

Camas

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CAMAS

An Environmental Journal



Winter 1992-1993

CAMAS

Dear Readers,

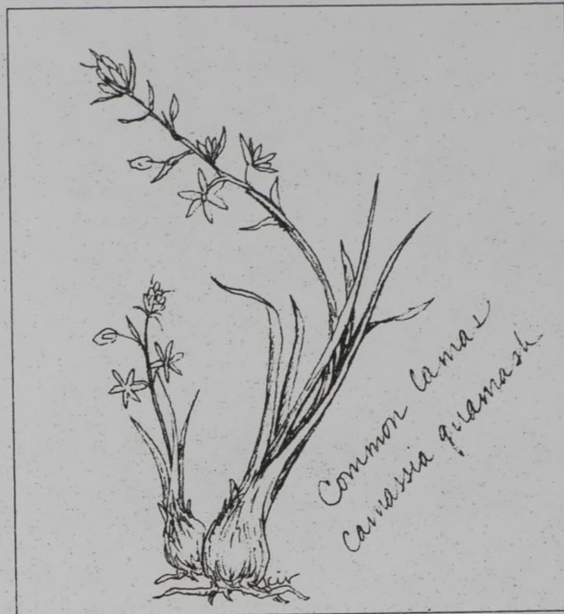
Welcome to *Camas*! This first issue highlights work from the Writing Wild Reading series held at *Freddy's Feed & Read* in the winter of 1991-92. During those readings, we heard bearded Dave Thomas shout about bears and watched Leslie Ryan walk through the desert in her poem "City of Rocks." Many other authors delighted the crowd. To encourage the creative community we found at those readings, we decided to publish a journal. Finally, a year later, it's here.

After much debate, we named the journal after the camas lily. The Salish of Montana's Bitterroot Valley harvested and roasted these sweet wild bulbs for food. Camas-gathering was a time of dancing and celebration, as well as work. We plan to publish *Camas* twice a year, in a similar spirit of celebrating good work. As we seek and select material to publish, we will favor regional writers and artists, because camas lilies grow best in western soil. We prefer the work of the lesser-known to bring a little more youth and diversity to a sometimes tired and homogeneous world. With those biases admitted, we nonetheless feel it can only be to our benefit to consider any work, on any subject.

At the first Writing Wild reading, Joel Thomas-Adams invoked Barry Lopez's "...ageless conversation, not only conversation among ourselves about what we mean and wish to do, but a conversation held with the land." As we put together this journal, those words guided us. We agree with Lopez that "...[I]n behaving respectfully toward all that the land contains, it is possible to imagine a stifling ignorance falling away from us." *Camas* hopes to provide a forum for this exchange by giving writers and artists a place to vent, to sing, to despair, to argue, and to pray.

The staff of *Camas* appreciates the generous support of *Freddy's Feed & Read* and the Environmental Studies Department at the University of Montana which made this first issue possible.

Camas welcomes your response to our venture. Please write us.



Submissions

We welcome fiction, poetry, non-fiction, art and black and white photographs focusing on nature and the environment. *Camas* favors work from regional, less-published writers and artists. We will return only submissions accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Write us at:

CAMAS
an environmental journal

c/o EVST
Jeannette Rankin Hall
Missoula, MT 59812

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Distribution: *Woody Beardsley and all of the above!*

Contributions

Shameless plea for money: *Camas* is a non-profit group, organized under the umbrella of the Associated Students of the University of Montana. If you would like to help us produce future issues, we are happy to accept donations. Make checks payable to the *Camas, John Dillon, Treasurer* and send to the address above.

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Dave Thomas

A Bear Story

Whenever he came out of the mountains we would sit together in the West Glacier Bar and drink. I stuck to canned beer but after a can or two himself he'd switch to shots and beers. We both worked for the Park Service. I was a laborer for the carpenters while he worked on a roving trail crew that would go off for ten days at a time to different areas of the park. Sometimes we would go to the Belton which was across the railroad and Highway 2 and was the only other saloon nearby. It sold just wine and beer but it had history. The Belton Chalet was the oldest building in or near the park; built by Great Northern Railway in 1906, it was now owned by the people who ran the Sperry and Granite Park Chalets—concessions leased from the Park Service. The bar in the Belton was run by a large male human being with an East Coast accent who bore a slight resemblance to a bear, a grizzly bear perhaps, and was known locally as Goliath.

The West Glacier Bar was closer to Park Headquarters. Right after work you could take a paved path that began by the Fire Cache, wound through trees along the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, and then climbed the bank of the Going-to-the-Sun Highway, which more or less began at the bridge over the river. Cross the bridge and you were in West Glacier. There were those who felt themselves to be residents of Belton, which was the railroad station, rather than West Glacier, and always took care to make the distinction. But in the West Glacier Bar you could get whiskey.

On days when he came in off a ten-four (ten days on the trails finished, ready to begin four days of drinking), I usually found him in the West Glacier Bar or he found me. My work was seldom arduous, especially during the peak tourist season, all the heavy building maintenance having been done earlier in the spring before the flood of summer visitors began to arrive. Now we did spot jobs here and there, working out of park headquarters, and spent a lot of time driving around in light green pick-up trucks. The trail crews however were busting ass because they had to keep the many trails in the park passable for the throngs of hikers and trains

Continued on p. 21



Photo: Greg Gordon

Jeanie Alderson

Overburden

Natalie, Mary and I sit pressed together in the front of the pickup. Irv slows down, reaches for his binoculars. "Look kids, there's a bog ol' owl sitting in that cottonwood tree."

