inhabit these woods.

Today, I startled when I saw the one-antlered buck. Whether he lost his other antler in a fight, or he's dropping his antlers ahead of schedule, his lop-sided head made him look vulnerable, but I wondered if it had kept him alive. What hunter wants to display a broken rack on his wall?

I am burdened by writing deadlines and student expectations. Walking soothes my restless head, which, these days, is full of scraps of thoughts for essays I'm in the midst of, or the working out of a lesson plan that will illuminate starlight in my students' heads about how to make a world on paper.

But I'm conscious, as I walk, that I'm accompanied by the things I cannot see. These woods are full of deer, chipmunks, skunks, opossums, mink (who live on the creek banks), coyotes, and bear. Turkey vultures and red-tailed hawks and northern harriers and crows—always crows—dominate the sky, but down here among the thorns of the raspberry bushes, and in the shade of the golden-leafed oaks and the scarlet maples, it's me and my fellow terrestrial beings.

I cannot help but announce my presence: the trees have dropped their leaves, and now their dry skeletons crunch and *shwush* beneath my hiking boots. A few days ago, it rained, and, not paying attention, I slipped and fell: the star-bellied sneech bruise upon my buttock proof of how dangerous the rocks that have been washed up on the creek ravine are. I test each foot fall now, protecting again, the body that has been revealed to me to be fragile.

Mostly though, I've been alert for the bears. They've been sighted within a half-mile of my house, leaving a trail of torn-down birdfeeders in their last attempts to gain weight for a winter that feels as if it is bearing down on us too soon.

I know they're in the woods with me. I've seen their scat, noted the broken brush. I'm not scared. Black bears are generally harmless, unless, of course, you startle them.

Which is why I sing to them. I wear my iPod as I walk. I don't get to hear the crescendo of the waterfall to my left, nor the sounds of acorns cracking down in free-fall through the branches.

Instead, I find myself singing/shouting along to Peter Gabriel's "Shock the Monkey," as I try to jolt myself into something creative to say to this afternoon's students. The shuffle is stuck in the past, and I crow to the black sentinels in the trees:

*Load up on guns
And bring your friends
It's fun to lose
And to pretend
She's over bored*

*And self-assured
Oh no, I know
A dirty word*

But I know who I'm really singing to. Black bears are shy, and unless you surprise them, you won't see them. I would love nothing more than to encounter a black bear on my solitary hikes into the woods, but I'm smart enough to know that would place the bear in a defensive position. God forbid I ever give the idiots around here cause to come shoot a bear. It's my job to warn them of my presence, so they can get out of my way.

Thus, the singing. Off-key, too loud, who cares. It's just me and the bears, now singing another of my favorites:

*I will buy you a garden
Where your flowers can bloom
I will buy you a new car
Perfect, shiny and new
I will buy you that big house
Way up in the West Hills
I will buy you a new life
Yes, I will*

The irony isn't lost on me. Here I am, serenading bears. The writer who struggles with her words. The writer who longs to write the near-perfect sentence. The writer, who wishes sometimes, that she could stay in the woods until the madness outside stops.

That other quotation, the one that's never far from my mind, comes into view. I can quote it verbatim these days, and I say it now, for the benefit of the bears, and hope that they understand.

For none of us can ever express the exact measure of his needs or his thoughts or his sorrows; and human speech is like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars. (Gustav Flaubert)

BONNIE BISHOP

BIO

East Point

Like a massive fist,
this granite headland
lumps up out of the waves,
on its knuckles a pelt
of tall grass, tansy,
and pink pasture rose.

A bronze compass,
set into the summit's
slant outcropping,
claims the center
of the visible world
whose circumference
is three quarters sea.

A long stone finger points
northeast to Egg Rock,
the masts of Marblehead,
the stacks of Salem, blue
and faraway Cape Ann.

Short Beach

The falling tide leaves sheets
of light, sand silvered to sheen

where beak to beak,
gull and reflection of gull
connect at the most extended point,
quivering mirror, twinned bird;

yet singular, their hurried
hieroglyphic prints, chaotic,
nearly legible.

I too might bow down,
peck at my reflection,
savor its salt, but

turning see instead
a trail of question marks:
heel, ball pad, toes
and emptiness of arch.

Following the Osprey

I set out in the little boat,
the mist rising from the pond
wraithlike, aimless, my kindred.

When I round a point, he falls
from a tall pine, swoops
across my path, carves an arc

to the far shore. I follow.
He loops back to light
on a dead tree limb.

Giddy with purpose,
I follow again, pushing through
a plethora of water lilies.

I glide to a stop below him,
morning's minion, power and
glory profiled against heaven.

Center of the universe,
he swivels his head in slow
survey; I am not worth

noticing. At last he speaks:
creee, creee, creee!
and accompanied by alarms

of crow and jay, plummetts,
ascends, veers off, heading
straight for the invisible world.

SHEILA BLACKBIO**Expiration Date**

This is the season to recommit ourselves
 to making grow what we can. The soil is packed
 hard; we break a sweat trying to prepare it
 for the seeds, we stab holes into the
 dirt and each time we drop one in
 faith seems slighter even than mustard seed.
 More like the blown head of the dandelion,
 which bends down and gives its all. This is
 the season for giving up the stories we
 have repeated through the long dark of who
 did what to who. What would be a world
 without history? It would be this patch of
 yard, scraped by March wind and rain,
 bare and nascent. Already the crickets are
 arriving from their birth-beds under the earth,
 The grackles have claimed this patch as their
 own. The small wars now in abeyance stirring
 again among the silent, the meek. I know we
 will miss the first blooming, but I mark it
 for you here, on this page. Look, you wake
 into the world, and the trees are all adorned.
 If this is not for you, then who is it for?

Osier Willow

(for Melissa)

I.

Lock-box, scorched earth. The osier willows by the silver-ribbon
 creek. It is bones, the pain of labor, a dry bed. I saw a thorn pushed
 through a seed. I saw a shoot break through a dry husk. The body of
 the woman lifted up and cracked open Osier. I am tired of this dream
 of creek. The willows on the banks bared, essential. Colors of bruises.
 Colors of sunset. I saw a woman laid facedown in the water, her hair
 shifting around her

I saw my blood threaded in the water, the tender shapes of bodies.
The dead are not like stones. We lift them up and their stillness
speaks to us. We can hardly bear to contemplate what they have to
say. Osier willow curved along the dry bed like ribs, like the naked
ribs of women peeled of flesh.

2.

Driving Highway 86 in Northeast Oregon, Joseph to Enterprise, then
higher to Flora, where even the schoolhouse has buckled in on itself,
the pressure of that emptiness. The story goes the Nez Perce when
driven out, forced to walk the Snake along Hell's Canyon, follow the
ribbon of the river ever deeper into strange Idaho, left pieces of
themselves behind. Their voices. Shook rattles of elk hide and gut,
feathers of jay, magpie, eagle.

Trailed their blood, wiped their spit on the leaves of the berry bushes,
wove their footprints into the trails of the Walla-Walla so that now,
driving below Joseph, through Halfway, and up through Cornucopia,
you hear them.

You hear them in the bones of the osier, in the metal-bright motion
of the creek beds.

One of those weird things where a sound can become a kind of light.

Or a kind of motion, a color, even a taste: their voices sour-bright
like the new leaves of the world when the world was young.

Hear them and what you think of is fever.

When as a child you woke out of fever and there was a walking you
heard in the hallway, say where your parents' door was shut, or from
the bathroom. That silver square of mirror, flickering with the light
of the tiles.

Or the backdoor, the place where you put out the garbage.

Dog running just beyond the corner of your eye so later,
if someone asks, you know what the shape was, but you can't
describe it. Dark with four legs. A tail. Or just eyes. That green-
and-yellow.

3.

On the road to John Day before the Dunkin Donuts and
the mini-mall shadowed by the hills.

Where the fossils are of the nameless mammals,
A little like dogs, says the guide, but not the dogs we know.

Hearing them like seeing a wind movie like someone
walking, ruffling the leaves like grouse feathers.

Or stirring the monkey flowers that push up violet and yellow
between
the moist clanking stones,

or the metal of the river, the way in the sun the water can
seem so hard and bright.

What do they tell you? Gone.

4.

The time we stopped the car to drink water and eat
stale crackers and cheese, I felt them in my head.

They were calling in the sougning of the osier
They were saying, Come here back, come here back

so like a child with fever I had a dream that I would run.

This was the scene: Highway with its even lines like yellow thread, a crumpled light where someone had left a half-empty soda can on the log of a ponderosa pine,

cool and gleaming in the eye.

And the needles made a rasping noise under my feet.

And in the creek I heard someone.

In the air that ponderosa smell of vanilla and
ripe cantaloupe

So that the body you saw in your head was like melon
rough and ripe.

But the creek was harder and the willows like teeth
reaching up to the sky.

And in the quicksilver running I heard,
Come here back, come here back.

Some people say it is like the laughter of children.

You turn your head and you can't hear it anymore
It is gone. It is what is gone.

Nothing but the road's dull leaking surface.

And the whispering grass and the babbling creek.

The streaked branches of the osier,
which look dead but are alive as anything.

SUSAN T. BLAKE

[BIO](#)

Shadow Song

I walked a trail at dawn
When the shadows were long
A low bump cast
A tall shadow
Spotted tree frog beside the path
I knelt to say Good Morning
He responded with a song
From my angle he was still
But the shadow of his throat
Vibrated in the dawn
As if it were his shadow singing

GLORIA BLETTER

BIO

Tracking

The mountain breathed, heaved up
dark rough caves,
rubbed itself into
crystal shinings and dullings,
hidden petroglyphs.

The wind moved along the path,
traced a field mouse,
riffled the hairs on her arched back
found by a silent unseen owl—
her tiny bones a delicacy.

When you have mastered
scat, straddle and stride lengths,
have walked in their steps and scents,
have seen heaps of fur and festers,
and do not recoil
at skeletons, snakes or prey unraveled,

you will find the twinkling lights
within the earth, touch its scattered bones,
come home, as shiny stones.

You will know which way
the mountain breathed,
the wind moved.

At Ginny's in the Poconos

We were unfinished
the young buck and I
(or at least I wanted
more)
Of seeing him raise
his stub-horned head
round brown eyes
checking me out.

Making note of my unmoving gaze
he returned to grazing
on the smidges of wildflowers—
survivors of the mower's blade—
While ambling, ever so slowly,
towards the dark woods.

I wanted to follow him,
to know the hollowed-out place
where he rested,
all four legs hunched beneath,
And to sleep with him,
curled around
his taut but soft body
with its new spotless hair
and hide.

Evening Gown

Not quite a woman,
perhaps a stately statue
wearing a long lacy skirt
hiding parts of her bark
with mottled gray-green
ruffled lichens and flash-green moss.

She has gathered the waist
of her skirt; it embraces
her where her low limbs grow,
outstretched, fruitless,
their skyward sides catch
the soft snow dust
like half-evening gloves
clothing her arms, exposing twig fingers—
her branches whitening the darkening sky.

NORA BOXER

[BIO](#)

Ursa Minor

for the young bear killed by a hit-and-run driver, Woodstock, New York, July 2010

why is it that night always pierces through the center of everything

like a table spattered with paint
the blank space patched by stars and
the same poem running through downed wires
her body a garment of space
her body a garment of night

nightbirds were dreaming
age threading the muscles
and you were
walking,
Ursa minor

berries under the thin rain moon

our fear of your
strangeness
your furred foraging sadness

I wake to drought again
and voices surrounding your death

and your body laid for days
weeks and
they took your skull and
insects vultures
humans took your skull

let me feed you a rope
made of luminous passage
claw up it til the starlight holds your weight

Ursa Minor,
and your sad mother's own
fasting roadside heart

claw up it til you rise like the skies
leave us
for a heart of space

KATHLEEN R. BROKKE

[BIO](#)

Why butterflies and dragonflies dance in midair

I live in what was once known as the Red River valley tallgrass prairie in North Dakota. Now, with fewer than one percent of a prairie that still exists in our region due to urbanization and agriculture, I continue to look for remnants of native plants, which once covered this entire region in various sizes, shapes, colors, and fragrance. Fortunately, I know of a few areas where I can still find remnants of our native plants. Though I am trying to recreate a minuscule portion of the prairie in our yard, I always enjoy even more finding and photographing native plants still growing in their natural habitats. I enjoy this particularly in the spring after many months of winter's dormancy for plants and a few of us in this northern region. Then, partly to escape the confines of our city as a form of retreat, I drive to an area where I, as a child, had wandered daily among the hills and river bottom land of the Sheyenne River valley. This is an area I not only love but once knew well. A return to my childhood haunts always replenishes my sense of well being for not only myself but for how I perceive the chaotic world around me. What I see, hear, even smell, and experience as I walk again in the river valley among the native plants, shrubs, and trees helps me to regain an inner calm and sense of well-being I sometimes lose in the daily busyness of my life. What are some of these native plants that still exist in their natural setting? I invite you along as I walk again in an area that I love.

Before I enter the valley, I park my vehicle off of the road near a hillside and walk along the side of a hill. Lilac, small cup-like flowers grouped in small blooming communities grow so close to the ground that one has to be careful where he or she steps. If one glances across the hilly landscape in the slanting rays of an afternoon sun, one is surprised to see multitudes of these colorful, velvety clumps across several slopes. One of the first native plants to bloom in spring, the pasque flower, *Anemone patens*, blossoms prolifically on the surrounding hillsides, which cradle the valley. The inner golden deep yellow stamens are enclosed by the velvet, lilac cupped petals, which seem to protect the gold brilliance of the stamens. On a warm day,

the petals open wide to welcome the rays of the sun and entice early insects. The Dakota Native Americans and early Euro-American settlers loved this humble flower and it is probably one of the most recognized native flowers that still exists.

When I walk down into the valley, sometimes slipping and sliding on the lightly snow covered hillside in late April, I always look for a bold yellow splash of color along the edge of a spring-fed, rapid water flowing creek. Now in a slight mini blizzard, I spy the cheeky marsh marigold, *Clatba pulustrus*, which seemed emboldened as snowflakes fell thickly around me. On closer inspection, I noticed its kidney-shaped leaves hugged the earth as the cheerful buttercup flowers mimic the color of the sun. I always bring my camera for photographing native plants but the picture in my mind is much clearer than what the photo later produced. People and cattle enjoy munching on its leaves as a delicacy, similar to a spinach taste when cooked, but I enjoyed its cheerful appearance left in its natural state. Even as the continued snowfall claimed another reminder of winter, the native marigold appeared to welcome not only me but the future of summer. On a different trip in late July, I returned to the same area to explore the creek to view wetland plants. In a marshy area where the marigolds once bloomed and we once panicked as children when the deep mud held our bare feet in a deep, deceptive suction, a green mass of five feet topped by a purple mist of flowers stood. Hovering over this fragrant purple haze, a variety of colorful butterflies floated and pirouetted in midair grace. Small and large bees buzzed busily in their midst. On closer inspection, I discovered it was Joe-pye weed, *Eupatorium maculatum*. Its common name belied its beauty and magnificence. As I intruded to photograph the misty purple cloud, the entranced waltzing butterflies and enraptured bees barely noticed me. Then, carefully and quietly, I slipped away.

This turned into a beautiful, warm day to wade down the ice-cold creek. Traversing slowly and carefully the winding bends of the creek, I gained a healthy respect for the ingenuity of native plants. Behind a tree, in five feet solitude but statuesque stance, stood another Joe-pye weed. Fortunate for the plant, I had never spotted it when walking on the path that followed the curves of the creek in the park. Hidden, the plant's survival rate increased since other people, upon seeing it, might be tempted to pluck it and carry it home. As for now, the flower remained rooted and bloomed for all

wildlife and me to enjoy. Other streamside wildflowers – the yellow spotted jewel weed, *Impatiens biflora*, white Queen Ann's lace, *Daucus carota*, and golden Alexander, *Zizia aurea*, intermingled in perfume to lend the air a heavy, sweet fragrance. They offered others sustenance. For instance, a black swallowtail caterpillar lunched on the Queen Ann lace's leaves. Methodically, lady beetles shortened a string of aphids on a wild raspberry bush for their lunch. A napping family of wild turkeys spooked awake at the sound of my feet slipping on the mossy rocks in the water. Frightened they fled, while I jumped, equally startled at the noise of their flight, watched their frantic retreat, quieted my rapidly beating heart, collected my thoughts, and sadly walked away as unobtrusively as I could. Finally, alert to the fragrance of the native flowers, the songs of native birds and differing buzzes and whirs of bees and insects, and the kaleidoscope of shades of green intermixed with a variety of colors of flowering plants and fruit, I waded into a new view.

Stepping from the intense cold water and its sandy bottom of the creek into the muddy ooze of the luke- warm river water, I paused and absorbed this sudden change. Scanning the river bank, I saw more white Queens Ann's lace and purple Joe-pye weed. Growing on a shallow rise before the curve of the river, pink swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, the beginnings of golden rod's, *Solidago missouriensis*, the striking purple hoary vervain, *Verbena stricta*, and a massive group of wavy-leaved lavender thistle, *Cirsium undulatum*, flowers grew in regal abundance. I startled a family reunion of goldfinches who banqueted on the multitude of fragrant thistle. This shy crowd cried their alarm and flew into the cover of the elm trees across the river. Following their flight across the river, I noticed what looked like tall balls of airy pink flowers on top of hollow, reed stems.

Still barefoot, I waded across the shallow channel and looked closer. Little starry flowers attached at one point in a ball shape. Later, I discovered its name, flowering rush, *Butomus umbellatus*. A non native plant somehow migrated to our state and adapted readily in this spot. A year later I checked the plant's tenacity and noted it not only survived but claimed its new home in fertile bliss. Just like many of our former residents – Euro-American pioneers and, before them, differing Native American tribes, this plant chose a wonderful location, adapted and stayed for as long as it could. In quiet observation, I remained motionless, absorbed my surroundings, and

inhaled the sweet fragrance from the surrounding vegetation. The river water slowly flowed and swirled about my feet as insects continued to softly buzz over my head. Then I sensed a change in the air as a chill rose from the water's surface and shadows from the neighboring trees lengthened in the twilight of the day. The river water turned cool and the sun's heat lost its grip. Dragonflies, undisturbed by my presence, congregated over the water's surface and weaved in and out invisible threads of a pattern as they fed on mosquitoes for their supper. Nature's song changed from a low, soft humming of whirring, flying insects to be interrupted by intermittent croaking of several social frogs and a higher pitched chorus of crickets.

Glancing again at the scope of the beauty in the length and breadth of the river, I watched and sensed the rhythm of nature in its continuity. Thinking of this wetland and tall grass prairie beauty and its cyclical nature, I understood my hesitance to leave. The balance and diversity of native plants, birds, insects, and animals still exists in many areas of the natural world. I wish more of this beauty and quiet existed for us all. Then sighing and inhaling deeply once more, I walked out of the water's flow and on to dry land. It was time to return and bring part of this gift of nature's serenity now in me back to my family. The harmony of the butterflies' and dragonflies' waltzes in midair to the sound of cascading water amid a panorama of color danced in my mind as I felt closer to the rhythm of nature on my way home.

BARBARA BROOKS

BIO

After the Rain

Stream flows, not quite out of its banks.
Titmouse calls, an echo.
Birch leaf, white flag of winter's surrender,
flutters to ground.
Spider floats silk between trees.
Rain drops jewel redbud.

Squirrel breakfasts on seeds,
starts a nest. Cuts and balances a twig,
maneuvers it to the crotch of sycamore.
Takes a break, inspects a hole in dead snag,
leaps to maple only to disappear.

Wind tears through greening tulip poplar,
rips tender leaf from branch.
Worm dries in sun, rain-driven
from soil. Ferns unravel by rotting log.
May apples umbrella forest floor.

CINDY BROWN

[BIO](#)

Cabresto Creek

the water snake
small, black, slippery
clenched and coiled
on the rocks

I see it and then I feel it

kundalini at the base
of my spine
shakes loose, releases
when you step heavy
with your black cowboy boot

rocking the board
where I sit
in the sun
on the rough wooden deck
at the edge of Cabresto Creek

although it is day
I feel the comet overhead

Poetry

late in the season

alone at the top of the mountain

short of breath, light-headed, euphoric

poems fall out of mind

into throat and heart

shutters hang off the hinges of the chest

poems spill out all over the trail.

disoriented, lost - running blindly

then

at the bottom

the black raven on the top of the pole

the perfect grove of aspen—all yellow, all blowing, all one

P. SUSAN BUCHANAN

[BIO](#)

Snow on the Second Day of Unforgiving November

Snow on the second day of
unforgiving November
needles slant
driven by a wind
last leaves tugged free
spiral in a grey sky
like a metal sheet
pulled down to hold the day
tight and cold on my shoulders hunched.
I am aching from the ice slipped
into my shoes.
The hunter's gun
like a chisel cracking wide the sky.
Geese fall from its folds
bloody feathers left for coyotes
to sniff and mouth the brittle remains.
The sun has perished in the cold
the tang of burning leaves
scorches my throat
a musty breath against my cheek
chafed by early snow.

The Grain of Time

The trees have buds
that speak of winter's chill and spring's grace
fresh buds full of tomorrow
the wealth of possibility
each year another ring of age.
The grain of time
each year's death and renewal.

Beneath these trees
a refuge from a rainy day
shelter and cool shadows for birds
soft rustle of leaves a secret song
whispered between each leaf
like a dance of nymphs in a green bower
or a lament of time.

The tree stands strong
avoiding the workman's devastating blow
until the sap is spent, the branches brittle.
Like frail bones they snap off in a winter storm fury.
Then the axe falls
heavy logs cleaved, filling the hearth
sweet snap, fire burning in the grate
like heroes cremated and resting in a silver urn.

WENDY BURTT

BIO

Wild Chicago

I recently heard a woman complain how ugly Chicago is, how the absence of wildlife disgusted her, how she hated it here. I bristled over the comment, understandable though it may be. Certainly, between the taxis, buses, commuter cars, pedestrians, horse drawn carriages, bicycles, and rickshaws, downtown Chicago is a wild place. Some days walking the sidewalks seems downright impossible. It feels like a forest of legs and faces reflecting infinite swarms of humanity, bouncing back and forth amongst the mammoth plate glass windows of hundreds of skyscrapers. Nowhere feels as far from nature as a city and Chicago, the third largest in the U.S, certainly seems as sterile as a mega-mall parking lot, at least when it comes to wildlife. Until you look up.

Chicago sits in the middle of a migratory bird route called the Mississippi Flyway. Researchers believe the shoreline of Lake Michigan is a vital migration route for hundreds of songbirds traveling between summer breeding grounds in Canada to their warm winter hangouts south of the U.S border. It is believed nearly 7 million wild birds representing over 300 species pass through Chicago skies, dodging skyscrapers to take advantage of the city's open water and parks to rest during their long trip south for the winter. The seed bearing shrubs, trees, and flowers which decorate the streets and green spaces, enticing residents and tourists with their natural beauty, also attract hungry birds. Well stocked backyard feeders provide a ready source of invaluable food. Plus, the daytime warmth absorbed by miles of asphalt radiates into the urban night air, giving birds respite from the encroaching cold of winter.

Last October while caught in a crowd mindlessly storming down Michigan Avenue, my glance inexplicably fell to the sidewalk. There, hopping between the spiked heels of women's shoes, the shiny new sneakers of tourists, and endless wheels of baby carriages, was a little House Wren. Unthinking, I stopped, parting the sea of humanity with a hard look and wide arms. A woman nearly impaled the tiny bird on her Manolo Blahniks before I bent down and scooped the bird to safety. Amazingly, he neither flinched nor tried to escape. As I lifted him to my

chest his eyes closed, and if a bird can pass out, this one did. I admired the rich rust plumage of his back, the delicate spots on his tawny belly, and the perfect condition of his flight and tail feathers. I tucked him into an inner pocket of my jacket and headed home.

A good night's rest in my spare aquarium refreshed the uninjured wren. But what should I do with him now? Northerly Island, the bird sanctuary located downtown near the Shedd Aquarium seemed the logical choice. But his angry buzzes filled my kitchen as he threw himself against the glass wall of his entrapment. Migration called, and I knew the warm sun of the morning would give him every advantage to make it over the city. So I took him into my palms, where he again sat calmly. I opened the back door, and we went out onto the deck. The sun shone down from the vibrant blue sky so common to a crisp autumn day. I looked into the calm eyes of this tiny wild creature, and opened my hand. He paused and it seemed as if he stared deep into me, hopping up my arm and waiting. The moment froze, the hypnotic connection between us slowing the world, drowning out the city sounds. Nothing existed except for a wild wren and a displaced country girl. Long seconds passed as the bird stared, and I lost myself in the gift of trust bestowed on me.

"You're welcome," I whispered. One long pause then he zipped away, landing on the brick face of my building to pick off a few spiders for the trip; then he was gone, over the bright yellow maple leaves into the distance. I think of him often, mostly to bless him for reminding me from where I came.

It turns out there a lot of people who notice birds and their struggle to travel across North America. In 1995, Chicago became the first city to advocate a voluntary dimming or complete shutoff of downtown buildings' decorative lights during the two peak migratory periods for birds. The Audubon Society estimates over 10,000 bird lives are saved each year by the Lights Out Chicago program. Migrating birds can become confused by the overpowering brightness, some circling until they collapse from exhaustion, and others crashing to their death against the glittering windows. For the birds who survive their collisions, new dangers await them on the city streets below including crows, seagulls, rats, and commuters. A group called Chicago Bird Collision Monitors hits the streets in the wee morning hours searching for casualties, both

living and deceased. Staffed by volunteers, the group catalogs victims and species as well as ferrying stunned or exhausted survivors to licensed rehab facilities. Check out <http://www.birdmonitors.net> for more information and ways to get involved.

Many species of birds live full time in Chicago, and not just the pigeons, starlings, and English house sparrows. Quite shockingly, Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood is home to a most unlikely flock of residential birds who never fly south: parrots.

The monk parakeets of Chicago didn't migrate to America by choice. Considered a pest in their native South America, the green and grey plumed birds were imported to this country for sale in the pet trade beginning in the late 1960s. From there, some may have escaped their captivity and others were probably set loose by thoughtless owners. The first feral pair showed up at a residential feeder in 1968, nested, and started a family. In 1973, a parakeet family set up shop in Hyde Park, and their existence has begun a legendary, if somewhat controversial, expansion into a stable colony of about 200 individuals.

Farmers feared voracious flocks of parakeets would decimate grain crops, much as they've done in their native Argentina and Paraguay. The USDA devised a plan to eradicate the birds, but in 1988, residents of Hyde Park united to create a legal defense fund in the name of the foot long flyers. Threatening a public hearing, the residents convinced the government organization to back off, so the birds remain. Their communal nests are enormous, looking like huts perched high in the tree branches. Each nest houses several family groups. The Monks seem to enjoy their city life, living on warm weather berries and well stocked winter birdfeeders. They've adapted quite well, and thanks to bird-loving Chicagoans, they survive the harsh northern winters.

Feral parakeets aren't the only unexpected avian city dwellers. High atop the John Hancock building on the 97th floor sits a bar. The floor to ceiling glass windows provide a panoramic view of the city, but if a patron sits patiently, they may also witness the incredible aeronautic finesse of a brutal killer: a peregrine falcon.

The April day felt typically cold. Though Lake Michigan keeps the city warm longer in fall, its frozen depths keep Chicago colder in spring as well. I leaned back in my chair, grateful for the pause in my busy day of sightseeing with an out-of-town friend. Suddenly, I choked on my

drink as a black shadow blasted past the window next to our table. No bird should be this high, right? No bird except a falcon! I set my mug onto the table, its contents splashing over the rim, and planted my face against the glass. Waiting, I prayed for another chance to get a closer look. Sure enough, the angular shape of a falcon shot past the window again.

“Holy Toledo honey look! It’s a peregrine!” Patrons of the bar stared at me, certain a crazy woman had invaded their midst. My fiancé, well aware of my affinity for wildlife, only smiled indulgently and returned to his conversation.

Driven to near extinction across North America during the 1960’s by the pesticide DDT, peregrine falcons are making a blessed comeback in the city skies. Reintroduced in the 1980’s by a group in Minnesota, the raptors began to re-settle their Midwestern territories with assistance. In Chicago, the Field Museum monitors the city’s 12 breeding pairs. Nesting sites are monitored, and close attention is paid to the city streets when the young falcons begin leaving the nest. Downed birds are quickly collected and taken to the Lincoln Park Zoo for a checkup. If they are uninjured, they are banded then released.

Peregrines fly at a brisk 40-55 mph but during a dive, called a stoop, they can reach speeds of a mind blowing 200 mph. These dives are aimed at prey, usually pigeons or waterfowl (sometimes bats), and are the only way a peregrine falcon catches food.

Peregrines aren’t the only raptors who call Chicago home. The American kestrel finds the tight confines of the city perfect for hunting mice and small birds, and are quite common because their prey is equally common and available. Perching up high, the kestrel uses its keen eyesight to hone in on groups of abundant house sparrows. Kestrels also hover in the air currents, and can be spotted frozen in mid-air, often above the berms next to roads, looking for mice or reptiles hidden in the grass below.

Sitting on a typically delayed ‘L’ car on the CTA red line, I stared at the sign right outside my window. The long red metal said “Cermak-Chinatown,” and perched atop it sat a gorgeous, but miserable, kestrel. His black masked eyes looked angry, perpetually so, but made more expressive by his sharp downturned beak. His beautiful rusted back feathers, creamy brown-flecked belly, and rich slate wings puffed out

against the chill rainy November air. I smiled sadly at him, in full sympathy with his discomfort. Fall rain in Chicago makes even the most stalwart naturalist shudder with bone chilling cold. With a disgusted shake and fluff of his feathers, the kestrel pushed off of the sign, lighting out to find better hunting grounds not blocked by a stupid red line train car.

The call of the kestrel is easily heard in the city. The high pitched “chee-chee-chee-chee” happens in rapid sequence, sounding like a shrill complaint. The listener can take a quick look around, focusing on telephone poles, antennae, or chimneys to spot the 8-12 inch tall hawk. During mating season, the pair chase after one another through the sky, the male flying after his beloved, sending out his cry beseeching the female to wait for his adoration.

Not all of Chicago’s interesting bird life is so glamorous. Like any major metropolitan city, Chicago is overrun by pigeons. Their true name is rock dove, and their natural habitat consists of cliff faces. Thanks to the urban penchant for cementing over everything, the pigeon thrives in human cities. Non-picky eaters, they gorge themselves on the dropped food crumbs of all things human. Nesting in shallow patches of sticks and fiber on bare rock, they reproduce prodigiously, sometimes as often as six times per year. Their city life span is brief, a mere 3-5 years. They are struck and killed by cars, kicked by naughty children (or adults), and perching locations are often covered with spikes. Frequently called rats with wings, the pigeon receives a pretty bad rap, wrongly blamed for spreading horrific diseases, such as histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis, and psittacosis. Such claims have been disproven repeatedly by health departments across the country. In fact, while pigeons can contract the West Nile Virus, they are unable to transmit it to humans. Perhaps their only crime is the indiscriminate placement of droppings. (Although any walk down an alley might prove humans to be guilty of the same charge.)

A short trip north from downtown Chicago, at the Howard ‘L’ stop, lives an urban legend, a pigeon who’s learned to commute for his food. He’s large, indicating he’s also old. His feathers are grey with large white ‘paint drips’, giving him a unique look. His favorite hunting ground is the southbound platform, and his preferred method of travel is train. This old man has figured out that we humans are sloppy, disobeying the

directive not to eat onboard the ‘L’, and we drop our food like wasteful monkeys. Waiting for a train, he hops aboard, not caring one whit when the doors close behind him. He then rides along, wandering through the car, chowing down on our breakfast bagels and donuts, our McDonald’s fries, and Pepperidge Farm Goldfish. He eats potato chips and pretzels, chocolate chip cookies, and melba toast. Passengers don’t seem to mind, and fascinated, I asked a CTA worker about the intruder.

“No, we don’t mind. He doesn’t make a mess, and we don’t have so much sweeping to do after he’s come through. We just leave him be, and he gets off when he’s done.” Apparently, the workers are quite familiar with their passenger!

His age may well be attributed to his relatively clean abundant food source, winter heat lights for passengers waiting at the platforms, and covered habitat.

Thinking about my house wren, the unexpected parrots, the acrobatic peregrine falcons, the angry Kestrel, and the clever pigeon, I have to admit the birdlife of Chicago is more interactive than anything I witnessed in the country. They’ve adapted, finding a way to thrive in an urban setting. It is perhaps because they are unexpected that they are so much more appreciated here. For the wandering curious naturalist in Chicago, the sky contains a rich diversity of avian delights. It just takes a look into the sky to see them.

YVONNE CARPENTER

BIO

On Being Still

Bright gold in the flash of his tail
betrays the fish in his disguise as
bleached log. Head upstream,
he moves backwards, grazing,
dorsal stripe undulating like the moss.
Feeling stared at, he sinks into
deeper, denser water.

Tangled in the tree silted with native trash,
a too-black spot gradually reveals
a turtle, then two turtles. Overhead,
a bird shadow moves across the river,
circles, hovers as the raptor decides
the large carcass in hiking boots laying
on the bank is not yet dinner.
Disappointed, it searches further.

Reaching too quickly for my vibrating
cell phone, I am found out again.
The turtles slip from their log;
the smallest settles into the mud.

Spying on the Neighbors

Behind the birdfeeder,
a blue head darts above the grasses,
disappears,
then shows up a few inches closer.
Slowly the pheasant approaches.
Large and colorful citizen
of birddom, he is shy
as a politician at a brothel,

knowing he is a target
for predators and voyeurs

while common gray sparrows
play without notice
in the corn dropped
from the well-filled
canister perched on
a tripod at the edge
where lawn meets
prairie. What do

they think of the being
who fills the can
then hides behind the screen
to watch
without pouncing,
making odd clicks and whirls
with a box held to the eyes?

LEANNE CHABALKO

[BIO](#)

The Hornet Alarm

Maybe you ignored the sound at first —
a maraca tentatively stirring, low to the ground —
as you pushed back and prepared to glide
on grandma's weather-blackened porch swing.
Dad was story-swapping, Budweiser in hand,
when the hornets under your seat took aim.

The nest awoke as one to the first rattle
of its dust-paper hive; pheromones
signaling a continued attack.
Leap up, little girl. Run. Scream.
Your army of adults will surround you
this time — spread you flat on the kitchen table,
pancake your burning flesh with flour.

It wasn't your fault. You will heal with time.
In time, a blurry accomplice pins your arms,
twists your nipples like cap nuts. Maybe he asks
if you like it; do you really? Oozing pheromones,
a signaling you cannot stop. Next time, there will
be a next time, try to listen. Listen for the rattling.

Bear Eats Shrieking Monkey In Front Of Zoo Visitors

Before the deed was done, several observers
 sent prayers aloft: *please let this be*
a fun-if-a-little-bloody game.
 But the pale-faced monkey
 would not stop howling.

Imagine the crowd's ohnooos
 as two Sloth bears circled the offering, drooling.
 Informative placards about the peaceful
 coexistence of species? They say nothing
 about the divine intent of nature.

On this day the jaw-snappers
 were ruthlessly claw-swiping,
 pointedly disregarding
 their approaching keepers.
 Fathers covered their sons' eyes

just as the reconciled primate gave up a leg,
 a tiny chocolate liver.
 Children wiggled free to witness
 how the ravaged mother of three
 was carefully lifted and carried,

knuckled arms dragging,
 to a cozy concrete den.
 Imagine the bear's words:
 Behold, my blood.
 Eat in remembrance

of flying joys under striped skies,
 far from sapien scents,
 deep within our spirit mouths.
 Eat this monkey, my child,
 as though it was your last.

LISA J. CIHLAR

[BIO](#)

Releasing a Turtle

The courage of turtles has never been in dispute. The one I hold two-handed was halfway across the road when I picked her up. She is as heavy as a small watermelon, full of juice and black seeds that are slippery and ready to spit through a rolled tongue. This turtle tucks into her shell, orange bottomed and green topped with fancy flecks and stripes of red on her neck and legs. She is common. I talked to a very old man from town who told me that traveling circus folk used to winter over here in the tiny rooms above the stores downtown. They wanted to blend in, just like the common folk. Still, the fat lady with the beard couldn't ever shave close enough. Once when the power went out in a storm she shouted from her window and everyone thought she was crazy but no one made fun of her fat. The painted turtle is an abundant creature, unlike those circus sideshows, each unique and prepared to hide all winter. When carried close to the river to be released, her sharp-clawed feet and legs come out of the shell and her head strains forward. She begins swimming in air.

Toadsong Nights are Best

Both the toads and I want my garlic scapes. They desire decoration for their damp spaces. I will trade Jack-in-the-pulpit and dame's rocket to acquire what I want. There is a rumor that the snakes will intercede on my behalf. They relate to the curly scapes; the way they twist and interlock. The toads wail all day and night to entice me onto their boggy sphere where I might sink into the floating mat and mud. I would be lost for generations. My skin turned leathery brown and rough from oak leaf tannins. It is a conjure they have performed before. I discern their enchantment before the ploy plays out. The snails marshal forces while the toads are conspiring against me.

RAYSHELL CLAPPERBIO**Plains, Mountains, and One More Tear**

I climb up the apple tree that marks our backyard. In the desert land of Albuquerque, trees become land markers, and this apple tree and the mimosa in our front yard often allow me to view the city around me and other times they call me home. For my first eight years of life, I have climbed this tree, my tree, in my backyard. As I climb higher, I see the neighborhood of houses surrounding ours. My friends live in these houses; my parents' friends live in these houses. I see my favorite places: Snow Park, Eubank Elementary School, and the 7/11 on the corner. With each branch I climb, I see more of my places. And then I reach the topmost branch thick enough to hold me, and the mountains demand my full attention. All my other places disappear. The mountains never look real, more like something out of a painting, something intangible, something sublime. Their colors of pink and white and green weave together to perfection. I imagine the mountain lions and lizards and eagles that call them home. I see the juniper trees contrasted against the pink dirt. I want to live with them always. They hug the entire city, protecting us from any harm. I glance at the mountains and sigh. No one is as lucky as we are. We have constant guardians watching over us. These mountains, the Sandias and the Sangre de Cristo sections of the Rockies, are my blanket—my comfort zone.

And from high up in the tree, I feel the safety of that place, of those mountains.

“OKLAHOMA,” Jason, my 16-year-old older brother, shouts at our parents. “What the hell are you talking about?” Even though he’s eight years my senior, I still jump at the use of a four-letter word, but he stands tall, towering over my parents with his six foot four frame. He’s not afraid of the four-letter word.

My mind races as I dodge the emotional avalanche falling around my two brothers and me. Mom’s promotion. More money. Chance to start over.

I stare at the familiarity of the living room, my living room. Our couch dutifully sits under the picture window that faces Moon Street, our street. Cars whoosh past the window at a moderate but constant pace as they have done for as long as I can remember. That whoosh has been my lullaby since infancy. The fireplace faces that window with the television and chair across from one another on the alternate walls. This has been my living room, all I have known, my entire life. I don't want to leave it.

Fear and confusion rush through me. My heart squeezes harder as I bite back my emotions. It breaks at the thought of leaving my home, my friends, and the protection of the surrounding mountains. The Sandia, the watermelon, my force field. I hear the voices of my family members in a muffled, underwater tone. Part of me understands the words, but most of me does not believe them. How could we move away from our home? How could our parents rip us from what we love? How could they?

"We're moving and that's it." Both my parents stand at my father's final decree.

"I don't want to start over," I shout as my body boils. I too stand up, fingernails digging into my palms as I clench my fists. Tears burst forth like an opened spigot. "This is our home." My shout turns to a scream with the last four words. I'm an eight-year-old throwing a toddler's fit, but I don't care. Before I can stop myself, my legs take me to my room and kick the door shut. And for the first time, Oklahoma makes me cry.

My hand wipes my face, leaving streaky remnants of tears as miles of cities turn into seemingly desolate towns on the east bound freeway. Two years have passed since first I knew we were leaving home for a land called Oklahoma. I do not like the uprooting. I know that I should be excited about the opportunity to start over. I know that I should be happy for my mother, but all I can feel is the excruciating squeeze in my stomach and the tornado whirling in my heart. The nausea of pain overwhelms me as I watch the sun slowly shoot its rays from behind the horizon of nothingness in front of me. No mountains, no hills, no city, no neighborhoods. Nothing but flat, lonely prairie land. Tears of longing pour down my face. I glare at the

frontier that is to be my new “home.” My mom glances over at me, her eyes tearing up and spilling over with sympathy, but I don’t care. It’s her fault we’re leaving home. My hurt-filled tears turn to those of anger as I jerk my head toward the window. And then I see it. The sun has finally peeked its way over the flatlands and pink waves make their way to the sky. A rolling sea of plush foam reveals itself inch by inch as the sun blossoms above me. I watch little beads pelt the van as the foam perspires. I see new colors, new animals, new plants, and for a moment peace overcomes me. But that moment doesn’t last long.

“Ray, do you see that? Anything that produces such beauty is better than just okay, right?” My mom runs a finger down my cheek as she too notices the sublime sky.

I immediately wrench my face from her and glare. I don’t want her touching me. I don’t want her knowing that I had a moment of comfort, that I saw the Oklahoma sky pink and endless. I stomp to the back seat of the company minivan—one of the “perks” of the move—and turn to the truck following us. My dad stares up at me from behind the wheel with my two brothers asleep beside him. He slowly raises his hand and flashes me an okay sign. He wants that to make me feel better, but it doesn’t. I turn from him too, and the slivers again rush down my face as a large stone welcomes us to Oklahoma.

“When are we moving home?” I confront my mother with my daily dictate. It doesn’t matter which parent I see first; I always start the day with the hope that we are going back to the mountains, only to have it dashed the second I ask. I don’t care, though. I want them to be miserable like me.

My mother no longer tries to make me understand. She rolls her eyes as she places my bowl of oatmeal in front of me. I no longer push the subject, but I never forget to ask. As I silently eat, my usually calm father rushes into the kitchen skittering from one side to the other grabbing bread and peanut butter and apples and baggies filled with Cheerios. He stuffs these into a paper bag. I watch his frantic motions. I have not seen him like this before.

“Finishyourmeal. Hurryupandgetdressed. Yourmotherandihaveasurpriseforyou.” Three hasty sentences exit.

Before I can respond, he whisks me from my seat and pushes me to my room.

"I guess we have no choice," my older brother whispers as he passes me in the hallway on his way to brush his teeth.

What is going on today? Where are we going? The questions repeat in my mind as I replace my pajamas with shorts and a t-shirt. Before I can answer my own questions, I find myself in my mother's van again, just as I had almost a year earlier, only this time we all travel south instead of east.

Ten times we ask where we're going, and ten times they just sit there smiling.

Daddy has crushed out three cigarettes since we left home, and we still don't have any clue where they are taking us. I haven't even seen any billboards even hint at our destination. Our feet bounce and shake as anticipation seeps up. I twist my hair and bite on my thumbnails as the mile markers pass. I cannot take my eyes from the road. Acres and acres of farm land, clay, and dying grass have caught my attention as I wonder where this trip will end.

Finally my mother stops the van. My brothers and I stop our fidgeting. We are at a point looking out into the hills. A large, thick assortment of trees stair step to the top of the hill in front of us; dried grass and worn gravel surround the van. The rushing sound of water engulfs me as I step one foot out of the car and glance around me. My own blood rushes as I bring my other foot out and stand, cautious and nervous yet with the anticipation that accompanies surprises. I play with my cuticles in excitement at our surprise and continue to look around me. My brothers follow my lead, slow and steady, but with the same excitement in their steps. Once out, Jason stands stoic. It's clear to me that he wants to seem in control, but his hands betray him as he clasps and unclasps them behind his back. Daric, my younger brother, plays in the dirt. I make eye contact with Jason. He just shrugs, and I shrug back. We still don't see our surprise. My father steps out of the passenger side, throws his cigarette down, and crushes it, all with a toothy smile.

"Well, what do you think?" He looks at me first, as always, and then my older brother. We glance around and then at each other lost in what we are supposed to think.

"What's the surprise?" We question in unison.

My parents walk to the front of the lookout and open their arms. Beyond them the hill looks back at me. As I begin to understand what they wanted us to be happy about, fury replaces my excitement. I clench my hands. My shoulders stiffen. I no longer see the trees or hear the water. All I hear is my heart pounding. And I glare.

"They're mountains. The Arbuckles. You said you missed them." My parents' shoulders drop at the realization of their mistake. No longer are their arms wide open and inviting but crossed in front of them as if to protect themselves. Now all I see is their disappointment. My older brother shakes his head and climbs back into the car defeated. Disembodied by rage, I cannot control myself. I forget about how much I respect and love my parents, and I scream.

"These are not mountains. These are barely hills. Stupid hills with stupid rocks. They don't even have cactus on them. What are you thinking?" The question punches harder than I intend. Both my parents step back from me, tears welling in their eyes. Never before had I spoken to my parents in such a way. I storm back to the car as my parents stare after me. Their lips tight and eyes wide, they do not know how to respond. Daric crawls in beside us, not sure what he should do. The stinging tears return. And once again, Oklahoma makes me cry.

Ginger moves with grace under me. Each hoof's step in time with my own pulsing heart. Her muscles respond to my own as we gallop on our property. We have been riding for two hours now. We watched the sun peak over the treetops, but now it shines bright on the land. I look around at the acreage that my parents have staked a claim on for five years and find it not quite as revolting anymore. Large red cedars and oaks hide our house, giving me freedom to become what I want, when I want. No boundaries. No people. Just me and my horse and Nature.

She begins to pant, so I slow her to a leisurely walk and admire the creek beside me. A little stream swooshes in the middle of the large crevice. I have never seen it full, but it always catches my attention. The trickle of water sings as the current pulls it over rocks and tree limbs. The sound is barely a whisper, but I find myself lulled

by it. Little perch scurry their way through the meager water, darting in and out of random plants and rocks deposited in their way. The splish of wild frogs and splash of bathing birds calms me. Little sprouts shoot toward the sun as the water feeds the budding ecosystem around it.

My horse takes deep gulps from the water available in the summer-dried creek. I am so blessed to have her. I slide off the saddle to give her a break and bend down to the winding wisp of water. The warm water laces through my fingers before I splash it on my face. I throw some on Ginger's hooves to moisten them in the sweltering heat. She whinnies her thanks. If we had stayed in Albuquerque, she never would have brightened my life. She couldn't have in the city. The resentment of moving slowly drains away year after year, but Ginger is the real key. It's because of this flatland that I have her. She helps me to cope. Finally, I hop back on her, and we make our way back to the house before I get called to breakfast. I brush her down and kiss her, leaving my sweet lawn mower to her favorite activity. As I enter the kitchen, I smile at Daddy.

"Beautiful Oklahoma morning, don't you think?" He winks at me as he brings me eggs. He used to wait for the daily question, but it has been a long time since I've asked. Oklahoma's not home, but it's not so bad anymore. Four years have passed since the last time she made me cry, and I find myself even liking her. I just look at him and smile.

"Catch up," he calls to me. Christian, my boyfriend, and I are fishing on a friend's land. Dried clay and thick redbuds envelop me here. Pecan trees tower on every side as I run to his side. I look around at the natural beauty and simplicity of the prairie land and scattered forests. In the breeze the Indian Paintbrush dance at my heels. The pecan and black walnut trees wave their leaves at me. And finally my eyes settle on the blue Oklahoma sky. With nothing to obscure the view, I see infinity in the vast sky. It's wide and open and waiting. A hundred yards away I see the lip of the pond for which we make this trip. With my fishing pole in one hand and his hand in the other, we saunter up to the small pond, crunching old pecan shells with each step like true Okies. He squeezes my hand before letting

go to bait our lines. Our Great Pyrenees prances up behind me. I notice that same sky looking up at me on the water's surface and even there it looks like forever. A ripple of wind on the pond's surface breaks the reflection of the Oklahoma sky, and I turn to Christian.

"Mind tying him up?" he asks, smiling while opening the worm canister. I nod. The dog comes right to me as I whistle. He puts his nose in the air, closes his eyes, and enjoys the scents as I wrap his leash to the biggest tree nearest to us. As I watch his nostrils twitch, I find myself envious of his joy. So, I too stop and let the wind dance around me. It flirts with my hair and tickles my arms. I look around at the this land—the pond rippling, tree limbs swaying, the grass waving—and find that I'm hypnotized by it. I look to my boyfriend, and the sun seems to be shining right on him. Again, he smiles and hands me my pole.

We drop our lines into the pond and lay back to look at the lazy sky. The same cottony clouds I first saw upon entering the state nineteen years earlier float above me, only this time they are disconnected instead of puzzled together as one continuous sea. I hear the cricket's symphony and cardinal's song in the distance while a turtle splashes in and out of the water near my toes. Contentment washes over me.

"Everything is so nice and slow here," I think out loud. "Calming...like the mountains." And, for the first time, I realize I have two homes.

ELIZABETH CLAVERIE

BIO

as we hike around the pond

a finger of fog wraps itself
around autumn hills.
oak trees crinkle like bedclothes,
nestle between upturned breasts.

between knee-up legs
sits the pond. like green glass
white with floating blossoms
black with summer shadows

north and south over
the humps of fallen grasses
we trod
single file

single women
like elephants holding the tail
of the one in front
over a pass of low flowers

stepping lightly on the slick
of nocturnal rodents
we scramble sideways
catching each other, laughing
towards the pond.

floating ducks
stare into themselves
looking back at them

and we do the same.

falconlove

that renegade falcon
 folded his large rusty wings
 around me.
 i found solace
 in the shelter formed
 by pinions and talons.
 in an ant line,
 his words poured out
 beak to lip
 claw to hand
 touching where none
 had been—
 he whirled his words
 into marble.

birds rain you

wax of midnight candles
 and you, arrogant
 leave me stunned.

but so did
 armadas of greedy buzzards
 hoping for a little roadside kill
 squawking their death dirges
 to careless lovers

and so does
 hot black rain falling heavy towards asphalt
 splattered from thunderous clouds
 evaporating like a prisoner's prayer

peering up, waiting
 for circling black birds
 i am stranded, wet.

girls, we must all become bird-like

tie ourselves to spring breezes
roost among the pyracanthas
talk circles around scattered seeds

they will walk by, preen their colors
strut to win our affection
they will puff out their necks,
wrap their wings around billows of air
skid across lakes, ponds and streams
they will work hard to be chosen
from the many available

and we will be the picky ones
turn our beaks towards each other
in sounds of comparisons, distain.

hummingbird

i can see you from my desk
right outside my window
looking in at me

your red throat glistening
sparkling like ruby
your wings, invisible

I pause between words
crafting out my pathetic attempts
at poetry.

my pen falters, stutters, shimmies
as the struggle for the right word
begins to err this side of failure.

Your distraction catches me off guard
my mind wanders to the yard and
the beckoning of chores and you

I watch you shimmer, flutter and hover
dipping your pen into trumpet flowers
lantanas and honeysuckle
writing your poetry

effortlessly.

DEENAZ P. COACHBUILDER

BIO

the impermanence of being

sometimes I find myself
fading away
I am not here
look, look there
at that monarch butterfly
those are my eyes
that spiked poppy leaf
my fingers
the constant chirruping
of the cicadas
my hurried heartbeat
fine crumbled rocks
my denuded bones
the rush of breeze
my happy wandering soul.

Ocotillo Lady

(Dedicated to Ruth Nolan, passionate gate keeper of the desert)

An ocotillo rises from the arid soil.
Tall, with willowy arms swaying in the parched breeze,
covered with crimson blossoms,
their lobes curled back into clusters,
lures for bees and swooping hummingbirds,
she lives beside a wash where flood waters create
deep crevices in the floor of the Mojave desert.
A young mesquite spreads its mahogany brown branches
in a rainbow arc. Saguaro, old and majestic,
provide shifting shade, beside unmarked

sacred sites lain there for thousands of generations,
asleep in the ancient earth.

Dark brown curls bobbing as she leaps
over giant valleys, her fist clutching a twig to ward off
desert dragons, not far from watchful adult eyes,
she winds her way through this sandy neighborhood,
over a worn stone strewn path.
Suddenly, she stops before Ocotillo Lady.
Her wide golden eyes reflect the throbbing
red heart of the desert queen. The wind stills.
Slowly, Ocotillo Lady reaches out, branches straining
to kiss glowing cheeks in an acknowledgement of kindred spirits.

Year following year, the blazing sunset streaks the sky
in peach, turquoise, gold and magenta.

Lady Ocotillo's woody,
spiny, whip-like
dry branches
still seek out
the sky.
Blossoms
no longer
appear after
a spring
shower.

The sapling of a woman deftly hikes the trail
that winds close by Ocotillo Lady. Curly hair tucked under
a crimson beret, she stops abreast of the dying lady.
A sudden shiver transports her back to dragon filled canyons
and a sun drenched meeting so long ago,
instantly binding them together
in an eternal magnetic circle.

Insects make a humming sound.
Slowly, the Eastern sky darkens.

DONNA COFFEY

BIO

Beauty Strip

Two Octobers past the bulldozers came.
From dawn to dusk six days a week for nine months
they knocked down trees. I learned some words.
“Fellerbuncher”: a giant scissors on wheels
that cuts and stacks the timber.
“Beauty strip”: the corridor of trees
between clearcut and clearcut.

I trespassed in the wreckage,
that summer of the drought.
Felled trees scattered at odd angles
like broken legs. Roots exposed like bones.
I tripped and cut my shin on a bent blade.
Kept climbing until I came to Pine Log Creek:
an empty socket. Nothing but rocks.

The ads proclaimed a “Mountain Paradise.”
A golf course, a club house, 2000 homes,
an Olympic-sized pool. Great Festival Park.

Beware of heaven, its straight streets,
its trees in rows, its identical houses.
Its children huddled in front of screens.

The golf course dips and rolls in the mountain’s shadow.
The old men are afraid to fall and stay away.
High brown grass bides its time beside smooth turf
and sand pits. The sprinkler shoots two streams
of water in long arcs, wets acrid white crystals.
The grass grows lush and juicy, a waxed apple.

Follow the run-off to the silted creek. Oily rainbows
shimmer in stagnant water. Fragments of boulders
rolled to a standstill in the toxic bed.

Dead giants. I stand on their backs.
The hill above is flat for a cul de sac.
Pipe stubs mark the homesites. Made in our image.
On which day will we call it good and rest?

Walk Away from Stories

Climb a mountain until sweat
runs between your breasts.
Climb until no one can find you.
Lay your cheek on a cool boulder.
Let it talk.

Swat flies and mosquitos.
Listen until the buzz
becomes a music.

Pick lichen off a rock.
Wedge gray-green grit
beneath your fingernails.

Poke a stick in dirt.
Crumble dirt between your fingers.
Watch worms wriggle,
beetles scuttle in your palm.

Gather black walnuts,
hickory nuts, beech nuts.
Smash them with a rock.
Put the leathery meat in your mouth.

Remember how to feed yourself.

Pull apart an acorn.
Pierce the green dome with your fingernail.
Taste bitter tannin.
Spit it out.

Pull a maypop off a vine.
Admire the taut green bulb.
Crush it in your hand.
Smell acrid pulp.

Pull muscadine off a vine.
Bite through thick tight skin.

Let juice run down your chin.
It's already wine.

Find blackberries in a patch
With scratched wrists
pluck dark berries.
Crunch sweet grit.

Push through a wall of rhod
Tug a leaf.
Feel how hard the tree work

Enter the creek valley.
Watch trees close around you.
Stand on a mossy rock.

Turn over creek stones.
Poke crayfish.
A pincer grabs your thumb.

Drag a finger in the water.
Feel the pull
of where it came from,
where it goes.

Find the bowl
where the creek grows deep.
Take off your shoes.
Take off your clothes.
Glow white-gold in a green light.

Leave all the stories
you've ever told yourself
on the rock rim.

Step in.

SUZANNE C. COLE

BIO

Grayness, Reconsidered

Gray the rough bark of cedar and oak,
gray the branches leaf-stripped by deer.
Mist silvers and cools the mornings
before melting in thick sun-blaze.

Gray the broad-winged red tail hawk
its colors bleached by strong sunlight,
climbing thermal updrafts, soaring
and circling fields of silvered fodder.

Gray the stately fox promenading,
over-sized triangular ears alertly pricked,
gorgeous tail plume slowly switching.
No pursuers, no need for tree-climbing.

Gray the eight-point buck fog-shielded;
head shifting, nostrils flaring with human scent.
Dare he drink from galvanized washtub?
There is no water in the woods;
dusty creeks reflect only day dazzle,
and all the swimming pools are fenced.
Implacable drought has shrunk plant cells,
withered their green to gray.
The yearlings nibble prickly pear fruit.
Panting, the buck stares down human menace,
bends to drink for long minutes.

The Art of Seeing Just Enough

Television news, images swirling into
words, into sentences without sense.

seeing without vision,
watching without observing,
meaning is lost for her.

Air fogged with melancholy,
her inner darkness refuses the light,
the usual remedies of familiar routine,
companionship, physical movement.
She curls on the couch.

Beyond the window dark
thunderclouds, rain crashing, but
in a vivid tallow tree the scarlet
flash of a cardinal eating chinaberries.
Raindrop pendants dangle from redbud
branches over heart-shaped leaves.
A thicket of glistening blue-green,
rain-burnished beauty of oaks
furred with Spanish moss.

Suddenly, she remembers
the art of seeing just enough.

DANA COLLINS

[BIO](#)

1/31-Bird Sighting

I'm reading Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* on the couch. Out the window, it is snowing. As the story progresses, the snow tapers out. I am reading accounts of solitary experiences in nature. The different ways in which men have been drawn away from structured existence and towards uncultivated wilderness and related acts of spontaneity. I weigh and balance the two opposed philosophies of life. Steadiness, routine dependability, and the possibility of mature, well-tended love versus unruly, unadulterated beauty in its purest, most abusive forms, attended by fear and risk; a magnetic attraction to the unknown. I can reduce that to the known versus the unknown. Life seems constantly meted by the tensions of these energies.

As I lose myself in passages depicting sprawling vistas, secluded creeks and gulches, perilous, abandoned trails lost in brutal drifts of snow, and the sadness that biography always offers—a glimpse of a whole life minimized and intensified, turned to a dream—I see something out the window that quickly diverts my attention and stops my heart. Something wild intrudes upon my tame backyard like an omen borne of my previous train of thought. I am besieged by some overwhelming sense of love, truth, elevated awareness—whatever it is that the characters before me were seeking (they themselves were not quite sure), as I see a massive bird perched on the very tree I used to climb. I'm nearly positive it is some kind of heron. It is a bulky oblong shadow on two long, stick-like legs that bisect the surrounding tree limbs at numerous angles. It has a long, thin beak. It rustles its wings and spreads them for a few brief seconds in which I marvel at the breadth of their span. I surmise that it is lost. I hope that it survives.

I throw boots on over my flannel pajamas and tiptoe into the backyard, cursing the obnoxiously loud crunch of the new fallen snow. The bird is unperturbed by my presence. I feel we are caught in some unexpected, holy union sanctified by the still wake of the now settled, morning storm. Then I get greedy. I desire a picture. And so I lurch ungracefully back into the house to grab my brother's Nikon. By the time I make my way back again, the bird is gone. For several minutes, I search the skies for its dense shadow, but find nothing except scattered flocks of sparrows and a couple of sea gulls. In disappointed futility, I snap a photo of nothing in particular.

CHRISTINA COOK

[BIO](#)

Lapwing

Silt settled on shad in the silk-black riverbed mud.
One time, willows, the slow world of sound, and the rot
of a tide-abandoned eel. What tempered the oaks

was the same soundless chant: waves reduced to glass.
When I was a cloistered child, convening
with the half-set sun, I saw a single lapwing land

in a dogwood whose dead red limbs had spread
like veins above the sedge; or was that I jutting out
of the reeds; my body that stiffened and stayed there, hollow

as the dance the damp air did with circuitous strands
of light? What remained was feathers
and wind, wood and my old black habit

of failing to summon a silence that outlasted the faith
I had in death. When I was an autumn child led
by winter's feeble torchlight, I saw snow settle on the bird's

black breast without melting. I prayed, but my words
were the shells of turtles, and my way was the way
the lapwing always circled back to the stick.

April Elegy

Sham angels,
 white traces of quartz:
dead oak leaves rake the air.
Next week new buds will punch them off

the branches and everything brittle
will plump with rain –

take fiddlehead
ferns, when young and not yet toxic.
Take pansies,
but not before the dew
has dried from their flimsy silks.

Your feet rustle the thick wet mat
of last year's leaves,
your silence slips
through these woods while the wind rattles
and the purple jack-in-the-pulpits
still sleep
in their fragrant thickets of mud.

Six a.m.

Is this lake ripped
with rags of mist

the far back part
of your memory

believing itself
alone again

while the recently
mateless heron

wades in reeds
bemoaning nothing?

BETH COPELAND

[BIO](#)

Picking Blueberries

I'd rather pick blueberries than write
a poem about picking blueberries.

I'd rather let my fingers and eyes think
for me, spotting the indigo berries—

so ripe they fall into my bucket without
being plucked—leaving the blushing ones

and pale pearls that aren't ready to eat yet.
A plump one plummets to the ground before

I can catch it, but that's the way it goes.
I can't get them all. Some are for the birds.

Some grow too high to reach without a ladder.
Some hide beneath green leaves. Whatever

I take is a windfall, a gift from the blue.
After berry picking, my fingers are stained

with nature's ink as if I've been writing
all morning with a leaky fountain pen.

JOELLEN CRAFT
[BIO](#)

Sounds in a Drought

The geese sound
like reams of loose
paper from the sky, look like question
marks as they pull up so they can
rest on the lake, which I learn
is in trouble as we near. Not

that geese care if there's not
a full lake—though sound
carries less, it still carries, I learn
as they chatter the dock, which stands loose
from the water—the floating geese can
cluster beneath. Each step a question,

my breath a question,
the sun's not
bright enough, nothing can
overwhelm. The low sound
you made I can't forget, can't lose.
With these insistent geese, I learn

how they learn,
without questions,
how they lose
their breath unthinking, not
making sound
as sound is for us: theirs can

measure any space, and they can
always learn
from that sound,
which is why they have no use for questions.
I want to know, but do not
loose

a cry as generously as these geese, their loose
harsh call on the lake, which can,
being a body and home, not
help but bounce it back to them. I learn
how quietly the trees give back your name, question
how to make them sound.

The sound learned so that I cannot
unlearn it. If it is not a question,
what fills, what turns me loose?

Starling Flock at Twilight

The massing flock swept past my building's roof, the air just
turned from pink to gray. Then the branches broke up
lifting out into another hundred birds,
and the first swell swept back through the bare lot catching up
these scattered ones;
then they all rose,
held one shape,
and slid away again like pages turned, perching back
in the tree tops, playing consolation.
I thought, soon
it will be dark and anyone
could see me standing here, watching
this rough charade. I almost stepped back
from the window as I have
a hundred times hearing
a shattering, or tires
scattering gravel,
or seeing my own face take shape
in the glass. All night,
small displacements fill the thin oak,
fill the small dark gods
who watch, deciding.

Sundial

Late July, when without knowing, everything
knows the sun's position—

—not knows, receives:

without knowing, everything
receives the sun's position. You are here.
You are here.

On my back dash
a bottle sucked itself into itself
all month, orange cap tight, cut
brindled light. I was not that kind
of lonely.

I stopped my walk
for every tree down, the trunks' red
pushed out by termites into mounds
like anthills. Years now since the storm,
roots still poked through dry dirt
the same red as the trunk's pulp,
still hoisted pebbly soil over ragged holes.

Each tree lay in the same direction
and I could not stop staring.

BARBARA CROOKER

BIO

In Key West

The humidity train's chugged up
from the tropics with its freight
of moist air, gone off the rails
and dumped its cargo—now walking
feels like swimming, and my hair's
gone native, got a life of its own,
little tendrils vining and snaking—
My feet are sprouting roots,
and out of my fingers, these words,
written in green ink, are starting
to climb a Gumbo-limbo tree,
looking for a scrap of sky
in all this heavy foliage,
some small space
they can call their own.

At the Last Chance Saloon

The moon's a half dollar tossed on the bar,
somebody's loose change. The cold gin in the Dipper
shimmers. We seem to think we can spend it all,
that our resources will endlessly replenish, as profligate
as stars in the sky's deep pocket. But the ice caps
are melting, the permafrost is thawed, oil reserves
sucked dry, while we turn our backs on energy
harvested from sun and wind. No winners
here. Pile on the down quilts. The days grow shorter.
Turn up the thermostat, open the window. Now,
while we've got it, let everything burn.

BARBARA DANIELS[BIO](#)**Astronomy Picture of the Day**

I'm scared of sirens
and planes flying low
overhead. It's the season
of death. That's why
people hate it—long prayers,
leaves getting ready to drop.

Today's picture, Venus.
On my phone I read
the false colors, search the map
for my own name.
Yesterday, the wrathful sun—
solar flares, splashing plasma.

A box turtle slows on the path
beside me, on his black carapace
exploding orange stars.
I can tell by his size (as big
as my hand) that he's walked
here for decades.

The turtle eats a clot
of weed while he slowly
draws in his head
and one of his stubborn
orange legs. The plane
above us dips and wails.

A long shadow covers us—
salt hunger. In eight
minutes sunlight leaps
past planets and
enters me, erasing
the leaves' phantom writing.

Snow Geese

Her red hair lightened,
never grayed. The clatter
in her cupboard is furious

bass notes from next door.
She dreams she's late, shoes
percussive on dark wood floors.

Wind flails field corn slashed
for silage. A bridge of land
opens above black water.

Waves of snow geese swirl
toward her, barking, honking.
They settle by hundreds,

stand serenely in brown
grass—stained breasts, pink
bills wide with desire.

CAROL L. DEERING

[BIO](#)

Magical Riff

Rivers pine, no two ways
about it. They carry their luggage,
always on the run,
spirits packed and folded,
when shadows come

undone.

In moonlit rush
the world's great passions
twine and spume anew,
primal rhythms tumbling,
trembling, to overturn

the blues.

Daylily Pastorale

for Roger

Plum wine, cream, twilight green,
the colors of sunrise and dew,
these blossoms ruffle, flared &
pinched, starred & ribboned,
in riotous tenderness,
ancient, yet each day new.

As one unfurls & tastes the air,
its petals cross another,
like a mare, resting her head
against her foal, lingering
in a peace that ripples
straightaway to our soul.

Down at Troublesome Creek

Here I stand, cow-brained in the road,
badly in need of a speck of grace,
a tug of sympathy from the cosmic
fold. Chin-whisker virgas

off towards the mesa
play at shivers of rain, sensing,
as I do, the birth of autumn
within July, a seed of pain.

A sigh of pine bough draws me under.
I spot a private thatch of sky,
and far beyond reach in a slant of sun
spans a spider web, glistening

like a peacock feather's eye.
I see as the tree does, no need
for words. We're all related to shadows,
to the inner darkness of a bird.

Resting my palm on the old tree trunk,
whorls and knots shoot whispers
deep to the rivers within. We share
a rhythm which translates anguish

to a radiant sense of kin. Birds
like sparks, rise from a ridge quite
near, and my spirit follows,
leaping fences like a deer.

FAYE RAPOPORT DESPRESBIO**Morning and Night**

It is early September in suburban New England, and I sleep through the hours when I would be happiest awake. The changing cycles of daylight catch me off guard. My head is heavy on my pillow when the sun comes up, and leans against the couch before midnight.

The day is full of promise before the neighborhood wakes. When I wake up early, I can watch from the kitchen window while dawn unfolds as if a paintbrush is touching the sky. Cherry red dissolves over a moody gray canvas. Pink peeks over the rooftops. The canvas slowly brightens to blue. The pink fades and stretches, blue mixes with white, gentle wisps of cloud appear. A flock of Canadian geese crosses the sky, honking and breaking the silence.

I feel privileged to witness nature's birth of morning, but as I relish the feeling a car passes by, then a neighbor steps outside and yells to his wife. His voice slices the cool morning air like a knife. My husband wakes and descends the staircase, seeks vitamins in kitchen cabinets. Two young girls burst from a door across the street. The door clatters shut. The girls run up the hill, call to each other and laugh. They're late for the school bus. I look back at the sky, but the colors are gone.

Daytime and people merge together to become one: the piercing light of sun and eyes. Voices are like the snarling demands of wolves. Garbage trucks growl, FedEx pulls up. Brakes screech. Teenagers laugh and throw stones as they walk up the street. A machine blows leaves, or cuts down a tree. A car passes by with the bass from the radio turned up loud.

I spend the day with ears raised and eyes wide, running and hiding, searching for a meadow full of lilies. This is not the fault of others. It is I; I am wax. When forced to interact, I lose my shape.

Ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom.

Late at night I slip outside, when the people are back in their houses. The trucks and cars have stopped rumbling up the street. Finally alone with the world again, I listen for the sounds of the night. Crickets sing with their wings, and an owl's distant hoot floats across the neighborhood. A cat materializes at the corner of the house, trots in silhouette across the yard. I watch it appear, and then disappear. The cat is headed to quiet places, around the edges of worn-out fences, under parked cars, into the secrets of alleyways, past painted porches and the hidden things that live beneath them. I cannot follow.

Above the telephone lines that scar the sky, a patch of dark velvet makes space for the moon. If I stand outside long enough with my face tilted upward, I can convince myself that I am alone. The intrusions of neighborhood life disappear. For a moment, I am part of the night – the crickets, the owl, the moon, the cat. There are no people, no wires, no doors that slam shut. I can wander through my mind, unseen. I am free, if shrouded in shadows.

The feeling won't last. Dawn will return to be followed by the day, when whoever I am, or whatever I feel, is always interrupted.

LIZ DOLAN[BIO](#)**On Winter Evenings Father Strings the Moon**

It tags along behind us tallowing maples
draped in frosted capes. The 6 o'clock
whistles long and low, long and low. Over snow

we trek in silence through hollows
of our town. Does quiet keep us quick?
An eagle shadows us so low

we can hear the whoosh of wings
until he leads us to twin steeples
where he pierces sky mocking

Orion's sword. In the cemetery
behind the church, Joshua, Ezechial
and Abigail sleep, warmer than we

who stamp our feet and clap our hands.
Tiptoeing over opal quilts spread
on loamy cradles, we trace

their names and dates on stones
listing like tilted sails. Hand in hand,
we, a trinity, then trudge home listening

to crunch of brittle snow, listening to tiny heart-
beats, ripe berries bursting in blue fire.

MARY RUTH DONNELLY

[BIO](#)

Ode to the Buffalo In the Campground at Dawn

How grand and how necessary
at first light, your body a thundercloud
made solid and warm. You pick your way
over the clay ground on legs
that seem too slim to hold your mass.
The unlikely hump of fur on your yoke
and head appear awkward, rugged
as you raise your flat face
to check the morning scent.

The night before
lightning had lit
pinnacles and peaks,
the jagged rocks,
of the Badlands.
Wind and rain swept
out of the mountains
and reshaped
these old rocks
again.

How odd and how generous,
buffalo, animal son of thunder,
remnant of the Badlands,
you weave among the little tents,
tents you could crush but don't
and never break the morning hush.

Bear Scratches Her Back on a Tree Stump in Alaska

This island where we live,
it is green now.
Mosquitoes are everywhere,
but so are the fish.
Oh scratch my back.

Yes, I raise my head in pleasure,
but that's not all.
I am never up in that blue sky.
But birds bring me messages.
They tell me where huckleberries
are ripe. They spread rumors
of cloudberry, a delicate orange,
that grow just over the ice.
They talk about more too.
They believe the sky is endless.
None of them have ever found its edge,
so they insist it goes on forever.
I keep my eyes on it.

Dreamy Water

Whoever survives the first days
with a careless mother lives
a long and comfortable life.
Mussel females disguise
their glochidia as food
for passing fish. The parasitic
little ones attach to the fish's gills.
Reaching the right size, they drop
to the stream bottom,
into the mud, and grow
their lovely iridescent nacre
amidst the dreamy waters
for 20, 30, 100 years.

WENDY DUNMEYER

BIO

Remains of the Mixed-Grass Prairie

Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge

Between
the granite rocks
embedded in the soil,
the bluestem stands and grama grass
still grow,
a scrap
of plains whose stony soil defied
the plow and man's attempt
to claim a land
not his,

a scrap
of plains that feeds
a few small bison herds
whose ancestors had no defense
against
the gun
and man's inherent greediness.
A few small bison herds,
a scrap of plains—

The Common Lilac

Prune it too much, and it responds
with new growth but no flower.
Young branches need time
to develop, strengthen, and blossom.

Its mature, stout stems, however,
furrowed and flaking grey,
flower year after year,
dependable as spring.

Rocky slopes, dry soil, full sun,
 cool climates, winter's frost—
 it requires life's roughness
 to thrive and produce at its peak;

yet, in its peasant hardiness,
 it needs to stretch its branches
 and unfurl its heart-shaped leaves
 to frame its panicles,

which keep their bloom a week or two
 before its fruits produce their two-winged seeds.

The White Coyote

The cattle rancher didn't think twice.
 He saw her fur lift in the southerly wind
 that brushed the bluestem prairie grass,
 aimed his rifle, fired, and watched her hips

swing out and collapse. He didn't wait
 for her to die. Grabbing a rusted coil
 of barbed wire discarded by the barn,
 he ran across the field. She watched him come,

then dropped her head on her front paws,
 her eyes tamed by pain, her quavering howl
 silenced by labored breath. Her latest kill,
 a slender cottontail to feed her pups,

lay at her side. The rancher stopped short;
 he hadn't seen the rabbit in her mouth,
 hadn't known she wasn't stalking his herd.
 The grass went still with her last breaths.

He stroked her head, clenched his shaking hand.
Too late to change what he had done,
he seized her by the scruff, wrapped the wire
three times around her neck, and hung her

from a pine fence post, her rare white fur
a warning to other predators.

In the Woods Beyond Gowbarrow Park

*Dorothy Wordsworth
Grasmere Journal
Thursday, April 15th, 1802*

The wind was furious & seized my breath;
the Lake was rough, but when I reached the woods,
I saw some daffodils close to the shore.
I fancied that the lake had floated seeds
ashore & that the little colony
had so sprung up—But there were more & more,
a belt of them along the bank, the breadth
of a country turnpike road. They grew among
the mossy stones, where some rested their heads
while others tossed & reeled & danced & seemed
as if they truly laughed with winds that blew
upon them o'er the lake. They looked so gay
ever glancing ever changing—The life
of that one simple highway undisturbed.

JEN EDDY
[BIO](#)

The Clay Path

I wander to my cabin along the clay path
that dips to traverse a bog stretching
from loamy dampness in the woods
into the shallows of a mountain lake.

Water inches deep, the color of weak tea,
lies dormant in the heat of day. A dragonfly
of iridescent blue hesitates over lily pad
leaves floating on the still surface.

Bubbles rise from the mucky bottom
disturbed by black tadpoles skittering
in their sun-warmed incubator. Something red
wiggles through the grass bordering the path.

I capture it and a red salamander squirms
in my hand, tiny tail lashing as it tries to get away,
then gentles as I open my hand close to the ground
allowing it to scurry back into the weeds.

At night, the grasses waving beside
the path are illuminated by cool moonlight.
I pause to hear the chorus of bullfrogs,
accompanying a solo by a lone whippoorwill.

In my mind, the path is always there
waiting for me to return,
where the dragonfly delights me by day
and the bullfrogs sing to the stars.

REBECCA ELLIS

[BIO](#)

Cricket

5 a.m., a steady trill—
what is it like for him,
hard black body still wet
with cold dew, the world
unlit except
for the moon, which his
spikey dark knees point towards—
how does he know it's time to sing,
high and fast into the coming dawn?

Second Flight

Fledged, he
hadn't gone far. Hung
by one foot from a blue string
he was a whirl of wing and belly spots,
the first imaginings of orange on his chest.
The little straws of air in him were a whirl, a dervish
spinning at the end of the string. He was a roped angel wrestling
himself, the slight heft of his free leg not much use. I walked past
at the edge of the woods, seeing through underbrush a blur, a taut
blue
tether and whoosh of feather as the bird flashed and spun. He swung
down,
stilled, looking at me, now the greater danger. We eyed each other,
sizing it up.

Back to the house,
I rustled the sewing basket, found
palm-size embroidery scissors, blades flat,
tight as a beak and sharp. Dish towel. By his side again,
I tossed the cloth like a soft cocoon over his confused flight.

His sudden stillness. Under the white towel I held his bone-light
body,
with the other hand clipped away the stand of poison ivy around him
—this
for my own convenience—and uncovered his leg, scissoring the
knotted blue line
from the bush where he'd hung. The blue was plastic, the last length
of it twisted tight
at his ankle. Laid him down on the ground, head and bright eye
concealed by the towel.
He lay unmoving as I examined, doctor-like, the throttle of plastic
still on him, the yellow foot,
its scaled length, its startled claw. The string gripped, too tight to cut.
Time paused while he

breathed—shallow quick—averted from what he could not see.
I thought hard, fumbling the string. Then, bifocals off, set aside
in the luminous grass, looking closer, small tugs, I tried
to unwind the knot. At last it loosened—
the cord released, the terrible small
plastic fell away.
I lifted the towel,
keeping his head covered, to check
legs, position of wings. Then flipped the towel back—
a startle, blast flashing up, a rocket of feathers,
passage of orange through the bushes, bright
thrust of air, and away.

GAIL RUDD ENTREKIN

BIO

Daylighting the Creek

Like the aspen trees in the golden grove
seem to be tall bouquets of shimmering yellow leaves
in separate silver vases but are really the same tree
rising up from the same system of pushing, pressing,
winding root, blindly moving to water, to light,
we are sprung from the river
that bubbles and curls beneath the surface
of our lives and into which, turning to our beloved
with a sigh, or taking up the pen, the brush,
the flute, we put a line down now and then,
trail a cool finger tip in the current of mystery.

In sunlight we click along the sidewalk in our busy shoes
where builders, in their wisdom, buried creeks
to make a city square and straight and new,
each of us forging ahead along a line from A to B,
forgetting for the moment
the dream or memory of crookedness,
of things that amble, take the low road,
speed up on the downhill slope, and pool
in the loveliest places. Things that come
together, merge and swirl, whisper along
in the night: *follow-me follow-me follow-me*
follow-me-home.

Dragons

Green is what you fall down into
as the silver road you follow dips
into the valley past the Coastal Range
out of the fog—the rounded green
of hills like sleeping dragons, the tree
scales bristling up here and there in bundles,

the rich verdure of shapes still and silent
 but about to shift as soon you turn away
 and once you've passed, about to rise,
 lumber to their feet, thrash their tails
 once or twice, turn, turn again, and,
 snuffling slightly, small wisps of smoke
 from their noses puffing into the sky
 to join the cumulus clouds, resettle,
 facing the sea.

Flowers of May

Here comes April in a dirty yellow Mac,
 knee-high rubber boots, squelching
 as she comes. May stands behind the fence
 waiting, filing her nails with a broken
 emery board and smoking a Camel,
 tapping her toes in purple spike-heeled shoes,
 skin-tight pink synthetic skirt.
 That May's a whore, or
 she sure looks like one. I bet
 she does that magic flower thing
 for anyone with an ounce of sun
 and a rusty watering can. April's
 busy though—a real worker, that one—
 she's deep in mud, sinking those bulbs
 with her grimy fists, knowing her reward
 won't show up till after she's gone
 and that slut May
 will take it all to the bank
 her skinny arms overflowing
 with all that green.

SEREN FARGO

BIO

tanka

never intending
this act of mercy
I let the baby
garden slug
go free

Tree

My roots winding twining like capillaries, interwoven
into the dark loamy fabric of the earth

succulent saturation of nourishing rains trickling dripping down
wonderful decay, rotting litter

a dinner of detritus.

Soaking molecules, moving feeding life skyward through
my diameter's center, growing outward thickening

a hardened trunk of spider web criss-cross dry lake bed grooves
like well worn lines in comfortable leather shoes

or a gracefully aged face.

Reaching, reaching up and under canopy of glorious
green, crowned jewels ruffled by wind

respite and hearth for the furred and feathered, scurrying
singing, bringing sound to my beckoning edges, quivering fingers
grasping inviting the fire of day

quenched leaves that in return, offer
life-giving breath to the earth.

JENNIFER LAGIER[BIO](#)**Penetrating the Mist***Fiscalini Ranch, June 2011*

Sticky monkey and harlequin lupine flame
 along misty flanks of a low, rolling incline.
 Somewhere beyond the white reek, invisible surf
 whooshes, washes a crumbling bluff's stony feet.
 Humid fog can't obscure early summer's gold blooms.

Despite impaired vision, I know this trail,
 could wander Marine Terrace to Park Hill
 even if walking while completely asleep.
 Here is the familiar clay and foxtail lined stream.
 Blackbirds decorate a driftwood bench, chorus rudely
 from the ridgeline's long-needled pines.

I imagine myself five years in the future,
 a cranky old recluse nesting in a small seaside cabin with
 the requisite garden of rosemary, rock roses, and succulents.
 Each day I would explore indistinct Cambria coastal trails
 while accompanied by a coven of fat, spoiled hounds.

Come-and-go morning drizzle will still provide
 my failing eyes the briefest peek-a-boo glimpse:
 twitching ocean, gray infinity, spaghetti snarls of kelp,
 something surprising always waiting to wash ashore
 after piercing the persistent, opaque vapor wall.

Fox

This morning, I see only the white-tipped tail of a red fox.
 She hears me thunder across an elevated boardwalk, makes her
 escape.

I catch a quick glimpse of her soft auburn hind end as she spooks,
shimmies down a bridge support beam, disappears in the weeds.

She slinks from creek bed to secret lair near flowering bluffs.
After, only the subtle wiggle of pale sea grass gives her away.

Moaning mourning doves accompany me on my continued hike
from stony ocean cove to golden ridge, the steep upper trail loop.

I struggle against age and gravity, flee symptoms of mortality,
fear my body as it frays and slows, becomes its own trap.

Montana de Oro

Purple thistles and circling vultures frame a blue bay.
We slide downhill, grab a rock wall,
and curse the rough trail.

Everything here is decomposing:
a dead seal washed ashore, torn apart by scavenger birds,
the fragile bluff fractured by storm and rain, tourist feet.

We come to savor, not collect. At every switchback, we pause,
admire incoming shore fog, guess wildflower names.
Below us, the stony beach displays an ever changing mosaic.

A small cottontail explodes from bright mustard; fat squirrels
forage among thrift and scarlet pimpernel for succulent seeds.
Under ancient cypress, we picnic, ignore jeering gulls.

Headland winds rise. We are carried away.

CHELSEA LEMON FETZER

BIO

Kind of Flower

once
heading home
from Dizzy's Diner
you found
a kind of flower so slight
we could
touch its petals
without feeling them

on walks since
Brooklyn, and me
still by your side
you searched for another
flower like that

Feeling
Feeling

the daffodil through
brownstone's
iron gate

dogwood blossoms
afloat
over concrete

and this violet
clematis

faithful, she rises
from abandoned hubcap
to grip the tire man's
chain link fence

MEG FILES

BIO

On the Lessons of Geography

Doing a geographic, they call it. Life messed up? Got issues? Get on the road. Things'll be different, there. Wherever there is. No need to face those demons. Leave 'em in the desert.

In the Sonoran Desert, the saguaros rise to 50 feet, weigh up to 7 tons, and can make it for 200 years. Yet these monsters' roots lie just below the surface. I imagine the tendrils spreading a hundred feet in all directions, searching for all the dead I have buried in Arizona, weaving themselves into shrouds around the desiccating carcasses.

This summer, in the name of book research, I'm doing a geographic. Trying, if truth be told, to leave my dead in the desert. I'm writing, now, on a rock near Glacier Point in Yosemite. In my foreground is a stand of fire-blackened Jeffrey pines, with tiers of green at the tops. Across the deep valley is Half Dome, only slightly higher at 8,842 feet than I am on my rock. I can imagine it whole once, and feel the long pain as glaciers melt back and its northwest half falls away.

This morning I hiked to the Grizzly Giant of the Mariposa Grove, where I learned that the 200-foot, 3,000-year-old sequoias—the most massive living things on Earth—have a root system only 3 to 6 feet below the surface. Their height attracts lightning, their soft bark burns but their water-soaked trunks endure, the fire clears out the debris and competition around them, and the heat causes the huge cones to fall to the prepared nursery below. They are built to start fires and to stand in the middle of them.

The first of my Arizona dead is Greylorn, the gray and white tomcat my husband had when we married. The cat I'd had then, Simon the Vicious, is buried in a shoebox, with a copy of James Dickey's poem "The Heaven of Animals" shrouding him, in South Dakota. Greylorn's grave is in Apache Junction, in a backyard beside a brittlebush, and I like to think of his bones tangled in the roots below this resurrection plant: nothing but a bundle of dry sticks in winter, but a hot yellow blossom rush in spring. Behind him, the Superstitions jut, and I remember all our hikes into those jagged

mountains, mother, father, son, dogs, and the grown son's pointing out Weaver's Needle to his grandfather: "Well, some call it something else." It's a spire of lava that hardened in a volcano's neck, which then eroded away to expose it. The Indians, too, had a name for it, with an allusion to a stallion.

In a cactus garden by the front door of our second Apache Junction house are buried the final two old cats, Pecos, born in the springs of our old double bed, and Murphy, who saw his person—our son who found him singed from a barn fire—from first grade through Ph.D. The roof-high senita cactus shading the graves began as an arm from our best Phoenix friends' yard, and the veritable tree of prickly pear as a single pad. Beside the front walk is a paloverde, at the beginning a tiny green stick we bought at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, now a huge glory of green and yellow.

This summer I left the desert—must escape heat, must do book research—to explore the White Mountains, Flagstaff, Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences, Albuquerque, Denver (where I read at the bookstore Plato would have imagined if he could, *The Tattered Cover*), over the Rockies to Glenwood Springs, northwest to Dinosaur National Monument (where I couldn't bring myself to ask another tourist to photograph me on the saddled-up brontosaurus, though I would dearly love to own that picture), up through Flaming Gorge (which literally was flaming with one of the hundreds of forest fires seizing the West), to Green River (in Wyoming now, on the Fourth of July, where I watched fireworks from my Mustang's hood, beside a row of pickups backed up for tailgate seating), to Pinedale (here at last is the actual research), up to rainy Jackson and past cloud-laced Tetons (more beautiful with this obscuring flaw), to Cody (oh, where are the bodies that went with all those stuffed animal heads?), to Yellowstone, back to Colorado, blah blah blah, to Salt Lake City, to the split-personality Utah/Nevada town of Wendover, alllll the way across a desert nowhere near as lively as my Sonoran, to San Francisco, and now to Yosemite (where I sit contemplating Half Dome), on next to the Mendocino coast where black rocks will rise from the surf like giant shark fins, and back across the West on 50 (to discover why it's called the loneliest highway in America) and on and on and on, crossing the Continental Divide a dozen times. Anywhere but home. There be demons. Daddies, don't try this on your atlas at home.

This summer, wildfires, most started by lightning, blazed in 10 Western states. It's the most intense fire season in 50 years. In Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, Nevada and California I watched the ashy-white clouds rising from the earth turn a bruised red and blue as I got closer, until I passed giant bloody clouds that made noontime headlights necessary.

Brandy Files (pronounced Bruffles) died alone in a cage in a Moon Valley veterinary clinic. So far, her ashes are unscattered. When she first came to Arizona, our son bought her red rubber boots to protect her tender paws from the desert. She kicked them off and did the hikes anyway, toughening up along the way. Ah! A metaphor. Shouldn't the desert make me kick off the boots and toughen up? But perhaps I've been here too long for that, knowing as I do that the desert is more tender than I. The unburied big white dog has appeared—mother, father and son each have confessed—in their dreams, once found running with the Apache Junction greyhounds, leaping gates and mechanical rabbits: Here I am, oh there you are, I wondered where you had gone.

We scattered the ashes of Chinook, love-tamed runner, in our bare desert back yard, just to the right of the patio where we carried our mattress outside to sleep during the monsoons. She'd slept with us, knowing humans' appreciation for the bouquet of wet dog. The scattered patch sprouted a thatch of bright grass. Yeah, yeah, I don't believe this stuff either. But maybe love on a mattress in the rain can prepare the ground for perfect green.

So: What are my geography lessons?

The mightiest—saguaro, sequoias—are somehow held to earth with shallow roots. But those roots spread over a hundred feet in all directions to gather water. Cut loose from love, I believed nothing rooted me. But the past radiates from us in all directions, just below the surface, and memories, carried like blood to the heart in the body's root system, keep us vital. Love, even buried, persists.

Nature loves the irregular, the warped, the distorted, or what's erosion for? Sinuous is shapelier than straight. But the rock, no matter the stark beauty of its asymmetry, eternally misses its broken mated half.

Irony abounds: Trying to escape the heat of the desert and the hot pain of loss, I went into a season of fires. Wherever you go, there you are. It's a cliché, but, well, there you are. Fire—fire like the flames on ocotillo, like wildfire rising into bloody cumulus, like giant trees calling lightning to themselves—the fire we make and the fire that is made for us—fire clears the ground for the future. We, too, are built to start fires and to stand in the middle of them.

NANCY FLYNN

[BIO](#)

Bringing in the Seeds

The light is turning; our days now edge toward gray.

After these months of sow & rejoice in parking-strip abundance,
I am identifying my dead.

Harvesting the winsome stalks of red-rose, burgundy hollyhock,
the rebel sunflower, *girasoli* who refuse to stop their lemon
turning with the sun.

For which I am glad: I still want time to snip to twist to spill.

To re-learn hollyhock is kin to the marsh mallow,
has curative powers (according to Culpepper) of “Wheesing,
Teething
Babes, Cramp, Cough, Convulsion, the King’s Evil, Kernels,
Sun-burning,
Heretic Hands & Their Trials by Fire.”

To revel on the altar, O almighty Helianthus,
pray any next-life lucky means every part of me
can be sun god like you, worshipped as nut, oil, silage, proxy
snuff.

Instead of the way I’ve now ceased to desist
flowering, daily denizen of the phrase, gone to seed.

While I’m bringing in these seeds, reaping bounty
after a summertime streetscape’s bend & bop.

And saying, so long—to “dusty loveless eyes and ends,” to vision’s
crystal,
grief. How soon it shifts—each pip a harvest, memory. No
matter,
those canisters of panoramic sidewalk-snaps I shot.

Keep Napa Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Free!

on the occasion of Dassance and Reed's Santa Rosa garden nuptials

I feel like a hopper,
not leaves but asphalt streets
in this former paradise forever
in a state of being over-paved by cars.

Too many right-angled curbs
that cement-bind and divide
one monogrammed clot from the next,
and nowhere left to imitate a stroll,
navigate the bindweed to sniff
the scrubby fields of fennel
and chicory yearning to blue.

Then it's me, too, piloting a car—
up, over, and around
this most fertile dirt on earth
as I watch for more telltale
signs of whitewash.

Because I've learned from the billboards—
the Moth Awareness Campaign!—
how a sharpshooter with its piercing, sucking
mouth will molt, turn nymph that skips
the pupal to prey, "leafhopper rain"
on almond, citrus, grape—
the lifeblood of this swank,
this faux, pretending-at-chateaux
finger of Cal-I-For-Ni-A.

So fitting: this critter
turned scourge in a West
renowned for gunfights
and tumbleweeds broken
and tumbling glow-in-the-dark
highway dividers, war-paint
down Nob Hill, Figueroa

(Spanish for grasshopper!)
or Mulholland Drive.

Yet leave it to the left-behind
poets in this world of lack
to decry enchant for the name alone.
Because glassy meeting wing
is surely the union we've all been seeking—
Transparency, I take thee flight!

[What am I trying to say?]

There is a morning.
You saunter an IHOP parking lot.
Jump, skip, and stumble a tar-patched quartzite curb.
Descend an irrigation ditch and gather up
the loneliest nosegay of wildest carrot.
Later, straddle a motel room tub.
Trim what once were armloads
until every umbrella blossom finds destiny
in a wedding feast's floral display.
In the process, re-locate a hatchery
of ladybugs—what would the border
pest inspector say about that?

Favored and, remember, lucky.

Nothing like you,
industry-wrecking, much maligned
(formerly unremarkable) *H. coagulata* moth.
Wedded to your fate, your reason to be:
mate, alight, and spew. Every flight
apparent because even as parents—
mother of a bride, a groom—
where we find the conjugal
isn't (necessarily) what's unmessy,
or clean but often the picked-over
and chewed.

Sense, our recipe

for revelation, but sift and stir.
Then watch it quickly
thicken till opaque.

On the Rare Occasion of an Ice Storm in the Coast Range

A skittish rain leaves luminous the tips
of grass, a green sea-field below Bald Hill.

Birds skate on pools that, yesterday, were flow
and tree limbs etch the hubcaps on my truck.

Two garden pinwheels catch returning light:
one stopped, one spinning wobbly as a top.

I lay a new log on the Jøtul's coals
and blue flames climb toward heaven where it exists.

While lilac skyward where the sun will sink,
a skittish rain limns, loosening its grip.

Outside, in after-frost, I taste the dirt,
and long instead to chew this world to pith.

Empty Nest

Garnet yams are the beginning of dinner in the oven and, in the living room, my son's on the couch, baseball on the television set. I escape to the deck—metal of the '50s patio chair my back, wine in a glass on the table beside me—where it takes but a second to find silence in the wind. Nuthatches dash from the feeder to a bird bath suspended from a branch of the light-starved pear while a raccoon raids the compost: freezer-burned pita her preferred menu, the meat scraps left for midnight's skunk. A black-chinned hummer—*Archilochus alexandri*—hovers, seven seconds in a ruby begonia, the blossom pendulous, the tiny bird at its neck. Clouds tip their hats and wander farther south.

The night shift irrigation starts, sputters, competition for a cappella frogs that live in the intermittent stream below the gravel drive. There's more wind, it's cooler, and the oaks that circle the house drop brittle, twisted leaves. They skate across the deck, the sound of one hand scratching, and I look at my hands: all this work and I've chipped my Afghani emerald again. A mountain next to the pickup, two cords of woodstove heat this winter, waits for my son to switch his workout from free weights to splitting then stacking logs. Spiders tat elaborate lace, fill what's empty between the table and the arm of my chair. I lift my glass, catch a web between finger and thumb. The world is hanging by a thread.

MANDA FREDERICK[BIO](#)**Methuselah**

Antiquity, especially that of living matter, has always amazed me; I couldn't say exactly why. Maybe the sheer historicity impresses me—a Japanese man, according the Guinness records, lived 120 years. He was born during the American Civil War and died when Ronald Reagan was serving as president. Perhaps the ability for a living thing to simply live so long impresses me—a land tortoise, reports Australian publication *The Independent* on May 2, 2006, was collected by Charles Darwin himself and brought to Australia. She has been happily eating celery and hibiscus flowers for 175 years. Whatever the reason for my astonishment, I continue to be awed by almost anything that can live beyond my modest and expected 75 years. So when I heard rumor of trees, bristlecone pines, growing for thousands of years in the mountains of the southwestern United States, I was curious, to say the least. My imagination became wild with images of enormous trees teeming together in mighty woody bristlecone fortresses, overlooking the mountains and deserts. But what I discovered was nothing like what I had imagined. What I discovered was a tree, not particularly large, not particularly eye-catching, yet miraculous in its own right, that had been growing alone in the desiccated White Mountains of California for four-thousand, seven-hundred, and eighty-nine years.

Methuselah, a bristlecone pine, is affectionately named by botanists after a biblical figure bearing the same name. According to Genesis 5:27, "And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died," making Methuselah the oldest figure in the Hebrew bible. This prehistoric pine has astounded dendrochronologists, scientists who study the age of trees through tree rings, for the last fifty years. Discovered in 1955 by Dr. Edmund Schulman, Methuselah is argued to be the oldest tree on earth. An alternate contender for the title is a system of dense trees located in the Tasmanian Mountains. The dense trees were thought to be multiple trees. But scientists now maintain that since the whole system has identical DNA, it is one large tree. That system is thought to be eight-thousand years older than Christ.

The pine is similar to many other bristlecone pines. These trees, members of the family Pinaceae, are not like other trees. They are not limber. They are not lush. They do not explode in to vibrant colors. Yet, to come across one is an astounding sight. The gnarled pines are often multi-trunked, their girth reaching as much as thirty-six feet. The bulk of the trees are often dead wood, which wraps around them in a ribbon-like way. This adaptation allows the tree to live under immense stress and harsh conditions. Wood damaged by fire or lightning will simply die. One such bristlecone spanned four feet in diameter, but only ten inches of the tree was living wood. The height of the pines is not immense, often only sixty feet or less. The trees' rate of growth is painfully slow and deliberate, often as little as a thumb's-width a year. A bristlecone of a mere sixteen inches can easily be 250 years old. New growth encircles the tree in whorls. The young branches arch up to meet the sky, forming a fresh crown—the perfect image of a woody patriarch.

The grayish trunks and limbs are rippled and contorted like cooled lava rock or carved marble banisters. These trees are survivors in unlivable conditions. They raise their sturdy arms, spiked like spears, threatening the soft, billowing sky above them. The bristlecone pines live in monstrous isolation, growing above the timberline at over 7,500 feet above sea level. Whatever little vegetation might keep the trees company in the expanse of mountains and deserts is usually unable to germinate due to a lethal secretion, called terpen, which is released from the pine needles during rainfall. Scientists believe this secretion is an adaptation to eliminate other vegetation, which might bring disease or spread fires to the trees. Unable to grow in shade, thriving in acidic and loose soil, the bristlecone pines were made for a lonely life on deserts and rock slopes.

It is difficult to imagine just how old these trees are—how casually we spit out terms like “ancient” and “prehistoric.” Methuselah has live nearly five-thousand years. Five-thousand years ago, the first desert people sprung from the deserts and mountains in the southwestern United States. Before these nearly forgotten Hohokum peoples carved irrigation systems in the scant ground, before the basket makers wove from within their sunken pit houses, before the Pueblo raised the first ladders to their cliff dwellings, before the Hopi Indians traded the first polychrome pots for buffalo

meat, and before the Zuni men clinched snakes between their teeth in their wild rain dances, these primitive hunters and gatherers must have made tools from what little woody vegetation was available to them in the deserts and dry mountains. Perhaps these ancient umber peoples searched the desert and neighboring White Mountains for wood to make tools, discovering one of the few coniferous trees growing in the skeletal soil. Perhaps they hacked at its limbs with sharpened stones, tearing down branches, scattering cones over the barren landscape. During this ancient raid, four-thousand and seven-hundred years ago, something else, perhaps something miraculous, was about to happen: a Bristlecone pine tree (*pinus longaeva*) was about to begin the difficult process of growing. It would live four-thousand, seven-hundred, and eighty-nine years. Methuselah has outlived these ancient cultures. The tree was already four thousand years old when Christopher Columbus made his happy accident and discovered America, when Benjamin Franklin tied a key to a kite and discovered electricity, when the Wright brothers took to the sky and discovered the freedom of flight—Methuselah is the essence of pre history.

Although these trees are immensely sturdy, their delicate nature cannot be ignored. The reproduction of these rare trees is a long process. Luckily, for the bristlecone pines, they have millennia to reproduce. The trees are monescious, which means their reproductive parts are male or female, but never both. Both organs, cones and flowering catkins, can be found on the trees, however.

In the month of October, the pinecone, the female part of the trees, arranged in tawny scales, matures. She has grown four inches long and is fully armed with Bristol spikes, which give the trees their name. When she is ready, having fully developed her megaspores, sticky with her secret resin, she will fall to the infertile earth. She will lay there for nearly eight months, waiting. What she is waiting for is somewhere off in the deserts and mountains. On some other bristlecone pine, the fascicles, the male part of the trees, have been preparing their microspores. In the month of June, located at the end of the branches in purple-red clumps of small rubbery cones, called catkins, the fascicles are growing fat while needles around them mature. The pines often keep the same needles for up to thirty years, as to expend as little energy on new foliage as possible. Then, one spectacular day in July, the female cone opens. For five days, the

catkins release their pollen into the ready wind. Bristol cone pines rarely self-germinate. Like an insect or fish that eats its own offspring at first emergence, the fatal terpen also stunts the growth of a parent tree's own seedlings. If, by chance, a rodent or bird carries a cone off, and the wind delivers the pollen, the trees can self-germinate. Rarely do bristlecone pines grow closer than six-hundred feet.

The chance is low that the improvisational wind will carry the pollen to the waiting resin of the cone. Once the seed is impregnated, she can lie dormant for an entire year before she germinates. It must not be forgotten that she probably lies beneath her own parent bristlecone tree—she must survive the poisonous terpen, and hungry birds and rodents. Survival is a rare occurrence. Observations of this successful marriage find that these trees can yield a crop only every ten to forty years—how many fruitless times Methuselah must have dropped hopeful cones and eager pollen.

These trees, especially Methuselah, continue to fascinate others like me who try to understand anything that can live for thousands of years. Methuselah's discoverer, Dr. Schulman, noted, "The capacity of these trees to live so fantastically long may, when we come to understand it fully, perhaps serve as a guidepost on the road to the understanding of longevity in general." We may never understand it; but we try. Scientists have been reported by *The San Francisco Chronicle* as having cloned Methuselah by grafting its pollen onto other seedlings, creating a perfect genetic replica of the ancient tree. Somehow, a copy of an ancient tree just does not seem as astounding. It is fascinating to look upon these trees and think that a real person, a primitive person so far away in history now—almost five thousand years—may have gazed upon the same tree. These trees are testament that nature, left to her devices, will craft an organism capable of terrific survival. This must be part of our fascination with all things ancient; we, modern human kind, have yet to find a way to sustain ourselves, like these trees, so that we resound through millennia with the same might as these seemingly immortal bristlecone pines.

KAT FRIEDRICH[BIO](#)**Sunk Costs**

I've never liked
The smell of gasoline.
Each time I fill the tank
Of this beautiful machine,
I get a whiff.
I see a tiny drop
Fall on the ground
Like blood -
Blood that evaporates.

I'm sure some executive
Prayed those black waves
In the Gulf of Mexico
Would turn blue,
But there was no escape
From the onslaught
Of oil lumps
Like some bizarre new species
Round and orange
In the fading light.

We have been devoured
By our own creations.
Today I eat shrimp
Because there are
No oil spills offshore.
I am truly privileged.

Our political will
Struggles in troubled water.
Oil rises on her bow.
She turns her sails
To catch the tide
And we all hold on tightly.

It would be
Dangerously easy
If we could wish our way
Out of this situation,
But that isn't my religion.
I believe the consequences
Of our choices
Are as real as this oil slick
And that being spiritual
Means doing your homework.

Get these foul stains
Off of my shores!
This is my country
And not yours.
Get these foul marks,
This gasoline scent
Off our streets.
I don't want to drip
Someone else's blood.
I don't want to buy their pain.

I disinvest
And I resist
False images.
Freedom is not a fast car.
Freedom is not
A jet plane streaking high
Above the rest of us.
Freedom is simply
Living without the fear
That we can never
Wash the stain of gasoline
Off of our hands again.

Economists talk
 About sunk costs.
 My heart is buried
 In an oil well
 Off the Louisiana coast.
 Disinvest! Resist! Resist!
 Cut your losses and get out
 Before they bleed you dry.
 Get out, before they close your beaches too.
 Turn off the motors and the pumps
 And let the oil wells go dry.

Sometimes justice
 Is a mirage.
 Sometimes freedom
 Is a lie.
 Today, I tell you, cut the lines
 That tie you to this fuel
 If you want us to escape
 This oil slick
 Alive.

SUSAN GABRIELLE

[BIO](#)

Gypsum Dance, White Sands

Gypsum fairies spun aloft in sky breaths
skip across seas of milkiness
slide across polished dance floors filled with partners

their music comes from places
our human ears strain to unsettle
resting grounds of bison, and before them,
mammoth families

they sing on below us

we follow,
off-beat.

CYNTHIA GALLAHER

[BIO](#)

13 Ways of Looking at the Moon

1. Old Moon

Year's born in ancient cold,
a frozen snowball of a moon,
silent and seamless,
hurls toward spring.

2. Wolf Moon

Whatever hasn't been consumed,
lies under gaze of both wolf
and moon. A waiting game,
hide and seek between barren trees.

3. Lenten Moon

How can we give up
what was taken away months ago?
Trees surrender sap, ground opens its crusty heart
to both sun and moon. We follow.

4. Egg Moon

The oval and sphere compare arcs.
Which is more perfect?
It's now April,
more beautiful and pink than both.

5. Milk Moon

Light's liquid
feeds us by day,
liquid light feeds
dreams by night.

6. Flower Moon

Blossoms twist into strawberries,
buds into roses,
the gibbous moon unwinds,
full as summer.

7. Hay Moon

You can hear everything grow,
tracking height and breadth
between crescents, quarters,
crops wax as moon wanes.

8. Grain Moon

The moon, a big grinding stone
covered in flour,
cakes and loaves
celebrate in circumference.

9. Fruit Moon

Plums fall like shooting stars,
moon hovers where no hand can pluck it,
fills the basket of our hands
with its white meloness.

10. Harvest Moon

Hours by the bushel full
are filled by picking,
nights find us still in the field,
and so does the moon.

11. Hunter's Moon

Moose and mushroom magnify
under its light,
we can see our breath,
foresee a feast.

12. Frost Moon

The moon has shaved
for the holidays,
sheds it stubble
as if earth were its sink.

Days of Christmas

These 12 most holy days
once a pagan bundle of solar leftovers,
pastiche darkness, phases, eclipses, tides,
falling to rest, awakening.

KAREN GEORGE

[BIO](#)

Feasting

I read and doze on the patio in twilight, nudged awake
when a squirrel scuffs the deep furrows of the locust trunk
before it leaps from a low branch to the birdfeeder,

hangs upside down from the tube's end by its claws, bends
to raise its furry head, against gravity, to reach the seeds.
I'm reminded of the time we pulled up the driveway

to a squirrel on a wooden fence munching a marigold bloom.
It refused to budge while five feet away we watched it crunch
wet-crisp petals riveted round a central core, releasing crushed musk.

I've since planted many marigolds, tasted a few, each bite blooming
the time we were doubly blessed by a tight-pleated bud that opened
in morning, and the squirrel who devoured it by dusk.

Grace

-for Marcia

A friend sent her essay about a great blue heron that flew across her
car's hood, so close she could have touched it without the windshield
in the way. Her family mired in crises, the bird-in-flight yanked her
back. I thanked her, said her story salvaged me—you near the end,
not eating, barely sipping, each day more skeletal. She lived near a
river where they nested in treetops, vowed to send one our way. Two
dawns later, on our lake bank, a great blue heron—spindly legs, neck
an elongated s-curve, bill like twin blades. I slowed, lowered my
window, memorized the scruffy plume feathers, the black striped
from eye to crown, and when it turned, its pale face. To tell you every
detail. How my breath ebbed when I met its onyx gaze, how I
became bodiless but for eyes, nose and ears, the lake water sweet and
feral, the snap as the wings unlatched.

JILL GERARD
[BIO](#)

What I Cannot See

In a field grown to scrub, bright
with tickseed and coneflower,
an indigo bunting flies
from the shelter of a brushy myrtle
calls *sweet-sweet, chew-chew*.

The bird so brilliantly blue,
trick of light, an unearthly bit of sky
or water gone wheeling through this expanse
between heaven and earth.

It's hard to know it was there,
so quick its flight, but image holds
just as blood remembers
its course through vein and artery.

In the hive, the queen bee trembles,
drones busy feeding and feeding her
until she becomes too much herself.

LAURICE GILBERT

BIO

For once it wasn't the ducks' fault

There was even less garden than usual,
that time it snowed in Wellington.

Bare clay turned to porcelain while
the sky fluttered, unfamiliar with

the presence of dry cold. In the silence
the ducks sought shelter, mute for a change.

From upstairs I watch the cabbage trees
then the pongas assert their shapes.

Roses sprout pale spring blossoms;
the hedge grows an old man's crew-cut.

Calm overtakes the customarily bustling aviary:
as the perches gradually whiten

the zebra finches, less impressed than me,
stay indoors; the quails huddle –

tail feathers to the centre – like wagon trains
against the common enemy.

At the garden gate I hesitate,
reluctant to impose boot prints

where there used to be decking, concrete
and paving stones in need of weeding.

The desire for immersion wins. I scrunch
my way to the washing line, stepping over

duck-discouraging fencing to see
what's happening in the poultry-free beds.

Crushed *Alstroemeria*, flattened jonquils;
only the *Magnolia stellata* looks at home.

Each tiny weed in each unsealed crack
bears its own crest of frozen history.

No insects, no cats, no rabbit,
no ducks. Just me and my camera –

and Antarctica's generosity –
tiny lights flashing in response,

the day I celebrated recording
the disappearance of my garden.

SUSAN B. GILBERT

[BIO](#)

I Write as I Walk

Entering the garden, a clear, sweet birdsong slows my gait, drawing my attention to a clump of flowers labeled Lily of the Nile. These whimsical round balls of color invite closer examination. I lean in, but my exploration disturbs a Painted Lady butterfly that flits with agitation and now hovers between my head and the arched branches of the Bower vine.

These fragile wings open my heart.

Walking alone, I see the connection between the wild, my past, and my desires on the right side of Canyon Road.

I write as I walk

Giant thevetia
Yellow blooms –
Meyer asparagus fern

Southern magnolia
Crunchy leaves
Himalayan Taluma –

I long to visit Nepal
Heed the Sherpa's call
See violet eyes
Feel the heat

Namaste

Purple heart
Slender palm lily
Winter cassia

I live the Seattle rain
Wild blackberries
Plum stain
Orca's leap
Reflects northern lights

Chinese plumbago
Dusty miller (Buffalo Springfield)
Big cone pinyon pine
Scorpion senna

I am the southwest desert
Laid bare on the red rock
A lone cactus flowers
The lizard mocks -
Framing a sun

Cooled by the deep shade of the Banyan tree I feel the subtle breath of vegetation as it inhales carbon dioxide and exhales oxygen.

I see my childhood in the blackberries growing wildly amongst the horsetails and ferns, rooted miles from their current destination, seeking sun. The burst of warm, sweet juice against the roof of my mouth is tempered by seeds. One gets stuck between my back molar and my tongue works hard to dislodge it.

Emerging from the stretch of Banyan trees, I cross a small bridge. The air, now calm, offers a resounding echo. The creek is in repose. There is a sense of light and color that find a purple orchid barely visible in the scrub grass.

The Lacebark Tree

Searching for evening's tonic
to soothe the brittle edge of day

Eyes dart

My pace slows
I breathe with the wind
Wrestle with the rustle of the leaves
Feel the shadow of the olive trees

Tiny mites start
Quiet is not what it seems
A symphony of sound reveals
Crows, owls, ducks, doves

A blossom from the lacebark tree falls.

It spits a bee

I continue on the path, no longer looking ahead, but around. In my head, I connect poets and plants. I stare into the tangle of green and see words lining the leaves. Their names take on a rhythm that resonates with the pace of my walk.

***Aloe distans*, the yellow teeth plant**

*Attend to this ridiculous performance**

Of choral fluted pipes
Twisted lights
Rocking heights
Heads above the gray green din

Mocked by swords
 with prickly skin
Tiny webs amidst the mass
hold decay and rotting grass

Trapped inside
succulent hosts
a safety net for struggling boasts
Touch me
Feel me
they seem to cry

Golden teeth
scar those who dare to try

Memories tug at my feet, churning up dust. I stop, settle the air, and remember to breath. At the lake, I see my image reflected, framed by the leaves of the overhanging trees. It startles me. I flash on some lines from *Standing in the Light* by Sharman Apt Russell. Her words mingle with the space.

I. *I have to welcome reverence*

Lilac hibiscus
Lemon scented gum
Weeping wattle
Privet
Pigeon berry
Cadaghi (eucalyptus tor elliana)
Silk tree

Who makes up these names?

I am in awe of the subtle colors
Brilliant bursts of light
A cacophony of textures
Highlight the edges of the night.

II. *I have to search and struggle*

The Pride of the Madeira has seen its better days
It's stumpy vacant flower heads
Drop seeds along the way

Branches search for sunlight
Spiders wait their prey
Sounds of distant sirens compete
With what the birds might say

III. *I have to doubt*

Will I ever hear the music,
Make sense of all the sounds?
Will I recognize my beauty
Before I hit the ground?

A hummingbird's distinctive song
Draws me to the silk tree's throng
It plays a perfect game of hide and seek
Before it disappears

I lean against the Olive tree and listen to her story. I feel her lost loves in the gnarled and twisted limbs. Her leaves, symbolic of abundance and peace, quiver as she reminds me that she had an affair with Plato. I envy her. She is strong and self assured.

The road becomes dry and dusty. The plant life becomes sparse, pale. I wonder what stories they have seen. Do they see their beauty?

Mission Cactus

Quimilo
You look old
Marked with age spots, cotton mold
Cancerous craters, gnarly holds

And yet—

Rich, plum like jewels
adorn your head
Dancing in a crowded room.
bodies collide
squeezing into space,
reaching high
into quiet heaviness

Full, not weary

Ahead, I see that once again, the garden shifts. There is an abundance of color. I marvel at the combinations that fashion would eschew. Here, it all belongs.

Jacaranda

I drink in the intense
Deep purple

It punctuates the gray.

Swallow the grape – whole.

Lilac snow falls lightly
Creating drifts of fairy dust

Bottle Brush

Naked limbs
Extend
Pretend
 To dance against the sky

Tangerine red
Flirts
Bedecks
 To attract hummingbirds on the sly

Birds of Paradise

Green swords
Point the way
Defending
 Faux birds of prey

Tufted armor

Amethyst bellies

Orange gaping beaks

 A refuge for the bees to pray

Rounding the corner, near the edges of the garden, the plants no longer seem familiar. Close examination reveals subtle veins, pungent scents, pollen and waxy film. The Fork Tailed Bush Katydid gives warning. There is tension here. A squirrel runs with a Meyer lemon. The air is short, the sun about to disappear. The moment is slipping away.

Let me be

Let me be like the tiny moisture ant
who breaks from the pack
and circles the words on my paper

Let me be like the red tail hawk
stepping out of its soar to avoid a cloud.

Let me be like the lone rose petal
lying under water on the fountain floor
amidst the feather skeletons and bee carcasses

Let me be like the breeze that
ruffles the leaves of the poplar tree,
rattles the gate
rumples the wait.

Let me be like the Peach Scented Sage
labeled touch me
near the Honey Scented Euphorbia

Let me be like the gopher hole.

Let me be like the Red Bauhinia
belly dancing with Senna Surattensis
while the coral tree plays hard to get

Let me be like the White Iron Bark tree
stripped clean and tall

Let me be like the burnished red pod of Tara
curled like an ancient scarab -
the jewel of the Black Madonna

Let me be old like Bartolone
(oplintia robusta)

a clear green gray with strong apple off shoots protected by Angel's
Wings

Let me be like the Yellow Bird of Paradise that holds its head high
and sticks its tongue out at the Sea Lavender.

The mountains now frame the rim of the garden. They are a solid
reminder of time space. A lone yellow blossom sits quietly in the
middle of the lawn patiently waiting for the wind to speak. It is a
giant yellow Thevetia blossom. I leave where I begin.

***Citations:**

Words in italics in "Contemplating in the Garden" from *Standing in
the Light* by Sharman Apt Russell

DEBRA GINGERICH[BIO](#)**Dolphin Rescues Stranded Whales**

Humans tried, with little success.
The disoriented whales kept
heading toward the sandbar. An hour
passed and the rescuers started
looking at their watches. Then came one
lone dolphin, named Moko
by the locals, and they were
steered to safety.

In Sarasota, dolphins are celebrated
on land in fountain statues. Evidence
shows that their ancestors sought
the reverse migration. They attempted
first steps on earth before they tossed off
limbs and land for an aquatic life.

Did they realize early,
as human forebears clambered
from the depths—discovering
our land legs—that this would lead
to where even they could not
arrange rescue? Did they then plan
their escape to the abiding sea
that with each persistent
wave, rebounds every piece
of suffering we hand it?

MICHELLE GLUCH

[BIO](#)

On Drinking Idaho Waters

Osmoregulation: the wide variety of processes by which a body or organism takes in and regulates water.

September 2010—Sinker Creek

It was a cool, silky, late-summer evening on the Owyhee front and my husband and I had chosen to spend it in his teenage haunt, at the bottom of Sinker Creek Canyon. We pitched a tent next to the old hitching post, which used to hug the brook but now stood weirdly next to dry creek bed after a severe flash flood the summer before moved the stream to the other side of the canyon.

We grabbed the coffee pot and set out across the ghostly creek bed, hand in hand, in search of water—I'd forgotten the bottled water. I laid the blue enameled pot on a rock poking out of the rippling water. I wanted to avoid disturbing the sediment, which was full of bacteria and other gifts, from the cattle that frequented the stream and lowed quietly from the rim rock above us. On the return trip, water sloshed from the pot and left a wet trail across the dry, chalky stones.

Amoeba Proteus

The Amoeba Proteus, the most commonly known of the amoeba, is found in all bodies of fresh water. The amoeba's primary function in life is osmoregulation. This organism consists of just five main body parts: the cell membrane, the pseudopod, a nuclei, the cytoplasm, and one contractile vacuole. Three of these five body parts are directly involved in the process of drinking—the membrane allows water to move in where it is absorbed into the cytoplasm, until a balanced is reached between the cell's interior and exterior world, which is regulated by the contractile vacuole that expels excess water as needed. Under a microscope, this action of taking and expelling water looks like a pulsing star.

The Amoeba Proteus possesses the ability to survive extreme drought conditions. Its cell membrane hardens into a tough shell called a cyst, which protects the organism. The amoeba can survive in this form for several years

until conditions improve. The dust on the rocks of the dry creek bed wasn't dust at all but the cyst form of billions of amoeba waiting for water.

My husband gathered more and larger stones from the streambed to fortify the small fire pit until no stray sparks could escape. He used the fire to purify our drinking water. The evening sun threw its last glowing rays into the depths of the canyon and lit the cracks and crevices between the rocks with a warm-orange candle-like glow.

Thirsty, I pulled a pint of Jack Daniels from the cooler, cracked it open, and took a long draw. My husband reached for the bottle and drank too. We talked very little. We chose instead to eavesdrop on the coyotes that yipped and yowled their conversation across the rocky expanse.

The sun sank lower. We sipped at the biting fluid. Chukar laughed at us from somewhere near the angular ruins of an old ranch house high on the hill. We watched the yellows, oranges, and reds of the sunset and the canyon walls mix and merge, then fade.

Without sunlight, the blues and grays of night closed in on us. Shortly, we were surrounded by blackness, in the belly of the canyon, except for the thousands of stars sprinkled across the night sky. Ours was a narrowed view of the cosmos, but the Big Dipper blazed over the northern lip of the canyon.

As we savored the burning, amber liquid in the bottle, the constellation slowly descended—the ladle of the Dipper gradually inched toward the canyon rim. Crickets chirped, the cottonwood leaves rattled in the light breeze, the stars traveled, and the stream whispered secrets.

Soon the bottle was finished, and the scoop of the Big Dipper was immersed in the canyon leaving only its handle visible, as if the heavens themselves were drawing a cool drink from the Owyhee desert.

The simplest and purest function of any body is drinking—every life, whether gargantuan or minute, depends on water.

August 2011—South Fork of the Salmon River

Just below a deep bend in the South Fork of the Salmon River and across the blue-green pool that I fish, I notice that the one-

hundred-foot ponderosa log that has long bisected the hole, its pointed top wedged between so many drowned granite boulders, has been washed free.

As I peer past the emerald color and into the water, I try to determine if the skinny top of the tree remains jammed in the boulders, another hazard for my line to encounter next spring. For a moment, a brief moment, I see a thick stick-shaped flash in the water. I lean in and squint. The low gray clouds overhead reflect off the glassy water's surface and impede my vision.

There. There it is again, a flash of color and then another. I slide down off of my rock. The rough granite grinds against my jeans, and I land with a squish as my feet sink into the sandy riverbank. I lean out farther. My body hangs over the rushing water's edge, and the salmon comes into focus.

He—the mean looking hooked jaw indicates sex—is about three-feet long, and large for Idaho salmon standards. A flick of his tail shoots him forward and reveals his partner a smaller, snubbed-nose, female, who emerges from under a green, algae-covered boulder. Side-by-side they face into the current and lazily move to the mouth of Two-bit Creek.

Staging in the shallow waters of the creek I can see them more clearly. He is in rough shape. His nose is raw and bleeding in places. All of his lovely silver color is gone, replaced by the dark muddy green and dull red of the spawn. Patches of flesh are missing from his sides. The damage that he displays is a result of the transition from drinking in seawater to drinking the fresh, clear waters of Idaho, and the energy spent during the nine hundred mile journey. The female is still colorful and whole. He probably won't live another week. She'll survive him for a few days to jealousy guard the orange eggs and milky sperm they will deposit in the bottom of the stream.

They move a few feet up the creek and then slide back into the river. The salmon pair repeated this struggle over and over. Hours pass and the sun glides behind the peaks of the Boise National Forest. The fish are barely visible but he continues to lead her into the shallow, swift current of Two-bit, tasting the waters of his birth and following his instinct to return.

My throat is dry and tight. I fight the urge to jump in and carry them upstream.

Pinus Ponderosa

Plants also osmoregulate. Through capillary action water rises up the xylem—the tube like structure similar to a vein—and is distributed throughout the plant, which continually experiences evaporation from its open stomata—the pores found on leaves, stems and needles. The tall, leggy sentinel of the forest, the ponderosa pine, drinks in this way.

Through millions of years of evolution, the ponderosa pine and the salmon have formed a sort of symbiotic bond. To successfully reproduce, salmon require extremely clean, cool water. The ponderosa sends out miles of roots that prevent soil from sliding into the river and provides shade. After the salmon die, their decaying bodies nourish trees at the water's edge.

September 2009—Lake Lowell

As we pull up to Lake Lowell I wondered why the parking lot was empty on a Thursday night, in the long, hot, dog-days of an Idaho summer, but my parched skin begged for a drink from the cool water and I gave it little thought. I grabbed our poles and tackle box. My husband grabbed our daughter's hand and the leash on Bunny, our Pembroke Welsh Corgi. We walked down the path covered in cheat grass and stinging nettles to our usual fishing and swimming hole around the bend from Gotts Point. Bushwhacking through the willows and brush I ran face first into a thick, sticky, gray spider web draped across the bushes. Panicked, my skin crawled with imaginary arachnids. I pulled a long thread of spider silk from my hair, shivered in the heat, and felt about my head and shoulders for the eight-legged orb weaver to whom the silk belonged. Luckily, I found nothing.

Araneus Gemmoides

The silk I pulled from my hair belonged to the "Cat Spider," an orb weaver that doesn't eat. It lacks the body parts necessary to chew; it drinks its water and nutrients. To capture this water the cat spider builds webs shaped like bicycle wheels overlaid with concentric circles. Once prey is caught, the spider runs across the fine silk and grasps the prey with its legs and pedipalp—the short, modified leg-like structures near the mouth—and injects a paralyzing neurotoxin. Once envenomed and immobile, the spider wraps its prey in a layer of silk and carries it back to its hiding spot where it regurgitates digestive enzymes onto its "drink." "The enzymes soften the interior parts of the insect, which the spider sucks up through its fangs like a straw, leaving only the exoskeleton of the insect behind like an empty cup. If a cat spider is unlucky

enough to construct its web in a space devoid of prey it can survive, for a limited time, by drinking dew that collects on its web. Sometimes, such an unlucky spider will set off in search of a new home. And sometimes, dehydrated and weak, it dies, becoming an empty cup itself.

“Yeah, water!” screamed our three-year-old. She pulled her hand free from her father’s grip and ran for the coolness.

“Now you wait. You need a lifejacket!” my husband said.

Our toddler stopped in her tracks and turned on her heels. “No jacket. Hurts my neck.”

“Tough,” he said, as he buckled the clasps on the jacket. “It keeps you safe.” He released the leash to wrestle our daughter into the safety device.

Bunny waddled down the gravelly bank, and I followed her. A thick, blue-green, pea-soup, algae floated on the surface of the cove. Bunny planted one foot in the water and leaned in to drink.

“Stop, Bunny!” I screamed.

“What’s wrong?” asked Jack.

“That’s blue-green algae. It’s deadly!” I pulled my dog out of the water by her collar and grabbed bottled water from the tackle box. “We have to get this off.” I poured the water over her copper-colored foot and washed the slime away.

“Is Bunny going to die?” asked Josie, her eyes sparkling with tears.

“I don’t think so, Fish. I don’t think she drank any,” I said. I took Josie’s hand and rubbed it to comfort her. “But, we can’t swim here. The water could make us very sick if we touch it and it could make you very, very sick if you drink it.”

“But, Mommy, I want to swim!”

“Sorry, Little Fish. It’s just not safe.”

My Little Fish, sweaty and hot, cried all the way back to town. I cried for the health of my Bunny and the lake that I had grown up on.

Whether tiny and simple or huge and complex all life shares certain biological processes. Water binds us all together.

RAIN GOMEZBIO**Bayuk***

Cypress legs sunk in ageless forgotten waters.
 Mammoths dressed in dusty wooly
 Spanish moss dancin in sticky sultry
 heat.

Meandering Snake Bird winds way like
 water moccasin through black green algae alligator
 enclave waters. Shadowed light plays against
 shades of gray and chartreuse, sienna and a navy
 so deep as to be licorice.

Under water, under black *shilup** moves
 with bones collected so far back human
 memory has forgotten names of ancestors fallen,
 taken maimed and lost—slipped through spaces,
 in-between, where stitches in the time of now,
 and then, and the time to come meet.

Woven into water a basket of bone,
 blood, and spirit whispers. Braided
 along banks into the ridges of clay
 and red earth. Breath calls up
 story as winds scatter over
 bayou water and muddy soils.
 Soft persistent effort lest we be
 forgotten.

**Bayuk is the Choctaw word for bayou, and where the term bayou originates.
 Shilup is the Choctaw word for ghost.*

ELEANOR GOODMAN

[BIO](#)

Iceland From the Air

There can be no there there
vastness more vast
than ocean
part ocean the sudden
volcanic plateaus
the snow peaks nothing
like whitecaps this
land as solid
as forest but a hint
of green nowhere
the fields of cultivation
of woman's struggle
to meld world to desire
houses sprout like mold
and how when
rain brings wet scree
in summer and in winter
only snow to stifle
the mountains to
cover the un-fields
of this unremediated light

Alpenglow

A river cuts its own path.
 It has never needed us,
 never needed more than snow
 reaching its infinitesimal limits,
 running in rivulets
 to meet the river halfway.
 Everything joins,
 the valley and cliff's talus,
 the footprints of shepherds
 so old they appear
 as fossils in the moss.

We live in enormity
 in praise of the salamander
 and the tadpole, busy at their work,
 in the sun's growing shadow
 across the eastern peaks.
 In praise for the woodsmoke
 and the woodsman chopping
 in the rain. And praise the rain
 bringing life to the forest
 year after year, and praise it
 in those years it doesn't come.

Praise the forest, all its denizens –
 the singers and leapers, the red-
 roofed huts, those preyed upon
 and those trailing the shivers
 of underbrush. Praise the brush, praise
 the fearlessness of waterfalls
 through the fall of evergreen,
 praise the growing and immovable,
 praise the incomprehensible,
 the ancient, the overtaken,
 the Alps.

By the Sea in Rain

The rain-laden gales

that force the gulls, fighting, seaward,
and tip us like buoys lift
the scarf's fringe above my head, Salome tossing

her veils seeking violence,

blow a kittiwake chick
off-course—
flimsy, flapping with conscious or is it

instinctual fear, knowing

only the gilded swoop
back to land,
that current slipping

like an eddy against the rush—

struggling, belly to the whitecaps,
he seeks equilibrium, and finally
tasting the safety of the shore, yaws

and sails himself further out to sea.

PATRICIA L. GOODMAN

[BIO](#)

The Aging Widow Understands

An adolescent house finch perches
on my window feeder, looking like
he was out too late with an older brother.

His untidy head feathers are slimed,
stuck together, the rest of him rumpled,
as if he just tumbled from the nest.

Chubby physique too inflexible
to bend into the seed ports,
he sits with a puzzled stare,

not sure what to do with
his new body/his new life.

To Move On

Like invasive lights
after a mesmerizing movie
I don't want to end;
like the morning after
a windstorm when my
adored oak lies prostrate,
roots tipped upwards —
these ashes on the table, all
that remain of a lifelong love.

The dove that stuns itself
flying into my window,
the river nearly blocked
by a massive rock slide,
the tree peony whose
fragile blossoms

shatter in a rainstorm,
all pick up, all move on.

This morning
the sun highlights
delicate arches of wild roses
on the edge of the woods,
but the silvery, silken
blossoms of the maples
shiver in the early breeze.

Ceremony Over

I stand outside the hall,
absorb the freshness of fall,
the lonely blue of the sky.

Above me a small brown seed
hovers on a parachute
of silver strands, descends

slowly into my waiting hand,
quivers on my palm,
fibers so light I cannot feel them,

yet tucked inside the seed,
a complete life—like
the lives that just began

with the same I do
you and I once vowed. Inside
the newlyweds hold hands,

radiant. Outside, a puff of breeze
lifts the seed from my hand,
carries it away.

JULIET GRABLE
[BIO](#)

George, or In Praise of Western Gulls

For a time I lived on a sailboat on Richardson Bay, the first lobe of the San Francisco Estuary just north of the Golden Gate Bridge. When I stepped down the gangplank to the marina, George was often one of the first residents I encountered. George was perhaps the healthiest specimen of Western Gull I had ever seen. Along with a great blue heron dubbed “Harry,” he was something of a marina mascot; everybody knew him. George spent much of his time resting on his favorite low tide perch, a crumbling, algae-slicked asphalt ramp that sloped to nowhere. George’s loyalty to the marina’s collection of rickety docks and ramshackle boats was easily explained: one of the marina’s long-time human residents, a painter and boat mechanic named Jeremy Coontz, had been supplementing the bird’s diet for years.

Like most adults of his species, George was quite handsome: large, plump, and deceptively clean-looking. His dark gray back and sides—called the mantle—complemented his snowy head and chest like a dapper vest; the black spots dotting his white primaries were neat as a bow tie. His almost formal plumage was incongruous with certain of his other features: his feet, for instance—absurd pink parallelograms that splayed across the slippery asphalt—and his bill—chunky and bright orange, daubed with a spot as rosy-red as a clown’s painted cheek.

Western Gulls are year-round residents, ubiquitous—common, some might sniff—throughout Richardson Bay. I saw them everywhere: on beaches, docks and riprap; on restaurant rooftops and in parking lots; on posts along the Sausalito waterfront. Resting on muddy islands at low tide. Chasing herring boats. In rafts out in the middle of the bay, harassing cormorants and pelicans. And in the air, where instead of aligning in uniform flocks they careened anarchistically about.

Though they spend a lot of time resting, gulls can be loud and messy. A flock of excited gulls can sound like monkeys screaming, babies crying, or goblins chortling; like a dozen syncopated tripped alarms or a hundred rusty gates swinging. No wonder so many

colorful terms exist for a gathering of gulls: a flotilla, a gullery, a screech, a scavenging, a squabble, and of course, a flock.

Gulls drag bags of trash out of dumpsters and peck them apart. They drop mussels from the sky and litter marina docks with crushed shells. They leave white paintballs of poop everywhere, but being scavengers, they undoubtedly clean up more messes than they create. They're at home just about anywhere and they eat just about anything: shrimp, crabs, invertebrates; herring, herring eggs, dead herring; French fries, potato chips, hot dogs. The eggs of other birds. Other birds, especially stilt and avocet chicks, which they drop from great heights into the water before scooping up and devouring them. The milk of lactating female sea lions as they lounge belly up and oblivious on the beach. Dead sea lions. Dead anything. Gulls steal and harass—the euphemism is “klepto-parasitism”—and they've been documented perching on the shoulders of cormorants and snatching their catch. I've seen them floating in wait while a harbor seal tussled with a good-sized salmon. The seal dove to evade them, but the gulls knew better than to give up; instead they paddled about, circling, chortling, and pecking at the bits of salmon flesh clouding the water.

The bird's common name reflects its reputation as greedy and insatiable. All gulls belong to the family Laridae, which comes from the Greek word meaning “ravenous sea bird.” The word “gull” may share origins with the extinct verb gull, meaning “to swallow;” both share the same root as the word gullet. The navy developed another meaning for gull: a prostitute who catered to sailors, often following them from port to port. The gull's adaptability, boldness, and omnivory have ensured its success and ubiquity. Most North American gull species are in good shape; I don't worry about them the way I do eagles and albatrosses. Even the California Gull, for a time a “Species of Special Concern” because of its precipitous decline at Mono Lake, has bounced back by colonizing South San Francisco Bay, to the detriment of other resident shorebirds.

If there's any concern for the Western Gull, it's that the species' range (and therefore its population) is quite small. Western Gulls hug the coast from Baja California to southern coastal stretches of British Columbia, never straying far inland. They nest in colonies, usually on rocky bluffs or offshore rocks. The largest colony of Western Gulls breeds on the Farallon islands, thirty miles northwest of San Francisco, but a smaller colony has settled on Alcatraz Island, right

smack in the middle of San Francisco Bay. For me a trip to The Rock is as much about spotting seabirds as touring the gloomy cells; however, nesting areas are closed to the public during breeding season. The closure protects bird nests and curious humans alike, for Western Gulls defend their young as fiercely as they squabble over fish flesh.

Alcatraz may very well be where George went when he was away from the marina. According to Jeremy, George brought fledglings to his boat to dine, and I frequently saw him waiting on the dock next to Jeremy's boat with his missus, Georgina. The female gull was most likely his one and only. Like most gulls, Western gulls show mate and nest-site fidelity, mating with the same partner in the same place year after year.

I often saw George waddling after Jeremy as he headed toward the gangplank in his paint-splattered jeans. Jeremy had painted the hull and cabin of his boat sky-blue, decorating each with a smattering of puffy white clouds and a few gulls wheeling about. No doubt George and his mate added a few artistic splotches of their own.

Jeremy was skinny as a piece of jerky and his head resembled a shrunken apple with a thatch of gray-straw hair hastily pasted on top. He looked like a good gust could blow him away and seemed indifferent to food himself, yet he always took care of George. If Jeremy let too much time lapse between meals, George would remind him with a loud rat-a-tat on the companionway door. The bird turned up his beak at white bread.

"Won't touch the stuff," Jeremy said, insisting George preferred the sausage and cheese that comprised the usual bill of fare.

One time I spied on George and Georgina when they were out on a dinner date. Jeremy had been out of town for almost a week, leaving the gulls to their own devices. A few marina residents picked up the slack by tossing crumbs of varying quality off the bows of their boats, and while George didn't always partake, half a dozen less discriminating gulls would inevitably materialize, splashing and screeching, before the first crumbs ever hit the water.

On this particular afternoon the tide was low, exposing rocks bearded with green algae of a dense nutritious color, like spinach; the odor was pungent and briny with an undertone of something else, maybe sewage. The pair picked along the rip-rap, one waddling a

good twenty yards behind the other, ignoring each other except for the occasional chortle.

Whoever came up with the expression “eats like a bird” obviously never saw the likes of George chow down. In the span of ten minutes I watched him devour two large crabs and an unnervingly large annelid worm. The smaller, palm-sized crab was first. George swallowed it whole, claws and all. For a few horrible seconds half the creature hung outside the gull’s beak, clutching at air, then, gulp! An awkward lump bulged in the gleaming white transition area between George’s neck and breast.

After a brief respite George continued his foraging along the tide line. Suddenly he bowed, stabbing at the end of a fat segmented worm. He pulled. Six, eight, then twelve inches of annelid emerged from the mud before disappearing into George’s gullet: a palate-cleanser, perhaps.

After that I turned to watch the dozen or so Clark’s Grebes in the sheltered cove north of the marina, but admittedly, they weren’t doing anything exciting. Most were asleep, heads tucked in wings as they floated. When I turned back around George had a second crab in his beak, this one the size of a salad plate. He quickly made the prudent decision to set the crustacean down on the rocks and tear it limb from limb, devouring the soft meat rather than swallowing it whole. Afterwards he picked up the empty shell and dropped it a few times, where it clattered delicately against the rip-rap.

Flying rats, flying garbage cans, feathered garbage disposals: gulls are the target of all kinds of derogatory labels, but I admire both their behavior and their anatomy. Try to imagine the iron gizzard required to process and digest a whole crab! But forget crabs; I’ve seen gulls on the San Francisco waterfront eating starfish, a creature with a very short list of predators. Apparently the biggest challenge for the gulls isn’t digesting the spiny echinoderms, but fitting all five limbs into their mouths.

Richardson Bay hosts other gulls—California, Ring-billed, Heermann’s, and Mew Gulls, as well as the occasional Herring and Glaucous-winged, but I’m partial to Westerns, perhaps because I can identify them with confidence. Gulls are the bane of many a birder; several species look frustratingly similar, and even if you can identify the adults, most gulls go through several plumage phases in the first three or four years of their lives, during which they look variously

brown-splotched, brown-mottled, or like collages of adult and juvenile birds pasted together. Adding to the confusion, many gull species hybridize, making positive identification near-impossible. Western Gulls, by contrast, are unmistakable once you've observed enough of them. Their large size, robust bills and bright pink legs are distinctive, and they're the only local gull with a pure white head in winter.

But although there's a particular joy that comes with easy recognition, I suspect my affection for Western Gulls springs in part from my acquaintance with George. As a person who's spent an inordinate amount of time holding her breath while tip-toeing around bushes, hoping to catch a partial glimpse of the drab brown wing of some obscure sparrow, I was grateful to watch this bold, beautiful bird without worrying he'd sense my presence and spook. George could see me, and he didn't care. George was tame but not tamed, as at home in a parking lot as on a wind-swept bluff. His presence in the marina added color, comedy and—I daresay—character, along with the inexplicable thrill of sharing close quarters with an ambassador from places wilder and other.

LISA K. HARRIS

[BIO](#)

Kayak Communication

My two daughters and I hugged the shores of the Bay of Fundy off Alma, New Brunswick, in a three-person kayak. The water was flat as an open bottle of root beer, the day bright, sunny, and warm — a rare springtime day for this part of the bay. I saw the trip as an easy paddle, us three girls enjoying a delightful afternoon exploring the coast. We were on vacation and adventurous, open to what the trip offered.

I steered from the stern while teenage Lyda sat at the bow and four-year-old Ava sat in the middle, her head barely poking from the life-preserver. We traveled south, paddles slicing through still waters, past Hummer-sized granite boulders heavy with a lush crop of grape-sized knotwrack bladders. The plant grew halfway up the cliff face, testimony to the fifty-foot daily tidal fluctuations.

Lyda broke the silence with relentless complaining. I wasn't steering correctly, she said. I pointed the kayak in the wrong direction. We should be headed more out to sea. Over there, she signaled with her dripping paddle. Not here. Would I correct our position?

I told her we were headed towards Mathews Head, a large, rocky outcrop jutting from the forest. She nodded in agreement, the wind ripping further words from her mouth and flinging her long auburn hair helter-skelter. Good, I thought, now that we were united in our destination, let's enjoy both the scenery and the ride—in harmonious silence. A puffin bobbed to the water's surface. Its distinctive white head and orange beak contrasted with the greenish-gray bay. A crow, its jet-black body iridescent in the sun, flew parallel to us and the shoreline. It cawed, the only other sound except for the water dripping from our paddles. And my eldest daughter.

Lyda continued with her barrage of complaints. Her whining blotted out the crow's song; the puffin fishing; the beautiful warm day I was spending with my two daughters. My steering was wrong, she said. Where was I headed? Mathews Head was over there. We're too

close to the shore. We should be out farther. It's too shallow here. We'll run into rocks. The tides coming in. We'll be washed ashore. Why, she asked herself, hadn't she sat in the back of the kayak when given the chance and taken charge? We would have been there by now, she said.

Why indeed? This is a question we often ask ourselves, particularly in hindsight: why didn't we take command of a situation? Why did we follow our spouse's direction, our parents', our friends', our bosses', or our leaders'? If we had steered life's boat, we would be there by now. We would have solved our country's problems, won the war, finished the project under budget, earned higher marks in school, balanced the checkbook, be in a happier marriage. We would have crossed the road without getting side-swiped by another's poor leadership skills.

After a heated discussion, where at one point Ava screamed we were spilling the kayak and she couldn't swim to shore, I realized that while Lyda and I agreed on our destination—Mathews Head—our routes differed. I followed the coastline, a scenic but ponderous course through shallow water. I enjoyed discovering the area's details—barnacle covered rocks, spruce trees, crows calling, and the water lapping against the beach. She thought we should make for the head in a straight line, paddling through deep, unchanging water. Lyda focused on the destination while I reveled in the journey. She looked at the bigger picture, the metaphorical forest, while I concentrated on the seaweed growing on the boulder.

Both paths led to the same place, but the course differed—one scenic but longer, the other quicker with a monotonous landscape. From my daughter's view point, I steered erroneously. And I would have said the same of her efforts, if she had sat in the back and commanded our craft.

We compromised after Lyda refused to paddle further. We split the trip, I would steer the kayak on the outward journey and she would command the craft on the return. On our leisurely trip to Mathews Head, I commented on the shapes of the rocks, the puffin fishing, the spruce trees high on the bluffs. Lyda acknowledged my finds with a flick of her hair, bidding her time for speed. On our

return we paddled hell bent for leather towards the marina. I worked hard to stay up with the swiftness of her strokes and was pleased with our synchronization.

Our craft remained steady after we agreed upon our plan. In the end we each achieved our objectives. And little Ava didn't have to swim to shore.

LOIS MARIE HARRODBIO**This Pilgrim's Progress***Hopewell, New Jersey*

When we walk our daily allegory,
 down Broad Street past Rose and Chubby's
 where the pink-faced Fat Boys fill their bellies
 on pancakes and bacon, past the Get Slim
 Exercise Gym where the upscale lawyers
 cycle Nowhere Fast, past Rhodie
 the Boxer doing her Muhammed Ali
 hind leg shuffle down the picket fence,
 begging her quotidian bone like a communicant
 at the sacrament rail, we wave to the fervent—
 the joggers, the runners, the bicycling priest
 who never misses a day, all those determined to be saved
 in a faster heartbeat, and the walkers too
 for whom we have special affection.
 Less pious, the woman who wears a different jaunty hat
 every day, the man who reads his newspaper
 and drinks his coffee as he ambles along,
 and especially the dogs who would lick our sores
 if we had them: Winston the Maltese, Lilac
 the yellow retriever, Button, Shelby, Shrug.
 And most of this congregation gathers in the park, a few acres
 with a stream that runs off sump pumps
 and sewage tanks, and there
 the birds come too—no, I do not call them angels
 for this is an earthly allegory, martins, robins, crows,
 bluebirds, jays, catbirds, chickadees, and yes, red-tail hawks,
 a peregrine falcon from time to time
 sitting on the bridge and the great blue heron,
 just one in the little park, occasionally feeding in the stream,
 though one day, we saw him,
 all of us, walkers and dog-walkers and dogs,
 in the briary thicket, as big as a pelican,
 caught in the tree, wing pinned by thorns,

and knowing we could not get him out,
we conspired to walk away, some saying
they would call 911 or Audubon.

The next day he was gone.

And we wanted to believe he had saved himself,
once the watchers turned away.

The Cardinal and the Mockingbird

At the top of the cherry tree, the battle of the one-bird bands,
the cardinal with his conventional patterns,
purdy purdy purdy . . . whoit, whoit, whoit, whoit

what you hear is what you expect
the Haydn symphony, comfort of coda and repetition,
which, I suppose, since I love it,

is not so different from the raucous monotony of rock.
One two, one two, one two . . . one, one, one, one,
the businessman's grind, the butcher's bump.

But sirening above the cardinal, the mocking-
bird with his stream of unpredictable phrases,
wild allusions to robins and chickadees,

wrens, the rarely seen cerulean warblers, squeaky gates,
yapping terriers, cell phones, microwaves, cats,
my own child screaming *Mommeee* above the hornet's sting,

each repeated three times or so you don't miss it,
he's not the obscure modernist he first seems,
repetition provides mastery. No difficulties here.

The deep desire: to be steadfast as the cardinal,
steadfast, certain about something,
even a little song, to know it and sing it and get it right

every time, *what-cheer, what-cheer, what-cheer* . . .
wheet, wheet, wheet, wheet. And the deeper desire
 to mock everything that passes, the fragmented throating

of ephemeral things. Once when I was trying a difficult phrase
 of Bach, something from the English Suites,
 the mockingbird learned it too . . . with every hesitation.

Consider the Cicadas

They work and they sleep
 and come August,

Cicadoidea in earthy brown,
 eyes large apart

they rise, grousing to the grass.
 So many timpani

rumbling *Hemiptera*
 drumming *Auchenorrhyncha*

wracking resurrection
 with dirge.

Well, crank up
 the cacophony.

Who else groans themselves
 from their graves?

JOEANN HART

[BIO](#)

An Unlikely Passion: The Lady and Cross Creek

In 1928, thirty year-old journalist, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, originally from Washington D.C. and a Yankee to boot, visited northern Florida on her honeymoon and discovered a full-blooded landscape that grabbed her by her soul. With her new husband, she moved out of civilization as we know it and into an alien world of dusty palmettos and swamps filled with alligators, possums and poisonous snakes. Set between Lochloosa and Orange Lakes, they called their home Cross Creek, intending to start an orange grove, but that never got off the ground and neither did the marriage. The isolated rural life was not for her husband, but Rawlings grew more attached to the land and stayed, farming and writing. Cross Creek was not just the place where she wrote but what she wrote about, immersing herself in the local flora, fauna and human culture. In 1938, she wrote the iconic novel, *The Yearling* (Scribners 1938), the story of a boy in backwoods Florida who keeps a pet fawn named Flag, which seemed to spring from the wet land around her. It is now considered a young adult novel, but it was written for adults and won the Pulitzer Prize in Literature.

The land absorbed her as much as she absorbed it. She spent many a steamy Florida night in the swamp hunting frogs (good eating) by hypnotizing them with flashlights, and daytime might find her shooting wild boar rooting through her petunias. She had a fiercely adversarial relationship with snakes (once, she killed one with the only thing at hand, *The Yearling*, upon which her grove man commented favorably on the merits of writing books), all the while writing some of the loveliest prose on nature and place to be found in the American canon, her non-fiction account of the land, *Cross Creek*. (Scribners, 1942). "We are tenants and not possessors, lovers and not masters. Cross Creek belongs to the wind and the rain, to the sun and the seasons, to the cosmic secrecy of seed, and beyond all, to time."

There are times in the book where it seems Rawlings was raised by Yosemite Sam, since almost all her interactions, human and varmint alike, involved guns. She was an avid hunter, and loved the quiet solitude of the hunt, walking through the landscape, listening

and looking. She never shot a deer, since her research for *The Yearling* made her too connected, but whatever she did kill, she cooked. In the same period when M.F.K. Fisher was in Dijon discerning the subtle essence of *fois gras*, Rawlings was in Cross Creek baking raccoons—that is, when she wasn't trying to make a pet of one. ("How so ferocious an infant clung so long to the bottle, I do not know.") Sometimes she inadvertently prepared endangered species for the oven (of roast limpkin, a rare crane, "delectable"). Rawlings' nemesis, the rattlesnake, became a delicate hors d'oeuvre in her kitchen, and everything else, from alligator to skunk cabbage, was slathered in buckets of cream, grudgingly squirted out from Dora, her Jersey cow whom Rawlings refers to as "pure evil." Every dish was served with her own moonshine. Recipes can be found in *Cross Creek Cookery* (i) (1942), where there are also instructions on making a conjur bag, for which you will need the right bone from a cat. She picked up the odd piece of voodoo like this from the locals, and also from Florida writer Zora Neal Hurston, who wrote extensively on regional black folk lore. Along with Hurston, Rawlings was in touch with many writers of her time, including Hemingway and Fitzgerald. For a woman who wrote so extensively on loneliness and isolation, she was very much the literary sophisticate.

Cross Creek, near Gainesville, is open to the public, courtesy of the Florida State Park system. I have been there. Nature presses hard against the human soul at Cross Creek, and I could imagine Rawlings' fear as she sat up at night typing away, listening to the sounds of the swamp: "To hear a panther scream is to add a new horror to the catalogue of evil." I immediately understood her devotion to her guns. Yet I was thrilled by the sight of an armadillo walking by the side of the road and the vision of cranes floating like kites above the fields. Rawlings was very proud of a painting of magnolia blossoms she had commissioned, and wrote that it had "the inexplicable added loveliness that true art gives to reality." She gave that loveliness to the often harsh reality around her, creating art out of the place and onto the page. You might not want to live there, but after reading *Cross Creek*, the place will always live with you.

PENNY HARTER

[BIO](#)

Last Night Over the Mountains

Last night over the mountains the moon
illuminated a rift in the clouds, its brilliance
streaming through a widening vee—spine
of some celestial fan.

I stopped on the gravel path to witness it,
willed my body up and out, eager to follow
that moon-road wherever it led—
fearing nothing.

But slowly, as I watched, the clouds shifted,
burying the light, and a bitter wind began
to moan in the pines. As I raised my face
to greet it, I thought of the uncharted path

our planet follows through the greater dark,
carrying the moon in its embrace of gravity,
and of how we all must travel with it,
the solar wind in our wake.

LISA M. HASE-JACKSON
[BIO](#)

Radishes

Though I could never tell readiness
by their sunburnt tops,

I loved the radishes in granddad's garden
most of all.

Funny round things with fibrous tails –
living all their life underground.

My father always pulled them small and tender –
too hot for my tongue.

Grandmother preferred them large and a little tough,
refrigerated with a bit of salt.

Only granddad truly understood
the secret auspices of radish-maturity

for the ones he pulled
and brushed clean with his weathered thumb

were always crisp as authority,
warm with sun.

Prairie Desert

From the valley
I hear trees along the
Bosque turn gold
as dust settles on sage
leaves. The llano's muted purple

confounds the lizard. She's
mistaken her lover
for a rock; protects it

from the roadrunner, the hawk.
A gander in Kansas once mistook me
for his goose. Grounded,

he followed me every morning
to the clothes line, every Sunday
to the creek. In October,

Kansas furrows are filled with
winter seed, Flint Hills yellow
in solitude and the Kanza speaks
in red maple. But I am in New Mexico

where twilight mountains turn pink
and the mesa is always blue.

POLLY HATFIELDBIO**The lowly underappreciated turnip.**

Nearly nowadays a food for paupers. Underrepresented, mostly unknown. Lacking the PR of mesclun mix or microgreens. Lacking the allure of purple asparagus or doughnut peaches. You cannot compete with the heirloom tomato lure. A fervor nearly. Them multi-hued, juicy, sun-ripened, sexy and oh so sweet. No, you are a white root vegetable. Growing well-nestled underground. A tuber. Your taproot offers the sustenance of the earth. Grounding, warming. You still there in the dead of winter. The older you get, the more bite you have. Sharpness gleaned with each passing week. You store well, root cellar friend. With you in my larder, I shan't go hungry. I shan't need, or be lacking. Though I may still want. Continuing to pine for what I do not have. For what is not mine. For what I cannot call my own.

You cultivate in me, as in the garden beds, a sense of groundedness. Untapped potential. Unexplored possibility.

You encourage me to think outside the box. To get creative. And to appreciate. That nearly a lost art nowadays.

You go punky with neglect. Air takes the place of your white meat, core compromised. You disappear nearly. What once made you, what lent you heft, is taken away. Lack of use leads to deterioration. Vitality usurped.

Your greens wave atop the fertile soil. You flying your flag. An attempt to attract attention perhaps. Or, to mark your spot. So you can remember where you are planted. You mark your place. Or is it a way to stand your ground. Top connected to bottom. M.C. Richards spoke of this magical place, the meristem, the limniscate, the shape of infinity. Where a plant branches both up & down. Where a seed makes it's choice.

This delineation. Roots seek earth. Nestle there, familiar, comfortable. Towards the earth's dark, loamy core. And leaves sprout up. Craving expansion. Chlorophyll fountains. While roots offer a sense of contraction. We need both. & so do plants. This vital exchange. Delicate, visceral decisions made. A point of no turning back. Final. Destiny, our fate, decided in that one vital moment. Or is it? Perhaps it's more of a continuous, flowing dance with silent music echoing in our very cells. Who can know?

Sounds of spring

The hush of winter gone along with dormancy and cold. Now windows are thrown open wide allowing the warm crosscurrents in and through the house. Bringing the outside in. The noise of traffic with people in their cars motoring through their very full and busy lives. Sequestered in their armor-like metal bubbles with the radio turned up loud, Blue Tooth ever at the ready and air conditioning already on. Creating, wrapping, enfolding them in a false sense of security. Allowing them the feeling of control.

But, I welcome the endless stream of bicycles. Last night after dark as I finished washing the day's dishes at the kitchen sink, I saw in the tree-dappled darkness a small blue light flashing. Coming closer. I smiled realizing it belonged to a bicycle rider. I felt as though it was a beacon, attempting to foster communication. I felt glad that they were out there bikebound and freewheeling creating so many revolutions of their own, big and small, while I tended to my dishes, washing each one by hand and taking my own sweet time.

The bees busy ambling homeward finally like a downtown drunk. Unable to fashion a straight line. Legs heavy with pollen, greedy for all that is good. This fecund bounty leaves you light-headed, but with a body so heavy you are nearly grounded. The hive though calls loudly and you never fail to respond. Your brood needs you. And the flowers heavy and near drooping with their pollen load need you too. Your work is good work. Purposeful, rich and rewarding. You know your place in this grand and busy scheme of things. You plod on, striped body dancing. Tending the gardens while allowing them to tend you.

SHAYLA HAWKINS

[BIO](#)

Autumn in Michigan

When the leaves trade
their green mantles
for sunlit robes
in shades of saffron, amber
honey, fire, wine

their blossom and sway
like the laughter
of fan dancers
that hypnotically tease
with livid beauty
until at last they strip
the brown branches naked

and, like sumptuous
brightly colored damsels
at a bacchanalia
that spin themselves delirious
and collapse with lush
beatific fever
into their lovers' arms,
tumble through the sky's
blue, soft silver light
to the waiting, aching earth

JANET RUTH HELLER
[BIO](#)

Winter Concert

Grey morning at six:
we shiver with the bare tree.
Red cardinal sings!

Frogs in May

Every spring after sunset,
frogs sing in a chorus
of high-pitched notes
like a counter-tenor ghost.

Autumn Leaves

Leaves like gold coins
fall from the ornamental pear tree
while the tulip poplar sheds
multi-hued flowers.
The sweetgum drops
red and yellow stars.

But oak trees hoard
their dry brown leaves
that rattle in the wind
like my obsessions.

JENNIFER HIGHLAND
[BIO](#)**A Change of Season**

I have felt this thing before in other scenes:
trying to hold the moving water back.
I have screamed in dreams at massive lurching blocks
that tumbled forward, growing with each turn.
It is only with effort, no grace, that I allow
the apple flower to fade and pass to fruit,
and some tough instinct in me each year tries
to clutch the crumbling autumn in my fist.
Today it all comes clear. Today the sun,
immune to all vague terrors, lights the sea
in a thousand places, skips upon the river,
washes the air with a clean and salty white.
The river, full and high, moves steadily,
bearing scraps and floes of broken ice
from far upriver to its spreading mouth—
moves with a breadth and force that overwhelm.
I bite my fist—the day is brisk and bright
but clouded with an ache, for now I know
that you are riding one of those shining slabs,
heading for an ocean I cannot see.

KRISTAN HOFFMAN

BIO

Galapagos

El mar

I.

I grew up on the water, but I didn't always love it. As a girl I feared the crash of the waves, and the dreadful dip down into the sea. But I became older and braver (and my dad became a better sailor). The boat is now a happy place, an escape, an inner peace manifested. I look forward to being surrounded by blue of all different shades. I look forward to the rhythmic song of the waves, to the openness of the sky, to the cradling. Day or night, I feel a vastness around me. Within it I am not small, but exactly the right size.

2.

I have never been a great swimmer. Once I nearly drowned at a beach in Valencia. I was with friends, but they had gotten ahead of me. Since then, I've been afraid to be in the back. What if the water tries to claim me again? What if no one notices until it's too late?

But I refuse to live a fearful life, so I swim, and when I fall behind, I move forward as best I can.

There are sharks in the Galapagos. Yes, I refuse to live a fearful life, but still I felt the fear. Of blood and teeth and the Jaws theme song. Of becoming one of those unlikely statistics. Of losing a limb—or worse, a friend. Yes, I felt the fear.

Naturally, during our very first snorkel, we saw a shark nearby.

After a few electric heartbeats, it was fine. He didn't come after me, he didn't want my flesh. He didn't even care that I was there, really. He was nothing to fear.

3.

It's easy to understand why we create fairytales about mermaids and lost cities under the sea. There's so much life below the water, so much color and motion. There are stories to be told, and feelings to be felt. There is life and death and love and wonder and ruthlessness and cunning and loyalty.

When I saw a penguin swimming right beside me, I lost my breath entirely. I became a child. I watched, starry-eyed, and I giggled like I never do. I tried to keep up, tried to catch the little elf, but I have never been a good swimmer. So I let him dance in circles around me. I let myself live a little fairytale.

La tierra

I.

There is no light when you wake. Just the ship's musty heartbeat, and the sharp ring of a bell calling everyone together. Through the darkness, sixteen pairs of eyes flit to the shoreline, eagerly watching its approach. What strange and lovely creatures await us today? What experience, what adventure.

But there are rules, even out here on these untamed rocks. Don't get too close. Don't fall too far behind. Sweat too much, drink even more. Stretch. Ache. Tire. Rest. See. Do. Live.

Never take.

The truth is, you couldn't possess this land even if you tried.

2.

The paths are marked in black and white—gentle but obvious reminders when set against such a vibrant world. *This is the only way you may go.* The rest of the animals pay no attention. Their definition of home will never include lines or locks or laws.

An iguana blinks up at me. His skin is ridged and cracked. He steps forward. He angles his head. His jaws open. He plucks a tiny yellow star from its leafy nest. He chews.

I laugh as he deflowers the entire patch of grass and then moves on to the next.

What a strange and lovely creature.

3.

Once upon a time, these islands were nothing but fire and ash. Coils of black rippling against each other. Burning waves conquered by the steady blue water.

Then there was a seed, a sprout, an egg, a chick.

Lifetimes layer like sweet, rich cake. Once upon a time, once upon a hundred years ago, once upon a yesterday, once upon a now. Tomorrow is invisible but there, waiting. It's the salt you taste on every breeze.

My only regret is that I am never alone here. Just for a moment, I would like all the other bodies and voices to disappear, to leave me with my thoughts, allow me to converse with this place that is science and history and art. We have been introduced, the Galapagos and I. But we are not intimate. I would like to really know her.

I spot a sea lion pup sucking on its mother's teat, and suddenly I have been let in on a secret. Our vulnerability is shared. The islands whisper, *You may not know me, but I know you.* And it's true. I cannot hide here, I do not perform. Like the land, my mind and spirit roam wild. This place is not the experience or the adventure. I am.

La gente

I.

For eight days we live in a strange mix of primitive and privilege. We are stripped down to the minimum—of clothes, comfort, language. They plunk us into puffy orange vests, and we bounce on the water like babies in a pool. There is in fact an innocence to us now, a childlike grasping to our communication. Everything is curiosity and discovery. When we don't know the words, we try a simpler language. We speak with our eyes and our hands and our laughter.

For eight days we share our lives with strangers. And then of course they are not so strange anymore. For all of us, this is a once in a lifetime experience. What does it mean to inhabit a single moment together? We cross into one another. We are living each other's time.

2.

The locals say they still feel awe, but I'm not sure I believe them. They are in constant motion, just like the boat on which they live. Cook, sail, clean, repeat. Our vacation is their responsibility, their exhaustion. Our paradise is their status quo.

I'm glad I speak their language, even if I do it poorly. Otherwise how would we have gotten to know that Mario is from the mainland, that Elio has a cold, that Edgar's son is named Jessie, that

Angel once worked for a Japanese man who liked shark fin soup? With my broken Spanish, I hope to become more than just another passenger to ferry, another guest to please, another bed to make. Because to me they are more than just the crew.

3.

When we are back on land, Andy asks, “What will you take away from all this?” At first I don’t know how to answer. The question is too big.

“Adventure,” I say at last. It is trite but true. “Opportunities. They’re all around us, if we have the guts to pursue them.”

He imagines, perhaps, that I am referring to swimming with sharks. Or chasing penguins with my camera. Or speaking Spanish with anyone and everyone because I have to.

But I am not referring to any of those things. Or perhaps I am referring to all of them, plus one more.

I am remembering our night in Puerto Ayora, when Ruben took us to the Calle de Kioscos, to eat his favorite dish, to meet his wife and son. I am remembering the bar we went to afterward, with the Australians and the Italians. I am remembering the empty dance floor.

Loud music, dark lighting, and a room full of people I would probably never see again after the week was out. No risk, and yet still I hesitated. Ruben and his wife led the way, twisting and shaking and spinning, with their spirits full in their eyes. The Italian ladies went out next, shedding inhibition, embracing the moment, as they had done the entire trip. Then there was me, sitting on a bench, sipping jugo de mora.

The girl that sat. That wasn’t how I wanted to be remembered. Or forgotten.

After a few minutes, I got up. I danced. And now I can say it, forever. Even if I never see those people—including myself—again.

I danced in the Galapagos.

That is what I will take away from all this.

SARA MARIE HOGG

BIO

Blue Jay Feather

Blue Jay Feather on the ground
Flutters,
White-tipped end, wind-driven,

Blue-black lines fall into
White shaft, pointed,
Writing stories in the dust,

Writing Jay! Jay! Jay!
Bird stories in the dust

HEATHER HOLLIGER

[BIO](#)

Grace Note

Fifty-seven octaves below the middle C.
 Deeper than the mind's reddest, hottest star.
 Composition of a distant black hole –

a lone hum, B flat traveling across
 darkness of space 2.5 billion years.
 The emanation of a star collapsed,

of warped space, light turned
 inside out, only darkness, its presence
 mathematical, gravitational.

This musical note is a minor key,
 a piano's black key, its seventh tone,
 the key of fallen leaves, cathedral hymns,

unclasped hands. Like the heft of memory
 sound waves cresting at thirty five thousand
 light-years apart, a frequency beyond

perception, an auditory shadow.
 Because ours is a seven octave world
 the nucleus of Perseus resounds

in the silence of instrumentation.
 We can only see it, an x-ray glow,
 ripples on a page. Behold the innards

of a galaxy cluster and behold
the anatomy of a God. Wonder
how we learn to hear, what we learn to hear.

Why I vision the bending of light, lean
into the curve of life-years, imagine
the pulse, hum of a cosmos, and listen.

FAITH S. HOLSAERT

[BIO](#)

The Flood

after Lucille Clifton

We said

it was the tree of life
we thought
rising the new way
was not lucifer but
venus in the morning
caught like a star
in the branches

no ...

coiled into the shadow
at the trunk's foot
scales
shine like kaddish

and even the
solitary child
the hope of our mornings
is drawn from her book
is walking in the dog hot day
her hair smoothed as if ironed
the hum of cicadas
the two eyes under the foot bridge
the corn silk limp
heat lightning
hell sulfur
just as the gob pile gives
the water fills the holler
from enclosing ridge
to enclosing ridge

CHRISTINE HORNER

BIO

(in the heat of July)

in the heat of July
a can of smoke and fire in hand
I keep my fingers free, ungloved
for the feel of it, to avoid crushing
life. rivulets of sweat
run inside my veil, inside my once-white
suit now stained with pollen bright
yellow, black, green.

my hive tool pries, the cool dark busy
pool of bees to violate. the force required
brings me close, enough to identify
the scent of their tribe, the wax
that only they can make, to recognize
the soft song of their wings, a theme
composed for the skies.

with a crack! the seal is broken.
sunlight spills over the lip, fills the open hive.
bees pour over the edge in heavy clusters to judge
the disruption, what cataclysm
challenges the order of their lives.

gentle, ready, in curious foment
they come to look, they want to know.
I go slowly now so they'll allow
my inclusion. this is the moment!

this is the gift,
before the honey, before and better
than the most uncommon sweets:
this heart-swell at proximity
to the working chord, the virgin cell,
this forbidden look at what is
hidden. what thrives without assistance
or intrusion, what provides
a perfect instance, as if permission,

to steal what is not given
before the unknown is known
before everything is changed
in the heat of July

JULEIGH HOWARD-HOBSON
[BIO](#)

The Pear Trees

From trees that one short month ago were bare
And a fortnight back were almost buried
In white blooms, verdant green unfurls from where
Brown swaying branches end and touch the air.
Beneath them, shifting, shadows wax and wane:
Now scattering...now solid once again...
In patterns made by breezes blown through leaves
And the few last petaled flowers that remain.
Can we imagine, in a few short weeks,
That swelling fruits will soon be hanging there
From where now flowers fall and branches creak
And rush into each other? These trees seek
Their own schedules which they do not share.
All we need know is this: there will be pears.

Copse at Sunset

Sun burnished branches hang overhead: dark
Lines along a red hued end of day that
Streaks and bursts among these ancient trees. Fat
Nuts and ragged edge'd leaves hang in stark
Silhouette up along the limbs and twigs,
Lending a solid fullness in dark grey.
The fading light creates an interplay
(Darkness and brilliance among the sprigs)
That no writer's word can capture. We try.
Oh, we try, but no terms can reproduce
The glory of the oak, or of the spruce,
As the day goes down in the western sky
And branches mix with twilight. While every one
Searches for the words to use...nature's done.

JAN HADWEN HUBBELL
[BIO](#)

His World

There is a stillness
Spring brings.
Clumps of light snow come
down
On grass
That is still not green.

It comes in breath
that whispers, “still”

at day break it fingers
the earth
skimming like
the hawks skim
thermals.

stillness you can hear
one small bird chirping
where there hadn't been

a branch defined by
new green, bowing
to the music of the small still
evening, strumming
in the very door of his temple.

When you enter it,
And it calls “hush”
And it comes small
And it treads light

Then Sun winks a golden breath
And Birds take in the silent breeze

No where to go
Just here. On this branch
Only now.
No more forevers
Laying down to cajole you.
Who wouldn't want to
Be a bird like that?

H.K. HUMMELBIO**The Abalone**

Certain things, like the solace of a solid home,
 encumber even the lightest of beings.
 Abalone eggs float first in the brine, drift like foam.

Their backs turn protective with disks of calcium brick
 and like all hardness, it brings safety at a heavy price:
 it sinks.

Where the surfgrass waves, bends and shivers,
 fish accept a constant watery prod
 that is sometimes violent, sometimes lulling.

In a world of constant pressure
 everything is ever-shifting
 yet the abalone refuses removal:

its stubborn body becomes a muscular anchor,
 its whole belly a foot clamping to reef,
 wedging into crevices.

The shell is modest: undecorated, pebbled,
 rough as a rock or barnacle. It hides its opulence well,
 jeweled vault hidden like a miser's.

The inner shell is arching, opalescent—
 pinks the color of krill, blues and greens the color of its horizon, its
 sky.
 Once impenetrable and alone, what to do but paint a watercolor
 ceiling?

Perhaps it's not a miser but a monk
 and not stuck but still, tucked into its own
 oceanic hermitage, a living meditation like a koan incarnate.

Vigil

206 million gallons of crude oil, 900,000 gallons of Corexit chemical dispersant. Sandwich terns, royal terns, least terns, gull-billed terns, bridled terns, brown pelicans, northern gannets, black skimmers, American oystercatchers, ibises, yellow-crowned night herons, tricolored herons, snowy plovers, magnificent frigate birds, Wilson's storm petrels, least bitterns, clapper rails, red-billed tropicbirds, glossy ibises, white ibises, seaside sparrows, king rails, American woodcocks, yellow-nosed albatross, band-rumped storm-petrels, greater scaups, Cory's shearwaters, neotropic cormorants, Audobon's shearwaters, Wilson's plovers, Bonaparte's gulls, lesser black-backed gulls, laughing gulls, double-crested cormorants, lesser sand-plovers, anhingas, masked boobies, pomarine jaegers, boat-tailed grackles, seaside sparrows, Virginia rails, reddish egrets, mottled ducks, Louisiana herons, sperm whales, dwarf sperm whales, pygmy sperm whales, blue whales, killer whales, false killer whales, pygmy killer whales, Bryde's whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, Blainville's beaked whales, Gervais' beaked whales, melon-headed whales, fin whales, sei whales, short-finned pilot whales, whale sharks, chain cat sharks, dusky sharks, sand tiger sharks, bottle-nosed dolphins, spinner dolphins, striped dolphins, Atlantic spotted dolphins, cymene dolphins, Fraser's dolphins, pantropical spotted dolphins, Risso's dolphins, rough-toothed dolphins, bull shark manatees, loggerhead sea turtles, leatherback sea turtles, green sea turtles, Kemp's ridley sea turtles, hawksbill sea turtles, Mississippi diamondback terrapins, eagle rays, giant squid, elbowed squid, benthoctopus, red drums, red snappers, Alabama shad, Warsaw grouper, bluefin tuna, French angelfish, mahi mahi, crevalle jacks, cutlass fish, dragonfish, Gulf sturgeon, midshipman, smalltooth sawfish, largetooth sawfish, speckled hinds, bay anchovies, marsh periwinkles, fiddler crabs, blue crabs, galatheid crabs, stone crabs, mussels, oysters, caridean shrimps, brown shrimps, black coral, bioluminescent bamboo coral, elkhorn coral, staghorn coral, ivory tree coral, coral larvae, brittle stars, sea fans, deep-sea jellyfish, zooplankton, phytoplankton, Johnson's seagrass, cord grasses, spartina grasses, humans and least terns. Even the least terns.

This Permeable Body

The trick is like sitting zazen:
work with breath, then breath again.

One might let go of their rigid frame,
then blend into the buck foraging in the roses—

or, the woman who watches
as the buck browses in her yard.

Even wind contains tones of sage and cypress.
To enter the fragile in-between is to feel

the quietude of the rattlesnake tucked
inside a warm cement crevice.

Everything has to do with the ocean
surrounding and moving through

the boy and the robin perched in a tree.
Silhouette joins silhouette, boytreebird as one.

JESSICA B. ISAACS

[BIO](#)

Wanton

All winter and spring, we ached for summer like a long-awaited lover,
anticipated her charms and voluptuous beauty,
the cool depths of lake and shade —

and now, we were here again, staring out at the scenery
from our hot, sticky vinyl boat seats in the middle of the lake —
but her brown trees and bare limbs

of deep August shone out from the once-green Cookson hills
like a bleach-blonde's roots showing; her seductive fresh-water depths
and silky lake-cove curves of our memory

punctuated instead by this year's disappointment of the dry heat,
the chisel of too many days of record-breaking drought;
her shoreline showing

a white, dry line of rock —a ribbon around the lake
like her bra-strap peeking out from under her faded tank-top.
This summer, instead of the cool water

to dip our bodies into, or the deep green of our fantasy,
we see our summer romance for what she is —
too fickle, too lean, too skeletal —

we see for the first time our lover neglected . . .
struggling to maintain her beauty, shriveling up before our eyes
like a wanton woman,

undignified, squirming in her heat, in her lust.
So, embarrassed, we turn away in our boats,
dock them for another year,

and leave her
to her private shame.

FREDA KARPFF

BIO

from **The Wild Blues**

Stardust

Is my mother migrating again? She didn't have money but clearly the mighty DNA of migration has a greater calling power than economic means. I can't help but think that my mother's part of a vast movement of people. It's sort of like the herds of caribou, millions upon millions moving across the wide stretches of tundra. Lands so vast, so vast a movement, that they can be seen like the great wall of China from the upper atmospheres. My mother is part of this vast, distant migration. She's gone off to the Wild Blue Yonder, sometimes as far out as the outer rim of the galaxy, past the curve of the Milky Way. Who knows? Obviously, I haven't traveled there. It's a kind of wilderness. But the rain, the wind, even the solar rays, brings stardust from there. Stardust, working our streams and streaming; touching ours skin and settling in the cool shadows, floating on the water, informing the DNA of dolphins and riding the waves in with me. I like to think that every day these little touches of stardust connect me with the people I love but lost.

Captured by shadows

I was captured by shadows after my sister died. Shadows in summer are refuge. Shadows in spring are painting and dancing. Are they also considered nature? Who can you ask? I was trying to find a way to write about the earth and make a persuasive argument, to anyone willing to listen, to use less gasoline, less water, be less wasteful. I got as far as the shadows and began to make a list that was a timeline of sorts. Here's my list: riding waves, bookie father, Newark and Yiddish, a tangled heart, maneuvering through space and time, the search for the daughter and the search for the mother, the age limit to being a tomboy, the charms of curves, are shadows also nature?

It's the shadows before spring buds the trees with its rough brush of color that I love the most. The movement of the wind through the evergreens, the soft shells of cascading sounds in my ears. The wind and the shadows. The soft sounds without machine noise.

I know that I ignore so much to see this. My struggle is simple. How to bear the pain of on-going disregard and self-destruction. How to choose where to help? How to be compassionate and to have compassion for the self also. Thoughts have shadows too.

The song of the Earth

When I was growing up the word “pollution” was something people actually heard. It didn’t put your mind asleep. You had to twist it around your head. It forced meaning upon you. It’s totally different today. We’re shut down to words like pollution and cancer. Everyone in my family has died from cancer. These are big words meaning big things; entire eco-systems, our bodies’ immune system.

Entire regional ecosystems are in danger. It’s not just any longer about how many hectares or acres a tiger needs in order to be a tiger. It’s not just about the curves in a river a salmon needs in order to be salmon. (The curves somehow producing more viable offspring within their bellies.) Finally, in our lifetime, we’re seeing some dams taken down. We wait for the salmon to wiggle waggle up the river again.

Today, we know that major dams, the largest constructions in the world, can cause seismic activity. We’re talking earthquakes. But the earth’s health is not even just about this sort of thing anymore either. It’s about how we’ve become threatened by our own existence.

Everyday we hear about new extinctions.

How do you talk about this enormous loss that all of us are facing? Those that have little ones. Those that like to think about futures. Like to think about the summer sun or kitchen gardens feeding families in Kenya. The movement of people and animals. Rhythms. Maybe the drumming of the caribou influencing our music. We don’t really know how any of the subtle or even the strong rhythms transform or change the flow of the blood in our veins. What we do know, we know so well that we’re starting not to hear it. We know that mountains in Switzerland have to be covered to protect them from melting. We know that bugs that have natural enemies are free to destroy because the cold that would suppress them no longer does.

We know that our opposable thumb is unopposable.

How do you talk about this and relate this to the loss of someone you love without making it seem like you've made too much of a leap and that people aren't important? When people rank priorities of life, we're always at the top of the list. Do people have to be the most important? Of course they are to you. Those that love you; those that give you meaning, and gravity and ground. But what about all those other beings and bodies living on this planet that sustain all that you love? What do you know about that? How close are you to it? Is your ear to the ground?

Enki, in ancient Sumeria, the place that gave us writing, meant wisdom. Enki literally meant your ear to the ground. Can you hear the smooth turns a salmon makes up a winding river? While in the belly, salmon eggs learn how to follow the river and to mind their way back to the open ocean.

Every day another extinction. Aldo Leopold said an intelligent tinkerer saves all the pieces. We're losing the pieces. Rhythms are changing. Some of the sounds that make up the song are disappearing. Some of the movement in the river is stopped by dams and diverted waters. We should celebrate our differences. But we have to distinguish between difference and loss. We know that the Earth has tremendous capabilities of renewal. Some people call wetland habitats the earth's lungs. If given a chance wetlands not only transform toxic wastes but thrive again and become open invitations to ducks flying overhead to rest during their migration. Every being is a significant part of this world. Every living being, every body of water, every parcel of land. How do we learn how to hear what we've put into the background? We need to start listening again.

ABIGAIL KEEGAN

BIO

The Leaves of the Survivor Elm, July 4, 2011

Leaves of a surviving American Elm are
Oklahoma City. In summer's heat,
city spigots fill crape myrtle buds,
doves drop seeds at cross streets as
black ants travel globes of peonies, and worms
eat Oklahoma City, turning themselves inside
out and outside into this
land we stand on, a city growing, this,
collection of lungs and leaf stomata breathing
city air, chlorophyll and hemoglobin washing
all the life they can, restoring
an exploded city to the sanity
of an Elm leaf, slowly inside and outside
each of our window panes.

Blue Heron Territory

Two young doe run to a startling halt
at road's edge where a red fox charges
around hairpin curves. The fox dashes
past the doe. In shadowy blackness,
on a grey deck, I listen to water ripple
in sedge as a long, tall bird strolls from
shore to lake. Above, milky stars blink
like young doe eyes in the dark.

When three stars shoot across the lake
the shadowy blue-black bird lifts huge
wings above the water and soars into
the inky territory of dreams, where
all at once, the whole world feels
like a story only birds can sing.

Reading Birds

On the streets of Oklahoma City a group
 of sparrows busy themselves in a gutter
 turning pages of yesterday's paper
 as if it were something to read,
 "not since the paper's competitor
 died back in the 70s," I want
 to tell to them. A blue sky
 blows in air so clear I can see
 all the way down the block,
 I leave them to their frivolous task.
 Later, light rain falls under
 heavy grey clouds as a Rock Wren
 places a small path of white pebbles
 against large stones dark as wounds,
 signs marking her way home.
 How wise of her to create
 something to read, something to help
 her find a place she wants to call home.

Edges of Empire

We've driven as far as we can, coming at last
 to the land's end, pits of fire line the shore,
 gulls circle humans clustered against cold.
 Pressing in, one at a time, the birds watch for
 crumbs of little left. Only two gulls hunt
 sand and sea for their own food, the rest
 stalk humans, but still, they seem innocent
 amid a growing population of crows when
 I hear you say in a Hitchcock crafted way,
 "Crows are taking over the world."

Inland, from cedar trees
 in Seattle, crows clicked, click, clicked over
 our heads while five dive-bombed a resting
 eagle, and again, here at Oregon's shore,

after traveling past cancer-bald mountains,
trees felled in droves, brackish black crows
the color of oil and numerous as Portland's
new homeless, move in taking control
of a discarded world, pecking stale pizza,
picking up carrion junk food. This displaced
murder of crows, with fierce-eyed intent,
assume positions atop cars, driftwood,
lamp and fencepost. Pushing through
clusters of gulls like professionals
with slick-backed hair, heads jerk and turn
in search of trade and territory. Looking
ripped—off, they peer at us as we edge
our way onto an overcrowded sandcrust
of public beach, here where America
meets its border. At beach entries, signs
offer ocean bacteria levels and new maps
for Tsunami evacuation. The history of crows
connects them to catastrophe. In Ovid they are
harbingers of livid storms, for Greek legend
these oracles portend an ending of disaster.
And when flocked unnaturally at water, they are
most ominous notes of doom. In British lore,
death of their dark cousins, London Tower Ravens,
foretold a fall for all of England. Here, miles of time
away, the raw-throated caw of clear-eyed crows
sound investments in a landscape at the edge of history.

CLAIRE KEYES[BIO](#)**Consider the Leaves Falling**

A puff of wind and they float
their good-byes down
while I ply my rake, gazing up to count the stragglers.
The sun has abandoned us for Ecuador,
lolling along tropic seas.
Piled onto my tarpaulin, unruly mounds
threaten to topple over, flicking their tongues
as they did when I was a child
diving into raked mounds in our backyard,
longing to be engulfed
by maple leaves, lilac, oak. Then flinging them
high, a fountain of color—rust-red, orange, brown
bits clotting my hair, my clothes.
And the bodies of those I've loved
are those leaves spinning separately to the earth
as if they enjoyed being free
if only for the moments it takes to land and settle.
I haul them in. We've this place, back of the house,
I mound them year after year, layers of leaves
pressing back into the earth.

Winter Beach with Gibbous Moon

We need the beach this mild-for-March day,
for its scent of brine and the pungent rot of bronze seaweed
lacing beach stones. For the gambit of the seagull
heading off-beach, a crab in its beak,
though he won't get away with it.
Another gull zooms up with a piercing shriek
as if her first-born had been abducted.
Something inside us needs rocky outcrops
that defy the thrust and pull of the Atlantic,
beatings they've taken for millennia.
Always, the beach's interplay of water,
sky, rock, cloud. And it's not just us,
crazy to exit the winter house. Midway,
a New Hampshire loon forages. We recognize
his handsome head, his distinctive white necktie,
and listen for the sheer weirdness of his call.
He's come, like us, for respite. And look:
riding the surf close to shore, sea geese rise
in concert with one another, fall, then rise again,
winter guests more beautiful than their name.
"Brant," you call them. The moon,
with a notch in its side, haunts the day,
measuring our months with cold imprecision.
Surfers don't care what month it is. And we need
their tiny black figures timing a wave's best surge,
pointing their boards, then riding the curl.

JENNIFER KIDNEY
[BIO](#)

Backyard Villanelle

The poems lurk in the back yard
 among the chattering squirrels
 where I'm searching for my words.
 Gazing through the gate, the dog stands guard
 while overhead cirrus clouds swirl.
 The poems lurk in the back yard
 but I'm distracted by the birds
 and the saucy way the dog's tail curls
 while I'm searching for my words.
 At noon on Saturday sirens are heard
 while the dog on the sofa lies curled.
 The poems lurk in the back yard
 under the bushes that barely stir
 while the jays and starlings quarrel
 and I'm searching for my words.
 A Cooper's hawk past the treetops soars
 giving wrens and sparrows a scare.
 The poems lurk in the back yard
 where I'm still searching for my words.

The Road to the River

The road to the river runs a rural mile
 south of the city, beyond the animal shelter,
 the town dump, the police firing range.
 This Dead End teems with life.
 Deer stroll out of the woods and turn
 to stare as I amble toward them,
 then they vault over a barbed-wire fence,
 scramble through a field of ragweed,
 and disappear into the woods. A bobcat slinks
 behind my car while coyotes gambol
 across a pasture. Certain vistas remind me

of paintings by Brueghels or Millet, depending
on the light and time of year. Angels
emerge from cumulus clouds above the road
or bales of hay are strewn like loaves of bread
across a field. But it's mostly the birds
that lure me here: the bright buntings of summer
that make way for sooty juncos,
the yellow-throated warbler of June,
the yellow-rumped warbler of September.
In summer I scurry between spots of shade;
in winter I linger in sunlit stretches,
binoculars raised to scan the sky,
the tops of trees and underbrush,
hoping for a glimpse of a rare bird,
a summer tanager popping out of the woods,
a spotted towhee wheezing in the tall grass,
the belted kingfisher rattling by the reedy pond.
Half way down the road,
pavement gives way to gravel,
then sand and the bank of the river.
In winter, bald eagles build aeries
in the oaks on the far shore and sail
along the water hunting for fish.
In summer, great and snowy egrets wait
for the fish to find them where they stand
in the shallows, then—quick—they've snatched a perch.
Every walk by woods and fields and stream
leading to the river is different from every other.
Some mornings wear shrouds of fog,
others jewels of frost. Some days
cows browse in tender grass; on others
horses graze the ground. In every season
the buttery song of meadowlarks rolls
across the hayed fields, and bluebirds fly
from fence wire to cottonwoods as I draw near
the end of the road to the river.

My Life in Birds

I believe in birds, those feathered wonders that help me tell the time and seasons, that brighten my days and entertain and enlighten me constantly. To me, they represent magic embodied, yet physiologically they are the descendants of dinosaurs. They represent centuries of evolution from reptilian lumbering to flight.

One of my earliest memories is of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird feasting on the honeysuckle that tumbled over the backyard fence. I was less than four years old and thought at first that I was seeing a fairy, but my mother told me I was seeing a bird, a fact that didn't diminish the wondrousness of the vision. Mother knew the proper names of most of the birds that came to our yard—Baltimore Oriole, Gray Catbird, Dark-eyed Junco, Carolina Chickadee—and had a lifelong fascination with the Northern Mockingbird whose evolving songs she'd stay up late to record on her portable tape player—although she persisted in calling the Yellow Warblers that descended in spring on the vacant wooded lot at the end of our street “wild canaries.” When I was seven, I thought that aliens had invaded the neighborhood one night when an Eastern Screech Owl was hunting. I had already seen one—a kittenish-looking creature barely eight inches tall—and was amazed to learn from Mother that the eery trilling I'd heard was his call.

The only indoor pet I was allowed to have as a child was a parakeet. I pored over Herbert Spencer Zim's book about parakeets, cared meticulously for my bird, and patiently taught Jackie to say “I love you” and “happy birthday” and “pretty bird.” While I was in graduate school, I had parakeets named Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth, all of whom I taught to recite poetry. I marveled at the shell-like pattern of their plumage and reveled in their antics and their mixing of phrases and poetry: “Hail to thee, pretty bird; I love you, blithe spirit.”

My relationship to birds took another turn when I took a break from graduate school in the interest of earning some money and found a job as secretary for the director of ornithology at the Peabody Museum of Natural History in New Haven, Connecticut. My desk was across from the “skin room”—drawer after drawer of taxidermied

birds, plumage intact. When I wasn't transcribing and typing letters to egg collectors around the world, I'd pull out a random drawer to gaze upon Bower Birds or Blue-footed Boobies or Painted Buntings. The ornithologists who worked there told me of spring migration and Christmas bird counts and where to find the good birds in urban New Haven. With their advice, I bought my first pair of binoculars and began to keep a life list. When I left the job to finish my dissertation, they presented me with *The Herring Gull's World* by Niko Tinbergen, a wonderful study of bird behavior. I should have known that my marriage wouldn't last when my husband asked, "What is that beautiful red bird?" to which I replied, "Northern Cardinal," and then he promptly and forever forgot the name.

Before we moved to Oklahoma, we spent part of the summer in Guatemala where I saw in the wild many of the birds I'd viewed in the skin room—Scarlet Macaw, Keel-billed Toucan, Vermilion Flycatcher, Blue-gray Tanager—adding an exotic flavor to my life list. When we arrived in Stillwater, my first impulse was to tell my employer that I'd changed my mind and to head back home. In 1974, that little town had more in common with a third-world country than with the East coast with which I was familiar. Advertisements for rental homes indicated whether or not they were located on paved roads, and the grocery store lacked all of the gourmet items I believed I required. But Oklahoma lies directly in the migratory path of a large number of North American species and is the summer home of many birds I only dreamed of seeing. Walking my dog, I encountered Greater Roadrunners in barren landscapes and Yellow-billed Cuckoos in the woods around the lake. The creek behind my house attracted the Green Heron and many native sparrows. But it was the Painted Buntings perching on the power lines behind my yard that made me want to stay and—after I moved away—drew me back to Oklahoma again.

Emily Dickinson described "Hope" as if it were a bird that came unbidden and unrewarded to perch in the soul. For me, the metaphor is literal. The annual autumnal arrival of the Dark-eyed Junco and the vernal return of the Brown Thrasher to my back yard reassure me and give me hope for the future. Still I worry about the Whooping Cranes and other species making perilous migrations with wind farms

in their paths or storms blowing them off course or oil spills
threatening shorebirds. I am able only to keep my yard birds fed and
watered and safe from cats, a small price for a gift of endless joy and
serenades at dawn and dusk of almost every day.

ALYSE KNORR

[BIO](#)

Alice in National GeographicLand

she watches the ash settle across a spindled horizon
over the valley kept hidden from priests

brown horse walks an ashen field
boats in the harbor grin cracked faces
cremated piles covered in footprints
even the leaves covered

lava fragments
gray water
gray snow

between a pickup's metal ribs
on the border of ash and sea

Alice in Droughtland

Dragonfly hovers mid-buzz mid-range
grace of your blonde arm hairs bent
back in the lake breeze
six o'clock sun creeps low makes
golden shadows on the wake.
This is a place of reaching,
of towns drowned to give us this basin.
Water dropped now to the roofs
of flooded houses and top row of the raceway
grandstands: concrete cresting the sand.
My hands weep for your flesh—
shingles petrified in red clay.

CAROLYN KRAUS[BIO](#)**Land of Kaleidoscopic Shadows**

We were driving through a cow pasture in a Texas heat wave when we saw the bats, 20 million of them, swooping up from a sinkhole in the ground like a tornado cloud. Turning and rising in widening arcs, they peeled off into giant horizontal columns that striped the evening sky for a mile. They kept pouring out and pouring out in waves that would continue for more than three hours.

This was no heat mirage, no druggy hallucination, no emanation of the terrors that flit through the belfries of our minds during sweat-soaked nightmares. The bats were there. And I was there. But why?

Three weeks earlier I'd been standing outside my sagging brick Victorian near the heart of Detroit, Michigan, shivering with fear as I waited for the exterminator to arrive. Not long before, I'd spotted something dark and coat-hangerish clinging to a curtain in my second-story bedroom. I'd dashed to the phone and dialed Boris, my burley, mustachioed next-door neighbor. Timid at first, he jiggled the curtain until something wobbled onto the bed and flapped into the bathroom, disappearing behind the shower curtain with its pattern of life-sized flamingoes.

Grabbing courage and a broom, Boris clutched a pink flamingo by the neck and pulled open the curtain to enact a scene out of *Psych*, bashing and thwacking until the bat lay on the white porcelain floor, bloodless and flat as a slice of salami.

"It must've come in through your chimney," Boris mused as he exhaled deeply, then nudged the leathery corpse out of the shower and into a dustpan with the toe of his sneaker. Together we wedged an antique highboy against the fireplace, but later that afternoon in an upstairs bedroom, I spotted another bat clinging to a pot of hanging geraniums—and froze.

Trembling, yet determined to avoid a second bloodbath, I dialed the Michigan Humane Society. "We don't do bats," a gruff voice informed me. "For bats, you gotta pay." The voice referred me to a suburban housewife named Betty who cruises the Detroit area in her Jeep: "She'll take care of your bats for a fifty-dollar service charge, plus twenty-five dollars per bat." One phone call later, Betty agreed to appear at my house the following morning.

I shut all the doors, stuffed towels into the threshold cracks, and double-locked the windows. Then, I spent a watchful night on the couch beside the barricaded fireplace. Wyatt Earp at the OK Corral.

The next morning Betty pulled up in her black Toyota Jeep with four searchlights mounted on the cab. It had been a busy week, she told me as she reached into her back seat and pulled out a broom. Five or six summonses a day, maybe thirty in all. "People tell me the craziest stories," she said. A man in Westland had called her insisting that a megabat had emerged from his hairbrush and threatened to brand him with the mark of Dracula. Two suburban janitors had run terror-stricken down the hallway of a junior high school with a bat in pursuit, locked themselves in the art classroom, and called her on a cell phone. A Detroit woman had vowed to give up her lease after Betty pried four bats from her living room curtains. Most of Betty's callers are close to hysteria. They want action. They want riddance. "They're standing outside holding their necks when I show up," Betty said. "I guess they're thinking of vampires. Then, when I pick up the bats, they look at me as if I'm God or something."

Before heading upstairs, Betty pulled on a pair of elbow-length gloves, picked up a small wire cage, and delivered a surprise: "I've been around animals all my life," she told me. "I don't like to see them killed." As it turned out, Betty's not an exterminator. She's a liberator.

I tagged a few yards behind as she plunged up the rickety stairs toward ground zero. After nodding at me with index finger pressed to her lips, she nudged open the bedroom door and snuck up on my one surviving bat, still clinging to the geraniums. Then she pinched it

behind the neck and transferred it into the cage like a kitten, explaining that she would drive the creature to a rural area north of Detroit and set it free. As I followed Betty to her car, my gratitude poured out.

"You're so brave!" I gushed.

"Not at all," she replied. "I love bats. They're one of my favorite animals."

"Bats have plenty of admirers," Betty added. Then, noting my skepticism, she referred me to internationally known ecologist, nature photographer, and bat advocate Dr. Merlin Tuttle in Austin, Texas. "Tell him I referred you," she said. "The Doc will straighten you out."

That very evening I called Dr. Tuttle, who is the founder of Bat Conservation International (BCI), headquartered in San Antonio, Texas. "The fear of bats is all panic, hype," he told me, "sensational media reports encouraged by pest-control companies and rabies research people in the interest of job security. Bats don't bite you on the neck and they don't get tangled up in people's hair." Tuttle once paid a woman \$20 to let him stuff one into her platinum beehive: "I stirred it up a little, but it popped right out," he said. As for the junior high school incident I'd reported to him, "If the bat happened to be flying down the hall and you could run fast enough, it might seem like it was chasing you."

I wasn't convinced. "What about vampires?" I asked him. "What about bats-out-of-hell?"

"Rubbish," Tuttle insisted, then invited me to fly down to Texas and join him in a little myth-debunking journey Bracken Cave near San Antonio, along with a small troupe of BCI members.

"But Doc," I protested. "They'll suck my blood."

"Meet me in Austin," came his cryptic reply. "You won't be disappointed."

That's how I wound up on a yellow bus deep in the Texas hill-country scrub, sweating in the heat and staring up at the sky, along with a half-dozen die-hards from Tuttle's organization.

"We've got three-column bats!" came a jubilant shout from the front of the bus, as it pulled up to a lookout point near the bat cave. The speaker was Merlin Tuttle himself. He would be our guide for an evening at Bracken Cave, home to 20 million Mexican free-tail bats, the largest single group of warm-blooded animals known on earth. Right now, they were headed out for the streetlights of Austin and San Antonio to forage for their evening meal and hang out until dawn. Tuttle had promised "the world's largest bat emergence." And, as the scorched ground grew cooler beneath kaleidoscopic shadows cast by the bat mass overhead, no one would challenge that claim.

It was the first bat mission for our driver, a pale, silent fellow with "Ralph" embroidered on the breast of his Texas Bus Company uniform. He pulled into the lookout point, slammed on the brakes, and stared up at the bat-black sky, smiling wanly, as we filed off the bus and set out folding chairs amidst cactus and limestone boulders near the rim of a limestone pit surrounding the cave. Cautiously, Ralph emerged from the bus to join us. Occasionally removing his glasses to wipe off a layer of the drifting bat fur, he cast narrow-eyed glances at his passengers and mumbled, "I didn't know there was no bat society."

Group members had traveled from as far away as Boston and Los Angeles and had met the bus at a freeway exit near San Antonio. The slogan on someone's red T-shirt summed up the common sentiment: "Bats Need Friends."

They have no more devoted friend than the group's founder, Dr. Tuttle, who was now merrily netting stragglers from the lower reaches of the swirling batmass. In spite of four decades in this business, Tuttle was not the fanged and black-caped Transylvanian you might expect. Dressed in safari shorts with a transistorized bat detector strapped to his belt, he looked like a gray-haired Boy Scout. He extracted a half-ounce captive from the net, and launched into an impromptu lecture.

Tenderly holding up the bat, he pointed out its cat-mouse face, little hyena ears and fingers that spread out like spokes of an umbrella to form wings, the source of the bat's scientific name: Chiroptera, meaning "hand wing." The creature submitted passively to its role as visual aid, making no attempt to bite in self-defense. Repeating what he'd told me on the phone following my encounter with Betty back home in Detroit, Tuttle insisted that reports of dangerous, evil-spirited bats are "mostly just bad press."

Blood-eating vampire bats are confined to the tropics, Tuttle said, and they seldom bite humans anyway. As for rabies, any wild mammal—like a raccoon, skunk, fox or bat—can have rabies. But a rabid bat would be sick, not predatory, and the incidence of transmission to humans is rare.

Far from being destructive, he continued, bats benefit us in many ways. They're natural insecticides; the Bracken Cave colony would consume a quarter million pounds of mosquitoes before dawn. They're a vital part of the seed dispersal and pollination chain that provides us with bananas, dates, avocados and peaches.

Tuttle handed around binoculars and we peered across a field of wild persimmons and cactus into the cavern. It was wall-to-wall bats in there—300 per square foot—and the floor was a forty-foot layer of steaming bat guano, the world's richest fertilizer. Three-hundred-thousand pounds of it would be "mined" here after the bats had flown south for the winter, a migration that has occurred continuously, Tuttle said, for more than 10,000 years.

"Keep back," Tuttle warned unnecessarily, one arm stretched toward us, flat palm raised like a traffic cop's. "Right now those fumes would kill you in two minutes."

By winter, the fumes would die down. After the bubbling guano has been processed by the billions of microbes and beetles that thrive on the floor of the cave, after the bats have flown south on their November migration, the guano would slowly dry out. In early December, laborers would swarm into the cave for the harvest. They would shovel the world's richest fertilizer into a hopper attached to a

vacuum pipe designed to suck it upward through a shaft that was installed for a more primitive version of this process more than a hundred years ago. With the advent of chemical fertilizers, demand for guano declined. But demand has revived in recent decades with the rise of organic gardening and the natural fertilizer is prized for its high nitrogen and phosphorous content.

At the cave's mouth stood the remains of a nineteenth-century furnace, a reminder that the bats of Bracken Cave have played strategic roles at several moments in American history. During the Civil War, the furnace was used to convert guano into saltpeter to make explosives for the Confederacy. During World War II, bat-snagging marines invaded the area on a top-secret mission called Project X-Ray. The plan was to flash-freeze the bats into temporary hibernation, strap tiny incendiary time bombs to their chests, and load them on bombers headed for Japan. When the plane reached its target city, thousands of drowsy bats would plummet to earth and seek refuge in dark crevices of buildings until the bombs exploded and the city went up in flames. But after two million dollars expended on local practice runs, Project X-Ray was abandoned. The bats had bad timing. Some failed to wake up from hibernation, some blew up too soon—all lacked the kamikaze spirit.

Tuttle's furry captive apparently shared its ancestor's pacifism. It had dozed off in his palm as, nearby, predatory hawks dove at the bat swarm and slender coachwhip snakes cased the ground for injured stragglers.

Far greater than the perils of this ecological carnival, however, were those posed by human ignorance. "Most people want bats to go extinct," Tuttle said. We poison them with pesticides, dynamite their caves, destroy their natural habitats and consider it good riddance. If I told people I would eliminate all the bats instead of asking for help in saving them, I could probably raise ten times more money."

As night fell Tuttle opened his hand, and our visual aid flapped off to join the bat ranks still trickling out of the cave. If the evening had been a confirmation for the busload of bat fanciers, it had been a revelation for me. The world held one less terror and billions more

fellow creatures. It wasn't immediately clear what the evening had been for Ralph, our bus driver, who had sat through the lecture/demonstration, attentive but silent.

But back on the bus, as we took our seats for the bumpy ride back to the freeway, Ralph was suddenly talkative. "I'm downright grateful for those bats," he said as he aimed the bus back down the dusty cow path. "When I go to bed at night, it'll be nice just knowing they're out there, workin' the streets."

PAGE LAMBERT

BIO

Coyote

Show me where it is you sleep
where you dream
the shape of your courage
the red iron earth
that marks the trail
to the heart of your den
the woven roots that wind and bind
the sepia granules of doubt
that flake away like rust.

Show me the way to tunnel into this cavern
littered by bone and blood and sinew
crack open the marrow
the hide and scars scraped bare
show me the inside of myself
so that I might see the fears
that draw me to you.

I found your den, Coyote, leaned
into the steep hill, clutched the carpet
of juniper by its woody vines, kept
from falling head-first into the darkness
left a strand of feral hair tucked into
the entrance of your tunneled world
so that you would know my scent
my taste, but you knew already
whispering once,

“So sweet, so sweet....”

Reclamation

They say the traffic in London has killed
 the song of the nightingale; when they
 serenade each other they sound more
 like the honking of horns, the squealing
 of brakes, and so the nests
 lie
 empty.

Yet a coyote sought shelter in a Chicago
 Starbucks last month, the closest thing to a cave
 he could find, stood shaking next to the cooler in the
 dark corner with the Odwalla juices and the caffeine
 drinks and the mineral water from Fuji.

Just last weekend, in Santa Fe, in the hours
 before dawn, on the Plaza while the town
 slept, a mountain lion leapt through the door of a
 jewelry store, leaving a spider web of
 broken glass. In Denver, raccoons pilfer garbage

beneath city streetlights while sleek Peregrines, with nesting
 boxes built into skyscrapers, stalk the pigeons cooing
 from the rooftops. Owls swoop down
 alleys, between buildings, hunt the falcons
 who hunt the doves. Moose leave the northern

wetlands, trek long-legged across Wyoming's
 Red Desert, nip purple blossoms from some rancher's
 alfalfa field half-way between here and the short grass
 prairie, while black bears forage in suburban kitchens,
 paw their wet way to the shallow end

of public pools. Elk herds cross highways, leap
 burrow ditches, tear through fences, travel
 the old migratory routes to the land their ancestors once
 grazed, while in Billings the city council passes laws
 prohibiting dogs in public parks.

Yet, they say that New York City, without man to trim
its hedges, prune its trees, mow its grass, replace
roads, and bridges and traffic signals, would soon be overrun
with feral dogs

yellow eyed cats
and ivy.

Without man or woman to tame it, would within two hundred
years begin to crumble, in half a century would turn to
dust, turn back to the earth within a millennium. Wars would fade
from the horizon, borders
disintegrate, walls come tumbling

down. Silt would rise in the dams, rivers return to their
beds. A new human would rise, begin the task all over
again, would carve flutes from the branches of cedar trees,
piano keys from the tusks of elephants, stain glass
from the sands of the Sudan, sew drums from the skins

of buffalo. Songs would rise from its thirsty throat,
deep and guttural. Eventually, the trilling of women
would pierce the night sky, slice through the blue
darkness like a sleek whale. Nightingales

would return
to their
songs.

SUSANNA LANG

[BIO](#)

Little Calumet

for Cappy

Yesterday we walked together beside the river.
 There were no herons in the heron rookery
 and no nests, though the north bank
 was still fenced off, the signs still posted.
 From fields we'd passed along the road, we heard
 the muted cries of gulls, and from the trees,
 the calls of invisible songbirds. You pointed
 to the hawk that floated for a moment overhead,
 then left. Behind our backs, a beaver
 splashed into the water, leaving
 the evidence of his hunger, one trunk
 after another chewed to a point.
 And on both sides of the path, yellow
 trout lilies and the first trilliums,
 white and blood red, the small stars
 of goldthread, toothwort, false rue anemone.

At our separate desks this morning,
 we each search for more: you learn
 that trout lilies grow in colonies,
 that for the first years they can only manage
 one leaf—which we saw, and wondered about.
 You are thinking about your garden, and where
 you might find a place for trout lilies. While I recite
 the names: bumbershoots, purslane, squirrel corn,
 sometimes called Dutchman's breeches. "Pepper-and-salt,"
 I call to you in the next room. "Mustard and spring beauty!"

In These Mountains

Morning: Vireos

Above my head, clinging
to the thinnest branch,
almost a twig.

White belly, back feathers
blending with the leaves,
song that flickers

like the light on the leaves.

Nightfall: Storm

Lightning over the mountains,
but the thunder is so slow in coming
I lose count,

like the Fourth of July without a soundtrack.
Or only the cicadas to sing
the storm in, cicadas and the oaks

calling the storm closer.

Morning again: Fog

It snakes through the hollows, rises,
falls back,
opens its mouth wide—Frost called it

dragon in the notch. Those were
other mountains
but the same spirits live here,

just beyond our clearings.

Egret, Columbus Day

The egret lingers in the warmth of these last days,
though leaves fall in slow drifts from the burr oak
and the poplar. Now he rises on bent wings
over the mud flats where a canoe disturbs the water:

slap of a paddle, shouts of children. Those wings,
the way they fold as they lift, the way they almost
touch their own reflection on the downbeat,
familiar as a shadow. He flies a little way,

then settles; not ready to leave this strip of cultivated
prairie for the winter. I want to see that flight
again, replay it like a film, but I did not even catch a still
shot with the camera that I hold, forgotten, by my side.

What Hokusai must have wanted, on an afternoon like this
two hundred years ago, when he saw a stork take flight;
then drew each plume precisely for the man who cut the blocks—
a separate block for gray, for black—and pulled the image.

ELISABETH LANSER-ROSE

BIO

How to Love a Buzzard

Shortly after we moved to Florida, one winter afternoon my twelve-year-old daughter and I were walking on a country road north of Tampa. A weather front had passed, turning Florida snuffle-cold. We strolled, she too old to hold hands anymore, both of us puzzled to feel the familiar northern bite in the air while we were looking at palm trees. Above us, in the Jurassic branches of live oaks, Spanish moss swished like flying horsetails. Beyond the roadside trees to our left, acres of swamp stood silent in Floridian winter stillness—no mosquitoes, no dragonflies, no frogs.

As the road curved nearer the water, my daughter got nervous. She pointed. “Is that an alligator?”

“Sweet!” I took two strides toward it and squinted. It was just a log. “Anyway, don’t worry. Today alligators would be too cold to come after us.” Then I noticed in the center of the swamp stood one pale, leafless tree, a snag so long dead that only a few broken branches remained, raised like arms severed at the elbows. I pointed to the snag and said, “Now there’s something to worry about.”

She clapped her hand over her open mouth. On each branch slouched black-cloaked figures, their bare heads snug between their shoulders: turkey vultures.

I had my pocket binoculars. I pulled one gnarled red head into focus. It looked like something that ought to be surgically stitched back into a torso. “Check it out,” I said, passing her the binoculars.

“Gro-o-o-oss!”

They flapped and bumped each other. Newcomers soared in and knocked the others off their roosts. Black vultures jostled among them, less gruesome cousins born without the grisly red skin. I watched one in flight to make certain it wasn’t a juvenile turkey vulture, and there flashed the triangular white wing patches that distinguish it. Always the irritating amateur bird-watcher, I tried to show my daughter the wing patches, but she was alert for alligators and reminiscing about the bay horse we had just passed, a thoroughbred mare who pranced the circle of her pen and whirled to

face us, head high and ears pricked, chest muscles twitching, all an elegant bundle of equine splendor.

"I think she liked us."

"She did." We had fed her grass from our flat palms.

A band of buzzards in a dead tree couldn't lasso a horse-crazy twelve-year-old girl's imagination. I forced her to linger while I made announcements like, "They have rows of short feathers on their scalps like raised eyebrows. It makes them look really worried."

"They're probably scared a gator's going to pull us underwater where they can't get the scraps."

"No," I said. "They're cool with that."

"Beautiful."

"They look like thugs in a dime-store doorway," I told her, even though I knew she didn't know what a "dime-store" was. I put the binoculars back in my pocket and took one last look with my naked eye. In the sinking winter sunlight, the snag, having shed its bark, gleamed like bone. Birds of the sun, the buzzards had come to this skeletal tree to spend the night. Heads tucked under wings, they settled down and fluffed on their bellies like big, black chickens.

As we walked toward our car, I asked myself how such harmless homebodies could ever horrify anyone. Crows may be otherworldly harbingers of death, but they manage to scavenge roadside kills without making our skin crawl the way vultures do. Maybe it's because from kindergarten on, we get to know the crow. In Aesop's fable, "The Crow and the Pitcher," a crow drops pebbles into a pitcher to raise the water level until it can drink. It turns out Aesop knew his crows. Crows can count: if seven people walk behind a blind where there's food, crows won't approach until seven people have left. They solve problems that other birds can't, such as how to reach a treat dangling from a string—with beak and claw, in a hand-over-hand motion, they reel it in. Crows make meaningful sounds the way dolphins and elephants do. They play in snow, sliding downhill on their backs and then flying uphill to do it again, and they do it all wearing a sleek suit in go-anywhere black. They're perching birds, oversized songbirds, passerines, cousins to the blue jay, the magpie, and other well-dressed winners in the Wall Street of the sky. Most of us like them even when we catch them in the middle of the road prying the guts out of a mangled squirrel. Cool customers, they flit aside to let our cars pass, and we forget to think less of them.

Seagulls raid picnic blankets, eat offal tossed by fishermen, gobble rancid scraps on shorelines, and cackle up a rowdy time at garbage dumps, but Jonathan Livingston Seagull isn't ugly; he's an aerialist, a nonconformist, a master of sea, sky, and outer space. As for scavengers who've won human hearts, the prize has to go to the dog. Take a dog to a farm, and he'll help himself to cow pie. Take him to the river, and he'll roll in otter scat. If he finds a piece of carrion, he'll try to choke it down before you pry it from his mouth. Dogs vie side-by-side with vultures for the best seats at carcasses, yet dogs vie side-by-side with us for space on our own beds. People will bankrupt themselves to pay the vet bills for the same animal that stole a maxi-pad out of the trash and ate it, leaving pink plastic panty-shield bits on the rug in front of house guests. We excuse them like children.

When I think "California Condor," the syllables send a silhouette soaring across my mind's eye, but the condor is a fellow member of the family Cathartidae and the order Ciconiiformes—it's a big, hulking vulture. When I hear the word "vulture," I see a scruffy, bald-headed bird slouching on a tombstone. How that image got into my catalogue of clichés, I don't know—Snoopy, the fierce vulture awaiting his next victim? But scavengers have no victims, and most corpse consumption isn't a crime, it's community service. Vultures don't hang around cemeteries—they can't operate backhoes, can't burrow six feet under, and can't stand the taste of embalming fluid. They don't beg mourners for scraps of their dead the way gulls do at beachside picnics. Maybe the image of a vulture in a cemetery burned itself into our collective memories during times of war and plague, when we had to pile our dead the way we do garbage, without the ceremony of embalming, shrouding, coffining, and digging a deep earthen chamber more private than a bathroom stall so the departed can get down to the rude business of rotting. I imagine vultures during the Black Plague watching for cartloads of fresh corpses (which, despite their reputations, they prefer over turned meat). I bet there were people who saw vultures tugging on skin, plucking out eyeballs, and working their wet heads in human abdomens the way surgeons work their hands. I bet some people knew and loved the body under the buzzard's bill. That could make for generations of hate.

My daughter and I stepped up our pace and wrapped our arms tight around ourselves as the sun dipped behind the live oaks. "Why

do people hate vultures?" I asked. "In some parts of the world people thank the buzzard for keeping the village clean. Some actually feed them their dead on platforms. They say the birds carry them to heaven piece by piece, or put them back together in their bellies to be reborn. Some honor them for monogamy and parenting practically the way we do swans."

"Okay, Mom," she said, zipping her jacket. "Except, they're ugly."

I looked up. Two were swinging low on their way to the snag behind us. I could see the red heads. The head resembles too frankly the flesh it tears. Its beak is the color of bone. Ousted from the raptor category upon DNA evidence and shifted into the stork family, the vulture has been denied the reflected glory of eagles and falcons and other breathtaking killers. It does look like the wood stork, which stands moribund by stagnant ponds with its wrinkled, gray skull slung low. Walking along a pond in Saint Petersburg one afternoon, I came around a stand of shrubs and surprised one particularly dismal specimen. It showed me a face that appeared to be in advanced stages of decomposition and blinked its dejected eye. Like its buzzard brothers, the wood stork soars on thermals and has no voice but a grunt. Like vultures, it will take carrion, but primarily preys on small fish, frogs, and fledglings, putting it more in company with egrets and herons but for that zombie face and the stain of DNA. As if roused from a drugged sleep, the wood stork I'd surprised broke its gloomy gaze, opened its white-and-black-banded wings and flapped, flapped, dipping its toes, once, twice in the water. It left me to regard it from a distance, at which it became a heart-stoppingly beautiful bird.

You will know the vulture by its characteristic wide V in flight, wing tips lifted like pinkies at a tea party. Most mistake it for a raptor, and I rarely correct people who look up and say, "Ooh! A hawk!" since they're disappointed when I say, "I think that's a vulture." Few species can soar as well as the turkey vulture, who flies the way we fly with parachutes, gliders, theme parks, and dreams—effortless sailing through space. In flight, the turkey vulture rivals the albatross, the greater storm petrel, and the magnificent frigate bird for its ability to travel miles with little more effort than it takes to doze off in a hammock. Rarely flapping, it circles and rises on an air thermal. Then, when it reaches the top, it glides to the next thermal, soaring

almost indefinitely. Even the better-looking black vulture and the mighty condor have to flap more often than the turkey vulture. Its wing-load allows it to float like a paper kite cut loose in the sky.

My daughter and I had moved to the city of Tampa, which is home to a wake of vultures that numbers well over fifty. They sleep on the roof of an abandoned hotel, sun themselves on the pyramidal top of the SunTrust building, and spend the day surfing the heat that rises off the city. As they sail past the office towers, their ominous and easy flight must taunt the workers boxed in their cubicles. “Look,” I bet they say to each other. “He’s coming for you.”

Once I was downtown walking along the bay when a man elbowed his friend, “Look—a hawk!”

A vulture sailed overhead. I thought I’d try something new. I gasped, “That’s an Eastern Condor!”

“Wow!” They paused, squinting at the sky, holding their breath as the bird floated, and turned, and rose a little higher, as if by will alone. They strolled on and seemed to observe a moment of silent self-congratulation. Around here, when you see a dolphin, it’s a blessing on your day, and now the same is true when those two see an Eastern Condor.

The turkey vulture’s way of skating thermals is why, when you spot one overhead, it’s always circling. Most people take its looping flight to be nature’s silent ambulance siren and suppose some poor dying creature lies exposed on the ground below, in a clearing, hapless without a cell phone. If you assume that where there’s a buzzard there’s a body, you sell the buzzard short. A social bird like the parrot and crow, the vulture lives a more complex life than you can imagine. Vultures congregate, court each other, play games of tag, and turn lazy circles to soak up sun. Perhaps as curious as parrots, vultures investigate more than lifeless bodies.

I know because I met two of them at the Boyd Hill Nature Preserve in Saint Petersburg, Florida, which cares for injured raptors that can never be released in the wild. Along with the bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, and screech owls are two turkey vultures named Pugsley and Turk. Those who work with them have grown fond of them—and defensive about it. They’re quick to mention Pugsley and Turk are by far the smartest birds in the aviary, which is why theirs is the only pen with dog toys. Turkey vultures will play tug-of-war, bump beach balls back and forth with their ugly heads, and play keep-away. “The turkey

vulture has more personality than all the other birds combined. He tilts his head when you talk to him, and I have always had the feeling that he understands everything I say," Sam Foster, a volunteer, wrote in a Boyd Hill newsletter. "I can't begin to explain how much I love these birds and what a privilege it is to care for them." At Lowry Park Zoo, I met with raptor-handler Ashley Hodges and her charge, a black vulture named Smedley. "I can't believe I'm leaving this guy," she said. Ashley had accepted another job. She smiled at him as he balanced on her arm. "I love him."

I once watched Turk eat a raw chicken egg. Lifting it gently in his beak, he held it as high as he could, then dropped it. Several attempts to crack it this way made nothing but small depressions in the sand. Finally, he carried it to the back of his pen where he tossed it against the wall. This time it landed with a small hole in the shell into which he worked his beak round and round, nibbling and swallowing and scraping until the inside was as smooth and dry as the outside, almost as if it had been blown clean by a Chinese egg painter.

Vultures live smart, sociable lives, even to the point of befriending people and following them around the neighborhood like flying dogs. Knowing they can be as affectionate as a family parrot, however, can't make up for the bad press. You can't keep the scalpel-billed vulture as a pet, can't eat it, and since we have funeral parlors and don't require their mortuary skills, the vulture is nothing but lugubrious. Contemptible. Sick.

It gets worse.

Without a song to woo you, the vulture can only hiss and grunt. These sun worshipers bake themselves in the sky or open-winged on fence posts and cool themselves by squirting liquid feces on their legs. When threatened, they shoot vomit that stinks as if pumped straight from an outhouse. When cornered or caught brooding young, the cowards just keel over. Farmers claim buzzards make a wicked snack of lamb eyes and piglet tails. There was a time when they were blamed for killing the livestock they scavenged, particularly newborn calves. Ranchers trapped and bludgeoned them by the thousands from Florida to Texas. It must've felt right and mighty to snuff entire colonies of these creeps. Buzzards may be enviable flyers, superior to eagles, but their morbid soaring as they search for corpses darkens our spirits, for along the ground beneath them they cast the skating shadow of death.

My daughter and I got back in our car and turned on the heat against the quickening chill of dusk. When we drove past the swamp, I could see dark round shapes on the topside of branches like strange fruit against the slate-gray sky. Watching them bed down for the night had reminded me of birds I'd lived with, my grandfather's parakeets, lining up on the highest perches in the aviary, fluffing themselves, and closing their eyes; my parents' parrots tucking in, ruffled and settled on their perches; my own finches flitting into their nest boxes and chirring goodnight to each other. Birds have been members of my family since before I was born, and, as I drove away, leaving the swamp and the snag behind me in the night, I caught myself loving vultures.

One incident can overshadow everything else. An otherwise warm-hearted holiday may be remembered only for the meal during which one relative let too much bourbon foul the gathering and said the unsayable. One moment can fuel a feud, cinch a divorce, turn the course of a family's history. The injury may never be worse than when we're the guilty ones. Perhaps we hate the vulture most because we can't forgive ourselves for the crime we're destined to commit, like it or not, by becoming a corpse.

As we drove back to the city on the highway, I passed my first dead egret, a surprise package under a streetlight, bundled in its own wings, a waste of white. When I blew by at seventy miles an hour, its feathers lifted like fingers waving an idle bye-bye.

After sunrise, a vulture would come. The large claw rolls the egret on its back, and the bone-white beak surgically snips a coroner's incision mid-belly, snapping feather shafts and hollow ribs. The vulture's beak, longer than it seems hidden in its red fleshy sheath, slips into the cavity crosswise to the incision and opens, prying the ribs wide. In dips the beak, and out spiral the intestines, wet and red and yellow, unraveling like a pulled knit. These get set aside as unsavory. In slips the beak again, and the spleen meets its first light, but only for a moment. Organ by organ, gizzard, liver, and crop, the vulture nibbles and swallows. Then comes the heart, and it too passes from bird to bird, soon to lift into the sky again.

ALI LANZETTA

[BIO](#)**just at the edge, where solid and liquid mix to make mud**

i was probably eight years old, but does this have to be about me? i ate a frog-egg. and i mean i really ate it. i didn't just lick it or put it on my tongue and spit it out, i actually ate it. i was in a pond. i was covered in muck. it was so lord-of-the-flies or something. i didn't have a lilypad in my eye. the ground didn't crack open like a speckled brown egg with a yellow yolky duckling inside. instead, it was slimy and slippery and slipped down my throat and nothing happened. julie rolph was sitting next to me in the pond, lakeblue eyes big like globes, wet with reflected pondwater. swimming minnows. something. i think we were naked. i think we were tired of kissing captured (terrified, peeing) frogs and toads and were going for something more consequential. we were waiting for some magic to happen. to rise up from out of the muck and prove itself, like it does. does it?

there was a church on that island. bear island, it was called. in the summertime we paddled a canoe across the lake to the island. once we brought a whole garbage bag full of barbie and her friends and their endless pink and white artillery. it sat on the bottom of the canoe all the way to the island. sloshy. i don't think we ever even played with it. there was always a more interesting Very Important mission to take on. like that church, for example. there was something spooked about it, something always-autumn, something like a bucket to catch a leak that has a long way to fall. that hollow plunk or thump. julie rolph and i would take these Very Important pilgrimages to the church, which was on some other edge of the island, just to spook ourselves. the titillation of some old-fangled danger. shades of brown. stain-colored, iodine. abandoned birds' nests. colonial ghosts. witch-dust. in the winter when we couldn't canoe we cross-country skied across the lake. all winter long, back and forth. walking on water.

in my memory of that island, there's something very salem witch-trialy about it. something tutuba, scarlet letter, something rustling the autumn underbrush. some kind of trap we never got caught in,

but that danger was so delicately infused into everything. sun through birches, sun sinking into water, long afternoon lakeshadows shaped like mysterious creatures, like intrigue, dangerous ideas. all of it you could walk right through, the light and dark moving, falling across your eyes in ancient patterns like water

seems to. we were a maple-people. a lake-people. a canoe-people with some sunwarmed water splashing the bottom around our sneakers. it's how lorine says *fish / fowl / flood / water lily mud / my life*, that makes me love her.

what's a giant bird that starts with a vowel? it's not a riddle. the church was in the forest, and so was the frogpond because everything on the island was. it was a cut-out chunk of new england forest floating belly-side-up and all by itself in the middle of that giant lake. is there a shadow under an island? i was never really afraid of the dark, but i was afraid of the shadow of our little sailboat. treading water in my smudgy tangerine life-jacket, i'd imagine that the shadow was a whale and it was looming just under my feet, waiting for it's chance to gobble me. the lake-whale became an almost mythological creature, showing up every time i swam from the boat. i never told anybody. nobody knows about the lake-whale but you and me.

so but that bird- that bird lived in the forest with everything else, on the way to the church. it's nest was high up in this tree. was it birch? maple? something. a lot of birch out there. skinny white trunks you could bend like licorice. dug-up bone-colored. the nest was enormous. at the edge of my mind, it's as big as a treehouse. five stories high in its licorice branches. if the nest was that big, julie rolph reasoned, how big was the bird? it wasn't *egret* or *osprey*, definitely not *ostrich*- that bird could fly. i never saw it. i imagined its wingspan as big as a rooftop. a bird who could drape itself over a crumbling church. a bird who casts a shadow big as a boat. i recently discovered the largest flying bird who ever lived. its name was (is) *Argentavis Magnificens*, which means "magnificent argentine bird". six-million years ago, *Magnificens* wandered the andes mountains and the treeless plains of argentina with a wingspan of 19 to 26 feet, a

height of 6.5 feet, and a weight of 140 to 180 pounds. feather-size for this bird is estimated to have been about 5 feet long. though it may have needed a downhill running-start into a headwind to get off the ground, it is said that Magnificens was an excellent glider, like a sail plane.

how much do you think a five-foot-long feather would weigh?

i'm trying to burrow inside of something. i would like to flip back and forth between worlds, and i do, and my plane goes down, or my raft pops a leak, or my starship hasn't been dreamed yet, and i'm wallflowering around like a bluebell grows through a crack in the corner of a roomful of windows, i've built myself a home here. at the edge of things. twigs and cattails and feathers. lengths of string i've gathered from so many different cliffs or ditches, crawling inside looking for something with which to tie my ends together. being a seasoned old sailor of dreams, i'm wavelength, starboard watch, i'm a maven in the art of knotting.

when did i become wallflower of the sea and everything in it?
 wallflower /'wôl,flo(ə)r/ noun **1** a southern European plant of the cabbage family, with fragrant yellow, orange-red, dark red, or brown flowers, cultivated for its early spring blooming. • *Cheiranthus cheiri*, family *Brassicaceae*. **2** [informal] a person who has no one to dance with or who feels shy, awkward, or excluded at a party. the truth is, i'm at the party because i wanted to be here. the truth is that nobody knows what's at the bottom. maybe there isn't a bottom. sea lilies and feather stars, sea urchins and starfish who don't have brains, or eyes, or hearts. the heart urchin comes sailing from the sand when disturbed, lands in the same water, and burrows back under the floor of the world. we are some of the most beautiful creatures on the planet, hiding. moveable spine, suction-footed. sand to rubble to coral to cold. the resulting locomotion is generally slow.

some of us can regenerate missing limbs, arms, spines. some of us (bat star, blue star, pincushion) can reproduce by breaking an arm or by deliberately splitting our bodies in half. each half becomes a whole new animal. well.

our upper surface is often very colorful, but our underside is mostly a lighter, a guessing, an aurora. don't see the sky except through water. if you're still wondering what's at the bottom- this is it, swarming with stars. basket star, beaded star, sugar star, brittle. cup-shaped feather-star with an ocean inside. you crawl, roll, walk, swim, cling, quick. loop your arms around something. slip-knot, anchor. cryptic, we hide in the crevice. situated in the middle. in especially strong currents, looped arms are liable to break. so who were you before, who are you now? this is all i wanted to say: look at how many one can become

deconstructing flight patterns, hoping for the best, i had this notion of piecing a sailboat together from a number of small bones. caterpillars don't have bones, neither does the paper for a paper airplane. neither do larvae, opposite of nymph: noun: an immature form of an insect that does not change greatly as it grows, e.g., a dragonfly, mayfly, or locust. my statement is imbedded in this question: what's with the birds? this is going nowhere fast.

i'm trying to deconstruct the projects. in threading things together, i found:

1. a lost girl trapped in a broken heart
2. a cat trapped in a tree
3. another letter from my mother
4. "Haring Ibon"
5. what one can find when one was not even looking. okay, okay, i was looking. i had the binoculars turned around backwards and was looking at my hand. don't hold it against me.

Maestro, conductor of my lungs, my feet, my heart:

in a dream i traversed the continent (wings of carefully balanced fiberglass, featherless, lit along the edges with electric candles, flicking the wind), wafting weightless down the dream-shoot (grandfather clock, a rockingchair rocking, my party-dress inflates like a parachute) i was only dry because i was standing on the tallest rock. a barred owl caught my eye. wounded, he perched high up in the aviary. a sanctuary. really? *he said something to me i didn't quite understand, he said it in the eyes completely, in the eyes a sailboat made of bones, starburst flick of recognition, or longing, or the fall of a gauntlet, or a don't stop looking, or*
starburst |'stär-berst|

noun

a period of intense activity in a galaxy involving the formation of stars.

i used his starmap (it followed me / crouching like a cat) to find my way out, or back, or in, or around.

the history of Home is holes in the sky.

the Philippine Eagle is the largest eagle existing in the world today (tuesday).

he looks worried, his feathery brown brow, slant. in the avian world, a Magestic bird. a Royal bird. they call him, "Haring Ibon"—King of Birds.

there are sixty-four left in the world. *will you still need me, will you still feed me?* an eaglet is born.

"Her arrival produced a considerable spark in the staff," they said, "and indeed all winged creatures around the world. The staff promptly named her "Pag-Asa" - meaning *Hope*."

CECELIA R. LAPOINTE

[BIO](#)

Talking With Kigâ - Thy Mother

"Good morning" I say to kijâ with my feet
As I gently walk on the Earth,
She responds back,
Gently whispering,
Gently slowing me down,
Gently helping me remember the fine dazzlement,
That is each and every leaf,
Bark,
Seed,
Dirt,
And she slows me down,
The rapidness that the concrete induces,
The quickening of my speech,
My writing,
My movements,
Are all slowed down by nature,
By kijâ,
Inheritance of abundance unexplainable,
My heart beats slower,
My breath deeper,
My movements slower,
Destiny affirmed in her beauty,
In her touch on my feet,
In how she holds me,
As if she reaches,
As if the dirt,
Sand,
Twigs,
Pebbles,
And compost of all molds my feet,
As if the plants reach and listen,
As perfect counselors,
As if the trees lean over to listen,
All in the perfect workings of kijâ,

To fill up my spirit,
 To heal,
 To radiate the light of my soul,
 The work of kijâ expands outward across the land,
 Emanating throughout the towns,
 Throughout all of us,
 Kijâ infinitely always holding us.

The Land is Us

The water is on my skin,
 I can feel the sand on my hands,
 Akki,
 Nibi,
 The tall pines are a part of me,
 I cannot shake the land that is a part of me,
 Migizi,
 Bineshii,
 Ajjaak,
 Aandeg,
 Baapaase,
 The dunes roll onward to the lake,
 To the lake,
 My feet race,
 I catch up to nibi,
 From my soles,
 To my soul,
 I connect,
 I cannot shake my connection to the winged ones,
 The fourfooteds,
 Waawaashkeshi,
 Zheshegowaabikosh,
 Waabooz,
 My friends,
 My home.

No One at the Shore

Could erase,
Time,
Barriers,
The lake knows,

Before the land was divided up,
The worth of it,
Less,

The ancestors,
Knew no different,

Why commerce,
Concentrated trade,
Instilled an incision,
In the heart,
The soul,
Of the land,

Value added,
Value taken,
What's more real,
Is unheard,

We draw a line,
In the sand,

Before murder,
Before genocide,

And all we can hear is silence,

Regal pines,
Listening,

There was no wounding,
Souls not tarnished,

We remember this time,
Before our souls were disjointed,
When no one was on the shore.

MAUDE LARKE

BIO

Brooks

None of them ever seem to get it right. Sometimes I turn off the radio rather than listen. Conductor after conductor goes through the second movement—titled "Scene at the Brook"—of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony as if it were an urban bus ride, if not an express train. I can only conclude that they have never had the chance to sit or lie by a flowing brook and simply be. It is true that this haste—of every conductor but Klemperer—may also come from too much focus on the clichéd notion of the "babbling" brook. They are trying, perhaps, to make Beethoven's movement "babble." But his music is not about the noise of the brook; it is about the calm that the moment brings.

I will admit that this disagreement is not entirely the fault of the conductors. I am most particular about that movement, that symphony, because I mentally choreographed an entire ballet to it (under Klemperer's "direction"). It was meant to be a filmed piece, not a staged one, and so it would have been danced in woods and fields and a village green. The gentle second movement served, of course, for the love story between the visiting schoolmistress and the local woodcutter, an extended and lyrical pas de deux.

My "Beethoven brook"—a completely imaginary stream—meanders slightly but levelly, through a tender forest of young trees with straight trunks, widely spaced, leaving clearings for the couple to do lifts in when they are not interlacing figures among the trees. The ground has a tranquil carpet of leaves that moves little but provides spring for the jumps. The lovers can dance through the entire movement while moving with the flow of the water. The brook never ends, never glides under a fence, never becomes jostled by interrupting stones, never trips and spills into a larger watercourse. It is an infinite brook.

I will also admit that "my" real brook was not like that. It was on my grandmother's farmland, since sold. The trees were young, but they stood closer to it, jumbled naturally. The uneven ground, the banks, the stones were mossy, moist. Finding a spot in which to lie flat, relax, enjoy the sun and the flow, was not the simplest thing. But

it was the closest thing to home that was calm and I drank that calm. I could walk down the field, through the woods, and disappear for a while.

It seems to me that I was less consciously entranced by the sound of the brook than by watching the water, as fascinating and as monotonous as watching flames in a fireplace. Whatever roaming I did around the brook, I always ended sitting by a mini-waterfall that curled around a sapling that dared thrust itself up midstream. The water was clear, with sudden smiles of mercury-like silver, very cool. It shimmered, winked, shifted its small paths in its separate leaps, long liquid fingers. I would sneak down to that brook as often as possible, as alone as possible—nothing against my younger brother, mind, but he did bring an altered atmosphere—do the correct thing and follow the brook upstream to be sure no dead animals had made the banks their coffinsides, come back down to "my" part of the brook and sit, lean, stretch, curl, ponder, dream, reach some first quaking virtual fingers into the child's homemade ashtrays of beginning acts of imagination.

Somewhere further along on the opposite bank a young tree held my initials for some time. I had at one point been trusted—or simply had made off with—a pocket knife, an old one carrying the Boy Scout insignia, that never closed quite completely, and which I used conscientiously except for this spontaneous attack on a sapling. If the tree is still there, the bark has probably grown over them.

And I say that it was the sight of the water that most fascinated me, but I can tell that my ear was surreptitiously attending. It is tuned to the "babbling" like a prodigy's to a violin's vibrations, and it subtly pushes me into my prose and poetry rhythms.

This is perhaps why I settled so well in that tiny park in that little village in the Lot region in the south of France for a week three summers ago. On three of the evenings of that week I rose to a hilltop village and entered a most incongruous, ornate seventeenth-century chapel to hear two marvelous quartets perform stunning Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schoenberg. But each day I left my hotel room in the lower village to walk upstream along the wide, calm Lot River, then step away from it to sit in the shade of a remnant of viaduct on the ground in a park that was nothing but green, one picnic table, and a brook that flowed straight, upstream to the Lot, then bent at a right angle and spilled into it. For every day of that

week I was alone there but for a mother duck who floated up and down the brook, her brown-and-dusty-yellow ducklings following her militarily or clustering around her when she settled in a hollow of the bank. The babble was quieter, the brook calmer, but it still spoke to me, dictated to me poems, short stories, novel chapters, and possibly the first seeds of a first full poetry cycle which did not burst from sowing to dandelion profusion for another two years.

I did find a babbling to rival that of the farm brook, when I became old enough to bicycle farther from home, and did so enthusiastically, wherever I could find roads bare of noisy mechanicals. I was taking a final uphill climb to the road that would lead me downhill to home, a road that had been dirt in my childhood when we went into it, our little 4-H group, to practice marching for the Memorial Day parade. Pedaling uphill produced a more detailed perception of what lay around the road than the more rapid car ever had, or the marching and the need to attend to the domineering group leader. Pumping allowed me to see more of the brook leaping down right alongside the road, a stream which I had only caught splash glimpses of before. But the rock made me stop in mid-mount. A wide detail that captured me quickly. It was flat, and brazenly planted in the middle, forcing the water to straddle it. In spite of the gush, it was dry. I dropped my bike gently down the bank, off the road, so that it was unseen. There, I took a wide step from the bank and passed dry-soled onto the stone, sat, closed my eyes, and followed the melody.

Still later, as a college student, I would look for untamed places to wander in to take a rest from the studies. My favorite was at the far end of the loop that I would do on my bicycle. I would stop and drop my bike gently down a bank, off the road, so that it was unseen, turn my back on the byway, enter the calm forest. This was a tender forest of young trees with straight trunks, widely and evenly spaced. The ground had a tranquil carpet of leaves. I wandered peacefully but neither there nor in the other untouched corners that I found at other universities did I find a brook. I never sat still. I meandered, circled back to the bicycle, lifted it to the road, pedaled away.

ANN NEUSER LEDERERBIO**Whales, Unhinged**

The vertical whales hang still, and sing.
 In darkest blue of sleep the cameras catch them at it.
 Their breaths improbably slow, they sing—
 the word the narrator chooses—their three toned moans of woe
 or soothing dirge or lullaby or hums of reassurance.
 Not hoot, not dance, but—one then the other improvises.
 Blips taken up, bemused balloons they pass along the new song.
 We turn our heads sideways, flip the view to normal.
 Still, these whales hang, and sing.

Lamb's Ear

La mujer asks in Spanish for the name of that white plant.
 Lamb's Ear, I answer to the translator, instantly thinking:
 Oh oddness of unpondered plant names.
 The Spanish word, no cognate, already escapes me.
 But we manage to find a connection after all.
 Her grandmother used it for healing. I eagerly add:
 Here too! The pioneers and Indians stopped wounds
 with its fleshy poultice. I pause to recall its plumpness,
 its silvery, almost fur. Once per year, (now), it spurts
 an improbable tentacle,
 waving, rotund, even vaguely pink,
 high above the low, labial cluster.
 Then, suddenly, I remember three roofless marble temples
 on separate nearby islands, aligned by the ancients
 for warning signals.
 A fire built in one, answered by another, then the next.
 And I wonder: what does one do at a dinner table, Friday night,
 with acquaintances, when one begins to weep at dessert
 after reading aloud a reunion poem
 containing a girl from long ago with long dark hair?
 What else but to look away, careful not to exchange glances,
 careful to utter nothing except for unrelated chatter.

JULIE HUNGIVILLE LEMAY
[BIO](#)

Walking Home

Labrador Tea, *Ledum palustris*; heath family;
a low evergreen shrub found in the bogs and
alpine slopes of Southcentral Alaska

I bend to the tundra
to gather the sharp sweetness
in a sprig of Labrador Tea,

then hike out from the trail, quiet
the whys and what ifs of my mind, quiet
my too busy hands. I need to lose

myself to find myself.
I want you to know
this place of me. I hold

the dark fragrance in my bright palm,
leaves as small and infinite as stars.

In the distance, the wind
sighs through the alders:
the sound of stillness within motion.

Spargania magnoliata

Spargania magnoliata,
Double Banded Carpet Moth,
trembles on my rug
like a mud smudge
in motion, unable
to fly. I try to encircle
it in my light
and safe hands

but it is impossible
to capture such
frail darkness.

My fingertips pinch
a wing and the moth flutters
like the fast beat
of a small bird's heart.
I carry it to the door,
and in the bright sun
drop it to the hard
deck. Dozens more
are still gathered beneath
the shut-off porch light.

They were once crawlers
and eaters of fire-
weed. Now, delicate
slender bodies, wavy lined wings
of neutrals and golden flecks
they wait
as if in silent praise.
Forewings and hind-
wings with scalloped
edges, opened flat
into the small outline
of a rough heart.

SHERYL J. LESAGE

[BIO](#)

Retriever

The pond was added after the highway; still, it works.
Pale cranes eye the surface, waiting for a sign
of quickness beneath; fields of goldenrod anchor the earth,
keep it breathing through this past most brutal summer.
Wild alfalfa, sweet clover, sunflowers and thistles
temper the baked air as you and I make our way
along the verge. We neither need nor hear the trucks
outside the fence. Instead we have our work today.

We need our work to become our selves.
Mine, to press our fine young animals to see
words as tools, shields, weapons, signs
of the mind that chose these
and did not choose others,
is almost always futile. But yours—
to find the safest path across the ice
to search the shores until the best way up is clear
to fetch what was lost, to lay it at my feet and grin
with that joy perfected by dogs,
is eternal, and sound.

But not completely. You were made later, too.
The end of a line, parents and parents all bred to stay near, to love
gunfire, to scatter themselves like seeds in the cold brush and reeds
yet always, always returning, shot pheasant a gift given—
a prize all its own for work done. Today I throw you the float and see
you swim, a smooth machine, single-minded and honed like a scythe,
slice through the aching blue of this pond in September. Whoever
made you
made a thing that loves its work

and that work is fine. It will have to suffice.

KAREN LEE LEWIS

[BIO](#)

Perun's Flowers: Royal Ferns from the Old World

“Perun is the Slavic god of thunder and lightning. ‘Perun’s flowers’ are the Royal Fern (Osmunda regalis). They are said to have assorted magical powers, such as giving their holders the ability to defeat demons, fulfill wishes, unlock secrets, and understand the language of trees.”

1
Cicada translates for treetop
hums into funnel of fox ear
Perun's flowers nest in thunder
planted by lightning's arrow
Her roots grow deep
are eagle's talons
ready to snare
water's serpent

2
From cloud to ground
at the end of lightning's whip
a fulgarite is born again

Below
the earth readies a glass slipper
delivered into shifting
sands

It is a boundary
that is not
clear cut

3
Earth is a cradle
This poem a wellspring
One form of energy
released
creates another

My parents
could be anywhere
be anything

Immortality's Witness

Inside me a memory so old
I carry its fossil in my blood
like a promise an intuitive inheritance
I hold immortality in a certain set of genes
I've named them Savanna Acacia Zebra
They create my present shape
I am gift wrapped in a cell's membrane
If I dissected a snail I would find me there too
I'm an inveterate invertebrate in a Horseshoe Crab's vein
a blue blood pedigree swimming in a shallow sea
my copper carapace a Samurai's shield
There I am sun bathing in a hot spring in Yellowstone
(one of my mothers dropped me there a few billion years ago)
If I peered inside you we'd find me there too
reading the code of meaning contained in the covenant
Immortality's witness—we pass on
the "I'm mortal" within the immortal
an agreement set in flesh
future forming a flowing fecundity
the origin of all species
alive in our blood

Dragons and Flames in the Understory

I wouldn't have
seen his hands
save for the angle
of her dress

Cousin of buttercup
Clematis vines climbing
Her body's brushwood
a traveller's joy

She is entwined
in the palms
of a devilish companion

One hand seeking
the protection of another

It is a poisonous pairing
I brush against

His essential oils
sap my body
Forearm blooming
wet amber blisters

I am a tainted trellis
oozing irritation
at the mention of his name

Cannot rub away
these dragons and flames

How could I be so rash
to let him touch me?

ELLARAINÉ LOCKIE

[BIO](#)

How to Know a Prairie Poem

You can see it on a morning drive through a Charlie Russell painting
Where an apricot sun splashes summer over the Northern Great Plains

Wild roses compose in ripened pinks and sunflowers margin the trail
across a sagebrush spotted sheet of prairie
Cottonwood trees slant in cursive created by a breeze
And clouds color bucolic viewpoints over Square Butte
in changing inks of blue, green and violet

You can hear it with windows down on your Ford Explorer
Garth Brooks ejected at the first meadowlark's six-note warble
Its meter already measured by Mother Nature
Accompanied by tires pounding their gravel crunch
governed by a thirty-mile-an-hour metronome
Cadence replaced with the beat of background crickets
after you pull over for a picnic

You can taste it in slices of homemade Montana-wheat bread
wrapped around chokecherry jelly and chunky peanut butter
Washed down with lukewarm coffee from a thermos
and dark chocolate that melts in your mouth
Caffeine and feral funneling through your fingers
for a first draft in a journal you keep in the dash box
While a few feet away a family of cottontail feed on purple clover

You can smell it like clothes fresh from the line
 defining the air in an endless blue and white marbled dryer
 A sea of native grass and sage scents narrated by waves of wind
 with whispers from a skunk-drunk coyote
 And inhaled smoke-signaled history on hillsides pulls you back a
century

into printed accounts of cowboys and Indians
 Who bring their stormy past onto the blank page of the present

You can feel it down to your feet—the unforeseen drum roll of
thunder
 As though a distant herd of buffalo hooves is thrumming nerve
endings

The sky suddenly spilled and smeared with black ink
 But it writes in a deluge of translucent drops
 that soak to skin before you can reposition your picnic to the
Explorer

Where you wait out the twenty-minute diatribe along with Garth
Brooks

Until the West's first poet touches your soul with its perfect
meadowlark lyrics
 And leads you to the exit of the sun replenished painted prairie

ROBYN LYNN

BIO

Wonderland

Away from buildings and street noise, surrounded by lush evergreens, is where I feel most at peace. Only in the wilderness do I feel truly steady, my feet rooted in the ground. Over the years, the trails and dirt roads of the Cascade Mountains have witnessed events large and small in my life, the wilderness a steady companion and inspiring teacher.

I was 2 years old on my first hike. Strapped into a blue canvas backpack carried by my father to the top of Mount Pilchuck, it set in motion a love for the outdoors that I never grew out of. Later, as a moody adolescent, I carried my own Jansport rucksack loaded with books up the same trail, just to sit on a rock and read, ignoring everything else. When I wasn't hiking, I was often perched on the dropped tailgate of a station wagon at the end of a dirt logging road, eating cheese and crackers, enjoying the view. Despite the evils of clear cut logging, the lack of foliage exposed the texture and pitch of terrain normally concealed, and was beautiful in its own stark way.

Day hiking when the car is a mere ten miles or so away was simple. I didn't have to prepare for much, my pack was light, there were people on the trail and help was relatively close. But backpacking was taking it up several notches. It never occurred to me to worry—I knew the important stuff, like how to read a map, what gear to bring, how to dig a hole for a toilet and squat without sitting in nettles. I had no idea that what you learn on the trail is not something you can prepare for.

The night of my first backpacking trip I woke to heavy silence, the tent filled with an ethereal glow. I had never heard silence so loud. Could silence wake you up, or was something there? My hiking partner snored softly next to me, and I didn't want to wake him like a scared city kid. But I had to pee. Ridiculously bad. But I couldn't go out there—alone. What was waiting for me in the dark? My heartbeat sounded like a drum in the quiet tent, alerting all within hearing to my fear. Didn't animals attack people when they sensed fear?

I frantically searched for my headlamp so that I could see something besides shadows. Where was the damn headlamp? Oh my god, why didn't we have a can or something to pee in? Finding the headlamp underneath me, I slid it on unicorn-style. With the switch flicked to its brightest setting a reassuring beam was directed at whatever I looked at. I scrunched deeper into my bag, hoping the urge to pee would just go away and closed my eyes.

With my eyes squeezed shut, my ears reached outward with supernatural ability. Trees creaked eerily as they rubbed against each other in the slight wind. I had to remind myself that the faint sound of laughter and voices in the distance was really the nearby stream. Or, was someone there? I held my breath. The sound of a twig falling softly onto the nylon rain fly was magnified as if a giant night creature just perched above my head. My eyes flew open as I bolted upright, the headlight beam careening off the ceiling and walls as I whipped my head around. I couldn't ignore it, I really had to go. Fumbling for my glasses, I unzipped my cocoon of warmth and safety and braced myself for a quick trip into the bushes. Unzipping the doorway, I crawled into the night and was birthed into starlight.

Still on my knees on the packed earth, everything else was forgotten as I gazed upwards. Clusters of stars were so dense that their outlines merged with one another made entire clouds that lit the sky with brightness. The empty night had become full while I was sleeping. Darkness was an illusion—something that lived in the imagination of someone who lived in the city.

I switched off the unnecessary headlamp, and marveled at how much I could see. Of course I knew the infinite universe lay out there, just beyond the invisibility cloak of daylight, but to see it revealed against this blue-velvet backdrop was astounding. There was nothing limited here, except my own ability to perceive. As I looked up into the endless space, I felt so small. But there was a strange comfort in that. Nothing in that vastness knew I was there; I was a piece of a larger puzzle—not the whole puzzle as I so often believed in my busy life. My problems were relatively unimportant in the larger world, and maybe they should be in mine. There was nothing to fear in the unknown, except how I let that fear cause me discomfort. My heart stilled. I stood up stiffly to complete the task that sent me into the ignited night. I was no longer afraid.

The next day I arrived at Mystic Lake, a pristine alpine lake 12 miles or so from the nearest flip-flop wearing tourist in Mount Rainier National Park. Spectacularly nestled in a bowl with a peak-a-boo view of Rainier, it was surrounded by a fairyland of alpine meadows dotted with indigo Bog Gentian and scarlet Indian Paintbrush. The trail was broken by trickling snow-melt streams crossed by small log bridges. The shallow lake itself was sun-warmed and giant sized tadpoles collected like tidal foam along its sandy edges. Each evening found a hiker with a fishing pole casting perfect arcs across its smooth surface, the meditation in the movement the intention as much as catching the fish below.

Instead of paying attention to the breathtaking beauty on this warm afternoon, I was engrossed in an ant colony on the move. Countless tiny ants moved across this section of the Wonderland Trail and back into the scrub again. Laying on the trail, nose inches from the packed dirt, I watched them go about their busy ant lives. Food, eggs and injured or dead comrades were carried, pushed or pulled away from something and towards something else. In their zig-zaggy confusion, I wondered if they even knew where they were going. Gently, I moved twigs and rocks out of their way, clearing the area in case their path should cross these difficulties. I encouraged them softly, "No, no, no!! Go this way little ant!", but too often, they chose another route than easy one I cleared. I watched, helpless, as they swung in circles, confused and exhausted.

My assistance seemed to only confuse their purpose, unaware as they were that that I was helping. I suddenly knew how God must feel, watching over us, doing what she can to move pebbles, and shaking her head at the difficult path we too often choose. It is a lesson I took with me as I returned to the city.

The 100 mile long Wonderland Trail captured me, and over the next months on pavement, I hungered for it with the lonely ache reserved for a lover. It was another year before I returned. As I hiked through Summerland and the Panhandle Gap to a camp on a knoll above a picturesque glacial river valley, Mount Rainier was a surreal background..It was still warm as night fell, and instead of tucking into the tent to sleep, I climb into my sleeping bag propped against a log to watch the stars. Meteors shot across the sky with impossible speed and brilliance. They seemed like a mirage—a figment of my wishes to see them come to life.

When I woke, it was misty-dark, sight and sound muffled and soft around the edges. Something was out there—a real something this time, not my imagination. I couldn't identify the soft calling, but could feel the thrumming of large feet on the ground under me. Should I try to make it back into the tent, or be still in the fog? Curled against the log, I wouldn't be stepped on accidentally, but the last thing I wanted was to startle whoever it was. Suppressing nervous giggles, I sat listening, blood pounding in my ears in symphony with the rustling noises in the fog. They soon quieted, and I fell asleep with the wondrous knowledge that I was sharing space under this vast ceiling with something unknown.

As the sun broke over the peaks, shooting the sky with pink, I woke to a large herd of elk sharing my scenic camping spot. They must have known I was there when they arrived in the night, but deciding I wasn't a threat, nestled down to share my blanket of shooting stars. Sleeping more soundly in my tent, I might have missed their arrival. I dozed to the sounds of their grunting and pawing as they moved about, preparing for their day. I felt safe in their acceptance of my place in their world.

When I opened my eyes again, they were gone, having disappeared quietly with the fog. Fifty yards from where I slept, the grass was still warm and imprinted with the shape of their bodies. I lay down in their nests, curling into the shape of the sleeping elk. Inhaling the clean smell of dewy grass and warm musk deeply, I thought about how fear limits us and our experiences, causing us to be blind to so much magic.

Rejoining the trail for another day of beauty, I stepped over a line of ants. Looking up at the clear blue sky, I smiled.

LINDA MALM

[BIO](#)

Loosing Mom

A mumuration
of ominous starlings alights

black turned iridescent.

A gyring hawk
drops a sharp wing feather

wind quiver.

You are in Nature's sights
I am ready to be

wounded.

Yet years of love must be
recorded somewhere.

Perhaps they hum within
the rings of trees.

Loons

Half laugh tremolo

hysterical black calls

carve caves into fog.

Half wail

water longing songs

haunt the hollows.

A sudden silent lake

another deep dive search

elusive and emerged again.

Loon, I solo too.

ARLENE L. MANDELL

[BIO](#)

The Architecture of Butterflies

Watering perennials this steamy morning. I spray coreopsis and Shasta daisies, disturbing brown spotted butterflies greedily gathering pollen. They flit off the flowers, returning just inches from my fingers.

I recall an article about complex structures called gyroids that bend and refract light to produce the precise colors on a butterfly's wing. Picture an emerald-patched cattleheart, its brilliant markings gleaming against a soot black background.

But I'm content to share sunlight with my commonplace companions, gather an armful of lemon, cornflower blue and magenta to fill my sturdy earthenware jug.

TANIA MARTIN

[BIO](#)

Receding Tide

I imagine myself on my mother's morning walk, by her side, as she navigates bits of driftwood and stone on the silky black New Zealand sand. I match her quick pace, listening for the telltale click of her ankle, muffled by the raucous surf. The occasional jellyfish glistens in a bowl of seawater left behind by the tide. We are headed north towards the green headlands of Peter Simpson's farm, sometimes dotted with groups of sheep and fringed with the remnants of the native bush. We pass the cluster of festive Pohutukawa trees where Eddie, a grey-mouthed black lab, bit me years ago. As we near the old camping ground with its tall pine trees, we will look out for the Oyster Catcher nests. We admire these monogamous birds, with their bright orange bills and legs, circling protectively around their nesting sites. If the tributary from the Aki Aki is not too high, we cross to the rock pools where exposed mussels bask on large rocks in the morning sun. We stop and gaze out towards the distant bay of Whitianga. There is a large sailboat heading out towards Center Island and we spot a flock of gulls circling in the sky above some hidden school of fish.

“Snapper?” I ask.

“Most likely Kahawai” she replies.

Walking back along the beach we notice a baby blue penguin has washed up in a tangle of seaweed. My mother scoops away enough sand to bury the lost fairy penguin, leaving it to the realm of the crabs rather than the scavenging seagulls. We continue on in silence, occasionally looking up at the quiet windows and empty decks of holiday homes, until we reach her house. As she climbs the steps to her deck, I open my eyes to reveal the surroundings of Aptos beach in California, where I sit staring out at the receding tide, and the Pacific ocean that lies between myself and my mother's morning walk.

CAITLYNN MARTINEZ-MCWHORTER

[BIO](#)

Seasonality

*I know that Beauty must ail and die,
And will be born again,—but ah, to see
Beauty stiffened, staring up at the sky!
Oh, Autumn! Autumn!—What is the Spring to me?*

—Edna St Vincent Millay

Introduction

As I listened to my grandfather rattle off the silly names he'd given to the hundred year old oak trees in his backyard, or as my father taught me to identify the tracks and excrement of various wild species in the woods behind our house, I thought I couldn't get any closer to nature. That was, until that day in September.

Winter

It was one of those winter days when the snow had almost all melted and the tiny patches that remained were no longer pristine and white. I had just turned seven, and my younger cousin, Jerry, was about to be two. He had decided, rather than to ride to the zoo that afternoon in his parents' car with his big sister, he was going to sit in our truck between my brother and I. Even at a young age, there was no arguing with him. We arrived at the zoo early in the afternoon. My uncle and aunt were busily unloading and assembling a stroller as my mother chased after my rambunctious little brother. Feeling mature and maternal, I assumed the responsibility of unbuckling Jerry from his car seat. Our truck was high off of the ground and it was necessary to leap out of it. As I reached my arms up for my baby cousin to take his turn and bounce into them, his little outstretched sausage fingers stabbed at my left eye. He had lacerated my cornea. I spent the rest of the day in the doctor's office with my mother as the rest of our family enjoyed the zoo.

Spring

It was one of those days when you hear birds chirping through closed windows and the sun scintillated on the hardwood floor in the dining room of our home. Jerry, now five years old to my ten, begged me to let him ride his bike outside on such a beautiful day. Knowing damn well he would not stay in our cul-de-sac and would instead wander the neighborhood, I refused to let him go.

"Not while I'm babysitting you," I told him. This was obviously not the answer he desired. My five year old cousin chuckled one of those, "I don't have to listen to you" kind of laughs, and walked towards the front door. I threatened to tell his mother.

"Do it," he said, not even turning his oddly large head to face me with his response. I threatened him with a time-out.

"F—off," the five year old replied under his breath. This was one of his favorite phrases, which is not surprising when you consider "f—" was his first spoken word.

Panicked, running out of possible punishments and imagining my fall from grace in the eyes of my aunt and uncle, I charged and tackled the disobedient munchkin. As I wrestled him to the ground, I snagged a nearby jump rope from the kitchen table, tied his hands and feet together, and then to a chair. His little body squirmed as he tried desperately to untie himself while calling me every name he could think of, some I hadn't yet learned the meanings of. When my aunt came home I handed him over to her, like a defeated hostage, with his hands still tied behind his back.

Summer

The July sun beat heavy on my blister pink neck like a thousand needles. The smell of worms and Northern Pike slime, that is all too familiar to any fisherman, hung heavily in the air. It was the summer after I turned twenty-one and my parents decided to take Jerry with us on our annual fishing trip to Canada. The little boy I'd grown up with was now sixteen and tripled me in size. On the fourteen hour drive up north I had sat, cramped, in the back seat of our truck with my father and Jerry. He didn't even yell at me for falling asleep on his shoulders.

I stabbed at a leech with my fishing hook. Its juicy, yet leathery skin tried to resist being punctured, though, was unsuccessful as I slid its body past the barb.

“Caitlynn, can you do mine?” Jerry asked.

“Jerry, what the hell happened to your minnow? That was your eighth in an hour and you haven’t even caught anything,” said my father, from the back of the small aluminum fishing boat. He was the keeper of the bait and a hater of waste.

“I keep flinging them off when I cast,” replied my cousin as we teased him about his disgust, or, rather, his distrust for leeches. Minutes later we heard the dreaded words.

“Uh oh!”

I turned around to see a heavy smirk spread across his face. I knew his eyes were smiling too, though I couldn’t see them under the army green sunglasses that barely fit on his face. As I followed the line from Jerry’s fishing pole with my eyes I was led into the branches of a large tree rooted on the side of a nearby island.

Fall

The fallen leaves p— me off. I angrily sweep them aside with my bare hands as I lay on my stomach in the fading yellow grass beside the large rectangle of replaced sod. There is no stone. If I hadn’t been here a week earlier I wouldn’t have known where to find him. The cornfields surrounding have since been plowed. Everything is dead or dying.

I’m connected with nature now, more than ever before.

MARIANA MCDONALDBIO**Possum Crossing**

In the cone of light the car fixes on the road
comes the strolling possum, like a vaudeville act
at once made clear in the curtained dark.

She looks at me, not stunned or startled,
but questioning: will I have the sense to slow,
and not to hit her? Of course I will—

this is her path as much as mine.
She waddles then across the asphalt
in the car light, the moonlight, the street light,

strolling, perhaps wondering
about the tasks of hours ahead:
Find food, find warmth, be safe.

Her marble eyes are flashlights slicing
through the dark. She wraps her babies
around her like an evening stole.

In moments out of sight, she leaves
in the way a glimmering:
to one creature day, another night.

Gravity

among the things
I do not like is
gravity

although I'm clear
without it I'd be
flailing floating flying

someplace where
the air's not good
for breathing

but if its force
could be contained
by love or mind or faith

all the falling suicides
would be clear voyages
to heaven

KARLA LINN MERRIFIELDBIO**The Sand Toad Monologue**

I.

Some days like today all it takes
to shake me out of a foul mood—
too, too many of those lately—
is a Fowler's toad, *Bufo fowleri*,
and his gritty voice issuing
from the shadow of a driftwood log
astride the beach I walk. I listen up.

II.

*Yo! Mama! You wanna know
what it all comes down to, here, now?
Endangerment, baby, the real thing.
You think you is havin' troubs?
So yo' bro croaked. Big effin' deal.
My bro toads is doin' it right
and left. Think about dat, babe—
me, my kind, dis water's edge,
dese shallow dunes—all goin'... gone.
Reckon soon I be de last toad jivin'
along Ontario on ole Lake Erie
in the Rondeau Peninsula 'hood.
But fo' I hip-hop it outta dis place,
I gotta tell ya, girly-girl: Git over it,
Kick da cremation box of his sorry-ass bones.
You'll thank me for dis bufo dude's advice.
You'll take my word for it, sista:
You'll survive, you'll git by widout him.
And wid dat, honey chile: Amen, sez I. Adios.*

Throb

*No, a butterfly's waking
dance there, at the spot where light would start
if the heart pumped light instead of blood.*

—Floyd Skloot

My heart pumps the morning glow
on piñon, on juniper evergreen.
It quickens with silver sage and white datura.

My heart pumps the glossy
raven of the cliffs, lizards
on the noonday rock.

My heart pumps the shining
enchantment of sunset
on red sandstone, red dust.

My heart pumps lightning,
phenomenon of desert evenings.
It skips beats in monsoon thunderstorms.

My heart, racing now, pumps the polished
night waters of Chinle Wash,
all that glitters in Canyon de Chelly.

An then my heart pumps the light
of lunar standstills,
of a supernova.

My heart pumps the Milky Way.

Vagina Dendronta

"To learn of the pine tree, go to the pine." —Basho

I admit it: I'm a tree slut.
 What of it? I've been sleeping
 around with deciduous guys,
 conifer dudes too, since I was fourteen.

That weeping willow in the side yard?
 I'd ride his thick low limbs for hours

inside the curtain of his leaves. I'd read
 him rhymy Edna St. Vincent Millay

and sugary Sara Teasdale
 in summery afternoon afterglow.

He dug my childhood stories,
 grooved on my unpolluted,

slow green river words
 Monongahela, Allegheny, Ohio.

He was subtle, my first tree.
 Too bad the town DOT buzzed

him down, hacked his buckling roots.
 I was pissed for weeks.

Then: the white clump birch
 with a bowl of slender trunks

to hold me in a limbo, spread over limber
 limbs, swaying in the winds. To him

I read Eliot's Practical Cats,
 some William Butler Yeats. He was

a wind dancer, that one; we loved
in sweeps, in gyres 'til one autumn,

at twenty something, titleholders
sold his sorry sod. He was fucked

by property rights, so I was too.
After that? Lots of pulp through the mill,

Not one I could turn down.
Sure, I remember some better than others.

There once was a mangrove
out in Rookery Bay; we sang

Jimmy Buffet tunes with the tides.
A freshwater surge got that old salt.

An autograph tree I met in Key West
was très kinky. I got him into

Ferlinghetti and McGrath. He's still
pimping at the Audubon House.

The shyest tree I ever had?
A *torreya taxifolia*. He insisted

I learn his Latin name before
I climbed all over him. Yews are

different, you know, they're sensitive plants.
And they're going into extinction now;

there's no consoling them, even with
Psalms or The Dire Elegies.

But lately I've developed
a yen for hemlocks.

I'm getting skanky
in middle age, taking

more risks. I know an entire
Georgia mountainside with

those sick puppies. Can do them
with Def Jam hip-hop all the way up

the Appalachians to the Adirondacks.
Suck that sap, swallow, girl—

quick before the dozers
come and it's morning-after clear-cut ugly.

Un-huh, you got it right:
I can't get me enough tree fast enough.

Sky is the consciousness

of its landscape.

You can see not only moon
and planets,
but entire constellations
reflected

 in the river
that is its great heart.

Except on watery edges,
where trees that are its soul
canopy the jungle night
with profoundest
darkness,

 stars shine light
on the invisible world
beneath this Amazon sky.

I gain consciousness on terra firma
in its rainforest.

The tropical sun-god rises.

FLORENCE MILLER

[BIO](#)

At Mendocino

Bulbous seaweed coiled
and bug ridden
Gnats hovering flies
I stepped on purple seaweed
and was stung
But then
I found a feather on the beach
 singing of your hair
 So black it was blue

FELICIA MITCHELL

BIO

Rorschach Block

In the dream I paused,
touched my son on his arm,
and pointed to the sky.

Look there, I did not say,
silence our only chance
at communication.

We were on a path
in a wilderness area
where I had walked before
with my lover,
who was not his father,
when I saw a hawk lift a bird
from its flight.

The red-shouldered hawk is broad,
as swift as death.

The sky was blue
in the dream as in life,
the hawk silhouetted with its prey,
feathers spilling ink on sky
like a Rorschach block
that I studied from the ground,
feet planted next to my son's.
I am not sure he looked
for more than a second,
what was poetry to me
more of an assault to him.

How do you tell a child
that this is the way to die,
snatched in midflight?
How do you tell him
that his mother is going to live,
and love, even if cancer kills her?

A hawk, a junco in its talons,
is one way to begin.

False Morels

False morels
are a little like
false hope—
only more palatable.

Some eat them
and die, and others
just vomit
or not, since
most mortals
can eat a morel
and never know
the difference
between
true and false
until they taste
the real thing
and learn regret.

I know how
to recognize one
as surely as
I recognize false hope
poking its head up
through decaying leaves,
something almost right
but a little top heavy
and world weary.

Bear Calls

I hear them in the early spring,
bear calls up on the side of the ridge—
a sound reminiscent of robin
but as jagged as a tree stump
gnawed by beaver.
Just yesterday, I stopped in my tracks,
certain I was hearing a long extinct bird,
or a very hoarse robin,
its call as large as a dinosaur's,
until I realized it was just another bear.
It saw me before I saw it.
This is what always happens.
Before I realize I am being blessed,
the bear turns towards its sanctuary
leaving me alone in the woods
looking up.

CAROLYN MOORE

[BIO](#)**In Search of a Sea-Change**

I will leave behind the foothills of the peak
 I never meant to climb. The further I trek,

the more all fractured sounds will join as strokes
 of keels that harrow water, sending forth

waves to flood all trace of my spent shore
 in a rhythm of *assault, retreat, retrench,*

escape. When poised between the land and sea,
 first we must lose lupine. Let lapse its name.

Next, names for Columbine, Dog Violet,
 translucent Indian Pipe—waxy, pale,

feeding on leaf-decay. Relinquish what
 isolates part from whole: *panicle, bract,*

stigma. Keep watch for what we once called *flowers*.
 One, blood-bright, shaped like a bottle-brush,

will serve as sign to scour, then melt, then merge
 into the blur of bouquet. This fluid state

is what we seek for growing the gills and verve
 to swim from landlocked memory and need.

Selected Moments in Geologic Hunger

after John McPhee

MOMENT BEFORE

It was morning and confusion.
Below airplanes engorged with business,
the worn-away continent, black as carbon,
kept eroding into shallow seas—persisted
even though the glacier had stopped,
ice in retreat, host to isolated islands.
What did I hope for? For drainage
and zeolites, those minerals who star in roles
of filter, clarify, refine. Zeolites: celebrities
to those of us who toil with alembic, still, retort—
alchemists who seek the universal mineral:
one both humble as non-clumping cat litter,
yet haughty as the twink on a diva's pinkie.

MOMENT NOW

Triassic red shale.
If it's gritty, it's a silt bed.
If it's creamy, it's a shale.
Magma so perfused with gas,
it fizzes like ginger ale.
Caves the size of peas,
caves the size of lemons.
Each a mouth open to famine.
If permitted to explain presence
by means of its shadow, absence,
I search the roadcut vugs
(as minute caves are called)
for zeolites large enough to suggest
the holes where lobsters hide
from fame and its attendant capture.

MOMENT AHEAD

Back to glacial melting, back to sieving out
confusion. When mud is muddle,
seeking renown finds zeolite crystals
doing a job otherwise assigned to platinum.
Undeterred by lethal traffic inches away,
its margins decorated with sandpits,
this lake—any lake—is by definition a sign
of poor drainage, an aneurysm in a river.
I will thwack lake banks with G-pick appetite,
snuffle them in search of zeolites,
their mystery and power. Zeolites:
I want them so bad I can taste them.

WILDA MORRIS

BIO

Arizona Sketch Pad

1.

I am dry as an arroyo
but after the next thunderstorm
I may burst into bloom.

2.

A great red rock sits precariously
atop the narrow cliff.
What holds it in balance?
But look at these boulders
at the bottom. I hope my burdens
let loose and fall off.

3.

Between naked trunks of trees
killed by fire
aspen established a nursery.
Their offspring, dressed in green,
orange and gold
glow this September day.
I too must learn to begin again.

4.

I am as stratified as the Grand Canyon,
newer layers more visible,
earlier ones a surprise to friends
who haven't known me long.
In my hidden strata are fossils
which stun even me
when, tilted by time or shaken
by earthquake, they surface.

Six Observations on June 13 in Lyman Woods

I

Last year's dried leaves
hang like dirty laundry
from scattered branches

II

Trillium blossoms are long gone
but those three leaves
give them away

III

Many seed pods
are as exquisite
as blossoms

IV

In the sapling's elbow
two attached acorn caps
hang like miniature cymbals

V

Gleaming web across the path—
is a spider telling me
this far, no farther?

VI

Three snake holes
make me yearn to scout
beneath the surface

MARGARET S. MULLINS

BIO

Beach Week

I.

on the way we fill the trunk
with pails of ripe peaches
quarts of red berries
plucked at their zenith
and like lemmings rejoin
the long serpentine line
of cars spilling over
with beach chairs and surfboards
foam noodles and coolers
frayed nerves and slushies
moving at a sluggish pace
toward the bridge
and a week at the beach

II.

alone before dawn
on the dark atlantic beach
faint peachy light
coming from europe
steals up at the bottom edge
of the sky's dark mass
until a mere drop of crimson
appears and grows
to a smooth glassy orb
pushing color up and sideways
until the whole sky
is ablaze with daylight

III.

as waves roll in and break,
two little girls—cousins—
dance along the line of sea foam
like delicate plovers
skittering up and down
the leading edge
of timelessness and change

IV.

if ever there were clear
reminders of mortality
they reside in vanished footprints
on the tilted strip of beach
between dry sand and sea
and in all the leveled sand castles
built just yesterday

V.

a fragment of shell
the size of a dime,
slipped into my pocket
by a two-year-old sprite,
reveals a smoothed palette
of white pink and mauve
a calcification of time
texture and motion

VI.

the high tide line
is strewn with broken shells
fragments of sea life
washed up from the deep
far away and a time long ago
or perhaps just yesterday

VII.

the beach is empty at dawn
a pale half moon above
fading into the void
dark clouds on the horizon
torn here and there to let
through the light that creates
a pathway from sand to sun,
the water between
stippled like fish scales

VIII.

a touch of morning melancholy
as sunrise heralds the day
that we must pack our bags
with wet swimsuits
and shells we will place
with those from other years
on the kitchen window sill at home

beating wings

the thud against the window
drew us to the finch
on her back on the deck
wings beating frantically
tail at odd angle

we moved her to cool grass
turned onto her breast
where she flopped over and flapped
the rest of the day

the hours passed
and the strength and duration
of beating wings
steadily ebbed

as we did the things we usually do
 on a late summer sunday at home—
 we drank sweet iced tea
 and discussed euthanasia
 until at last the sun slipped away

Dragonfly Bridge

Our bridge was torn out by combined water power
 of ten inches of rain and a burst pond upstream.

Inspectors, engineers, steel and concrete men,
 insurance adjustors and neighbors' advice,
 EPA impact studies, permits and steel plates
 tie up the calendar for weeks on end
 while we hike up the hill, schlep groceries by hand
 warn friends of the danger, gasp at cost estimates.

Water striders, frogs, crayfish and salamanders
 are visible, moving once more downstream,
 but as I consider low bids for repairs
 without proper studies or government permits
 a tension rises and I wake at night
 to thrash and think of the tiny larvae
 of emerald dragonflies, aquatic nymphs,
 caddisfly eggs and baby crawdaddies
 hiding in riffles, vital and vulnerable.
 I toss and turn, think of the heron
 who stands on one leg waiting, watching
 for food to swim by, and the raccoon digging
 for tasty bivalves in sweet clean mud.

If I were a dragonfly I would implore me
 to protect my home and my babies no matter the cost,
 no matter the time, no matter the long uphill hikes.

In the end, I am that emerald dragonfly,
 her larvae my own precious children.

VALERIE NIEMAN

[BIO](#)

Out of the Ordinary

My friend mourns the missing thrushes,
ee-o-lay that used to rise
like fireflies at the verge of oak woods.

Her memory saves a space for their song;
others, later, won't notice the lack,
satisfied by the insistent mockingbird

(his repertoire a hundred songs or more,
including cell phone and cricket chirp),
reweaving a looser web of dawn chorus:

So one bird replaces a canopy of absent
warblers, as a synthesizer sets ghosts
in the chairs of an emptied orchestra.

*

Like the scissored silhouette
of a child's shadow, this becomes the is
of what isn't. What is no longer,

like those ballads that bridged generations.
We no longer lift our quotidian voices
to pace work or ease the idle hours,

now that professionals provide
tunes at the ready, electronically
clipped and smoothed,

like purebred stock at the fair,
not a hair out of place,
not a note quavered that's not intended so

MARGIE NORRIS

[BIO](#)

Upon Awakening

The skirt's zipper snags new underwear.
You misplace your watch.
Coffee spills.

Inside the mind, switch turns on.
Loudspeaker in your own voice blaring
you're stupid, you're stupid.

Then, you're off to work.
Above your head, a bumblebee buzzes.
When you roll the window down
you can't even free it!

And when the window's up
its wings become entrapped by glass.
The bee hitches a ride.
Your eyes suddenly notice the yellow.

Once again, you are consolable.

The world in yellows.

Acacias, blooming along the highway.
All those yellows in their warning signs.
The highway's wise middle lines

yellow, yellow, yellow.

Stop

The first impulse
to swat
insects who fly
less high in a world
so partial
to birds

SHERRY O'KEEFE

[BIO](#)

Living Inside a Diamond

She ran side-hill trails to reach dark places,
 to stay away—she was born knowing how
 to speak deer.

She didn't talk, but would listen—
 there, in tall grass a whitetail hid with wild asparagus
 and a settler's forgotten rhubarb, a nearby fawn
 waiting for her mother's quiver:
 Now is not the time. Stay still.

Such will; such trust between the two
 she could imagine, but she never dreamed of
 even when camped next to the jump-twice river
 where she waited

for Betelgeuse to appear, measuring the distance
 between his night sky and her bedroll with cartwheels
 spun from forest air. Sometimes thunder gave in
 to earth. Sometimes she spoke
 star.

Sake

For the sake of hay and alfalfa fields downstream, the basin has been allowed to run low. Across Eastern Montana the balance between upland and bottom land potential flooding has been a hot topic. Who decides, and how to determine what is most wanting; for whose benefit is water allowed to either run or be held back? We debate this word, sake, without conclusion as we unload our fishing gear from the backseat of his car.

Stream fishing below the small earthen dam is said to be good, but that would involve hip waders and today both of us are more interested in sitting down. For our sake—we joke—today, let the fish come to us. It's cold and the sky is slow. But within minutes we get into trouble. Well, let me say: he gets into trouble with quicksand near the water's edge.

I am so busy establishing how I will position my fishing chair against the wind and where I will store my can of nuts and water bottle so I can nourish myself with minimal effort that I don't witness his near death experience. Who knew he could be so quiet, sinking to his knees, lunging for a limb from a nearby bush to heave himself from quicksand?

Only after he manages to rescue himself do I realize he could have been in danger. And so I say: Looks like we can't go near the water.

No reason not to fish, he replies. A black gumbo mud line mars his jeans just below his knees. Sometimes I am so sure of him; something like this can make me laugh.

The promise of a sun breaking through the clouds is enough to stay. And if the sky would pick up its pace and sweep away the clouds, we'd be in position to witness a glorious sunset. But for the want of that mountain looming to the west of our sodden beach. Who put the mountain there? From the city-sided portion of my mind I ask the mountain to assume a more northerly posture so as to allow a clear shot of the western sun.

We settle down and fish. Six feet out from the bank and to the right, air bubbles announce a muskrat. We grow still and will it to emerge. Soon, it surfaces to balance on a flimsy limb of a drowning bush. What do muskrats do under water, exactly? For its sake, I cast wide to the left and let the weight sink before I tighten up the cajon line. And immediately I catch a fish. In fact, two in quick succession. They are so hungry that a second fish gives chase to the first fish. The moment I recast, I catch that second fish, fatter and bigger than the

first. When next we glance toward the submerged bush, we see another muskrat has joined the first. We have witnesses—an audience.

After the fourth fish, the wind picks up and smells of rain along its northern edge. There'll be no setting sun. I pack tackle and chairs back up the embankment and through the tangle of willow bushes to reach his parked car. He finds a large rock, water lapping, and crouches to clean fish.

When I return to him with several large zip-lock bags in hand, he is on his knees. He turns to face me. In his large, cupped hands are strings of salmon-colored, oily eggs. We'd caught two females on the verge of spawning. It seemed we'd caught a hundred potential fish.

It'd been fifteen years since he'd caught such fish, he tells me as we drive back to our tiny cabin, but he still remembers how to cure these eggs during the winter months. Next spring, we'll come back up here when the water is high and use the eggs as bait. Where he comes from, the Pacific Northwest, it is considered a blessing to catch a fish with eggs. To whose benefit—this blessing—is the question I'm still waiting to ask.

HEIDI C. PARTON

[BIO](#)

A Series of Poems On the Theme of a Blue Jay

I.

Emblem of my sin—
A waiting blue jay is perched
Alone on my swing.

Years later, I still feel him
Waiting for me, like a ghost.

II.

Blue jay, I have you;
I haven't yet forgotten
Your claws in my hair.

Your memory is etched
On my shoulder, toward my heart.

III.

The sage poet Hanshan wrote:
"East is just as good as West."

Tree bark and the walls of caves
As good as fine rice paper,

Jays as lovely and mythic
As albatrosses or doves.

IV.

Blow and the dust disperses,
Mist of gold-flecks in sunlight.

Perhaps after this,
I'll be a blue jay, a pine,
Sunlight in autumn.

Song of the Orchid Cultivar

I come from nomads, travelers, || migrants whose hearts were unfixed,
Whose bodies were borne beyond, || burdened with yearning, stillness
foreign.

And so I am adapted with || aerial, mist-loving roots
Fit to travel, to attach to any || tree branch or moss-laden monolith,
Still only in strangeness and strange || surroundings, where I am
compelled
To look upon myself—singular, || lost, a fragile alien under glass.

NANCY PEACOCK

[BIO](#)

English as a Second Language

The language of the woods
Requires that I don't talk,
That I don't think,
That I don't diagram sentences.

Only verbs and nouns live here
And the punctuation of a branch
Dropping its load of raindrops
As the hawk lifts off.

Three Haiku

First Frost
Ticks dead
I enter the woods

The one-horned cow
Looks at me,
Sunrise behind her

Halfway to town
The leaf on my windshield
Lets go

RHONDA PETTITBIO**Something About Us**

In the wedge of mown grass
between interstate ramps
along the old but busy highway,
a lone plant of Queen Anne's Lace
asserts, for now a white vehicle
of stillness. How many thousands
driving by to somewhere today
will notice this, take this, keep this
in their mind's vase?

How did it survive the blade,
or did the mower loop around it
nearly grinning? Or is it the first
to return, uncowed, inspired by the violence
used to tidy the land? It knows
something about us.

Invader from the Old World,
food for the brooding Black Swallowtail,
source of our domesticated carrot,
summer lover of wasted fields —
and it stinks, too. Anything this
accomplished sings of weed.

Here amid the crossroads above
and below, amid concrete and asphalt, steel
and carbon monoxide, with all necessary
betrayals to the contrary, its tiny
clustered blossoms open
my window

where looking out
is looking in.

Period

At Koomer Ridge, the call of nature
made her take the wooded path
away from others at the campfire, to the clearing
and portable toilets. Looking up
was the accident that stopped her:

the night sky a black sheet
sentenced with glistening periods,
as if any second their silver ink
might spill out and spell out
in Disney-screen magic
the why of it all.
Nothing fell for her

and still it was beloved.
With strange relief she felt
herself unnecessary, began to believe
she was free to choose
to not.

For seconds, forever, she gazed
upward while her womb released its red
web of origins, her body saying
good riddance to what
it would not grasp.

Cramps meant freedom
and inconvenience. She could smell
the blood, the smoke in her hair,
hear thousands of voices
behind her.

Musca Domestica

First I hear a pop pop pop
against the yellowed lampshade,
then I see you:

small, dark, so distinct and delicate
you almost look clean, tempting
me to forgive

your invisible feculent trails.

You give up the light
for the white plains of paper,
your B of a torso
writing itself

even along the upturned edge
of a page. I envy
the authority

with which you land,
observing the mute, minute particulars,
taking the world on your own
terms. So close,

so large a backdrop,
I cannot be taken in.
I am reduced to abstraction,
a kind of death
to us both.

Consolation & Hunger

It is not sad
that the sparrow near the feeder
knows more about flight than death,
is life itself in its mindless knowing
of what and how to make,
and once caught by talons
and consumed lives on
in the captor's flight.

A hawk can say this.

KAREN PHILLIPS[BIO](#)**Artifacts**

A slender glass bottle with serpentine curves sits next to my computer monitor at work. The bottle is roughly a third of the way full of agates. I gathered them on a long walk along a windswept beach north of Port Orford this summer, poking thoughtfully through piles of stones, filling my pockets as I walked along the shore. The agates glow gold and red, cream and yellow in the morning sun. “When this bottle is full,” I tell my coworkers, “I am quitting my job and moving to the coast.”

On summer weekends when I was a child, my father and I would wake before dawn and head out onto Kirk Lake to go fishing. We’d be on the water as the first golden light brushed the houses along the lakeshore; our easy talk alternating with companionable silences. One day, while cleaning the fish we’d caught, I discovered a baby perch inside the belly of a large-mouthed bass. The perch was perfectly formed, with vivid yellow and brown stripes. Rather than toss it in the trash, I smuggled the tiny fish up to my bedroom and slipped it into my desk drawer, where it remained for years - mummified - my secret treasure.

In my hand is a yellow tin, decorated with a picture of Easter bunnies dressed in their holiday finery. Inside are eleven fossilized shark teeth—still sharp enough to draw blood. A friend and I found them one warm afternoon while hiking the barren foothills east of Bakersfield. I was aware that the soils the shark teeth were found in also harbored the spores of Valley fever, an occasionally fatal respiratory infection. But that fact remained a small, insignificant thing when compared to the wonder of hiking those hillsides and gullies, imagining a time when sharks swam overhead, through a long-vanished sea.

A family of horned lizards lived at the fringes of my garden in Weldon, California. They liked the loose, sandy soils and the rich insect life of my unsprayed yard. The adults basked happily in the sun, blending into their surroundings so well that I walked with care to avoid stepping on them. I'd sometimes find young horned lizards frolicking in the spray from my soaker hoses on hot summer afternoons. Once, I discovered the shed skin from the front leg of one —a perfect, elegant horned lizard glove. I still have that glove, tucked away in a box in my back room. You can never tell when I might need it.

Over the past ten years, injuries and circumstances have conspired to lead me away from the outdoor work I love and into the world of office work. I am not yet reconciled to this turn of events. The shelves above the desk in my home office are littered with the detritus of my job: pads of post-it notes, binder clips, thumb drives, blank CD's, printer cartridges. I now spend most of my days sitting in front of a computer, gazing at the computer monitor that serves as a portal to a virtual world —shiny and seductive, but not quite real.

But the shelves that stretch along the wall to my back open onto a different world. They're adorned with an array of found objects - shells and feathers, bird skulls and lizard skins, pieces of lichen and bits of driftwood. Winding through this wild assortment is a six-foot long snake, pieced together from 131 rocks of graduated sizes —from the quarter-inch moonstone at the tip of its tail to the 3 ½" long striped gray rock that forms the head of the beast, tipped with a tongue made from a long, yellowed gopher tooth.

At any time, I can swivel around and lay my hand on an object that anchors me back into the real world; connecting me instantly to a specific place, a specific set of emotions. At any time, I could turn off my computer, get up from my desk chair, and walk out the door. There's still a lot of room on those shelves.

MARGE PIERCY[BIO](#)**Brightness rains down**

The road through the woods
 is paved today with leaves
 that rustle beneath our feet
 releasing the scent of earth,
 decay and burnt toast.

The road dips, sidles up
 a shallow hill to the crest
 of oaks, easy to walk on
 side by side, a golden road
 summoning so that we hike

miles further than we intended.
 These woods are ours a few
 weeks more before hunters come
 to soak the leaves with blood.
 It's time to harvest butternut,

striped *delicata*, grooved Rouge
 Vif d'Estampes pumpkins,
 pluck the green tomatoes
 before frost rots them, season
 of pears laid out in paper.

Hawks migrate south on the wind
 hunting over the cliff. Swallows,
 warblers have gone with the roses.
 Crickets chirp under the radiator.
 Spiders web corners. Golden

time that will fade to leaves
the color of old blood,
the world thinned down
to skeletal weeds, only wood
and stone and monotone to see.

Drying up

The sun cracks stones.
Dust blurs the sky.
The beans form shriveled.
The shoots of the onions lie down.
My skin flakes ants.
My bed is wrinkled as parched corn.
For seven weeks no rain has fallen.

I dream of water
seeping through the withered reeds of my joints.
I dream of water
arching pellmell down the waterfall of spine:
water
roaring white as it roils over and kicks up foam
with the clatter of pebbles and spume rising.
I hear water
dripping like chimes from leaves of the maple.
I see water
riding the wind in long skeins of pale wool
I feel water
soaking into the cracked earth of my mind.

Loose the rain on us, soft or hard.
The sun has become a grimace:
an absence stronger than any
presence is long drought.

MARLA PORTER

[BIO](#)

93 Foxglove Lane

tiny poison bells
grow pink until too heavy
for their own,
then bow from sidebrush
to gravel. my tires
don't try to miss them
or these familiar potholes.

you never let me refuse your projects -
I sat near while you worked. you didn't
want help, just talking and togetherness. I'd do
the same now, if I had a daughter.

once

I even planted tulips; you poured beer
in slugtraps, the only time I ever
saw you touch alcohol, while blackberries
and foxglove closed in on each side.

have I been gone long enough
that the trees you planted cover the bathroom window
and we can take the curtain down? or so long
that blackberries climbed them,
opened the window, and moved into the house?

Basil

It's like zucchini, only late summer
isn't the only time you'll wish you'd
planted less. It's the herb you can't even
give away, leaves you push through
cracked car windows in a hot parking
lot, or you leave in the office refrigerator
to see if they really throw out food on
Fridays. I'm downing it with gin and ginger
and still it's sprouting under the mailbox,
hemming in the trees, holding me to
what I thought I wanted.

JANELLE RAINER[BIO](#)**Mother**

Twin moose curl
in brush on the pond bank
while their mother plunges
eye-deep in green water to wrap
her thrumming lips around lily pads —
their deep magenta bellies and stems
a glistening tangle spilling from her mouth.
One calf rises, slow as swelling dough
on trembling stalk-like legs,
crescent ears flapping. Limbs bend
and splay in an awkward amble
towards the wading mother
as she moves to shallow water.
Her new creature leans forward
and stretches its golden neck to grasp
one nipple. But the mother
moves away, clinging to the paling dream
of being young and alone.

Radish

All radishes are male. Just look
at their stark dicks sprouting
from buried sun bodies
deep into the earth,
snowy tendrils of pubic hair
caked with brown dirt. So
that's why they taste
so hot,
so hard.

PATRICIA SMITH RANZONI

[BIO](#)

A Daughter's Gifts (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)

Call them Steller's Jays if you will, habitat right, according to the book.

Coniferous canopy here, shore to timberline, north cliff off Yaquina Bay
betwixt the Pacific and Cascades. Neighbors to crab, sea lion, elk.

Here where our daughter dwells in a perch midst evergreens, too,
so that when she flies us across the continent West to this new place
for Christmas, swoops of black and dark-blue-gleam pull me to a view
where endangered native presences open my sight.
Birds never known! Never dreamed! (Hereafter, never gone!)

Just think how it would be for a pen dipper from a far world
to come unknowingly among song birds that look as if their Maker
had actually given words wings, dunking them whole into pots
of sapphire shine, then, head crests first, in black ink down over
their shoulders, still dripping, ready to write themselves.
And in writing themselves, to fly!

Oh, daughter, how can I thank you for this?

Beginning by cherishing the three feathers they leave,
naming them *word birds*, dreaming to soar.

LISA RIZZO

[BIO](#)

Star Coral

White dome
with petal-shaped dimples
as if flowers
fell to the bottom
of the ocean
before saying goodbye
and kissed this coral

which broke free
and rode the waves
up to shore
joining other wanderers
who mingled their bones
so sea creatures
might find a home

until this human interloper came
wishing she were innocent
but greedy really
to take one perfect treasure
far from where it belonged
now just flotsam
lying lightly in her palm

Come Sing

We buzz
we sisters
visit one sticky
yellow center
then the next
nestle our striped
fuzzy bodies in

search for sweet
syrupy beads
rolling in pollen
till we clothe our legs
in gold
we sigh and hum

come sing with us
raise your face to light
soak in the nectar ecstasy
mingle your hands
in blossoms
crabapple spring

KAY ROBERTSON

[BIO](#)

Frog Love

Bulging eyes, green skin,
beauty's standard in ponds
mobbed with amphibian passion.

Male, female, seducer, seduced
cruise the anonymous mud.
No names exchanged,
no astrological signs compared.

Thousands croak, calling,
"I am here, where are you?
Baby, let me caress
your cool, round body."

JANIS E. RODGERS

[BIO](#)

Driving Through Iowa with a Fellow Primatologist

We drive through the center
of Iowa, like cutting something—
two disembodied women
starved for forest and talk of monkeys
who do not sleep through the night,
long distance relationships
which have spanned continents
because of these distant cousins.
She wears Africa on her face
even when she declares,
There's something to say
about soil this black.

We note a fragment of wetlands
where red-winged blackbirds
rise from cattails and gleam
white against a corn silk sun,
or rolling hills, sharp twists
in the road, wooded ravines—
all natural habitats are decimated
by similar forces, slashed-and-burned.

She read the Bible front to back
while studying chimpanzees in Senegal.
David is a devout Catholic, she said,
after we described our own spiritualities
and admitted the stigma
of religion, the military.

My husband trains as a combat diver,
I don't know what that means, only that my heart
is there, under reconnaissance,
in deep ocean waters. Hers is in Senegal,
in a village with David's sister,
waiting for him to come home.

Search

As wild plums ripen on the periphery,
I will tell you—Do not try to dig me up
among layers of pressed prairie and flower,

fermenting petals and fossil pollen,
thousands of years beneath your feet
layers of spirit, the smell of nectar—

It will be time for you to tend your own soul,
sharpen blades, test the soil or ache for me.

Once I give back what I've borrowed
the promise of life and marrow,
my body will be rich again.

When the creek thaws and mussel shells
burrow out of the sand, when prairie returns,
dropseed and little bluestem,

I will be one of the smooth aster that grows.
When the land lies fallow, I will be ready
for you, the flower with bones in its stem.

CYNTHIA ROSI

BIO

Short Linebacker Rules the Roost

At dusk the white hens fly up into the pine trees, settling in rows of fifteen along the bending branches, like giant Christmas ornaments.

An adolescent rooster hops the spiral of boughs to the treetop, and picks his perch. Beneath him, the king of the flock, a red and orange rooster, makes sure every chicken has a bunk. Listening to them cooing, and his clucks of encouragement, takes me back to the settling sounds of a summer camp cabin.

This is the rooster's final task before dusk, when the predators prowl. He will nap and listen, asleep but alert, until the hour before sunrise when he adds his crow to the dawn chorus.

Last year, he'd been a chick, one of twenty five cockerels trying out for the job. My previous rooster became paranoid after fighting weasels in 20 below freezing, and began to fly at me, spurs out, defending everything.

I knew I had to replace him. But which breed would do the job? Buff Orpingtons, reputed for withstanding snow? A pretty black-and-white speckled Wyandotte? A Rhode Island Red, or a pure White Rock?

All summer I watched the boys establish their pecking order. As chicks they jumped at each other, bashing together. When they'd fledged, they began stare-down competitions. They stood chest to chest, ruffling their neck feathers, alert as Marines, eyeballing, unblinking. The rooster who looked away first also jumped sideways, avoiding the snap of the victor's hard beak.

Toward autumn, as the hens began to lay eggs, the roosters grew into their crows. At first they sounded comical, like toy horns. Then, one morning a screech outside my window matched Pat Benatar's "...go craaaazy!" I marveled at the complexity. That was my rooster!

Next morning, a cockerel countered with Steve Miller Band's, "...all the way to Tacoma." I felt bonkers as I tried to finish both songs in my head at once. Which did I want to hear for years? Not Pat. Not crazy!

The best kind of rooster will cover hens with his wings during a cold snap. He will lead them to shelter in a thunderstorm. When a hen chortles about laying an egg, he will answer her with clucks of encouragement. This begins a duet which lasts several minutes. "I've laid a beautiful egg," she cackles. "It's a wonderful egg. I'm so clever."

"It's such an ovular egg," he chuckles. "You are a beautiful hen."

Or so I like to imagine.

All summer I watched the flock. The Buff Orpington became aggressive. He chased around with a hen sidekick, grabbing birds by the necks and tossing them aside like a chicken supervillain. The Wyandottes remained small and lacked personality. A White Rock, Steve himself, watched the skies for hawks and warned the troops with a clear bugling.

One rooster stood out. His crow? Not so musical. Three repetitive notes, like a bad ice-cream truck. The prettiest of the cockerels, his neck feathers shone a rich orange, wing feathers bright red, and a tail curved as elegantly as an Italian General's hat. He avoided playing stare down. Instead, he hung out with the hens, chortling to them, digging up worms and calling them over, wiggling a worm in his beak until a hen understood it was for her.

At the end of the summer, our flock becomes meat, except for the hens who will lay eggs throughout the winter. On the night before our trek to the slaughterhouse, my husband and I plucked the chickens from their roosts and swiftly crated them. I easily recognized the showy little cockerel in the middle of a branch lined with hens.

Now he's the largest chicken in the yard. When a hen pecks on another, he runs from one end of the pasture to the next like a short

linebacker on goal for a touchdown. He follows me as I deliver grain to each of four feeders, ensuring order, and when the bucket empties and feeding settles down, finally begins to eat.

This year I brought in 110 new chicks, and he took them in without a flap. He kept his focus on the hens, and the young cockerels steer clear of the boss' bulk.

Soon we'll be hearing music from the trees again, perhaps this year a rendition of Lady Gaga. But the boss' position won't be usurped. He's a watchful steward of his flock, and stays to the end.

MARYANN RUSSO

[BIO](#)

The Garden

We were in the garden
overgrown green
flush with magnolia and dahlia
wide and fragrant
invited to slide down their stems
into their centers

We heard the songs of exotic birds
though we did not see them
caught the quick flap of wings
and glimpsed the leaves tipping over
after they launched

We were in that garden
the one with peaches and pomegranates
but we wanted the mangos
plush ruby fruit
ripe on their branches
calling

We ate
swallowed our innocence
and suddenly
naked

fled

Koloiki Ridge Hike

If you were here
you would hear the stillness
of thick green cliffs
and the white wings of a single bird
waving in the corridors
of the gully

If you were here
the Kukui groves would bow
with the slight silence of their leaves
in the island breezes
and the sisal plants
which line the trail
would open to you

just as you are

even with your worry
that neither gratitude
nor the present moment
can hold you
as this red earth holds
the thin stalks
of the Cooke pines

though you are
as wary as the Axis Deer
that roam and disappear
into the forest
with the mere rustle
of a foot on the path

Dance

An open heart
folds and unfolds
in the unseen rhythm
of petals,
a rhythm
that transcends time,
like waves
sliding in and out
over and over;
the moon's slivers swelling
to wholeness
again and again.

The rose, invisible,
seeding, sprouting, then
shooting its glaring red
stalk for all its worth
to produce one fragile bud,
and all the while
green leaves everywhere sway
and pelicans skim the sea.

The dance of it,
wild and still
is always here.

MIRIAM SAGAN

[BIO](#)

Notes from the Edge of the Bombing Range

Where Am I?

I'm in Wendover, Utah. In a living pod designed by an art class in the abandoned Wendover Air Force base. Next to the hangar where the Enola Gay was housed. It's like a little mobile home but with oddities, mirrors and shelves appear in hidden spots and an indoor mailbox houses plastic kitchen bags. Spacious for one, doable for two, with two sleeping spaces carved out of corners.

At the edge of the Great Salt Lake. In what was once a vaster ancient inland sea, Lake Bonneville. At the western edge of the "bathtub"—where mountains once were a shore. In a world of salt flats and playas that flood at the slightest rain, shimmering, not mirages but pure reflections, mostly of the utter blue of cloudless sky.

In a landscape pitted and mined. At the edge of three million acres of the military's bombing range. Where bombs are buried in undocumented locations. Where I can see old munitions mounds spreading out over the landscape like the ancient Mississippiian city of Cahokia. Craters. Historic aircraft. A landscape big enough to lose a plane or a bomb in. A landscape that seems to make people want to drive really fast, crash into things, and blow them up. And right outside my window, local police practicing some kind of maneuvers with cars loaded on a truck.

Its warm and sunny. Where am I? On the boundary between Wendover, Utah and West Wendover, which is Nevada, and which sports casinos and strip clubs. Also the grocery store, where I buy the odd things I'll eat when I'm alone and not at home—cabbage, camembert, flavored instant coffee.

I plug in the tiny colored X-mas lights that adorn the inside of the living unit, change the sheets, and settle in. This isn't exactly Walden Pond.

How Did I Get Here?

I flew to Salt Lake City. But of course it started before that. In the summer of 2009, I was involved with Albuquerque's citywide Land Arts exploration. Rich and I took a bus tour with CLUI (Center for Land Use Interpretation) that despite having water bottles and power bars was like no other bus tour. It included housing developments abandoned for lack of water and funding, and the location of a "broken arrow"—a bomb which fell by mistake from a military plane.

CLUI is a kind of think tank, a data base, a world view that might almost be Zen—things are as they are, exclusive of our opinion. People are part of nature and topography, even if we destroy it. I heard they had a residency in Wendover, Utah. I asked Matt Coolidge who was running the bus tour "Do I want to go to Wendover?" He didn't take special note, but I did, and sent them an application. It was accepted.

From Salt Lake due flat west on 80. Past the Brigham pit, with its enormous smelter tower—the second largest open pit copper mine in the world. Made me wonder about industrial sites named for religious leaders and prophets. Could there be a Moses mine? It seems unlikely.

Past Saltair pavilion, a faux Moorish attraction, past the Morton Salt Works where the little girl in washed out blue strolls with her umbrella across the sign, past Reilly Chemical Salt Works that pulls everything from lithium to pot ash from the muddy playa.

Past the Tree of Utah, a huge sculpture you can't stop to see—an artwork built to be viewed going 75 miles per hour, six spheres like planets coated with local rocks and minerals, built by a Swedish artist driven to put something vertical in this horizontal landscape.

Left at the Shell Station.

Left again, past the hangar where the Enola Gay was housed before it flew to drop the bomb on Hiroshima.

Here I am.

Why Am I Here?

Because I am tired of beauty. Can that really be true?

I've spent the last five years in pursuit of writing in nature. I was an artist in residence in the Everglades, at Petrified Forest National Park, and at Andrews Experimental Forest in the Cascades. I saw orchids and tree snails, baby crocodiles and alligators, giant crocodilian fossils and trees petrified to crystal. I saw what park rangers call "clambodia"—an acre of fossilized clams. Leaves as big as my head, nurse logs, and fungi I could almost see growing.

I saw tourists and agribusiness, prisons and poverty, hunters and notices about teens killed by DUI. I was always on a border—between a National Park and a teepee rest stop. I wanted to cross that border somehow, or integrate place once and for all.

Maybe an impossible task, but in any case I came to Wendover, Utah.

The arid west is my home, with all that implies—water issues, military, salinization, and yes, raw exquisite landscapes at sunrise. I wanted to think about destruction.

In the little airport here there is a room's worth of museum—a model of the Wendover base in its heyday and an exact replica of the bomb Little Boy. It was obsessively crafted, down to the rivets. And signed by members of the surviving crew. It sits in an office, with signs saying DON'T TOUCH THE BOMB. Maybe I as a writer see the irony, but it is meant, and I use this word on purpose, innocently.

Solitude

All day and all night, 24/7, several times an hour, a huge truck rolls by my window. The road is in good repair, potholes recently patched, but otherwise deserted. The trucks are a huge cab/engine with two long open containers hooked together, somewhat like railway cars. The trucks make a groaning noise as they level out.

Outside the CLUI residence here in Wendover is a sign: CHINA 6547 miles (pointing east) and HOLE TO CHINA 120 miles (west).

This is the work of Lucy Raven. Raven's video of the journey of copper, "China Town," starts with the huge mine in Ruth, Nevada

(SW of here). The open pit dwarfs even the big CATS—it all looks like a model from a distance. The mine is its own topography—evocative, swirled, devastating. A mesmerizing abstraction.

We follow the rough extraction to our very road here, then on to a railway, and to Vancouver. Then by ship to Nanjing, and to the processing in China. Some of it seems so low-key—guys with shovels, a man with a twig broom. There is the festive looking Copper Co. with red decorations, smelting furnaces, molten slabs, polished sheets, and then endless spools of copper wire.

The copper goes to Three Gorges Dam that lights up Beijing.

After a few nights alone here—sunset, dawn—vastness seems to keep me company. The airfield lights up to the south for the last plane bringing tourists to the casinos across the Nevada line. Then it goes dark. The crescent moon comes up very late. Sunrise is late too, as we're at the absolute western edge of the time zone—an orange ball of fire. I look too long and get a retinal after image burning on every surface I look at for the next few minutes.

There isn't much in the way of animal life—a butterfly, houseflies, a flock of blackbirds. Something eats my bacon sandwich put out in the trash. There are spiders, grasshoppers, and beetles out there.

The playa grows greasewood, pickleweed, salt grass—and prickly things that cling to my pants.

I practice my Zen koan, given to me by Joan Sutherland-roshi. Stop the sound of that distant temple bell. Sometimes I say it as—stop the sound of that ancient temple bell.

I seem to hear the waves of the sea that was once here, the tide. The desert is so large I might swell to fill it, but after a while I don't feel like myself—I feel like the desert.

Maybe this is my Walden Pond after all.

GIORGIA SAGE

[BIO](#)

The Coast

Trace the craggy collarbone of the coast
Draw the drapes of waves from the contours of her body
Lift the swathes of thick and briny cloth
See, there the little iridescent freckles of fishes
Mottled stone polished and pulled
Raw and healing skin turning smooth in time
The curving hook of her finger emerges from the crests of her gown
Points, there! There at me, the gull
Accuses and praises the curving guardians above
Gray and white cat claws on the blue
Gliding on the crashing purr of her footsteps
Kicking against the cliffs

We paint her eyes with chalky cataracts
Take flight from her womb
An exposed sore in the rippling veins of sandy flesh
To her womb we return
Come to rest in the moist, dark hole, dripping with green
The fine sweet hair of her secrets
Black stones polished and peering like seal eyes

She sleeps and dreams
Of her twisting body hidden beneath her blue gown
Embroidered with layers of fine, frayed lace
Wrinkled from care and use and lifts
To divulge the curving small of her back

She holds her children close
Against her stony bosom
They feel her heartbeat through thick folds
A strong and binding current
They guess at her secrets
They watch with polished stone eyes
Nestled in scraps of lace thrown against the smooth sand of her
calves
She sighs as the wind runs fingers through her hair
Untangling the wiry green web

She returns to sleep
A swell of breath enveloping her children
She hitches her hem up in her slumber
And in the bellies of the folds you can see the deep blue of night
The navy of a new dress before it fades
Of polished new eyes tumbling behind her lids
flickering flickering like lace wings
There is a darkest blue
Glossy and lustrous like a marble
They eye of an albatross
watching watching it hovers
Above her shifting frock
Set into motion like a pendulum
It watches

BECKY DENNISON SAKELLARIOU

[BIO](#)

What Could Happen

Cherry trees, second cousins, grasshoppers.
Some years everything dies.
Other years everything blooms.

I walk through the knee-high Queen Anne's Lace,
this year far more abundant
than any other year.

I understand that
this is what it's all about, really,
raking the iris beds, clipping the lavender,

astonished at the purple mimosa,
no blossoms for five years
and the apple tree we cut down

eaten away by troops of ants,
now rising out of rotten roots,
humming sun and cells and water.

Nothing to do with my love life,
my bunions, my sorrows,
or why the strawberry plants withered,

or Yianni, thinner and thinner,
two tumors in his right lung,
two in his brain, still smoking.

Or whether there are ghost warriors
still battling on the Plain of Thebes,
or if stones are ever hungry.

I am sad about my apricot trees
 stricken with *gummosis*, the heart-shaped leaves
 fewer and fewer, no fruit this year,

only the insolent ivy climbing
 the dying trunk, oblivious of what could happen
 or what I think.

Unmeasured Hour

The September sun does not dry the figs
 as fast as the August one.

They need at least a full day or two more.
 Later, as the month

closes upon itself, shadows will narrow,
 lean north, a slight

variation that probably only I would notice
 but enough so that I will move

the blue and white canvas chair closer to the railing
 into the dimpled shade of the pomegranate branches

and the boxes, stools, buckets holding the fig-filled pans
 into the squares of sunlight around the front.

I hold my mind as still as the unmeasured hour
 between sunset and dark

as butterflies, diagrammed in gray and brown,
 arrive to study the fruit.

The figs are not as fat and round as last year,
 still they are thick and slow against the tongue.

Dried, sliced and packed
with fresh basil and chopped walnuts

into pickle, peanut butter, and coffee jars,
lined up for when you and other friends come visiting.

Later, you will taste this late summer day,
chewing slowly, lustily, imagining

the bees and ants that crawled around the fruit
looking for sweetness to carry back to their nests,

the cricket's soft trill as I bring in the chairs,
the small black bird alone in his ecstatic washing

in the puddle where the hose drips,
the geckos, positioned upside down on the pink wall,

spitting out their mating calls, stalking
the moths come to meet the electric light.

This earth draws my body,
my fingers, the soles of my feet

into its dry clay, its surprising fecundity,
its obstinate resurrection

promise me never to leave
promise me salvation.

JUDITH SANDERS

[BIO](#)

A Failure

The sun fondled her face.
The earth massaged her feet.
The air ran its lips along her neck.

The sun offered entertainments:
It sparked diamonds from water.
It melted opal mists
and voilà: purple mountains.
It unfurled silent fireworks
to oratorios by hidden birds.

The earth spread a feast:
quinces and pineapples,
peaches and pistachios.
It spun trees into bouquets.
It embroidered hillsides
with Queen Anne's lace.

The air murmured
about distances,
rattling leaves
like castanets.
It danced in fragrances
of pine and hazelnut
of lemon and wine.
It pressed upon her
the freshening rain.

She sent them all away.
Free of their fawning attentions,
their opulent generosity,
that demanded so much gratitude.
What a burden.
She would rather
sleep.

But even the dark said,
Let me love you.
Even the dark caressed her
with velvet hands.

Geography Lessons

There, the land bites the sea
with its pointy dragon snout
frothing and fanged with boulders
and spiked with bristled pines
many broken from battles
with ferocious storms
If you intrude, you find yourself
blinded by freezing mists
and wandering in tightening circles
toward the snapping jaws

There, the land is scored with ridges
raked by glaciers' claws
You climb and climb
as the altitude snatches your breath
You shade your eyes to scan
the ridges lined up like waves
lashed from an endless sea
You descend in a squat,
clutching at roots
that wrench loose, spitting dirt
Pebbles skitter off and plink
deep in camouflaged ravines

There, the land folds steeply
 over crevices lush with secret life
 Eyes peer from logs and thickets
 as you pick along paths
 carved by animal feet
 leading to caches of inky berries
 or the hoof-paddled banks
 of muddied streams
 There, in a lost corner,
 a pool sparkles in slanting rays
 The moss is warm velvet
 You could live forever
 in that ferny cave behind the falls
 if only you could find it

There, the land lies unbreathing
 worn thin as a sheet of paper
 under the galloping clouds
 Rain pools on the highways
 You rotate always at the center
 never closer to the distant rim
 with its promise of a way out

There, the earth was flayed
 The warm loam and the fuzzy conifers stripped
 The horny skeletal plates exposed and bleached
 Birds with scraggly gullets and pincer beaks
 prowl for tiny beating hearts
 in their packets of warm meat
 cowering from the wingspan's shadow
 that sweeps the blazing plain

We haven't yet discussed the ice fields,
 crackled and dirty,
 where nothing stirs but wind
 Nor how the distant sun glimmers
 as if itself a chip of ice
 Nor how blue hulks lie stranded
 and crevasses plunge

Surely you know about the cities
How the lights flare and spatter,
corroding the dark
How the programmed swarms vanish
through revolving doors of towers
that loom but never fall

And we have not yet talked about the night
How it goes on forever
It is like inhabiting another planet
Vapors waft in, crooning of emptiness,
while invisible insects insist
on jingling tambourines
Harlequin blacknesses loom and vanish
and small spaces balloon
You grope through treacherous shadows
warding off thuds to shin or chin
with your outstretched palms

Now let me tell you about my bed
How it too goes on forever
It began when I watered an acorn
and tended the sapling for centuries
till, in the course of nature, lightning struck
I let the green wood season
before touching it with a saw
After, I rubbed it with beeswax
I combed bolls of whitest cotton
I snatched flyaway feathers
at the beaks of preening swans
Now every evening I shelter
under the billowing sheets
and entrust the planks with all my weight
Every morning in the bitter sunlight
I navigate to the edge
before planting my bare feet down
and making my way among the landscapes

ADRIENNE ROSS SCANLAN

[BIO](#)**Longfellow Creek: A Citizen Science Diary**

The first rule is, to keep an untroubled spirit... The second is to look things in the face and know them for what they are...

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Late September. Every fall during my five years monitoring salmon at Longfellow Creek, I've driven along the Alaskan Way Viaduct past Seattle's downtown towers and Elliot Bay's waterfront and ferry terminals, and onto the West Seattle Bridge. Below are the Port of Seattle's cargo terminals and cranes and the Duwamish River's West Waterway, into which opens a culvert making it possible for spawning coho and chum salmon to leave the river, swim beneath city streets and the steel mill until the culvert day-lights, and the fish enter Longfellow's downstream rush. From the Avalon Way Exit ("Welcome to Luna Park"), I pass the café and glass-blowing studio, then go down SW Yancy Street to a fitness center where I park and, as I do every September, I think: this is a weird place for a salmon stream.

#

Longfellow Creek is so low it seems little more than light glimmering over stones. Five house sparrows take flight as I rest my data collection form atop the footbridge. I put on polarized sunglasses. I watch the creek for a twist of movement, for a dorsal fin slipping through light-rippled water.

The fall rains haven't started, but since I don't know when the salmon will arrive, it's best to start early. I'm here as a citizen scientist, one of many volunteers who observe the ecosystem around them—when flowers bud or migratory birds appear, for example—and relay that on-the-ground, observational data to researchers to help answer scientific questions, often about environmental conservation. Perhaps it's because I'm an agnostic Jew that I trust that this world is as important as one of spirit or after-life. I believe I have an obligation to know this world that nurtures us. It's a joy to

learn more, to glimpse a greater complexity to our beautiful world. I want to share that joy by tossing a bit of meat into knowledge's stew pot, where it will simmer and sustain us for another day, another month, another year.

But now, and most of my time at Longfellow, I'm waiting for something to happen. Three times a week, I wait and watch, alert, yet relaxed, striving to accept the sudden and not discount the unexpected. An alder limb might crash into the creek. Black-capped chickadees could call in the red-osier dogwood. A coho salmon could search out the shelter of a downed tree that breaks the current. If I see a fish, I mark the date and time, whether it's an adult or juvenile, and if it's dead or alive. Different streams have different species, but at Longfellow, I'm expecting UNIDs (unidentifiable fish), coho salmon or chum salmon, but I'm also keeping an eye open for the threatened Puget Sound Chinook, as well as various trout, and marking down whether an external tag is present or adipose fin is missing (coho and Chinook from Lake Washington hatcheries have the small fin below the dorsal removed prior to release), if I've talked with local people, or if anything at the stream seems odd or requires attention. My marks join those of hundreds of volunteers watching the Lake Washington watershed, Vashon Island, Seattle and selected central Puget Sound streams to sketch a picture showing policy makers and the public whether fall spawning salmon are returning to creeks and reaching spawning areas.

I've searched out western Washington's salmon streams for years. I've watched for chinook, coho, sockeye, chum, and pink salmon that, having left their ocean-feeding phase, returned to mate, lay eggs, and die in the streams where they were born. I've learned their natural history, helped restore their place in local waterways, and thanks to those experiences, journeyed through personal landscapes to make peace with illness, my father's death, and other wounded domains of family, community, spirit. I've interpreted the salmon as icons of home; as symbols of fertility, death, and transformation; as messengers bringing me an epiphany. I've come to wonder, though, if it's more respectful to see a creature as it is rather than how I want it to be. Maybe gathering observational data means seeing Longfellow on its own terms.

I see the creek, a dragonfly, and a bird that flies too fast to identify before it darts between Himalayan Blackberry leaves. While

I'm engaged in citizen science, some would say that simply gathering data doesn't make me a citizen who's also a scientist. For that, I would have to analyze and make meaning from the marks made on data forms, or at least ask (and answer?) a few questions of my own. None of which, unfortunately, are scientific. What can I hope to find here? Why should Longfellow, given all that's been done to it, be beautiful or bountiful? What will I see if I let myself see it? A question is a route out of boredom and into wonder, if I'm lucky. I check my watch, mark zeros on my form, and wander along the Legacy Trail.

#

Near the Salmon Bone Bridge, I find a russula mushroom growing alongside a bigleaf maple. The Himalayan blackberry is thick with berries, some black and drying out, others red and rushing towards ripeness against the coming winter. But what's pulling my attention is an office chair upright in the creek, water flowing between its wheels.

Citizen science has its protocols, one of which is that I'm not supposed to go into the stream. It's a bad example for the public, and I could crush a redd, those gravel nests holding salmon eggs, although it's too early in the season to worry about that. Tikkun olam, which Jews believe is an obligation to repair the world, has its necessities. I haul the chair onto the trail.

#

Early October. It's Yom Kippur, and I have eaten. Just as I am not fasting, I am also not praying. This adds to an impressive list of sins I am supposed to be considering on this Day of Atonement. Since I'm tallying up all the things I'm doing wrong, I should include that I'm supposed to be at the SW Yancy footbridge and not clearing plant debris from the culvert Longfellow flows through on its way to the Duwamish. If the culvert's grate is blocked with tangles of fallen tree limbs, leaves, and Himalayan blackberry vines, no salmon swimming up the Duwamish can enter Longfellow. Seattle Public Utilities, which oversees Seattle's creeks, clears the grate regularly, but leaves and twigs don't drop according to government timetables.

I shove a branch into the water and use it to maneuver deadfall between the grate's bars and from there, downstream. A channel opens, and with it my pride in a job well done. A fish streaks upstream. Another waits within the culvert, and then a speckled fish with a scarred back and no adipose fin pushes forward seemingly merging with the stream.

Yesterday and this morning were the first rainstorms in weeks. Longfellow holds stormwater laden with lawn fertilizers, pesticides, car oil, copper and other toxins washed from streets and roads. If those fish are coho, they'll probably be poisoned and dead in a few hours. My pride may be another sin to ponder.

I pull out my data form and scribble "3 UNIDs @ grate." With luck, I'll see them at the footbridge but not doing the "Jesus walk", the term for poisoned coho gyrating so wildly they appear to be walking on water. Upwards of 60—90% of Longfellow's coho fall victim to "pre-spawn mortality" dying before they have a chance to find a mate, much less reproduce.

"One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds," wrote Aldo Leopold. A loss of innocence, ecological or otherwise, is the proverbial birth of knowledge. The stormwater pouring into Longfellow came from my actions and millions of others living in this watershed. Saying knowledge brings responsibility is easy; figuring out what to do is hard. From Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) to Yom Kippur, our obligations are *teshuvah* (repentance or return), *tefillah* (prayer), *tzedakah* (charity) and, I believe most important, *tikkun* (repair). Even at my most agnostic, I hold to *tikkun olam*. As I understand it, I (we) have the power to harm, and that same power gives me (us) an obligation to try and repair. Leopold's world of wounds is alive with *tikkun*'s opportunities.

Tikkun isn't a presumed beneficial deed that leaves me feeling good. I've come to believe it's the result that matters because in an imperfect world, *tikkun* will be imperfect. Sometimes a repair, repairs. Other times—like clearing the grate, perhaps—a repair causes more harm than good. Or a repair reveals hidden problems. Longfellow used to flow into the mudflats, saltwater sloughs and marshes of the Duwamish River—Elliott Bay estuaries. Sometime before 1920, Longfellow's Young's Cove mudflats were filled to make way for an expanded steel mill. The culvert was built to allow

Longfellow to reach the Duwamish and to avert a public health hazard from raw sewage that had been entering the creek. Since the 1990's, when Seattle began restoring its streams, gravel was imported to form spawning areas, fish passage barriers were removed, and native trees were planted along Longfellow's lower reaches to provide shading and cooling in this riparian zone. No one seems to have thought about water quality until coho accepted our invitation to return.

Glimpsing a repair's rippling consequences, as I understand it, requires watchfulness and close, careful living that can build knowledge of a place, rather how marriage moves love beyond infatuation and into an illuminating spiral of intimacy and forgiveness. Tikkun requires the humility of returning and observing anew, because what you need to know changes with how a place changes. I hope my citizen science efforts are helping to build that evolving knowledge. What knowledge have I gained about science and citizenship? Should I be clearing this grate?

Longfellow typically receives more spawning coho than other Seattle streams, with some years bringing more than 200 fish. I used to think clearing the grate would help re-establish a run, but now I know better: too many fish die before spawning. Longfellow has some of the highest coho pre-spawn mortality rates among Seattle streams, but in contrast, chum salmon appear immune to the toxic runoff, and mate in Longfellow and other local creeks. Some Longfellow coho survive to spawn and die afterward as part of their natural cycle, becoming food for urban wildlife. While Longfellow's smolt numbers are low, perhaps some survive their year or two in the creek, eventually swimming downstream into Puget Sound. Some coho from Puget Sound streams spend their growing years there; others migrate out to feed and grow in the Pacific.

Once back at their spawning creeks, coho will be strong bodied yet fragile, their immune systems shutting down, no longer eating, but burning through their protein and fat reserves. They will die as they have lived, unconcerned with us even though their survival depends on human stewardship of creeks, rivers, estuaries, and ocean. Is that why I cleared the grate? Was it for the part of the watershed I touch as I sit on a concrete embankment? Or was it for pride? Was it

to see coho at the footbridge? Why pay attention if there's nothing to see? I ponder my questions. I shift my position. No more grate clearing.

#

Mid-October. A red-tailed hawk circles above the parking lot. At the SW Yancy footbridge, a man in a green corduroy coat, silver hair over stooped shoulders, gives me the fish gossip: "There won't be coho this early. Wait till Halloween, you'll see 'em holding under the footbridge before shooting upstream."

Later an elderly man walking a mud-splattered, white poodle stops to say that in the 1940's, the fire station had a barn for their horses on SW Yancy. He points downstream, towards where I've heard beavers have tried to put in a dam, and says he remembers when the Duwamish came to a cove where the steel mill now sits.

"No silvers jumping in the river, not yet," he says shaking his head.

Coho at sea have silvery sides and a light belly—their nickname is "silver salmon"—but in mating colors their lower body turns wine-colored to gleaming blood-red. Unlike these men, Longfellow's coho aren't necessarily local. Longfellow has resident populations of rainbow trout, three-spine stickleback, prickly and Pacific staghorn sculpins, but sea-run cutthroat trout and steelhead trout are long-gone, while its coho seem to be a mix of wild fish and strays from hatcheries or Puget Sound's tribal net pens.

"You're here too early", the old man smiles and continues on his way.

Living fish. Dead fish. Courtship. A redd. What's the data I'm watching for but a moment taken out of time, recorded, remembered? That old man's memories are data, a local knowledge gained from living decades in the same place. Does he drop his stories like seeds, planting them with strangers wherever he goes? What does he hope will take root? Is it just that if he doesn't pass it on, everything he's learned becomes just another lost bit of lore about a long-gone place? I've lived in Seattle for over 20 years, and while I feel at home, I look to the future, not the past. I want a tale

to tell my daughter (and myself) how knowledge, work, stubbornness, and patience brought a place back to as much life as it could still support.

#

Late October. Longfellow holds the rippling reflections of red-osier dogwood and black-capped chickadees. I remind myself: whatever I see is important in its own right. With each pencil mark, I confirm that salmon are present at a stream site, during what year, and what time of year. That thin line reveals nothing about whether fish are present but where I can't see them, present at night (common for salmon migration), or present after I leave. Put all the data together, and you get a working understanding of the presence, location, and numbers of salmon in a given year. Assuming, of course, that I and other volunteers see what's there, identify it correctly, mark it down, and do this session after session, year after year, so that the reliability and credibility of those lines write over nature's impermanence and memory's imperfections. Nibbling my positive attitude is: Will this be a good day for fish?

One mold chewed salmon circles upstream of the footbridge. Spots on its back and upper tail fin place it as a coho, but if there are spots on the back and the upper and lower tail fin, it could be a Chinook. I can't see the gumline, so that's no help in identifying it. The fish shifts. I see a red belly. I mark down "coho". Sunlight sparkles on wind-rippled alders. A UNID surges past the bridge. A breeze across the downstream rush reveals a red flash of belly. Another coho. A tail slaps the water. A female is digging her redd upstream. I check my watch, write down the time, and walk along the trail. Fallen bigleaf maple leaves crunch under my steps.

Past the next footbridge, three salmon lunge each other. The years maturing in a creek, the migration to feed and grow followed by an often arduous return and re-adaptation to freshwater has expended so much energy that all the salmon have left is a brief time when females fight for redd sites and males fight for access to ripe females, all so another generation grows in gravel nests as their unknown parents' lives end. A fast-moving dorsal fin cuts the creek and casts out ripples fracturing reflections of cedars, alder, Pacific

willow. Sunlight pours through the water, revealing a mosaic of stones and a salmon making its way upstream.

#

My first crayfish! Just a few inches long, with a brown mid-section (thorax?) and an orange-brown head and claws, it glides over the streambed's silt and stones. Are crayfish benthic indicators? Benthics are stream bottom-dwelling invertebrates, such as insects, worms or mollusks, good indicators of habitat and water quality because they tend not to migrate, are sensitive to human impacts, and easy to collect. The more benthic species a creek hosts, and the more individuals per species, the healthier is the stream. Longfellow scores poorly for benthics, indicating its species diversity is poor and most likely made up of species that are short-lived, pollution-tolerant, or in other ways able to tolerate life in an urban creek. Is the crayfish a native species? An invasive? Does Longfellow have a large population? Is this creature at the vanguard?

Cottonwood leaves are turning gold. A grey sky promises rain. An ordinary day, but my mind was as open as my eyes. Now I have questions and questions and questions. Perhaps I'm watching Longfellow not to see what's here but to see what's not known. To find questions, not answers. That beautiful thought from the astronomer and naturalist Chet Raymo: "Knowledge is an island. The larger we make that island, the longer becomes the shore where knowledge is lapped by mystery.."

Every answer leads to questions; every question reveals a larger world; there are questions even in ordinary places. Maybe "mystery" is more questions than I'd imagined. Maybe that's what it means to see a place for what it is.

#

Early November. Alder leaves fall with the rain. Three days of rain. Longfellow is running high and fast.

In the early twentieth century, Longfellow Creek flowed through a local wilderness. Rain fell on centuries-old cedars, spruces and fir trees, dripped upon snowberry, salmonberry, swordferns and other shrubs, sinking into a welcoming earth, where it drained into

Longfellow, the Duwamish, Elliot Bay and other nearby waterways as fresh, cool ground water. Now, roads, sidewalks and other impervious surfaces cover approximately half the city. Rain slides hard and fast off streets and sidewalks, picking up daily life's toxic droppings from pet and wildlife wastes to gasoline, copper, arsenic, mercury and a host of other metals that come largely from cars. This stormwater flows into Seattle's drainage system, which pipes some of it into sewers for treatment while the rest pours into Longfellow and other creeks flowing into lakes or Puget Sound.

Seattle is re-designing its drainage system to better control floods in the future, but right now a woman stops along the footbridge and points where the water was yesterday: three feet up the bank. Slightly over half of Longfellow's 2.7-mile watershed holds impervious surfaces, and almost the entire watershed drains into a system of pipes, storm drains and other structures that shoot stormwater into Longfellow, while additional outfalls bring combined sewer overflows, or a mix of stormwater and untreated wastewater when severe storms overwhelm the pipe system and threaten a wastewater backup. Today's flood is eroding Longfellow's banks, digging gashes into the stream bed, scouring out redds or smothering fertilized eggs with silt, ripping out downed trees and other large woody debris needed to create resting pools and rearing areas, and pushing immature fish out of protective cover and into the waiting jaws of predators. Juvenile coho typically spend a year or longer in small, freshwater streams prior to going to sea. Their numbers are determined partly by the number of spawning adults but also by a stream's length and habitat quality (such as rearing pools containing large woody debris that can offer young fish a complex, sheltered in-stream environment), factors harmed as cities expand into natural areas. Puget Sound coho are a "species of concern" and not listed as endangered, but in four river basins alone, increased urbanization led to a 75% decline in coho using those basins.

Longfellow's in-stream habitat repairs can't alone offset the habitat-disturbing processes created by the surrounding developed landscape. And I can't hope to see any fish today. Why not return to my warm car? (It's not lost on me that my driving only adds to Longfellow's deteriorating condition.) I'll never be a scientist no matter how many marks I make on a form. I'll always be a citizen of where I live. Sometimes gathering observational data is about

citizenship, not science, and being a citizen means not looking away. I've heard it said that people restoring urban streams have a romantic relationship with muck. I try to see past Longfellow's leaf-strewn rush as it washes away hard work and good intentions. I think (or hope) that naivety is swept away so that a realistic intimacy can ask: what's still possible? The *tikkun olam* that's needed extends beyond Longfellow's physical habitat. The small acts of daily life brought on this roaring water. Are there mundane choices—walk rather than drive, vote, support a law or a lawsuit, replace the concrete carport with a garden filtering rain down to the groundwater—which can create an informed engagement with where we live? Like drops of water falling on a stone, can small, persistent acts wear the rock away?

#

Late November. The afternoon light casts my pen's shadow upon the page. Two UNIDS glide into view. The female clears gravel with slaps of her tail, then goes nose to nose with her mate before both seem to disappear as twilight darkens Longfellow's flow.

I glance up. A great blue heron glides in long winged grace to perch in an alder. What luck! A few minutes more, I'd never have spotted the bird amid darkness and branches. Only it wasn't luck. I've learned it's important to say "thank you" to this world for being here, but I can't do that without knowing what's living here with me. I used to think that meant learning to identify plants, birds and other creatures, but Longfellow contains another set of field marks. I'm learning to see the netting holding the stream bank, the planted seedlings of cedar, spruce, snowberry, Douglas fir, the trash hauled out, the graffiti painted over, the ordinary, often anonymous acts that allows me to acknowledge Leopold's loneliness in recognizing ecological wounds but replace it with gratitude for stubborn people who loved and repaired Longfellow enough for a great blue heron to find shelter in the night.

#

December. I'm cold under my polypro pants and jacket, cold under my hat and gloves, cold along my bones. I watch for fish. I see

rain plopping on the creek. I listen for splashing. I hear cars pounding streets. As November faded into December, there were chum and sometimes coho. That was a week or two back.

Time to mail in my data sheets. I won't be back until next fall. While I'm gone, Longfellow's flows will shift deadwood and gravel, perhaps closing old channels, perhaps opening new ones. I dip my hands in the creek and see a salmon that's no more than tail and spine twisted over stone. I want something to feed me until I return. What were those questions from September? Before there was "citizen" or "science", there were people looking at the place where they lived, wondering: How did this fish get here? Why this tree? On and on until the question behind all others: Why am I here? Organic farmer and poet Scott Chaskey writes: "It is possible to replace the abstract question - why are we here? - with a local knowledge."

Is that true for me, here at Longfellow Creek? My citizen science efforts have shown me that a local knowledge is never static or simple. Cities and streams, people and coho, even tikkun change and are complex. Knowing why I'm here means staying alert to what I still need to learn, to those unexpected creatures and sometimes unwanted moments, to ecological wounds and the resilience that illuminates this odd, lovely place.

I shove my monitoring form into my rucksack and walk up the trail.

(2003-2007)

ANDREA SCARPINO

[BIO](#)

Earthrise, December 1968

-taken by astronaut William Anders

Once, the farthest window
was the sky, an opaque frame
to earthliness. Blackbirds
drew in night with their wings,
sparrows called for dawn.
In those days, sky knew best,
could tell of grasslands scorched
by fire, algae blooms, stampede.
Could tell of water gathering,
about to fall. Then, one day,
a bursting into weightlessness,
the other side of sky's vast sight.
Earth framed by darkness,
quiet, expanse. Sky's limits
wavering. Collapsed.

Afterward

-After Lucie Brock-Broido

Tell me there are ocean waves,
sky collapsed in mountain pass,

tumbling. Tell me we can float
on our backs, listen to our hearts

beating, bird wings leaned
to breeze. Tell me all our wounds

knit closed, salt-sting. Whoever
you are, whatever you believe,

tell me you agree: our bodies
nothing more than energy

contained, released, than pulse,
vibration, beat. Before: nothing.

And afterward? The sea.

LISA SHARP

BIO

Birth . . .

Through the summer heat, monsoon rains gave nourishment to the swaying green grass in Southern Arizona's high Sonoran valley. Autumn's days evaporated the moisture and pasture forage dried in preparation for winter. Meanwhile, baby calves grew inside their mamas. By midwinter, their bellies, looking as if the slightest pressure would burst hair, hide and entrails into a thousand pieces, cows trundled down small trails and slogged through mud looking for feed or water. Old cows with backbones protruding and stomachs sagging with the increasing weight of new life maneuvered the pastures with a deliberateness that comes from traversing a land for many seasons. Udders slowly filled and seesawed between their hind legs as each hoof left the ground.

Three seasons ticked past with days and nights spent eating, drinking, defecating and sleeping. All the while, wombs nurtured their inhabitants to live in another world.

The milk laden bags became more noticeable with taut teats anticipating their purpose of existence. Tails swished back and forth, soon-to-be-mothers laid down to reposition their load and ease discomfort, stood up again and continued grazing. A thick mucus released in the birth canal dribbled down the cow's hind legs; the mother and baby prepared for the ensuing contractions.

I rode out from the barn to make sure there were not any calving problems. Long-johns, Levi's, wool socks, over-the calf cowboy boots, turtleneck sweater, a flannel-lined levi jacket fully buttoned with a red silk scarf tied around my neck prevented February's wind from seeping into my body. With each ivory cloud that drifted occasionally across the Arizona sun, the wind chill factor rose up a notch.

My old quarter horse, his chocolate coat in full winter bloom, moved along the cow trail in a slow steady trot as we searched for new calves. Walking alone with the dry prairie grass scratching their hocks, the

soon-to-be mamas found private birthing places in the nooks and crannies of canyons, arroyos, and eroded hill banks. My eyes scanned the flatlands as we trotted through open pasture land before heading west to search the hills. Agate colored strands of the horse's tail blew haphazardly along his side and dusted my stirrups as we crested hills and walked along their ridges.

Protected from the wind by a small hill, I spotted a big brown buoy in the sea of winter's faded green grass. Two tall Sacaton grass clumps, their broom stick stalks filtered the cold air blowing on the cow's hide. All alone, but accustomed to horse and rider, the cow glanced at us and allowed her neck to relax again. We kept our distance, stood still and waited. The wind carried the sound of the mother's final push while her head fell momentarily in exhaustion.

The calf slid with front feet pointed, bursting thru the sac with its head resting on front legs, body and hind legs stretched out behind and lay on the low bunch grass and dirt. The experienced mama cow lifted her head and stood up with her front legs providing the final thrust while trails of a broken bloody membrane hung under her tail. She staggered, regained her balance and bent over her baby. The wide tongue lapped milky film from the calf's nose allowing full breaths to enter waiting nostrils. Like a spatula, the tongue skimmed off the mucus from the calf's eyes allowing eyelids to be free, and soon, ears twitched and head moved. The body, responding to his mother's caresses, welcomed the warmth caused by the blood flow into newly exposed nerve endings.

The small animal's smell ran through this cow's sensory system and was absorbed permanently into her being. She would be able to find her calf amidst 1000 others simply by this one act of pulling the calf's unique smell into her cells. A time-immemorial action, a two minute bleep on life's screen, cemented these two animals together again. The white head framed in black hair, a mirror image of the larger head hovering over it, lifted and lay back down again.

The cow did not relinquish her maternal duties and kept urging life to flow throughout her baby's body. The young head with its wet hide plastered to its skull moved gingerly like an old blind man afraid of another fall. The narrow ivory hoofs scratched the earth while the short tail tested the wind's strength and oxygen flowed into the bloodstream and cells accepted their mission.

My horse and I stood silently, respecting another one of nature's miracles and watched a new life come to existence on the land's bassinet. The pair would stay there for another day or so, and on my next ride, I would see the mother walking to water while her calf lay hidden in the tall grass waiting for her return. We continued down the canyon trail with the sounds of horseshoes echoing in the wind.

LAURA JAN SHORE

[BIO](#)

Te Anau, New Zealand

You've come to witness the lavender embrace—
lake and sky, their reluctance to part.

Te Anau in summer where nobody sleeps.

The first tendrils of sun ignite the grey mouth of morning.
Wind wrestles fog. Peach blossoms hover like wings.

You abandon yourself to Te Anau, its silky dark waters,
white granite peaks of mock snow.

After blizzards and avalanches, after one hundred days of rain
comes the season of honeyed light.

The dull curtain is lifted and behind the scenes,
incandescence has always been there.

The surface trembles with the voltage,
those vast depths, glacial waters, ablaze.

You tramp across wet sand, all synapses sparked
by the clarity of beech trees and ferns.

The takahe and her chicks nest beneath mountain daisies.
Just another resurrection under electric skies.

Recharged, you've become a luminous song,
afterglow as the sky deepens into aqua

and the full moon
proffers its silver coin of dreamless nights.

Te Anau in summer where nobody sleeps.

At Dawn

The sea is a collector . . . —Marianne Moore

Lured by the throb and suck
of high tide,
 I'm immersed
 in purple and gold
clouds that smudge
a brightening dome.

Summoned too, by rainbow lorikeets
who screech in code
as they savage
the banksias and the winged
whistle of crested pigeons,
crunch of dried pods underfoot,

the whorl of grasses
beckoning up and over the dunes.

There a dazzle of jade silk
unfurls to meet the edge of the sky
and my heart is caught
like those sea bream
agape
in the glitter of wind.

CAROL SMALLWOOD

[BIO](#)

Discovery

Does knowing what causes the Aurora Borealis
(the Northern Lights) change delight?

Did their discoverer feel like they were telling
children there's no Santa Claus?

We still say the sun rises and sets long after
Copernicus.

Light of Spring

The first light of spring is from a testing sun,
hesitant to usher change: a slant
familiar to ancestors peering from caves

My young cat parts dusty blinds,
stares long
at new birds in flight

FAYE SNIDER

[BIO](#)

Predators

A blue heron stood behind the Japanese maple shrub, its talons firmly planted on a flat rock at the edge of our frog pond. She was still—so still I could barely see her breath from my window, a few feet away. *Serene in grace*, I thought as her very presence calmed me. She didn't waiver as I entered the garden and stood inches behind her. She was focused across the pond and so it did not occur to me she might be scanning for food below.

I fall in love with critters—mainly, my beloved native frogs, which arrive in a burst each spring except for that spring when a pair of green-backed mallard ducks visited the pond. I laughed the first morning I opened the blinds to the sight of the couple's bobbing, their tail feathers in the air. It was the delight of close observation, how they swam in sink, then drifted apart, the wet, green glint of their necks. It took me a week to wonder what the ducks were feeding on. I turned to Google and was aghast; ducks eat frogs. The mallards were feasting on the pond's hatchery of tadpoles and froglets.

The next morning, when the mallards flew in, I was out the front door like a wild woman, clapping my hands, shouting, "Shoo, shoo, go away." It took minutes of stomping and shouting before they scattered, never to return, at least up to this point.

I've been the keeper of our man-made pond for six years. Before, I had no experience with pond life. I'm an inveterate gardener and chose a house where the front lawn had been transformed into a perennial garden with flag stone paths, which encircle two ponds.

I was so transfixed by the pleasure of tending the wild irises, feathery astilbe, and my favorite tassel-head cone flowers, I barely noticed the bevy of frogs clustered around the pond. But each time I approached too close, one frog after another, like fingers on a keyboard, leapt into the water and splashed their melodies. One hot day, a curious frog stayed put; she peered up at me from the edge of the small pond as I snipped trailing vines.

“How are you today, little one?” I asked.

I swear she blinked her eyes.

My gut warmed; I felt less alone as I went about my chores. Thereafter, I looked for “my little friend” and often found her hanging off the trailing water celery, her muscled legs dangling. On sunny days, over a dozen frogs, some sandwiched together, basked on the lily pads while others seeped heat from the rocks along the edge.

In the third year, a tan garden snake appeared. Its movement fascinated me, how it hugged the land as it wound its way in and out of the copper bells. When I saw it slither around a holly next to the pond, I worried, *Was this snake also a predator?* I Googled snakes/ predators/ Charles River/Newton and a picture of this very garden snake appeared. It was a predator!

I came up with a plan: to snag the snake with a long handled bucket-net and toss him into the river. Weeks passed before the snake re-appeared and wound its way around the spreading juniper at the big pond. “I’ve got you,” I said aloud as I flipped the net down and over the snake only to realize, at the flick of my wrist, it had slipped away.

On a rainy day, I watched from my window as my prey slid into the pond. My worst fears were realized—all of May, June and July, the pond and rocks were empty of frogs. A Massachusetts Wildlife “hot-line” employee assured me that the frogs would return. He predicted they could blow in on the heels of a rainstorm. In August, after a Northeaster, a bucket of large and small frogs, too big for the snake’s small mouth, settled in for the rest of that season.

The blue heron projected the essence of quiet genteelness: she did not move into the pond to forage like the herons on Sanibel in the Bayou streams. But the fact is that blue herons do feed on frogs. No matter how glorious her presence, I distrusted her. The frogs had become like family and I had become their protector. I tried the clapping, the calling out; the heron did not budge. Her concentration was laudable, a sense of being one with the space, a sensibility to which I aspire.

Did she sense my dilemma—the attraction to her grace and the worry that she could harm? I was grateful that last day I inched up behind her, hoping my presence would prevent the worse. We breathed in sink as she fluttered, lifted her head, and stretched tall to

double in length before opening her wings to the gift of flight. She lifted off, soared over the pond, across the road to the river where she turned east, downstream, away from the frogs and the waning sun.

Every critter on this earth needs to eat. Was the heron's watchful wait any different than my selection of the exact "right" piece of salmon steak from the fish display at Whole Foods? Like the heron, I scan and check, aware of what appeals to me: thickness, color, weight. Does the heron prefer a black tadpole or a froglet? Is it fair for me to judge? Not really, but in my space, when I witness, I get to choose who is bait and who is protected. I have no control over the wee morning hours or those hours when I am otherwise engaged. Control is, after all, an illusion, a concept in modern life and for the moment, one I choose to embrace, at least in a limited way.

SANDRA SOLI

[BIO](#)**Before Flight: Owl Box**

For weeks, through techno-wonders of webcam,
 the reality show of barn owls twenty feet up.
 Fans numbered in thousands catalog each mouse,
 gopher, rat and rabbit delivered by Molly and McGee
 to four sleepy-eyed owlets; father in the stealth of night,
 mother on permanent alert, one leg like a stork's, the other
 poking her fattening brood back from the owl house door.
 Patience. In her mate's long absences, she whispers
 rules of the hunt. Day by day we click electronic mice,
 cheer the fledging of her round-faced darlings,
 note the coming feathers, the urgency of flight.
 A disembodied voice offers T-shirts and coffee mugs,
 souvenirs of this shared vigil, the spring we learn
 fidelity at Molly's open school, her manger.

Update: 3-19-12——McGee disappeared last week, probably hunting too close to the road. Mollie was forced to go scrounging for food; her clutch of eggs and one hatchling died.

Yellowstone in March: Webcam Livestreams Old Faithful

Dusk. Dragon's foggy breath
 surrounds a line of bison
 lumbering across my desktop

Their patriarch senses a camera eye,
 slows for a view of icicles that hang
 from his beard, fringe for his body

Sky to silently-grumbling ground
everything closes for the day
white on white on white

Dragon watches his red clock
beneath us all, knows
his turn is coming.

Ghazal for Bees

Why do monks and poets admire the dance of the bees?
None can match the industry or elegance of bees.

Once, on an open-windowed night, I dreamed a garden
Behind a charming cottage in France, lavish with bees.

August in the city: bizarre tendencies emerge.
Beware the dangers of lips stung by romance, or bees.

Perhaps wisdom lies in the behaviors of creatures.
Develop study habits, a friendly glance at bees.

Fires near the lake, where circles spread out their mysteries.
Armies map swarming strategies, to advance as bees.

Along with the ubiquitous many, who can say?
Here in lilac's honeyed delight, neigh and prance for bees.

Climb the high promontory to seek obsidian:
Volcanic gems your reward, a cave entrance, no bees.

CRIS STAUBACH[BIO](#)**Back Floating**

the cradle of my birth was waves
caressed by waves, i'm blessed by waves
my body offers no resistance
i fill my lungs with salted air
that sanctifies my world-worn brain
regrets have all been exhaled away
my joints are loose; they bear no weight
my neck's at rest; my back's at ease
i let the sun's light close my eyes
i hear the ocean in my ears
fronds of seaweed lap my arms
and drift beneath my legs, my toes
i feel my body young again
and free, afloat upon the waves
caressed by waves, blessed by waves

MAYA STEIN

BIO

toward summit+

You bring a pad of paper, of course, and the good pen because you imagine the hike will ask for your keenest observation, and this you take to mean words you will lay down on that even white acreage. And so you climb in earnest without a water bottle like some fool thing, toward summit, pushing your knees through the bush and eying the blond earth forming the semblance of a path. Even from here, you can imagine yourself at the higher elevation, the scansion that view will allow, and the lines that will river out of you, an ode you will craft out of this mountain, and how you might—you dare say—turn it even more beautiful, mythic with beauty. At the first quarter-mile, you're already clicking the metaphors off your tongue, dreaming up better ways to say "green" and "wide" and "wild." The rock where you're heading becomes a man, a lover, God, beckoning you close, and soon your fingers are itchy to transcribe the conversation. There is a poem in your mouth, its scrawny beginnings, and you push it down against your chest with every step and breath by breath to make it flesh.

But if you were really here, you would know you're not looking where you should. For instance, there are a thousand ways to break your leg, and there are the bees to consider, the flicker of rattlesnake, the ground sand-dry and near avalanche at the steepest inclines. There is the nature of this nature. Three quarters of the way up a thirst encroaches on your throat. It has become so hot outside, breezeless, the brush leaving thistly markings on your ankles. The paper moistens and droops in your sweaty hand, the pen slips to the ground, and so do you, landing on the plateau from which the summit

flirts and cajoles. In front of you,
 a trail of ants soldiers back and forth,
 carrying invisible rations.
 You don't know about ants, if these are the ones
 that will level with you with one bite
 or simply industrious vegetarians. No matter.
 They are ignoring you. You could sit here as long as you like,
 eavesdropping. Various birds are circling—you don't know
 their names, but you know, at least, they are birds.
 Maybe that is all that's required, to recognize
 what you're looking at, because your mind is a trickle, now,
 slow as summer noon. The poem slips out, unseen,
 from your teeth. The word for wild is "wild,"
 and the trees below are continent enough.
 There can be no more green to this green.
 If you could just sit here,
 watching them move as they move,
 still as they still, breathing your wordless breaths
 until your lungs understand, you will have it.
 This is the poem.
 This.

the swim

It is no small thing to dip into a New England lake
 at the first swell of summer, air damp enough
 to pool a sweat at the back of the knees
 before entering. It is no small thing
 to lower the body rib by rib into a crucible of water
 sugared with pollen, to wade past a skeleton of twigs,
 a charm bracelet of boys daring each other with handstands,
 and turn an ear toward the whisper chorus
 of dragonflies. It is no small thing to align
 with this permeable geography, to forfeit weight
 and gravity for dark, bottomless dark, to accept
 the mystery of transient borders and an undependably slick
 raft of leaves, to eye the opposite shore and be unable
 to gauge, exactly, what kind of strength will be needed

for the crossing. It is no small thing to attempt that crossing,
 to gather good oxygen and release it in service of a mutable
 journey, to move with neither elegance nor cleverness but, simply,
 to move, to get parallel with what is being asked, to dim
 the body of its adjectives, to unburden the mind of debate
 and dilemma, to siphon the clatter out of the lungs. It is no
 small thing to submit to a current, however imperceptible,
 to fall into and rise out of the surface using only
 fingertips, to arrive at the center and realize that a center
 is not, in itself, a destination. It is half of one, or a quarter.
 There is the next length, and then where does that leave you,
 your towel and car keys where you'd secreted them behind,
 and so having reached the far beach, an understanding that the swim
 is really a series of swims, parting after parting, breath after breath,
 and the only thing required—not theatrics, not athleticism –
 is a trust in the buoyancy and benevolence
 of water.

It is no small thing to receive that gift, so submit to such a kindness,
 to recognize that something other than muscle and criticism
 can propel a body forward, that underneath the strict machinations
 of living, some liquid thing is beating its great heart,
 carrying you.

It is no small thing and yet,
 it is the smallest thing,
 how you bow to the turning of this slow,
 unseen wheel, the way you follow
 one stroke with another,
 your belief in what you are about to do
 buzzing like an atom, like a particle of air,
 like a lifeline.

ODARKA POLANSKYJ STOCKERT[BIO](#)**The Turtles**

All of us ride our bikes up into the valley,
they close the road there
all you can hear is the wind in the trees
the river spilling out of the reservoir
and your self speed through air

we pass that place where you and I built fires
burned things
occasionally, sent smoke signals
up into the early evening
each hoping the other would see

it is all gone now
eaten up by the forest
rotting leaves
earthworms
yielding that earthy forest smell
as you ride by

dogwoods are in bloom
their scattered flowers light the darkness
there are turtles on the logs
for us to watch in silence

most other biking families
drive right by the turtles,
but we stop to talk to them
and they tell us about their time
spent as falcons
what it was like to soar above the trees

The Locust

If you don't know why
I stayed
instead of flying
mostly,
I was afraid of your bare island.

I remained
with only my blind eye
your absent breath to hold

I ran in search of you
in nameless places you would never go
toward orange arms,
translucent minds.

Surrounded by death and fertile ground
I burrowed under fallen leaves
and stayed for seven years.

JULIE STUCKEY
[BIO](#)

What Lies Beneath

Dark forest lake of shrouded unknowns
 beckons today—shining and rippling
 as Wind's whispered caress
 seductively ripples over sunken mystery.

Fringed by feathery fern fronds
 which pray continuously along marshy edges,
 this sunlit pond of aboveworld beauty
 veils deep darkness and buried riches.

Bullhead's iridescent scales catch and magnify
 water's sun-fed prism while snatching
 unwary water striders skimming
 their dainty surface dance.

Returning to deeper, tree-protected pools
 the bullhead noses among algaed cooler banks
 in search of new prey
 and a chance to rest unobserved.

Milling bubbles rising from below
 signal snapper turtle's presence –
 the long-lived, becrusted behemoth
 cruising up to survey today's offerings...

... cantankerous creature of the depths
 diving into dark coolness and dimness –
 home to treasures long-hidden and forgotten
 in this murky, watery world.

Beneath ...layers of secrecy...
 undeciphered runes...
 remnants of what can be seen and felt...
 submerged mysteries awaiting light.

Snag

Bare of growth, she sways in a resilient dance,
withstands powerful winds, relentless storms.
Turmoil sweeps across the solitary hilltop,
repetitious battering gusts that pull at her roots
deep and thick from season after hopeful season...
yet the vigor is gone now—decaying
underground tendrils trembling and loosening
with each violent windstorm.
She listens for approaching footsteps, voices
eager for felling ...wary of the glinting axe.

snag: partly or completely dead standing tree; provides critical habitat for many species; can remain intact from 2-100 years

PAT STURM[BIO](#)**Advice to a Young Gardener**

Young gardener,
do not spend your energies
planting until you've looked
through your windows and
prompted your partner
to drive a stake
into the ground when
you say, "There!"
For there is where
you will see your tiny
crepe myrtle flower
pink or white or red,
first on three branches,
later on thirty.
There is where
you will see the Shumard oak,
skinny and bare,
burgeon with heavy green leaves
to block the sun,
offer shelter for redbird nests,
and eventually awe you with
red and gold every October.
Do not fall victim to
a glossy magazine photograph,
a landscaper's insistence,
a friend's advice.
As an old gardener,
you will smile through
glass-paned memories
of your gardening life,
there, and *there*,
and *there*.

INGRID SWANBERG

[BIO](#)

Am Faoilleach

the silence of this day

penetrates every sound

no one speaks

no one comes

only the wild birds

famished by the cold

how brief

the passage

of red-gold light

upon the snow

this evening

how near

the stars glow

Note: Am Faoilleach is the "wolf month" or "Wolf moon" of the old Celtic calendar.

TAMMY TILLOTSON

[BIO](#)**A Windy Day**

mopping, cooking both can wait
 for me
 a little hand
 a walk
 a windy day
 be careful not to step in cat poo
 the dog comes too
 potato rocks—brushed clean
 Clop! Clop!
 watched ripples in the pond
 a much, much bigger pot
 sun shines hot - - rip - - jackets off
 like milkweed pods, waving, in the soybeans
 tied sleeves around the waist
 sitting atop a bale of hay
 a yellow moth stops
 investigates some grapes—a bunch of heather morning glories
 youth, fresh and wide awake
 mini daisies holly berries berries for the birds
 blue clung to the cedar tree
 same blue hung in the sky why
 there I almost didn't see
 the flat nest of a wasp
 the yellow fruits
 of some beaten horse-
 nettles Float!
 though rocks do not
 two buckeyes echo
 time to go
 and then they lead
 the way
 miss the pothole
 in the road
 the cat killed baby mole

KERRY TRAUTMAN

BIO

May 1st, Redbud

The redbud tree flames itself fuchsia
like a towering tentacled flower,
the lacy carcass of some lovelorn jungle bird,
the breath of a summer's-worth of berries,
the soaring relics of a vanished purple rose.

Like a brittle, living coral scooped from tepid
reef waters, thrust in woodland underbrush
to desiccate itself to fringed purple bone.
As if a swelled-bellied doe nibbling shoots
in damp humus above the tree's new roots might,
like Newton, be struck by a stowaway seahorse,
tiny magenta blossom curled in its scaly tail.

BRIGIT TRUEX[BIO](#)**Tide Beauty**

Glory be to the Maker for mottled things,
 for sands of indefinite stipple that band the beach,
 for sequin-scale spangle on swimming fin-back;
 the barnacle-mapped minstrel whale that sings,
 pied flukes foam-furrowing at each breach;
 spotted mollusks, dimpled limpets, braided wrack;

 all things tumbled, scrumbled, nubs of glass
 scattered, speckled and foreign (what could they teach?)
 hand-tossed, storm-thrown, adrift on some dawn-dappled
 track,
 tiding them to shore, not letting them pass –
 this, the beauty we lack.

To The Deep

starprick & phosphorescence
 shimmer
 the only light
 on this moondark night

weave of footprints
 absorbed by
 faint suck of sand & surf

laying its payment
 of tangled kelp & shells
 black on black
 currency minted by

currents sweeping close
then drawing away
after the exchange of loose

sea-wrack for the jawbone
of some leviathan, all
that's left of that singer
who opened his maw

to the elements
then sieved them clean
as his beached skull

when his song went
unanswered for too long—
it is done by us
all, this release

& consumption
as God—the tide
itself—

disposes
of what remains
& returns all
to the deep

ELLY VARGA[BIO](#)**Rare Blooms On A Mountain Trail**

A spire of fingernail-sized rare blooms
 growing above one another shakes out
 a subtle fragrance too delicate for my senses.
 Yet the alluring female messages they waft
 into the forest air is never missed. Adored
 by a mixed host of minuscule flyers, all the
 insect lovers compete for the pleasure of taste.
 Seekers bump in a busy frolic with inspired
 antics to enter each beckoning tunnel first.

Minute orchid tower surprises always appear on
 the mountain crest trail where I least expect them.
 Round as a teacup a small fan of veined leaves
 catches my eye with its dusty white central stripe
 dividing each shiny verdant leaf in half. Easy
 to spot if you know the clues. I discover these
 unusual flowers usually offer an introduction to
 their devilish entrancing presence in the fading
 limelight that spots the forest floor of summer.

Dearest creation: Your tiny velvet crowns
 with sexual provocation salaciously invite
 the thin threaded tongue of a Clipper butterfly
 to suck a nourishing potion. I climbed a mountain
 path three miles high panting on steep switchbacks
 to find the cups of your beauty. So small and hidden
 to all but a cautious discerning eye that appreciates
 your swaying dance in the welcomed downrush
 of a cool breeze, a breathy gift we both appreciate
 that blows away the sweltering afternoon heat.

That kiss of sundown freshness sets your petals
aglow with the enlightened goal of your efforts
to charm every sipping or ogling visitor with a sultry
sly smile like the Mona Lisa who knows a secret.
Your seedpods are filled with the living promise
of a future endorsing your successful seduction.
Your delicate progeny will replicate your blossoms
in the next fertile offering that spirals upward with
enticing gems for every searching bug and observant
hiker to attune their radar to such rare delights.

RONJA VIETH

BIO

The Awakening

You wash
Onto the shores lined with booms,
Soiling the pristine white,
Azure plastic sausages
Skinned in netting that breaks
Free from hooks and bamboo stakes.

Boom hugs boom in half a foot
Overlap clenching: like human hands
Of boaters, who forget surgical gloves,
Neglect the bright blue layer, touch
The fluid oil - chemically dispersed crude
Two shades darker than peanut butter.

You wash
Against the barricaded beach
Staining everything brown like
Pelicans, your decomposed body
That waded into the water at the same
Grand Isle in 1889 as Edna Pontellier.

Plastic pom poms trap
Like marriage lure and bind
You in double layered bags
To prevent leaking, captured
Soul and cells in company
Of other lives and toxic waste.

J. S. WATTS

[BIO](#)

Frozen Water, Kneesworth House

The stream is frozen today,
holding only to the memory of water.
It won't be going anywhere.
On gentler, softer days, it snakes
through the landscaped grounds,
tempting with bubbling promises
of frogspawn, duck chicks and elsewhere.
Today it does not.
Today it adopts the texture of indifference
and squats
between grey-grass, frost numbed banks
and permits the mist's soiled muslin
to bedraggle it.
What's to lose?

It manages its inconsistency indulgently.
At times, in places, it remembers
what it once was,
a sluggish trickle of almost water,
almost flowing until
the splay footed coot
proves that thaw is just a myth
prematurely toying with spring
and clown skates over the surface,
oblivious of what shadows beneath,
that may be significantly deep
or just more of the yet to come
solidly uninsightful silence.

A fat parade of winter ducks
 bosses over to inspect progress
 but finding there is none
 leaves the coot to get on with it,
 whatever it is. The stream's not telling.
 It's lost its voice to the dark
 below the surface where opinions
 fail to meet or give in to
 the instinctive urge to flow on,
 babbling with unrestrained voices
 and the debris of spent seasons,
 that could choke the flow for good or
 with time and patience turn hope
 into a direction to flow on by.

Spring Snow

We woke up one morning to a world of white,
 Paradise regained through winter's sudden purity.
 The silence as smooth and deep as ermine
 And eternal as the erosion of time.
 Not even a sparrow stirred to disturb
 The land's unexpected slumber.
 Yet movement hid there.

First like the drowsy ruffling of doves,
 Then with greater momentum,
 The snow slid from the boughs like
 Fat dropping from the bone,
 Or flesh melting in the heat of an atomic sun.
 Winter's mystery profaned
 By the thrashing of a feverish spring.

And as purity and innocence rushed headlong
 The re-exhumed tree skeletons
 Showed taint of green,
 But lacked the freshness
 Once expected
 And my eyes were scorched
 By the breast of the robin.

SARAH WEBB

BIO

Waste Land

As I traveled south from the Great Tetons, the road took me between cliffs along a stream that tossed spray almost up the roadbed. I was camping for the summer through the West, traveling alone in my VW bus. I'd thought the trip might give me a way to go into wilderness despite my age and arthritis, and sometimes it had, but more often I saw the land through the windshield. Still, it had been a fascinating trip.

The landscape flattened until I came down onto the dry lands. The dramatic slopes further north were gone, but there were still low hills of grey-white rock. Juniper lined gouges in the rock and gullies. Along the road, grass jerked in the wind.

After the rich greens of the pine forest, the landscape seemed austere. Intent on making the miles through it, I did not take the invitation to go to the west on Wild Horse Loop. Sometimes on the road I fall into a pattern of clicking off the miles. Get to the next town, next campground. This time it might be Flaming Gorge, if I got that far, much more interesting territory.

But as I drove on I was displeased with myself. It would have been wonderful to see wild horses (if I did—I hadn't in the Steens), and anyway, what was an adventure if you didn't take the byroads that beckoned? But I didn't go back.

I cast my eyes down a canyon that opened to the west. Yellowy grass flowed down to juniper along a river and rose on the other side to hills and further hills and blue uplands. Dramatic layers of red stone lined the riverbed.

Then I saw one of those brown outdoor recreation signs like the Bureau of Land Management puts up. It said Petroglyphs, Sand Dunes, Boar's Tusk. It stuck up from the sagebrush and tan grass like a promise. I pulled off the road into a graveled side lot. The second sign was more specific, a Sand Dunes campground. I studied it, deciding whether to go. The campground was for off-the-road vehicles, but it could serve as place to stay if this side trip took too long. The kicker—White Mountain Petroglyphs. Seventeen miles down the road, but, according to the sign, the road was “well

maintained,” and there seemed to be a loop back to the highway I was headed for, if I wanted to go thirty miles on. So I did it.

The road did seem to be okay, fine gravel and, as the sign promised, “well maintained.” But about a half mile in, I came to a Y. Each side looked smooth, each side was wide and straight. A sign on white poster board, well lettered, said TSC. With nothing more than that to go on, I followed it to the left.

The road stayed gravel. A white pickup, high on its wheels, rattled past, young men, maybe ranch workers, inside. The road veered north. I consulted my map. The turn didn’t seem right, but I wasn’t sure of any of the roads on the map. I came to a BLM sign to Long Canyon and Crooked Canyon. Something official! Not the same names but maybe that was where the petroglyphs were located. I took that road. On my map, it said the Leucite Hills. To my left I could see formations, odd ones of mustard-colored soil and grey-white clay, maybe leucite, spiked with rocks. A dark band ran near the top of the greyish clay. Erosion had gullied the higher areas into mounds and low plateaus, which bellied as they fell, and spread in fans of colored soil. I drove below them on what seemed to be a flood plain, though the only sign of water was a line of darker green to the right.

Washboarding began to vibrate the bus. I stopped to call my friends Mickey and Sheila to see what they could bring up on the computer about the area. Because I was nearly out of range, the call kept breaking off. They couldn’t find the canyons and only a brief mention of the hills. Nothing of the campground, petroglyphs, or Boar’s teeth. I closed the cell and headed on up the road. Seventeen miles. I set my trip odometer at 0, so if I hadn’t come to anything by 18, I’d go back.

There was sagebrush and the deserted landscape sorts of things—jumbled rock, plants I couldn’t identify, a grey soil line by the road that looked like a trail but which was probably graded dirt from road maintenance. I drove by big circles of bare soil with fire ant mounds in the center, some of the mounds two feet tall. Caves and crevices in the rock looked dark in the pale clay. I wondered what might live in them.

Just off the road, gravel led to oil or gas sites: little metal buildings and tanks and pipes and fittings, sometimes towers or mysterious metal configurations. The road began to shake the car,

and I had to slow down to 20. A whack and a lurch took me down to 10. My confidence that this was the right road ebbed, but TSC pointed the way from possible turns.

Some company had laid down red rock gravel to their sites and had patched the road for stretches with jarring red rock. I began to run through sections where the road was buckled and rutted from trucks going through mud that had since solidified. Several whams as the van fell into dried mud craters reminded me to keep my speed down.

I'd driven fifteen, sixteen, seventeen miles now and no sign of a person. Just the many oil or gas installations. TSC had been replaced with checked rally flags. I speculated, was TSC from some car rally group? The Society for Creative ...? It was too far out for a party group—even though the rally flags were set in Budweiser boxes.

The flags disappeared. I was coming up on mile 18. To the side I saw a rough road going up a slope. It looked muddy, or had been total mud and had solidified, and it rose at an impossible slant. Somehow it didn't seem an oil road—they were all nicely built with crushed rock, red or otherwise. I looked up at the track uneasily. No way was I going up that. I took the other fork, crushed red rock.

The gravel climbed up to an oil tank and circled it. End of the road. I got out of the car and stood in the freshening wind. Clouds had begun to gather overhead.

I was disappointed—no petroglyphs, no campground—but I wanted to see the land closer, barren as it was. I climbed the rise behind the storage tank, and stopped. The slope beneath my feet dropped down and down. I stood at the rim of an immense canyon, its slopes crimson in the late sun, its bottom lost in shadow. I stared into the mysterious depth, wanting to go down into it. Was this Long Canyon? Had I reached the end of the earth?

The call to go forward was stronger than at Wild Horse Road or at the sign to the petroglyphs. Despite the roads and machinery here at last was something that seemed entirely wild, beyond men, some secret red heart. The canyon might reach just beneath the shadow and bottom out at more oil company roads or it might descend miles into the earth.

But how would I climb into it? There was no sign of a trail, and the ground bulged outward so that any route down was invisible. No trail, no guardrail, no help if I were to fall. Gravel scratched

beneath my foot, and a pebble bounced down the steep soil. Abruptly I was afraid.

I turned to the bus and headed back. Eighteen miles down what clearly had been the wrong road. As I passed the uneasy track that headed over the bluff, I slowed to stare up it, but I did not take it, even though it was the only road that might have gone into that unknown chasm.

An antelope was watching from one of the bluffs as I drove. Soon he reappeared to look down from another height. He jerked himself around and fled.

Now I could see the clouds that had been massing behind me. They were low and dark and bulged menacingly. Veils of rain fell blue at the skyline. These clouds were close to the ground. One strand of them seemed to catch on the hills across the valley. As I'd camped these past few days further north, it had rained, a hard, fierce rain. I did not want to be on a road that dissolved under my tires if the sky opened. The road lightened from a flash.

I drove faster than was good for the bus, and I heard rattles and thumps as I went over the ruts. A sprinkle fell on the windshield and later another, then none again. The clouds looked like the black, menacing ones in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds*.

After a mile, on a stretch of freshly graveled road, I came across an oil site in the process of construction. The company had parked a trailer there with a big sign: Tri State Construction. TSC. Not a car club rally after all.

I manhandled the bus down the road over the deep ruts, then over better gravel. I reached the place where I'd phoned my friends, the place where the sign had pointed to the canyon, then the fork. At it, two horses grazed now, the only animals I'd seen in all this desolation except for the antelope. I breathed easier now, the panic leaving me.

Just to see, I headed up the other fork. It went steeply up a bluff and headed straight as an arrow over fine, well-maintained gravel without a hint of washboard. I sighed. Another day.

I turned around at a place where people had dumped metal and plastic and a shot-up water heater. When I got back to the fork, the two horses looked at me. One had a diamond blaze, one an odd wriggling lightning mark from between his ears down to his mouth. An odd place to keep horses. I hadn't seen a fence in 18 miles.

Later I thought, I can't backpack deep into the wilderness like I used to, but today I did go into the wild. A different kind of wilderness that the oil equipment didn't change, a hard desert wilderness of rock and scrub and ant and maybe horse. It was not beautiful like the pine-clad mountains that could make me catch my breath, but more a wilderness by default, by abandonment. No one cared enough to live there or to improve it, and it was undoubtedly deeply polluted. But it was the true wild.

The rain didn't catch me until I'd reached the highway.

BIBI WEIN[BIO](#)**Local Warming***Adapted from the memoir Full-Time Paradise*

In the little patch of the north woods where we have spent twenty summers and five winters, the nights are dark, the stream that borders our front lawn is magical, and my husband Bob and I remain fascinated by the subtlety and drama of the forest through the changing seasons. The more one confronts these revolving mysteries, the more complex they seem. To me, the most compelling of these mysteries is how life—any and all life, including ours—persists through winter.

As a freelance writer and a teacher, we've had the flexibility to spend at least a few days at our log cabin in every month of almost every year. Then, in 2006, Bob's early retirement from his Manhattan teaching job allowed us to overwinter here in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains. In these few years, the nature of winter has changed. There is less of it.

Climate change means extreme weather of all kinds. There have been more violent storms in all seasons. Little is routine now, nothing is predictable. The flowers that always bloomed in July may come in June or not at all. A reliably early snow and late spring are in the past. Birds, plants and insects are changing their ranges. For example, the black-legged tick, vector of Lyme Disease, is increasingly common here. A dozen years ago, if any ticks made it this far north—and there's no reason to believe some didn't hitch rides on migrating birds then, as now—the winter cold reliably killed them off. Temperatures of 30 below zero that were the rule are now the rare exception.

At 44 degrees north latitude, this has not historically been a snowless place. So in 2010, when cold October, dull November, and the early days of "bleak December" saw not a single flake, the first gusts of white that blew in 25 days before the new year carried a sense of things as they should be.

I'd been anticipating this year's snow with both eagerness and dread. Dread because I'd had foot surgery in October, and would not be fully mobile until spring. This year there would be no snowshoeing or long walks through the deep woods where the snow cover can be light at the beginning of the season. But the first snow makes the world so dazzlingly beautiful—fresh paint, indiscriminately coating everything—I want to rush around and look at all I can see. The familiar becomes as new as if the furniture of the outside world has been rearranged. The title of a novel on my shelf comes to mind: *Everything Is Illuminated*. Less winter there may be, but when it is with us in full, the experience remains unchanged.

I wonder where the mice hide by day, those soft little brown mice with white feet and big, big eyes, who pilfer the fringe from the throw rugs when we're not here, and, when we are, nibble—just one tiny bite—at any piece of fruit left out in carelessness. Are there any bark beetles or carpenter ants cozying up inside the log walls? Considering how many creatures are out there, cold and hungry, we're lucky more of them haven't eaten their way in.

*

Three days later, I'm thinking blizzards are beautiful, no doubt about it. Can't deny I felt that frisson of excitement when I heard it was coming. I know Bob did. He loves storms, and I guess I do too. If you are safe and warm they turn you back into a child. Snowed in, all work is off, especially if the power goes out. In a blizzard, you can just play, if you know how. Always a big *if* for me. In my childhood, the verb *to play* meant practicing the violin. I knew its common meanings for *other people*, but I was in my thirties before I could begin to penetrate the mesh of habit and guilt that barred any attempts to apply them to myself.

Today, I consider *pretending* the power is out. The snow makes me feel domestic and adventurous, calm and excited. How to live this day? Which of the many fruits of time to pluck? I want to make soup and bake bread and go out and wander as far as I can go...Or just sit by the fire, watching the chickadees and nuthatches in their constant dance to and from the feeder. I have an article due soon, but my editor works from California. If she tries to check in with me, she'll never know why I can't be reached. For once, I'm glad that our dead-

end dirt road, with just three human families, will be one of the last the town will plow.

Before the days of modern snow removal, snow pretty much stayed where it fell. And people pretty much stayed put. According to our town historian, families just denned up during periods of heavy snow. "Men were considered improvident if they did not have their supply of pork, potatoes and meal in the house in the fall, enough to outlast the winter . . . if a family needed a little salt, or 'sody' or 'tobaccy' it could be brought in on snowshoes."

*

A week later, snowstorm overnight and the power is out when I wake at eight with the kind of headache that tells me the barometer is falling. The main characteristic of this headache is not severe pain but confusion and clumsiness. It takes effort to figure out how to light my way to the basement to get bottled water and make coffee. We have been through this many times before. But did we prepare? I don't even know if there are jugs of water in the basement. As the day progresses, the sky remains so leaden I can hardly see to write by the brightest window. But then I look out and see that the juncos have arrived with the snow, as they always do, and I feel fine.

Other birds visit us regularly as well: reliably, red-breasted nuthatches, this week a lone but feisty pine siskin, holding his own admirably with flocks of other species. Often bluejays. And the occasional marvel of a rose-breasted grosbeak. Winter goldfinches, house finches and brilliant purple finches become as common as the chickadees later in the winter. And a new delight: the redpolls that usually winter in Canada, apparently prefer the Adirondacks at times, and in recent years have been an increasingly frequent flash of crimson above the snowy lawn.

*

I remember the thrill of our first winter visits to the north country. My brother and his wife bought a house before we did, and the four of us, plus our three tweenage children and sometimes a guest or two, all stayed there. We adults all worked in Manhattan, and it was usually midnight when we arrived. Often the snow was so deep we had to leave the cars at the bottom of the long driveway and trudge up the steep hill with all our gear. The children, sensibly, went

right to bed, while the adults got flashlights and searched for tracks on the lawn, listened for owls, reveled in the clarity of the winter constellations.

*

A month later, I'm complaining. Snowing again? It hardly seems possible. Sunny yesterday, not warm enough to do without a hat but warm enough to have fantasies about some melt instead of shoveling off what's accumulated three feet deep on the roof. So far today, only a light dusting, sugar coating, dressing up the evergreens.

I fill the bird feeder and say to Bob "the chickadees are happy," and of course I don't know if they are, or what happiness would mean to them if they were. But in the rhythm of their flight, a nonstop circuit to the feeder from the nearby spruces and balsams and cedars, snatch a seed and back again, I see happiness. What I'm really seeing is a demonstration of the urgency with which all creatures approach food at times of scarcity.

The black-capped chickadee, half an ounce or less of hyperactive black and white fluff, appears to eat all day. But what he's actually doing is more like *shopping*. Grocery shopping and putting the groceries away until needed. Rather than scarfing down all those seeds, he's carrying them off and stashing them. He must increase his body weight by 10% daily to survive each winter night. He stashes his acquisitions in myriad tiny caches, here there and everywhere, sometimes over multi-acre territory.

Like the chickadee, I am a scatter hoarder, with stuff stockpiled everywhere. All right, not everywhere. Across my 250-mile linear range, my caches are only in three places—the cabin and the studio 100 yards up the hill, and the apartment in Manhattan. These caches consist primarily of books and papers—and clothing, much of it outdated and too small, for every probable temperature and improbable occasion.

As the winter progresses, occasions of any kind become increasingly improbable. Those of us who don't ski or snowshoe go out less and less. Advised by my foot surgeon not to snowshoe this winter, I feel like I'm living in a cave, or an igloo. The sun peeks indoors through only the very tops of the windows. The cabin is barricaded by mountains of snow—the snow that's been piled up by the plow, the snow that fell or was shoveled from the roof, creating a

shallow moat against the cabin walls where juncos take shelter. Bob shovels and shovels, just so we can circumnavigate the house. Why would we want to do that? Many days, a walk around the perimeter of the house is the only walk I get. I remind myself that, in the scope of things, it was only recently that people expected to leave the homestead in winter at all. In the early days of the automobile, cars would be put up in barns on the first of November, where they remained until the snow was gone. In May? June?

*

At least theoretically, I'm told, life can continue, on hold, at the lowest temperature in the universe.

And imagine this! Several kinds of North American frogs, including spring peepers, are able to survive the winter frozen solid. There have been times—usually in February—when I've wondered if these frozen frogs are having more fun than my husband Bob and I are having in our 600-square-foot hibernaculum.

For more than a decade of winters we would come and go with every school holiday, no matter what the weather. Each time we packed out and headed back to Manhattan, I ached for all the birds I was going to miss at the feeder. On clear, cold nights, how many missed opportunities to see the aurora borealis? On a warmish day would the stream's thick ice break up with crashing drama? Would it refreeze? I knew I'd never be able to actually watch it freeze, yet somehow I half-believed this might be possible. I felt like I was walking out of a cinematic thriller before the end. I wanted to see what was going to happen!

Now I know what will happen. It will snow.

Not always a lot. Often, just enough to put a light panka crust on the car and make every step slippery. Just enough to keep the sky white and banish the sun. Or, even in April, we could get a blizzard, putting me inside a snow globe which looks very pretty from the outside, but is, shall we say, a bit confining. Confined is how I feel going out in boots, in clothing, layers of it, hoods, hats, scarves. Nothing feels comfy but a nightgown, and soon nothing else really fits. One reason those layers get even more uncomfortable is *torpor*. Torpor is an adaptive physiological state that enables small birds—hummingbirds year-round, chickadees and others in winter—to survive overnight without constantly eating. The heartbeat slows, the

body temperature regulates itself at a lower point, so that less energy is needed for survival. In humans, when psychological torpor sets in, we too use less energy, but consume the same number of calories as we do when we're more active, and often, thanks to boredom, even more. We all know where this leads: not only to discomfort in any garment snugger than sleepwear, but also to less energy rather than more. The less you do the less you want to do. The fewer people you see the fewer you want to see. And the less you have to talk about, besides the weather.

*

March 20 was the last day of official winter. The next morning, the day spring will arrive at 8:20 p.m., I walk the four miles to the post office and back. The wind is kicking snow all over icy Trout Brook Road. The sun is shining, sky brilliant blue, and the temperature may be a hair above freezing. But there's far too much snow to take a step off the road, and the wind is chilling. A novel I'm reading, set here in the nineteenth century, tells me that in March in the 1880s, winter was only two-thirds over.

*

At last, spring. When the snow melts, the new landscape wears the scars of defeat, with fall's dried grasses long and tangled, matted down like hair uncombed for an entire season. The waters of Trout Brook rush past our front yard, and then eventually recede, revealing stunned plants encased in icicles.

Of all the bulbs we've planted, a single snowdrop nods its drooping head toward the brown leaves on the ground.

The wind shrills through the pines, the way it does in horror movies. The crocuses are hiding in the dark.

LENORE WEISS

[BIO](#)

The Widow Discovers the Secret of Leona Canyon

Before dog-walkers with squadrons of panting beasts
pull up in SUVs, I arrive early—a woman without a pooch
who can be trusted to make a game of counting packets of shit

set aside for some doggie walker's return trip.
I start early, knot a hoodie around my waist,
hiking in the sun I want to lose myself,

balance on a branch of a buckeye tree
with its candelabra of mock lilacs,
walk past hemlock that lace the trail,

everything is a blaze of white
as spring marries summer and loosens her veil.
I dip my hands in water and wash my face.

Anna's hummingbird, with her red crown
and red spotted throat, sips right along with me.
Shepherds follow their off-leash flock up the canyon.

JOANNA M. WESTON
[BIO](#)

RITUALS

trees shake their heads
casting birds southerly

rakes march out
assemble in platoons
and swish into glory-be
every fallen leaf
tangled under arbours
where shovels arrest worms
and I duty compost

winds howl
an invitation to winter
for leaf rot and wood mould
while I light fires

LAURA WHALEN

[BIO](#)

**The Invention of Chlorophyll or,
Eternal Significance of the Spring**

Sarah, gave me my first botanical guide
at the age of nine or ten,
and I read what the
botanist wrote:
“The earth over,
we live in a green world.”

Always been the truth for me. Infinite
variety springing from the soil,
the chive, wild leek,
beach pea tendrils, the shape of each leaf
an alphabet in a language I wanted to learn.

With time I moved to larger lessons—
early blossom of the serviceberry
timed to the shad’s run
from the Atlantic
upriver each April.
Nature’s rhythms, life lived.

Soon the shadbush buds
will flower, creamy clouds turning to June
fruit—their almond flavor,
the ten seeds inside.
The shad run fallen
in recent years.

Plant life lingers even thrives, and
my colored fingers will gather the red-
blue sweetness, in a few months time,
world invented over again,
radical green surprising the eyes,
Just as my first guidebook taught me:
“the eternal significance of spring.”

July Evening

By the Sacandaga River,
your daughter selects a slim bouquet of grass.
You ask: Timothy? Red top?
Add a single red clover. Perfect.
Daughter and mother side by side in the field.
No swimming tonight.
It's too cool
Though the golden dog dips in and
shakes off next to us. Shower—

Dark river water holds all our secrets like tannins.
We, friends talk—identify elder blow, choke cherry.
Spicebushes compete for our eyes.
Tapered swamp candles smolder at dusk.
I pick one to bring back to the house
where we eat our sour cherries and bitter chocolate,
fall asleep dreaming of birdsong.

Long notes of the yellow warbler,
short bursts of the chipping sparrow.
Wings of the flying squirrel
stretched out overhead on Craig Road.
And the elegant traces of
the fawn's hooves
following its mother in the
fresh soil of the riverbank.

What to make of all these blackbirds in poems?

Of the snow bunting in December in delicate winter duns—
 Of the three bald eagles perched above the Sacandaga to fish in
 January's open waters—
 Of the white-throated sparrow singing itself sore on the Adirondack
 mountain peak—
 Of a gathering of evening grosbeaks on the Kunjamuck Road settling
 into November—
 Of the cardinal calmly eating the kousa dogwood fruits from a city
 tree—
 Of the ruby-throated hummingbird jousting around the summer
 feeder—
 Of the kingfisher swooping across the brook with his tussled crown—
 Of the lone snow goose out of place on the university pond—
 Of the cedar waxwings feasting in the serviceberry last spring—
 Of the blackburnian warblers courting by Griffin Gorge—
 Of the scarlet tanager descended from the canopy above

to find a small meal on the macadam of Onesquethaw Creek
Road,
 in the same bend where my father lost his crimson life nine
years ago.

ALLISON WILKINS

[BIO](#)

Girl Who Learns Ecopoetics

Somewhere between books
on poetry and ecology she starts
to build a house of renewable resources:

mostly broken tree branches and twisty ties.
She finds some earthworms willing

to tunnel the twigs into the ground
and a few spiders who weave her white
sticky walls. Grass clippings cling

when the wind blows, creating a lovely
design. Beetles become outlets

for the office when she must plug in
her computer to look up words
she doesn't know on Google.

She hangs basil curtains, throws cups
of rainwater at the stones in her path.

Birds circle her old, abandoned house,
inside that house she can no longer breathe.
She keeps her destruction there,

guarded by black bears
and a swarm of bees.

LISA WILLIAMS

[BIO](#)

The Glass Chimney *for Rachel*

Since the bees have settled there for summer
 I imagine it made of glass,
 its corridor a throat with no language
 but exquisite small gestures of bees
 and imagine their vowelled hums
 a proverbial chorus of murmurers
 like the packed Sistine Chapel after ushers
 have told us to Sshhhh! for a third time—
 first silence, then a steadily growing wave
 of our willfulness rising and rising,
 chit-chat hymnal, contrapuntal—*Sshhhhh*.

Bees chose this house, this chimney.
 They crawl up and down its bricks
 with a hurried vocation, nuns to their habits
 and ritual drones. There are hundreds
 of cells to the hive which, if under glass,
 would shimmer like verses in honeyed light . . .

*But the bees' will in motion! The "will of the hive"
 and the Queen being tended, abdomen stroked!
 Not beauty, but engorgement, encouragement,
 which is as it should be at the center of the hive!
 No stings, and praise around that amoral center
 which hotly expands and breeds. Keep the brood cells clean
 and tender. Let the Queen fatten
 so no violence supplants her, and leave the hive swelled
 as frost cracks petals of imagined glass flowers.*

The Swallow That Hibernates Under Water

—hypothesis of 19th century naturalist Gilbert White

He kept them close. He dreamed their weight in water,
 brain a dome of swerves under the clouds,
the pond a quiet shell, iced-over drift,
 each swallow balled into a slackened fist,
wings slick, ethereal purpose dormant
 —just what he thought the swallows' months
of cold meant: in pond shallows, tucked
 where they could safely winter, dwindle, breathing,
brains a void of swerves under the clouds
 that overarched such acrobatic dips
in spring and summer, for ripe ephemerals
 they'd catch. They'd clarify the air. Agile,
he kept them close. He dreamed their wait
 in water.

LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN

BIO

The Summer for Mantis

Little prayer, I catch you in a cup
left by the pitcher. I am afraid

you'll sting. What good you do
among the raspberries, rosehips,

and purple buds of cat mint.
I release you. A ruckus of blackbirds

descended this morning. Their flock
lifts, settles in the maple, and lifts again

in constant chant and tone. Take heed.
They collect and carry off lost souls.

First Thaw

February, 2011

It dropped for weeks until even the three o'clock sun
could not lift the mercury from the single digits,
but today all the squirrels sit on their haunches
as they munch a forgotten morsel dug up from the soil,
robins parade across the lawn like ambassadors
eyeing hors d'oeuvre and cardinals trumpet
encouragements from bare tree branches
to every single living thing that has failed to notice—
the crocus, the daffodils, the elderly who peer out
from curtains, unconvinced. One by one doors open,
half-hung windows pop wide to let the breeze chatter
the blinds and we too obey, shirk out of sweatshirts,
kick off shoes and stretch out in lawn chairs. Yes, yes,
we know it might only be today, but it's ours.

Directions Home

(This is the your house
of flowers.) Prairie fire
blossoms pink in spring

above the mailbox.
The leaves blush with the fall cold.
(Take the interstate.)

A magnolia
tree opens its white centers
in the front and drops

petals on the walk.
Above the roof line spruce pierce
the sky. (Choose exit nine.)

Along the driveway
sedum speaks with jade green tongues
in June and blushes

with buds in August.
A sour cherry tree waits
beside the sidewalk.

(Meander southeast
though residential enclaves.)
In the parking, riots

of gold day lilies.
Their leaves sing with the prairie.
Black-eyed susans call

everywhere. (Listen
to the trains if you travel
by night. I'll be there

beside the stairway,
moon flowers, hollyhocks. Take
the path to our door.)

Kinswoman*After Ted Kooser*

Groundhogs day already, and the sky
brushed with thin clouds, white crests
on the high, quick wind above the branches
swept clean of leaves and snowdrifts
like loose skirts around summer boats
stranded in drives. A cold winter bundles
the steadfast dog walkers. Robins, the red
spot they search for in their circuit
of the neighborhood's scooped walks.

You have been gone a century now today
and have missed the repopulation of eagles
that nest in the craggy black arms of elm
on the high banks of the Des Moines river.
To see them, I roamed for an hour with binoculars
while hundreds of gulls somersaulted in flocks
from river, to bridge stays, to the sand crescents
carved by water. Then the temperature dropped,
a storm front to blister the ground in ice
and dust everything in the glitter of new snow.

The juncos are back, and the starlings
have changed their ebony coats for speckled ones.
Every other day, the geese cross, honking.
They follow a compass for warm waters
wherever they are. Last year, a wild turkey
trumpeted from atop a neighbor's roof,
descended the shingles, and sauntered off
down the street. How strange I thought,
as I think of it now, the possibilities
this prairie winter-scape has for us all.

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI

BIO

Trilogy of Land, Sea, Sky

Blue-eyed grasses and wild iris flirt the sunny bracken, bumblebees
in berry blossoms, little spittle bugs on huckleberry, nurse log
bearded
in moss behind the wild azalea,

all hanging on as seaside ships tack and jibe the bay, careen and beach
where last night's breaker waves tossed up drift logs, sea stars, crab
shells,
agates beading the coast in mighty booms reverberating.

And I was there, too, beneath that boozy moon hanging out all my
sins
on its beams, all a swagger under the barrel-chested clouds, so starry-
eyed
with the peachy sunset ribboning the horizon,

its incandescent streamer bearing some message
I stand here still straining to decipher.

Somedays, Docked Here

South Shore Park, Pittsburgh, PA

All summer we watched
for something, the return
of gulls riverside, ducks
circling boat wakes,
a promise of rain.
We waited like a still life,
butterflies skirting weeds
at our feet, waited
for the rock dove's coo,
a fingernail moon.

Somedays, like house wrens,
 we chipped the sticky air
 with curious chatter,
 dipped and preened,
 turned our wings
 from the sun, landlocked
 by another summer, the pulse
 and shift of each other.

Somedays our thoughts bared
 and spare as winter limbs,
 rose like a surprise,
 cheeky and loud
 on the wings of geese
 beating against the gray of sky
 awash with clouds.

One day, at the other side of day,
 our eyes blurred by stars,
 we breathed in outer space,
 and our mouths formed words
 the shape of love, and the sky
 cracked open with rain blades
 sheathed in thunder, electrified
 by light, in another simple act
 of tension.

Revering a Hawk from a Mountaintop

(after Robert Bly's "Hunting Pheasants in a Cornfield")

I
 What is so fetching here about a bird crossing sky?
 It is a hawk, fire-tipped wings spread wide and strangely
 Silent. My eyes drift with it at dusk in Autumn.
 I crook my neck from this mound of earth and look.

II

It rained all day in skips along a bone-dry season.
The muddy trails are strewn with slips of leaves.
The sun is setting down, birds in branches atwitter.
A small happiness wends in where I stand and watch.

III

The mind delights in distances beyond what it can circle,
Endures alone inside stretches of still pastureland.
The moon tames the sky with patches of new quiet,
And I content myself with bird wings in my head.

IV

Day folds in its own wide wings, pulls up night covers,
I stay close to the ground and my own skin I crawl in.
I do not know all the things I could yet come to love.
At twilight, we do what we must, eyes turned upward.

AUTHOR BIOS

Barbara Adams lives with her husband and a menagerie of goats, cattle, donkeys, chickens, peacocks, dogs, and cats on the family farm. Her poetry and non-fiction are centered in nature and drawn from the rugged beauty that is southwestern Oklahoma. Her work has appeared in *Passager*, *Ruminate*, *Whistling Shade*, *Oklahoma Review* and *Westview*.

Sandra Ervin Adams is listed in *A Directory of American Poets & Writers* and has been published in anthologies and poetry journals. In 2006 she authored a poetry chapbook, *Union Point Park Poems*, and in 2011, one titled, *Through a Weymouth Window*. Sandra has been a writer-in-residence at Weymouth Center for the Arts and Humanities in Southern Pines, NC, and lives near Jacksonville, NC.

Carol Alexander is a writer and editor in educational publishing. She has authored ten children's books; in 2011-2012, her poems appear in numerous online and print journals including *Avocet*, *Canary*, *Chiron Review*, *Earthspeak*, *Mad Hatter's Review*, *Numinous*, *OVS*, and *The Red River Review*.

Dorothy Alexander is a poet, memoirist, storyteller, co-owner with her partner, Devey Napier of Village Books Press, a small independent press, author of four poetry collections and editor of two volumes of prose. She reads her poetry throughout the Southwest, and facilitates the poetry readings at the annual Woody Guthrie Folk Festival in Okemah, Oklahoma. She is working on a memoir.

Olivia V. Ambrogio is a writer, communications specialist, and former biologist who cherishes an inordinate fondness for marine invertebrates. Her writing has been published in over 20 literary magazines and anthologies, and she writes a blog, <http://beastsinapopulouscity.blogspot.com/>, Beasts in a Populous City.

Poetry by **Lou Amyx** may be seen in *The Arena*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume IV: Louisiana*, and at Melusine.com as the winner of the 2011 Vivienne

Haigh-Wood Poetry Prize. A chapbook, *The Bracelet*, is available from Finishing Line Press. A podcast of "Bigfoot Kept Lumberjack as Love Slave," featuring original music by Joshua Amyx, may be accessed at qarrtsiluni.com. Lou teaches university writing classes in Louisiana and delivers the U.S. Mail in Texas.

Claudia Anderson is a writer specializing in female fantasy fiction and creative non-fiction, often highlighting the emotions and adventures of middle-aged women. Claudia is happily married and has two great sons, one super daughter-in-law, an adorable grandson, wonderful friends, two dogs, and two sassy cats. She is creator of the popular blog "Humoring the Goddess: Managing the Madness and Magic of Middle Age." www.humoringthegoddess.wordpress.com

Judith Arcana writes poems, stories and essays; her books include *Grace Paley's Life Stories*, *A Literary Biography*, the poetry collection *What if your mother*, and the poetry chapbook *4th Period English*. Forthcoming in 2012 are a poetry chapbook (*The Parachute Jump Effect*) and the old woman poems. Judith is working on a linked fiction collection (*Hello. This is Jane.*); visit her website for more info: juditharcana.com.

Susan B. Auld is the author of *Waiting Innocence* and *Visiting Morning and Other Quiet Places* collections of her poetry. She lives in Arlington Heights, Illinois where she teaches community writing classes and works as a speech therapist teaching young children the power of words. Her poetry can be found online and in various poetry journals.

Tara Baldrige is a graduate of the MFA program at Roosevelt University. She has been the recipient of the Friends of American Writers Scholarship, the Jane Anderson Scholarship and her fiction has been presented at the Humanities: Power and the Public Conference at Roosevelt. Although Tara lives and writes from Chicago, her southern roots remain intact.

Christianne Balk's books include *Bindweed* and *Desiring Flight*. After majoring in biology at Grinnell College, she went on to study English at The University of Iowa. Her poems have appeared in

Alhambra Poetry Calendar, The Atlantic Monthly, Ploughshares, The New Republic, Prairie Schooner, and other anthologies and journals. Many of her poems reflect her work as a caregiver for her daughter, Elizabella, who was born with cerebral palsy. Christianne lives with her husband and daughter in Seattle, where she enjoys gardening and hiking.

KB Ballentine has a M.A. in Writing and a M.F.A. in Creative Writing, Poetry. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and publications, including *Alehouse, Tidal Basin Review, Interrobang?!*, and *Touchstone*. *Fragments of Light* (2009) and *Gathering Stones* (2008) were published by Celtic Cat Publishing. In 2011, two anthologies published her work: *Southern Light: Twelve Contemporary Southern Poets* and *A Tapestry of Voices*.

Julie Brooks Barbour is the author of the chapbook *Come To Me and Drink* (Finishing Line Press, 2012). Her poems have appeared in *UCity Review, Kestrel, Waccamaw, Diode, damselfly press*, and *Bigger Than They Appear: Anthology of Very Short Poems*.

Jessica Barksdale is the author of twelve traditionally published novels, including *Her Daughter's Eyes* and *When You Believe*. She is a professor of English at Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill, California and teaches online writing classes for UCLA Extension.

Lori Becherer is an artist, photographer and poet. She has received numerous awards for her poetry including first place in the 2011 Wednesday Club of St. Louis 85th annual poetry contest. Her poetry has been published in *Penumbra, lipstick*, and *Head to Hand*. She is a coauthor of *Orchids in the Cornfield: Collected Writings of the Heartland Women's Writers Guild*.

Kimberly L. Becker is a member of Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers and author of *Words Facing East* (WordTech Editions, 2011). Her poems appear widely, most recently in the "Native American Women's Poetry" folio in *Drunken Boat*. Visit her at www.kimberlylbecker.com

Lytton Bell has published three chapbooks, won five poetry contests and performed at many local Sacramento, CA venues; her

work has appeared in over three dozen poetry journals, web sites and ezines. Ms. Bell earned a poetry scholarship to the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts in 1988, where she studied with Deb Burnham and Len Roberts; she later went on to study poetry with the legendary Molly Fisk. Ms. Bell can be reached at lytton_bell@hotmail.com.

Ann Beman earned her MFA in creative nonfiction from the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts's Whidbey Writers Workshop. She is nonfiction editor for *The Los Angeles Review*, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *DIAGRAM*, *The Literary Review*, *Bombay Gin*, *Stone's Throw*, and *Canoe Journal*, among others. Beman lives and whitewater kayaks on California's Kern River with her husband and two whatchamaterriers.

Carol Berg's poems are forthcoming or in *Pebble Lake Review*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, *qarrtsiluni*, *blossombones*, *Spillway*, and elsewhere. Two chapbooks, *Ophelia Unraveling* (dancing girl press), and *Small Portrait and the Woman Holding A Flood In Her Mouth* (Binge Press), are forthcoming in 2012.

Denise Bergman's *Seeing Annie Sullivan*, poems based on the early life of Helen Keller's teacher (Cedar Hill Books, 2005), was translated into Braille and into a Talking Book. *The Telling* is forthcoming in 2013 (Cervena Barva Press). She conceived and edited *City River of Voices* (West End Press), an anthology of urban poetry. An excerpt of her poem "Red," about a slaughterhouse in the neighborhood, is permanently installed as public art. Her website is Denisebergman.com.

Elizabeth Bernays is a biologist and writer. She grew up in Australia, became a scientist in England, then a professor at the University of California Berkeley and the University of Arizona. She has published 30 essays in a variety of journals.

Lorraine Berry wanders the woods of the Finger Lakes region of New York when she is not teaching creative nonfiction at SUNY Cortland. Recently, she's had the pleasure of seeing coyotes while she's been out, but as of yet, the black bears have eluded her.

Bonnie Bishop lives in Nahant MA overlooking the Boston shipping channel, often walks the beach with her husband and their dog, in all kinds of weather. Her book *Local Habitation* came out two years ago through *Every Other Thursday Poets*, a workshop she has been part of for more than two decades.

Sheila Black is the author of two poetry collections *House of Bone* and *Love/Iraq* (both CW Press). She recently co-edited with poets Jennifer Bartlett and Mike Northen *Beauty is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press, September 2011). A third collection *Wen Kroy* is forthcoming from Dream Horse Press where it received the 2011 Orphic Prize in Poetry. She is the 2012 winner of the Frost-Pellicer Frontera Prize given to one US and one Mexican poet living along the US-Mexico border for 2000 and a 2012 Witter Bynner Fellow in Poetry, selected by Philip Levine. She lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Susan T. Blake is a business consultant and coach, writer, photographer, and explorer who believes curiosity and wonder can save the world. Susan is a resident of northern California and blogs at SusanTBlake.com. Her guest posts have appeared on a variety of sites and her article, "What Gets in the Way of Being Curious?" was published in the November 2011 issue of *The Art Journal Journey*.

Gloria Bletter writes: "Many of my poems relate to animals and the natural world. Having grown up in Brooklyn, New York, and still living in Manhattan, I long for more contact with woods, fields, and animals in the wild. Activities like tracking workshops and hiking have been a good antidote to working as a lawyer (now retired), and the over-cemented fabric of the city."

Nora Boxer's poetry has recently appeared in *Pilgrimage*, *Prism Review*, and *Spiral Orb*, and an essay and poem is forthcoming in a print anthology on women writers and the craft process, edited by poets Elana Bell and Aracelis Girmay. In 2010 Boxer's short fiction won the Keene Prize for Literature, and she is currently at work completing her first novel. She is the Poetry Coordinator for the Alameda County Fair, has worked with the Society of the Muse of

the Southwest and Badgerdog Literary Publishing, and has been a resident at the Byrdcliffe Arts Colony and the Elsewhere Collaborative.

Kathleen R. Brokke, currently writing an environmental history of an area she loves - the Red River valley, is a history PhD candidate at North Dakota State University with an University of Minnesota-Crookston horticulture degree and an University of North Dakota history degree. She has taught at all three universities and continues to write about environmental, horticultural, historical, and gender issues.

Barbara Brooks is the author of a chapbook, *The Catbird Sang* and is a member of Poet Fools. Her work has been published in *The Oklahoma Review*, *Blue Lake Review*, *Granny Smith Magazine*, and *Third Wednesday*, and on line in *Southern Women's Review* and *Poetry Quarterly*, among others. She is a retired physical therapist and lives in Hillsborough, N.C.

Cindy Brown lives in Taos, New Mexico where nature provides the journey and the destination. She writes poetry about women, nature, and passion, as well as articles on hiking for The Taos News. She is the author of *Lessons from Nature in Healing, Strength, and Flexibility* and founder of the website, <http://www.girlsguidetoswagger.com/>, The Girl's Guide to Swagger.

P. Susan Buchanan writes: I finally got serious about my writing two years ago, when I turned 50. Now I spend my days writing poetry and prose, sending my work out into the world. I'm happy to say I've had some success!

Wendy Burt lives in Chicago, IL where she shares her home with three cats, a Brazilian Rainbow Boa Constrictor, a Bearded Dragon, a Ferret, one fiance, and one 8 year old daughter. Her work has been published in *Mindful Metropolis*, *Common Ground*, *sharkforum*, and *qarrtsiluni*, spanning an array of topics from Mark Twain to intestinal gas. She runs two blogs whenever her schedule permits, *The Unlikely Feminist* and *They Call Me Tia*.

Yvonne Carpenter's poetry has appeared in literary journals and been published two volumes, *To Capture Fine Spirits* (Haystack Publishing), and *Barbed Wire and Paper Dolls* (Village Press). Yvonne's poetry can also be found in the Oklahoma Writing special issue of *Sugar Mule*. She and her husband raise cattle and wheat on a Custer County farm.

Leanne Chabalko earned her M.A. in creative writing from San Francisco State University and received the 2012 Ann Fields Poetry Prize. Her writing has appeared in *Stoneboat*, *Used Furniture Review*, *Caesura* and *Bookmarks* among others. She works in advertising and lives with her husband in San Francisco.

Lisa J. Cihlar's poems have been published in *The South Dakota Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *In Posse Review*, *Bluestem*, and *The Prose-Poem Project*. One of her poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her chapbook, "The Insomniac's House," is available from Dancing Girl Press and a second chapbook, "This is How She Fails," is available from *Crisis Chronicles Press*. She lives in rural southern Wisconsin.

Rayshell Clapper is an Associate Professor of English at Seminole State College in Seminole, Oklahoma, where she focuses on inspiring people to love words and believe in their power. She writes fiction and non-fiction, currently focusing on stories about Oklahoma-her people, her experiences, and her life. This non-fiction piece is part of her memoir-in-progress about growing up as a transplant to Oklahoma.

Elizabeth Claverie has been writing poetry since she was born and has enjoyed a modicum of success in the publishing world. She currently teaches middle school students in California about all things word related. In addition, she plays the cello, raises chickens and has walked across Spain twice. She was just recently published in *America Magazine* and *Echoes Literary Journal*.

Deenaz P. Coachbuilder, a resident of Riverside, California, was born in India. She is an educator at the university and public school level, a consulting speech pathologist, an artist who works in oil, a

writer, an environmental advocate, and a recipient of several awards, the most recent being President Obama's "Volunteer Service Award." Deenaz is a published writer in the U.S. and India; her first book of poems will be published this year.

Donna Coffey is an Associate Professor of English at Reinhardt University. Her poems and articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Calyx*, *The Mom Egg*, *Contemporary Women's Writing* and *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*

SuzAnne C. Cole, former college English instructor, M.A. from Stanford, writes in the Texas Hill Country. Both a juried and featured poet at the Houston Poetry Fest, she's also won a Japanese haiku contest. Her poetry and fiction have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her poetry, essays, short fiction, and plays have been published in a variety of magazines, anthologies, and newspapers.

Dana Collins is a vegan, Korean-adopted poet living in Deer Park, NY. She earned her MFA in Poetry from Queens College, City University of New York, where she is now working on an MA in Applied Linguistics. She was previously published in the blog, *Poets on Adoption*, the online journal, *The Whistling Fire*, the local print zine, *Shouting Shorelines*, and the e-zine, *Artistica*.

Christina Cook's poems, translations, essays, and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in a number of journals, most recently including *Dos Passos Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Ohio Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Cimarron Review*. Her chapbook, *Lake Effect*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. She holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts and is a contributing editor for *Inertia Magazine* and *Cerise Press*. Christina is the senior writer in the president's office at Dartmouth College.

Beth Copeland lived in Japan, India, and North Carolina as a child. Her book *Traveling Through Glass* received the 1999 Bright Hill Press Poetry Book Award and her second poetry collection, *Transcendental Telemarketer*, is forthcoming from BlazeVox Books. Her poems have been widely published in literary journals and have received awards from *Atlanta Review*, *North American Review*, *The North Carolina Poetry*

Society, and *Peregrine*. She is an English instructor at Methodist University in Fayetteville, North Carolina and she lives in a log cabin in the country with her husband, Phil Rech.

Joellen Craft teaches poetry and composition at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *2River View*, *storySouth*, *Back Room Live*, *The Pedestal*, *FutureCycle*, and *Juked*, who also awarded her poems their 2009 Poetry Prize.

Barbara Crooker lives and writes in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, and her poems have appeared in journals such as *The Hollins Critic*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *America*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The Green Mountains Review*, and *The Denver Quarterly*, and anthologies including *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, *The Bedford Introduction to Poetry*, and *Good Poems American Places* (Garrison Keillor, editor) (Viking). Her books are *Radiance*, which won the 2005 Word Press First Book competition and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance* (Word Press 2008), which won the 2009 Paterson Award for Literary Excellence; and *More* (C&R Press 2010).

Barbara Daniels' chapbook *Quinn and Marie* is available from *Casa de Cinco Hermanas* and her book *Rose Fever: Poems* from WordTech Press. Her poetry has appeared in *Mid-Atlantic Review*, *Solstice*, *The Literary Review*, and many other journals. She earned an MFA from Vermont College and received two Individual Artist Fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Carol L. Deering was born in Springfield, Mass., and has also lived in Arizona, Michigan, Germany, Washington State, and, for many years now, Wyoming. She has received the Wyoming Arts Council Literary Fellowship in Poetry, and was selected by the Bearlodge Writers for a week-long residency at Devils Tower. Her poems have appeared in online and traditional journals, contest booklets, and in some anthologies, notably, *Ring of Fire: Writers of the Yellowstone Region*.

Faye Rapoport DesPres is a graduate of the Solstice MFA Program in Creative Writing at Pine Manor College. Her personal essays have appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Ascent*, *damselfly press*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Platte Valley Review*, *Prime*

Number Magazine, and *Superstition Review*. Her book reviews and interviews have appeared in such publications as *Fourth Genre* and the *Writer's Chronicle*.

Liz Dolan's second poetry manuscript, *A Secret of Long Life*, which is seeking a publisher, was nominated for the Robert McGovern Prize. Her first poetry collection, *They Abide*, was published by March Street Press. A five-time Pushcart nominee and winner of The Best of the Web, she has also won an established artist fellowship in poetry and two honorable mentions in prose from the Delaware Division of the Arts and, recently, the The Nassau Prize for prose.

Mary Ruth Donnelly likes to write poetry and hike. Her poems have been published in *Natural Bridge*, *Bad Shoe* and other journals including one upcoming in *I-70 Review*. Her chapbooks are *Tomb Figure* and *Weaving the Light*. One poem was selected to spend a year riding the Metrolink where she hopes many bus and train riders read it. She is active in the poetry scene in St Louis, Missouri.

Wendy Dunmeyer received her BA from and has taught Basic Composition Skills and Developmental Writing at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, and recently received her MFA from the Sewanee School of Letters at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. She was a finalist for the 2011 Morton Marr Poetry Prize and is currently working on her first poetry collection.

Jen Eddy is a poet, artist and teacher who delights in helping others to appreciate their natural surroundings. She has traveled widely and has had many of her articles and poems published in anthologies, some online websites and books. Upstate New York is where she and her retired husband live.

Rebecca Ellis lives in southern Illinois, on the eastern bluffs of the Mississippi River. Her poems have appeared in *Bad Shoe*, *Prairie Schooner*, *So to Speak*, *Natural Bridge*, *qarrtsiluni*, *RHINO*, *Sweet* (sweetlit.com), and *Flood Stage: An Anthology of St. Louis Poets*. She edited Cherry Pie Press, publishing a series of poetry chapbooks by Midwestern women poets. Her reviews of poetry have appeared at www.rattle.com and in the Cherry Pie Press blog (<http://cherrypiepress.blogspot.com>).

Gail Rudd Entrekin has taught Poetry and English Literature at California colleges for 25 years. Her collection of poems, *CHANGE (WILL DO YOU GOOD)*, was nominated for a Northern California Book Award, and her new collection, *REARRANGEMENT OF THE INVISIBLE* (Poetic Matrix Press), is forthcoming in 2012. Her poems were finalists for the Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize from Nimrod in 2011, and she is editor of the online literary journal *Canary* and poetry editor of *Hip Pocket Press* in Orinda, California.

Seren Fargo lives in rural Bellingham, Washington. She has been writing poetry, particularly Japanese forms, since 2007, and in 2009 she founded the Bellingham Haiku Group, which she currently coordinates. Her poems, both Western and Japanese form, have been published in several countries and can be found in journals such as *Mu Haiku*, *Ribbons*, *The Red Moon Anthology*, *bottle rockets*, *Lyrical Passion Poetry E-Zine*, and *Dreams Wander On*, as well as her chapbook, *Yearning*.

Jennifer Lagier's five books are *Coyote Dream Cantos* (Iota Press, 1992), *Where We Grew Up* (Small Poetry Press, 1999), *Second-Class Citizen* (Voices in Italian Americana Folio Series, 2000), *The Mangia Syndrome* (Pudding House Publications, 2004), and *Fishing for Portents* (Pudding House Publications, 2008).

Chelsea Lemon Fetzer's poetry has appeared in *Stone Canoe*, *Callaloo*, *Tin House*, *Poets for Living Waters*, and her short story *Coming Through Avalon* was selected as a finalist in the 2010 Mississippi Review Prize Issue. She leads creative writing workshops across New York City in collaboration with PEN American Center's Readers and Writers Program, The New York Writers Coalition, and The Create Collective Inc., a non-profit organization Fetzer founded in an effort to bring arts programs to community members of all ages and means. She recently completed her first novel, *Rivermaps*.

Meg Files is the author of the novel *Meridian 144*, *Home Is the Hunter and Other Stories*, *The Love Hunter and Other Poems*, *Galapagos Triptych*, and *Write From Life*, a book about using personal

experience and taking risks in writing. She edited *Lasting: Poems on Aging*. Her new novel is *The Third Law of Motion*.

Nancy Flynn hails from the anthracite coal country of northeastern Pennsylvania where somehow, at an early age, she fell in love with words instead of into a sinkhole or the then-polluted Susquehanna River. She spent many years living on a downtown creek in Ithaca, New York. In 1998, she married the scientist whose house once hosted parties where Vladimir Nabokov chain-smoked cigarettes. They packed up their Conestoga Volvo 850 and headed for the foothills of the Oregon Coast Range, finally settling in Portland in 2007. More about her past lives and publications can be found at <http://www.nancyflynn.com/>, NancyFlynn.com .

Manda Frederick holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from the Inland Northwest Center for Writers. She has published poetry and nonfiction in journals such as *Iron Horse*, *Switchback*, *Adventum*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Muse & Stone*, and the *White Whale Review*. She is currently an Asst. Professor of Writing Arts at Rowan University near Philadelphia.

Kat Friedrich is a science writer and poet. She wrote poetry, published it, and read it in local venues for years before getting a degree in science and environmental journalism. You can follow her blog, katfriedrich.wordpress.com, Science Is Everyone's Story.

Susan Gabrielle was raised in Georgia, but you'd never know it by her accent. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Heyday*, *TheBatShat*, *New Verse News*, *San Francisco Peace and Hope*, and *Bethlehem Writers*, and she was a finalist in the Tiny Lights Narrative Essay Contest. She currently teaches writing and literature classes as a university instructor, and is at work on a writers' guide, *Writing Your Way into Dreamland*.

Cynthia Gallaher is listed on Chicago Public Library's "Top Ten Requested Poets" and named by *Today's Chicago Woman* magazine as one of "100 Women Making a Difference." In addition to *Earth Elegance*, her other books of poetry include *Swimmer's Prayer* (Missing Spoke Press, Seattle) and *Night Ribbons* (Polar Bear Press, Chicago).

She has taught through the University of Illinois at Chicago Writers Series, and holds frequent writing workshops in schools, libraries and centers throughout the Midwest.

Karen George, author of *Into the Heartland* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), has work forthcoming or published in *Memoir (and)*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Still*, *Cortland Review*, *The Single Hound*, *Ontologica*, *Blood Lotus*, and *Barcelona Review*. She has been awarded grants from The Kentucky Foundation for Women and The Kentucky Arts Council. She holds an MFA in Writing from Spalding University, and teaches writing at The University of Cincinnati.

Jill Gerard lives in Wilmington, North Carolina, with her husband, children, and dogs. A poet and essayist, she finds inspiration in the natural world, the wonder of the body, the ties of family.

Laurice Gilbert is President of the New Zealand Poetry Society, with poems published in many New Zealand journals and anthologies, *Island* (Australia), *The Book of Ten* (UK), *Shot Glass Journal* and *Fib Review* (online). She is the current Featured Poet International at Muse-Pie Press and the launch of her first collection, *My Family and Other Strangers*, is imminent. Her full literary CV is online at <http://www.poetrysociety.org.nz/aboutlaurice>, the New Zealand Poetry Society.

Susan B. Gilbert is about to turn 60 and is doing a happy dance to celebrate her publication in *Sugar Mule*. Her book, *The Blue White Veil*, will be published by Black Bamboo Press in the fall of 2012.

Debra Gingerich's poems and essays have appeared in *Mochila Review*, *MARGIE: The American Journal of Poetry*, *Whiskey Island Magazine*, *The Writer's Chronicle* and others. She is the author of a collection of poetry, *Where We Start*, and coeditor of the anthology *Shifting Balance Sheets: Women's Stories of Naturalized Citizenship & Cultural Attachment*. Gingerich was a winner of the John Ringling Towers Fund Individual Artist Award and serves on the editorial advisory board for the Wising Up Press writers collective. She received an MFA in Writing from Vermont College and she lives in

Sarasota, FL where she works in communications and public relations.

Michelle Gluch is an author and photographer with more than fifty Idaho based stories, articles, and photographs published in print and on the Internet. Her writings are rich with details of her home in Southwestern Idaho. Michelle holds a BA in English with a writing emphasis, from Boise State University and is currently pursuing an MA in Composition and Rhetoric.

Rain C. Gómez, winner 2009 First Book Award Poetry for *Smoked Mullet Cornbread Memory*, which is awarded by the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas, is a Sutton Doctoral Fellow in English at University of Oklahoma. Creative and academic work has appeared in various publications most recently *Tidal Basin Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *SING: Indigenous Poetry of the Americas*, and *Louisiana Folklife*.

Eleanor Goodman writes fiction, poetry, and criticism, and translates from Chinese. Her work has appeared widely in journals such as *PN Review*, *Pleiades*, *Terrain.org*, *Pathlight*, *The Guardian*, *Cha*, and *The Best American Poetry* website. Beginning in July 2012, she will be a Research Associate at the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University.

Patricia L. Goodman is a widowed mother and grandmother and a graduate of Wells College with a degree in Biology and election to Phi Beta Kappa. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, both online and in print and her first full-length manuscript is currently being presented to publishers. She lives in Wilmington, Delaware on the banks of the Red Clay Creek, where she is surrounded by the natural world she loves.

Juliet Grable lives and writes in Southern Oregon, where she spends as much time outside as possible. Her work has appeared in *Bay Nature Magazine*, *Southern Oregon Magazine* and *Switchback*.

Lisa K. Harris lives in blazing hot Tucson, Arizona, with two daughters, three dogs, seven cats, one persnickety saltwater fish tank, and nine desert tortoises. She write to maintain her sanity. Sometimes it works. Her essays on nature, travel, health, and raising out-spoken

daughters have appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Boston Globe*, *SLAB*, *Motherwords*, *Passages North*, *Stone's Throw Magazine*, and several anthologies. She writes regularly for the *Desert Leaf* on hiking and outdoor adventure. A trained wildlife biologist, when she's not writing or tending to her menagerie, she runs an environmental consulting firm.

Lois Marie Harrod's *The Only Is* won the 2012 Tennessee Chapbook Contest (Poems & Plays) and her 11th book, *Brief Term*, a poetry collection about teachers and teaching was published by Black Buzzard in March 2011. She teaches Creative Writing at The College of New Jersey. Read more at loismarieharrod.com.

JoeAnn Hart is the author of the novels *Addled* and forthcoming *Float*. Her work explores the relationship between humans, animals, and their environments, natural or otherwise - JoeAnnHart.com.

Penny Harter's recent books include *Recycling Starlight* (2010) and *The Night Marsh* (2008); a prize-winning e-book, *One Bowl*, is forthcoming from Snapshot Press in August of 2012. She was a featured reader at the 2010 Dodge Poetry Festival, and she has won three fellowships from the NJSCA; the Mary Carolyn Davies Award from the PSA; and a January, 2011 fellowship from VCCA. She lives in the Southern NJ shore area.

Lisa Hase-Jackson's a poet, teacher, and creativity coach. She currently facilitates and edits 200 New Mexico Poems, an online project celebrating New Mexico's Centennial, and ZingaraPoet.net, a blog for poets.

Polly Hatfield wiles away most of her hours tending to and being tended by a gloriously rambunctious patch of land in Portland, Oregon with her dear beloved and a gray striped cat, once wildling, who's stolen her heart. Usually found with her nose not far from the earth reveling in the magic unfolding and mumbling plant names in Latin all the while. She muses at the vital connections between heal and whole and holy.

Shayla Hawkins is a poet, fiction writer, and past winner of The Caribbean Writer's Canute A. Brodhurst Prize in Short Fiction and the John Edgar Wideman Microstory Contest. Her recent publications include poems in *tongues of the ocean*, *Pyrra*, *Magnapoets*, *Taj Mahal Review*, and *Tidal Basin Review*. Her first book, *Carambola*, is scheduled to be published in Fall 2012. She lives in Michigan.

Janet Ruth Heller has a Ph.D. in English from the University of Chicago and is president of the Michigan College English Association. She has published the books *Traffic Stop* (poetry, Finishing Line Press, 2011), *Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and the Reader of Drama* (literary criticism, University of Missouri Press, 1990), and *Folk Concert: Changing Times* (poetry, Anaphora Literary Press, 2012). Her fiction picture book for children about bullying, *How the Moon Regained Her Shape* (Sylvan Dell, 2006), has won four national awards.

Jennifer Highland's poems have appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Isotope*, *Conclave: a Journal of Character*, and other magazines and anthologies. She practices osteopathic medicine in central New Hampshire.

Kristan Hoffman is a twenty-something writer who loves dogs, travel, and football. She earned a B.A. in creative writing from Carnegie Mellon University and is an alumna of the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop. Her work has appeared in the *Oakland Review*, and her contest-winning web serial *Twenty-Somewhere* is now available as an ebook. For more about Kristan or her writing, please visit kristanhoffman.com.

Sara Marie Hogg's most recent volume of poetry, *Multiple Exposures* was nominated in the poetry category for the Global eBook Awards. In addition to her recent collection and an earlier poetry collection, she has written two novels and one collection of short fiction. She is also a regular magazine contributor and has also been a humor columnist for her county newspaper for over five years. Sara lives in the Ozark Mountains.

Heather Holliger teaches writing and women's studies at Ohlone College. She is a former editor of *So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of*

Language & Art, and her poetry has been published in many literary journals, including *The Aureorean*, *Apropos Literary Journal*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Labletter: An Annual Journal of Language & Art*, and *Straightforward*, among others. Her poetry also appeared in *Riffing on Strings: Creative Writing Inspired by String Theory*.

Faith S. Holsaert was active in the civil rights movement and co-edited *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (University of Illinois Press, 2010). For many years, she lived in West Virginia where she raised her son and daughter. She received her MFA from the Warren Wilson Program for Writers and lives in Durham, NC with her partner, with whom she shares seven grandchildren.

Christine Horner began her writing career with the Berkeley Calif. Women's Center Workshops in the late 70's. Once a registered nurse, once a beekeeper, she is now a raptor handler and interpreter, a performing tap dancer, and plays jazz banjo with buddies in assorted pizza parlors in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson's poetry has been nominated for both the Pushcart and The Best of the Net and has appeared in such venues as *The Lyric*, *Mobius*, *The New Formalist*, *qarrtsiluni*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Best of the Barefoot Muse* (Barefoot Pub), and *Caduceus* (Yale University). She was most recently shortlisted for the Holland Park Poetry Prize. She is the Assistant Poetry Editor of *Able Muse*.

Jan Hadwen Hubbell says "Growing up as an 8th generation Vermonter, my love of nature was forged on Lake Champlain. Seeking a return to that innocent joyful time informs much of my writing. I was lucky to study with Stephan Sandy and Bernard Malamud at Bennington College. At the Iowa Writer's Workshop, I honed my writing skills through fiction. Now, as an English Professor at Colorado Mountain College I am lucky once again to live in one of the most majestic places in the USA and dive daily into the world of literature."

H.K. Hummel is a poet, editor and teacher. Deeply influenced by her native California and the Pacific coast, she writes most often about the intersections of landscape and psyche. Her poetry has recently appeared in journals such as *Poemeleon*, *Quiddity*, and *Antigonish Review*. She is one of the founding editors of the literary journal *Blood Orange Review*.

Jessica B. Isaacs is Division Chair of Language Arts & Humanities and Associate Professor of English at Seminole State College, where she is also the director of the annual Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium. She has presented her poetry at Pop Culture / American Culture Conferences, Scissortail Creative Writing Festival, and Woody Guthrie Festival.

Freda Karpf is at work on a book about the intersection of grief, coastal environmental issues and comic revenge. She writes about grief and resilience, and the things that make you feel crazy and sane on <http://thewildblues.com/>, *The Wild Blues*. Her book *Conversations with Nic* is a multi-genre comic epic through the land of withdrawal based upon the *Odyssey*.

Abigail Keegan is a Professor of English Literature at Oklahoma City University. She has published essays on literature and a critical book, *Byron's Otherved Self and Voice: Contextualizing the Homographic Signature*. Keegan is the former editor of *Piecework: A Poetry Magazine for Women*. She has published three collections of poetry, *The Feast of the Assumptions*, *Oklahoma Journey*, and her latest book, *Depending on the Weather*, was a finalist for the 2012 Oklahoma Book Award.

Claire Keyes is the author of two poetry collections: *The Question of Rapture* and *Rising and Falling*. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Prairie Schooner* and *The Newport Review*, among others. She lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts and is Professor Emerita at Salem State University in Massachusetts.

Jennifer Kidney is a freelance scholar and adjunct assistant professor for the College of Liberal Studies at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of six books of poetry. Her most recent

collection, *Road Work Ahead*, was published by Village Books Press in 2012.

Alyse Knorr received her MFA in creative writing from George Mason University, where she served as poetry editor of *So to Speak: A Feminist Journal of Language and Art*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *RHINO*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Salamander*, and *Sentence*, among others. She is currently the production director for the Fall for the Book literary festival.

Carolyn Kraus is a professor of Journalism and Screen Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Her work appears in academic, literary, and general audience publications, including *Biography*, *English Language Notes*, *The Journal of Ecocriticism*, and *Threepenny Review*. She has been an op-ed writer for *The New York Times* and a Far-Flung Correspondent for *The New Yorker*.

Page Lambert grew up in the Colorado mountains, where she fell in love with harebells, wild onions, and gangly ponderosas. In her teens, she courted the South Platte River, cottonwood trees, horses and frogs. She's been "writing nature" since the mid-80s, when she moved to a small ranch in the Black Hills. Books include her Wyoming memoir *In Search of Kinship*, and the novel *Shifting Stars*. In 2006, Oprah's O magazine featured her River Writing Journeys for Women as "One of the top six great all-girl getaways of the year." She also writes the blog "All Things Literary. All Things Natural." For more about her retreats, workshops, and writing services at www.pagelambert.com.

Susanna Lang's first collection of poems, *Even Now*, was published in 2008 (The Backwaters Press), a chapbook, *Two by Two*, was published in 2011 (Finishing Line Press), and *Tracing the Lines* (Brick Road Poetry Press) is forthcoming in fall 2012. Lang has published original works and translations from the French in *Inkwell*, *Little Star*, *New Letters*, *The Green Mountains Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Kalliope*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Chicago Review*, *New Directions*, and *Jubilat*. Book publications include translations of *Words in Stone* and *The Origin of Language*, both by Yves Bonnefoy.

Lang lives with her husband and son in Chicago, where she teaches in the Chicago Public Schools.

Elisabeth Lanser-Rose is the author of a memoir, *For the Love of a Dog*, (Random House), and a novel, *Body Sharers* (Rutgers University Press). *Body Sharers* was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award for Best First Novel. Her work has appeared in *Ascent*, *The North Carolina Literary Review*, *Art:Mag*, *Kestrel*, and *Feminist Studies*. Go to elisabethlanserrose.com to learn about her hilarious memoir, *The Naked Australian and Other First Dates*, and feed your fascination for birds, beasts, and books.

ali lanzetta is a woolgatherer who lives in the forest and sleeps under a blanket of books. When not reading or writing, she spends most of her time making music, art, and messes. Her work has appeared in various journals, including *Hunger Mountain*, *Verse*, *Switchback*, *Eleven Eleven*, and *A Capella Zoo*. ali is enamored with giraffes, whose hearts are over two feet long.

Cecelia R. LaPointe is an Anishinaabekwe of mixed heritage who strongly identifies with her Anishinaabe/Ojibway roots. She is a published author, poet, writer and healer. You can read her poetry, writing, rants and ramblings on her [website](http://www.anishinaabekwe.com), www.anishinaabekwe.com.

Maude Larke has come back to writing after years in the university system, analyzing others' texts and films, and to classical music as an ardent amateur, after fifteen years of piano and voice in her youth. She has stories, poems, three novels and a screenplay to offer so far.

Ann Neuser Lederer was born in Ohio and has also lived and worked in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Kentucky. Her poems and creative nonfiction appear in various journals; anthologies such as *Bedside Guide*, *Best of the Net*, and *The Country Doctor Revisited*; and chapbooks *Approaching Freeze*, *The Undifferentiated*, and *Weaning the Babies*. She is employed as a nurse in Kentucky.

Julie Hungiville LeMay was born in Buffalo, New York and moved to Alaska's Matanuska Valley where she has lived since 1978. Her

work has been published in *Pilgrimage*, *Bluestem*, *The Mindfulness Bell*, and *Midwest Poetry Review*.

Sheryl J. LeSage lives in Kansas, where she teaches writing and literature at the community college level. Her last published poem appeared in *Mikrokosmos* more than a decade ago. Still recovering from graduate school, she hopes to be observing, writing, and publishing more in the near future.

Karen Lee Lewis is an independent Teaching Artist and Teacher Consultant for the Western New York Writing Project at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY. Karen is a fellow of Canada's Banff Centre; her poetry, short fiction, features and photography are widely published. Her full-length poetry collection is entitled *What I Would Not Unravel* (The Writer's Den, 2010). For additional information see www.karenleewis.com

Ellaraine Lockie's seventh chapbook, *Stroking David's Leg*, was awarded Best Individual Collection for 2010 from Purple Patch magazine in England, and her eighth chapbook, *Red for the Funeral*, won the 2010 San Gabriel Poetry Festival Chapbook Contest. Her recent chapbook, *Wild as in Familiar*, from Finishing Line Press received *The Aureorean's* Chapbook Pick for Spring, 2012. Ellaraine teaches poetry workshops and serves as Poetry Editor for the lifestyles magazine, *Lilipob*.

Robyn Lynn is a MFA student at Goddard and is currently working on a memoir. Her work has been published in the *Pitkin Journal*, the anthology *How We Became Breast Cancer Survivors*, and several cancer-related magazines. She lives in the Seattle area where she spends as much time outdoors as possible. You can find her writing at <http://becomingamazon.com>.

Linda Malm was published as a teen and then returned again to poetry when she retired as a college dean. She is currently one of the Writers of Los Luceros (the Robert Redford/NM Film Board enterprise). Her recent poetry has appeared in issues of both *Howl* and the anthology *Adobe Walls*, as well as the 2011 *Iowa Summer Writing*

Festival Anthology and the current issue of the literary journal *The Examined Life*.

Arlene L. Mandell, a retired English professor who lives in Santa Rosa, CA, was formerly on the staff of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. She has published more than 500 poems, essays and short stories in newspapers and literary journals, including *The New York Times*, *Tiny Lights* and *Wild Violet*.

Tania Martin is from Palmerston North, New Zealand, but has lived in California for most of her life. She is a geologist, artist, and emerging writer. rania.wonderland@me.com

Caitlynn Martinez-McWhorter, a Chicago suburb native, is an MFA candidate in nonfiction writing at Columbia College Chicago. She completed her undergraduate degree at the same institution, and also teaches Writing and Rhetoric at Columbia. She decided to embark on her MFA journey after an epiphanic volunteer experience in Australia working with endangered species.

mariana mcdonald is a bi-cultural poet whose poetry has appeared in many publications, including the forthcoming *Anthology of Georgia Poets; From a Bend in the River: 100 New Orleans Poets; The Reach of Song*; and *El Boletín Nacional*. She lives in Atlanta, where she is active in the poetry community. She works as a public health scientist to improve the health of women and people of color.

A seven-time Pushcart-Prize nominee and National Park Artist-in-Residence, **Karla Linn Merrifield** has had nearly 300 poems appear in dozens of journals and anthologies. She has seven books to her credit, the newest of which are *The Ice Decides: Poems of Antarctica* (Finishing Line Press) and *Liberty's Vigil, The Occupy Anthology: 99 Poets among the 99%*, which she co-edited. Forthcoming from Salmon Poetry is *Athabaskan Fractal and Other Poems of the Far North*. Her *Godwit: Poems of Canada* (FootHills) received the 2009 Eiseman Award for Poetry. She is assistant editor and poetry book reviewer for <http://www.centrifugaleye.com>, The Centrifugal Eye (www.centrifugaleye.com) and she blogs at <http://karlalin.blogspot.com>, Vagabond Poet.

A founding member of Shakespeare's Sisters, **Florence Miller** co-edited several anthologies including *State of Peace: The Women Speak* (Gull Press). She co-authored with Alexis Rotella, *Eleven Renga, Yes, A String of Monarchs* (Jade Mountain), and *My Dreaming Waking Life :Six Poets Sixty-Six Poems* (Dog Ear).

Felicia Mitchell's most recent chapbook, *The Cleft of the Rock*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2009. Poems appear widely in print and in online publications such as *Terrain. A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments*, *River Poets Journal*, *Hospital Drive*, and *Coping Magazine*. She teaches English and creative writing at Emory & Henry College in Virginia, where she has written a weekly column, often on nature, for rural Washington County News since 2003.

Carolyn Moore's three chapbooks won their respective competitions, as has her book-length collection, *Instructions for Traveling Light*, pending publication from Deep Bowl Poetry Press. She taught at *Humboldt State University* (Arcata, CA) until able to eke out a living as a freelance writer and researcher, working from the last vestige of the family farm in Tigard, Oregon.

Wilda Morris's blog, "Walking with Nature," is published on-line by <http://bolingbrook.patch.com/users/wilda-morris>, The Bolingbrook Patch. Her <http://wildamorris.blogspot.com/>, poetry blog, offers a monthly contest to other poets. Her poems have been widely published in journals and anthologies; RWG Press published her book, *Szechwan Shrimp and Fortune Cookies: Poems from a Chinese Restaurant*.

Margaret S. Mullins lives in Maryland. Her work has appeared in *Loch Raven Review*, *Creekwalker*, *Magnapoets*, *New Verse News*, *Sun, Alehouse*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and *Little Patuxent Review*, among others. She is a Pushcart nominee and the editor of *Manorborn 2009: The Water Issue* (Abecedarian Press). *Family Constellation*, a chapbook, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Valerie Nieman is the author of a new novel, *Blood Clay*, as well as a short fiction collection, *Fidelities*, and a poetry book, *Wake Wake Wake*. Her work has appeared in *New Letters*, *Poetry*, *North Carolina*

Literary Review and *Kenyon Review*, and several anthologies. She has received an NEA creative writing fellowship, grants from North Carolina, West Virginia, and Kentucky, and prizes including the Greg Grummer Prize in poetry. A graduate of West Virginia University and Queens University of Charlotte, she was a journalist before becoming a writing teacher at North Carolina A&T and poetry editor of *Prime Number*.

Margie Norris lives in Palm Springs, California. She is a retired psychiatric social worker who obtained an MFA late in life. She has been published in magazines, journals, and anthologies. This is her first publication on line.

Sherry O'Keefe, a descendent of Montana pioneers, is the author of *Making Good Use of August* and *The Peppermint Bottle*. Assistant poetry editor at IthacaLit, YB, and Fifth Wednesday Journal, she is currently working on her third book, *On the Corner of First and Prairie*, soon to be released by BW Books. Visit her at <http://www.toomuchaugust.wordpress.com/>, Too Much August .

Heidi C. Parton is a recent graduate of the Lesley University MFA in Creative Writing program. She writes both fiction and poetry, freelances as a copywriter and editor, and has contributed articles to a variety of culture blogs, including her own, <http://somethinglooseknit.wordpress.com/>, Something Looseknit. Heidi lives in Columbia, South Carolina, with her husband, dog and two cats, but grew up as a gypsy child in an Army family and is therefore from everywhere and nowhere.

Nancy Peacock's first novel, *Life Without Water* was chosen as a New York Times Editor's Choice. Her most recent book, a memoir titled *A Broom of One's Own: Words on Writing, Housecleaning and Life* was published by Harper Collins. Peacock is currently at work on her fourth book, a historical novel set in the 1800's in Louisiana and Texas. She invites you to visit her website, <http://www.nancypeacockbooks.com/>, Nancy Peacock Books .

Rhonda Pettit is the author of *The Global Lovers*, a poetic drama exploring sex slavery and consumerism that premiered in the 2010

Cincinnati Fringe Festival. Her poems have appeared in print and online journals, as well as the human rights poetry anthology, *I Go to the Ruined Place* (Kwansy & Smoker, eds.). She teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, and lives in Northern Kentucky.

Karen Phillips lives, works, writes and hikes in the Siskiyou Mountains of southwest Oregon. Her writing has appeared in *Snowy Egret*, *Bird Watcher's Digest* and various obscure natural history newsletters.

Knopf brought out **Marge Piercy's** 18th poetry book *The Hunger Moon: New & Selected Poems 1980-2010* last spring, scheduled for paperback this spring. Knopf has *The Crooked Inheritance*, *The Moon is Always Female*, *What Are Big Girls Made Of?* and several others in paperback. Piercy has published 17 novels, recently *Sex Wars*; 2 early novels, *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* and *Vida* have just been republished with new introductions by PM Press, and *Braided Lives* will be coming out later this year. You can learn more about Piercy's writing and workshops at margepiercy.com.

Marla Porter holds an MFA in poetry from Vermont College of Fine Arts, a MTS in Hebrew Bible from Harvard Divinity School and is working on a PhD in Hebrew Bible in Berkeley, CA. She writes about nature as always a little sinister, reflecting that urban environments are an attempt to tame nature or be removed from it entirely.

Janelle Rainer lives in Eastern Washington where she writes and labors as a construction worker. She is a poetry student in Pacific University's low residency MFA program.

Mixed-blood Yankee, **Patricia Smith Ranzoni**, writes from one of the subsistence homesteads of her youth in Bucksport, Maine. Her work, published across the country and abroad, is forthcoming in *Puckerbrush Review*, *Monongahela Review*, *Felt Sun*; the anthologies, *Whitman Cooks* and *Pride and Passion* (EqualityMaine); and her eighth collection, *Bedding Vows, Love Poems from Outback Maine* (North Country Press). She is one of the poets invited to read her work for

this summer's gala 100th anniversary commemoration of the discovery of Edna St. Vincent Millay working at Whitehall Inn in Camden, Maine.

Lisa Rizzo's work has appeared in a variety of journals including Calyx Journal, 13th Moon and Earth's Daughters. Her chapbook *In the Poem an Ocean* was published by Big Table Publishing Co. last year. Two of her poems won first and second prizes in the Bay Area Coalition of Poets 32nd annual poetry contest in 2012. Learn more about Lisa at her website <http://www.lisarizzopoetry.com/>.

Kay Robertson lives near Puget Sound in Washington State. Always an avid reader, semi-retired at sixty-five, she began writing poetry. Her work appears in *Loch Raven Review*, *Pirene's Fountain Japan Anthology*, *Soundings Review*, *Poetry Breakfast*.

Janis E. Rodgers is a New Jersey native working on her MFA in Creative Writing and Environment at Iowa State University. With a background in field research and primatology, her non-fiction and poetry are now concerned with conservation of non-human primates.

At 21, **Cynthia Rosi** emigrated from Seattle to London, England determined to write for a living. She worked in journalism, writing poetry and fiction on the side. At the turn of the millennium, Headline, UK published Cynthia's two mystery novels *Motherhunt* and *Butterfly Eyes* (now on e-book). In 2003, Cynthia moved with her husband to Columbus, Ohio. She spent time raising a family, and helping her husband start Via Vecchia Winery. She shares her work on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ColumbusFreelanceWriter>, Cynthia Rosi, Columbus Freelance Writer.

Maryann Russo has authored *Wild and Still*, a collection of poetry. She lives in Redondo Beach, California, where she is a practicing psychotherapist.

Miriam Sagan has recently been a writer in residence in Everglades National Park, Petrified Forest National Park, Andrews Experimental Forest, and Iceland's Gullkistan Residency for Creative People. Her

books of poetry include *Map of the Lost* from University of New Mexico Press.

Giorgia Sage is a bus rider who eats fog and tangerines. She has been published in the Bicycle Review and the inaugural issue of Belletrist Coterie. She currently lives in San Francisco with a cat and two frogs.

Becky Dennison Sakellariou was born and raised in New England and has lived most of her adult life in Greece. She has recently published in *Passager*, *Northern New England Review* and *Dos Passos Review*. Nominated for the Pushcart Poetry Annual twice, she won first prize in the 2005 Blue Light Press Chapbook Contest for her chapbook, *The Importance of Bone*, and had her second book (first full-length), *Earth Listening*, published by Hobblebush Books in 2010 as part of the Granite State Poetry Series.

Judith Sanders has a B.A. in literature from Yale, an M.A. in writing from Boston University, and a Ph.D. in English from Tufts. She has published articles in *The American Scholar*, the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *Modern Jewish Studies*, and *Film Quarterly*, and in the anthologies *Mama*, *Ph.D.* from Rutgers UP and *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker* from McFarland. Her poems have appeared in anthologies, journals, and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette; her poem "Homage" recently won the 37th annual Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest sponsored by Kent State University.

Adrienne Ross Scanlan's essays have been published in *Adventum Magazine*, *Pilgrimage*, *The Fourth River*, *Tikkun*, *Under the Sun*, *LabLit: The Culture of Science in Fiction & Fact*, *Tiny Lights: A Journal of Personal Narrative*, the *American Nature Writing* anthology series, and other print or online publications. She received a Seattle Arts Commission award, an Artist Trust Literature Fellowship, and her essay "Salvage" was recognized as "notable science and nature writing" in the *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2002*. "Longfellow Creek: A Citizen Science Diary" is part of an essay collection (in progress) about discovering home and restoring nature in the urban wild.

Andrea Scarpino is the author of the chapbook *The Grove Behind* (Finishing Line Press) and a forthcoming full-length collection from Red Hen Press. She received an MFA in Creative Writing from The Ohio State University, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and teaches with Union Institute and University's Cohort Ph.D. program in Interdisciplinary Studies. She is a weekly contributor for the blog <http://www.planet-of-the-blind.com/>, Planet of the Blind.

Lisa Sharp is from a third generation ranching family from Southern Arizona. After the sale of the family ranch in 1998, she owned a boutique B&B in Tubac, Arizona, traveled in Asia, Europe, and South America, and lives in Taos, New Mexico. She is currently writing short stories about growing up on her family's cattle ranch.

Laura Jan Shore's poetry has widely appeared in literary magazines in the US, Italy, New Zealand and Australia. Her first collection was *Breathworks* (Dangerously Poetic Press 2002). Her latest, *Water over Stone* (Interactive Press), won IP Picks Best Poetry 2011.

Carol Smallwood co-edited (Molly Peacock, foreword) *Women on Poetry: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing by Successful Women Poets* (McFarland, 2012). Her poetry received a 2011 Pushcart nomination. *Women Writing on Family: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing*, with *The Writer's Chronicle* editor as foreword writer is from (Key Publishing House, 2012).

Faye Snider, a retired psychotherapist, received her MFA from Pine Manor's Solstice Creative Writing Program in 2009. She published "Goldie's Gold" in Issue Twelve of *Alimentum* and placed as a finalist in Creative Nonfiction's food essay contest. A retired psychotherapist, she continues to consult. An inveterate gardener, she weaves the natural world into essays about family and relationships.

Sandra Soli's work appears most recently in *Parody*, *Ruminate*, *Tilt-a-Whirl*, *Cybersoleil*, and *The Oklahoma Review* and is forthcoming in the *Texas Poetry Calendar*. Awards include an Oklahoma Book Award, New Delta Review's Eyster Poetry Prize, and two Pushcart nominations. She enjoys collaborative projects with artists in other disciplines.

Cris Staubach is Head of Youth Services at the Public Library of New London, CT, a founding member of the New London Environmental Educators Coalition, and she is currently working on a certificate in Environmental Citizenship at the University of Guelph. Her poem "Last Ferry," won first place in the received-poem category of the Oestara Pagan Poetry contest, and was published in the Eppy-winning *Oestara Anthology of Pagan Poetry*. Her work has also been published in several anthologies and periodicals including *Whispers of Inspiration*, *Sacred Stones*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *Grandmother Earth XVI*, *Möbius*, and *Voices Along the River*.

Maya Stein is a poet and creative nonfiction writer. She has published three collections of personal essays, poetry, and photographs, and most recently, "How We Are Not Alone," a compilation of writings from her poetry blog. Maya's "10-line Tuesday" poems reach more than 900 people around the world each week. She also facilitates live and online writing workshops. <http://www.mayastein.com/>,

Odarka Polanskyj Stockert is a New Jersey native poet and long time member of South Mountain Poets and the Yara Arts Group at La Mama Etc. NYC. Odarka is a harpist, poet and songwriter, an engineer and inventor. She lives in Millburn with her family. Odarka's poetry has been previously published in a variety of journals in print and online. You can visit Odarka virtually on <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Odarkas-Poetry-Page/250392821524>, Facebook and at <http://www.Odarka.com/>, her website.

Julie Stuckey grew up in Pennsylvania, graduated from the University of Delaware in business and currently lives in Pawling, New York. She is especially drawn to writing that is firmly rooted in the imagery of the natural world and has had numerous poems published online, in print journals and in anthologies.

Pat Sturm reads, writes, gardens, and rescues animals in Western Oklahoma. "I never thought I could write poetry," says this teacher of twenty-plus years, "but since my retirement, it has become my passion." Four times named a Woody Guthrie poet, she now has a book of poems accepted for publication.

Ingrid Swanberg's most recent poetry has been published or is pending in *Osiris*, *Presa*, *Blueline*, *Indefinite Space*, *Big Hammer*, *Napalm Health Spa*, *Ginosko*, *12x2* (Marseille), and *Suzuki Grass* (Black Rabbit Press, 2010). A chapbook, *Eight Poems*, and a poem sequence, "in the dreamtime," currently appear in the online *Light & Dust Anthology of Poetry*. She is the editor of the poetry journal *Abraxas*, www.abraxaspressinc.com, and the director of Ghost Pony Press, www.ghostponypress.com.

Tammy Tillotson lives in rural Virginia with her husband and two small boys. Her work has appeared in *Becoming: What Makes a Woman* (University of Nebraska-Lincoln Gender Programs, 2012), *Chopin with Cherries* (Moonrise Press, 2010), the *Poet's Domain*, *Sweetbay Review*, *Tidal Basin Review*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, and the *Scream* online. Her first poetry chapbook, *Lady Fingers*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in the fall of 2012. When not writing, she makes jam, carts kids to soccer, and follows Akela.

Kerry Trautman writes at dawn before the clamor of the house's children begins. Her poetry and short fiction have appeared in various print and online journals, including *Alimentum*, *The Coe Review*, *The Toledo Review*, and *Think Journal*, as well as in the anthologies, *Tuesday Night at Sam and Andy's Uptown Cafe* (Westron Press, 2001), and *Mourning Sickness* (Omniarts 2008).

Brigit Truex has settled into the Sierra foothills of northern California, after living in various places both east and west. During her sojourns, she has been published in international journals including *Atlanta Review*, *Canary*, *Tule Review* and *Contemporary Literary Review: India*. Anthologies include *I Was Indian*, *Fog and Woodsmoke*, and *Broken Circles*. Her latest book is *Strong as Silk*, from Lummo Press.

Elly Varga is an avid hiker who loves the Pacific Northwest mountain wilderness. She has an MFA degree (from SIU Carbondale) and her works are published in collections of short stories and journals.

Ronja Vieth is a South African born German looking for a life which fruitfully combines teaching, traveling, and writing. She has been invited to read several pieces of her poetry and creative nonfiction at conferences in Wales (UK) and the US and has published in national and international journals including *The Brooklyn Review*, *The Southwestern Review*, *Taj Mahal Review* (India), and *Life is but a Verse* (Germany). Samples of her versatile work as scholar, writer, social media consultant, language instructor, and translator can be found on her Facebook and website: englobe.me.

J.S. Watts' poetry, short stories and book reviews appear in a wide variety of publications in Britain, Canada, Australia and the States including *Acumen*, *Envoi*, *Mslexia*, *Polu Texni* and *Orbis* and have been broadcast on BBC and Independent Radio. Her debut poetry collection, *Cats and Other Myths* is published by Lapwing Publications and her first novel is due out from Vagabondage Press in autumn 2012. For further details see <http://www.jswatts.co.uk/>, her website and <http://www.facebook.com/J.S.Watts.page>, her Facebook page.

Sarah Webb is the poetry and fiction editor for the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma's interdisciplinary journal *Crosstimbers* and co-editor of *Just This*, an online magazine of Zen and the arts from the Austin Zen Center. Zen has not eased her restless desire for adventure, and each summer she and her hound dog Rex roam the West in her Volkswagen camper-bus.

Bibi Wein is the author of three books, most recently *The Way Home: A Wilderness Odyssey*, which received the Tupelo Press Editor's Award for Prose. Her essays and short stories have appeared in *Iris*, *American Letters & Commentary*, *Hawk and Handsaw*, *Other Voices*, *Kalliope*, and many other magazines and anthologies. She has been a fellow of The New York Foundation for the Arts, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Blue Mountain Center, Artsmith, and Yaddo.

Lenore Weiss lives in Oakland, California where she has worked as a Content Developer for the high-tech industry. Her poetry has been widely published online and in print journals including *Nimrod International Journal*, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Canadian Women Studies Journal*, *Praxis*, and many

others. Her publications include three chapbooks and a full collection, *Cutting Down the Last Tree on Easter Island* (West End Press, 2012). She also has produced two CDs of spoken word poetry, "The Cell Phone Poems," and "Börte's Perfect Love Song."

Joanna M. Weston has had poetry, reviews, and short stories published in anthologies and journals for twenty-five years. Her poetry collection, *A Summer Father*, was published by Frontenac House of Calgary.

Laura Whalen is a writer/editor living in Albany, New York. She has studied at the New York State Writer's Institute and The Vermont Studio Center. She has also been a teacher of English in both the US and France. She has published poems in *Adanna's* inaugural issue and in *Blueline*.

Allison Wilkins is a graduate of the University of Nevada Las Vegas International MFA program. Other poems from her manuscript, *Girl Who...*, have appeared in or are forthcoming with *STILL*, *Broken Bridge Review*, *The Georgetown Review*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Tulane Review* and others. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Lynchburg College where she serves as Poetry Editor of the *James Dickey Review*.

Lisa Williams is the author of two books of poems, *The Hammered Dulcimer* (1998), which won the May Swenson Poetry Award, and *Woman Reading to the Sea* (2008), which won the Barnard Women Poets Prize. She has poems forthcoming in *Blackbird*, *Memorious*, *Raritan* and *The Louisville Review*. Lisa teaches at Centre College in Danville, KY.

Laura Madeline Wiseman has a doctorate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she teaches English. She is the author of five chapbooks including, *Branding Girls* (Finishing Line Press, 2011.) Her forthcoming chapbook is *She who Loves Her Father from Dancing Girl Press* in 2012. Her poetry has appeared in *Margie*, *Feminist Studies*, *Poet Lore*, *Cream City Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Her prose has appeared in *Arts & Letters*, *Spittoon*, *Blackbird*, *American Short Fiction*, *13th Moon*, and elsewhere.

Andrena Zawinski, Features Editor at PoetryMagazine.com, is an award winning teacher and writer. Her latest collection of poems, *Something About* (Blue Light Press, San Francisco), received a PEN Oakland award. She is editor of *Turning a Train of Thought Upside Down* (Scarlet Tanager Press, Oakland, CA), an anthology of poetry from the Bay Area Women's Poetry Salon she founded and runs. Her poetry appears widely online and in print.