"Daddy, we can walk to school from here," I say. He rolls up his window, doesn't seem to hear and drives on slowly.

"We don't want everyone to see we have a new pickup," Natalie says matter-of-factly. He pulls up in front of the school house. It feels like everyone is lined up to see.

"Oh, just tell 'em the ashtrays were full on the

other one." He chuckles.

We slide out one by one and grab lunch boxes and soft ball mitts out of the back. He makes a wide turn. Everyone gets a good look. Right away I hear a mean, loud voice; I feel my face burn as blood rushes.

"Did Mummy and Daddy get a new pickup? Is Mummy flying away for the weekend?"

"Shut up," Mary sparks.

"Come on, the bell's gonna ring. Let's choose teams for next recess," yells Kevin.

We all twelve gather. Carolyn Cox and Kevin Cady are captains. Of course Jenny B and Matt are chosen first. Then Jay and Char. Soon kids clutching mitts form two teams. Natalie, Mary and I stand together against the white wall of the school building. The Alderson girls. Natalie nudges me in the back and we move towards the swing set.

"Nobody wants rich Aldersons on their team," announces Matt.

I say under my breath, "I don't know why they call us rich. They're the ones who just bought a whole bunch of tractors with their coal money." Mary spins around. Matt is still standing there. "I told you to shut up, you goddamn, dirty, son-of-bitching coal miner." Suddenly she has him bent over the bottom part of the slide. As she drags him, his shirt comes up. I see his bare skin scrape against the peeling, green paint of the slide.

"All right, that's enough of you, missy!" Miss Boardman jerks Mary by the wrist. I think Mary's arm is going to detach from her tough little body. Natalie and I follow inside. "Go on, you two. This is none of your business. Stay outside. The bell hasn't rung yet," she says as she hoists Mary up to the sink. Natalie and I watch through the open window. Mary's legs dangle; her stomach is pressed into the sink. Her blond pigtailed quiver as Miss Boardman holds the back of her neck. The water runs. Miss Boardman reaches for a bar of soap. Natalie and I can't see Mary's face as the white bar is forced into her mouth. We can hear, "I don't care what your mother lets you get away with, but you will not use that language here." Mary never cries. I think this makes grown-ups more furious. I wish she'd cry. Natalie and I sit down on the steps. "I hate her," Natalie hisses. I put my arm around her and we wait for Miss Boardman to come outside and ring the bell.

Even now, the smell of those two rooms is dizzying. I usually just drive by, passing the small church, the school, the three or four houses and what used to be the general store. But on this visit the teacher, a friend, found out I was home for a few days and asked me to come talk to her students. I stood there talking about Costa Rica, Guatemala and Nicaragua to fourteen children ranging in age from six to twelve. Their eager eyes saw a grown-up who had been to far away places and who spoke another language. I felt so tall in that building. Those familiar little faces don't know of the war over coal development that split open this ranching community. Yet still it affects them. A railroad still might be put in. Twenty-three units a day, a hundred cars a unit, may roll by their school. But I don't think there will be a fight this time.

I sit out on the flagstone patio of the house I grew up in thinking about my visit to the Birney School yesterday. At 9:00 a.m. the hills already shimmer in the heat. As I sit here in the sun, I can feel sweat behind my knees. It's so quiet. Do these intricate old hills know the danger? Do they know that beneath them lies one of the nation's largest coal deposits? They must. They have recorded everything: drought, locusts, homesteaders, Mormon crickets. They know the secrets and sorrow of little kids who tickled them. The hills' outline is familiar, like someone else's face. Is it this familiarity that makes me feel protected? There is a wisdom to this familiar view. But who will watch out for these hills? They are the place we go when things are wrong. I thought the threat was over. Somehow it drifted away—or was that me? I think of the map inside on the dining room table. The Tongue River Railroad—a blue line on a white piece of paper, a benign mark that cuts through the valley, through ranches and through lives. The stone step beneath me soaks up August. My focus moves from the far off yucca and sage to the empty flower pots nearby. Big clay pots seem to wait for something. They once held life and color; now they mark its absence. This peaceful place rustles with loss. My mother didn't take anything but books, her paintings and clothes when she left.

I think of the map on the table and Irv's letter to the Interstate Commerce Commission. "A rancher shouldn't have to explain why he doesn't want a railroad through his pastures. . ." Does he wish she were here to write letters? To gather people? To tell the Interstate Commerce Commission what she thinks of their "news"? Would it make him feel better to see her on the phone to someone in Washington?

I don't even know whom to write. Who is going to stop this? Looking for something that will tell me what to do, I go inside to a dark room that nobody ever studied in. I open a closet. There

*My mother
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thing but
books, her
paintings and
clothes when
she left.*

await neatly stacked notebooks, environmental impact statements, books, journals, articles. All of this is familiar. I pull them out looking for information—something. I sift through papers, maps, documents, endless, boring material that suddenly fascinates me. What am I looking for? My eyes stop at big black letters: *The North Central Power Study*. It's heavy, the start of everything.

I would have been five.

In 1971, my parents went to a meeting where the plans of *The North Central Power Study* were explained. The study proposed building 42 coal burning power plants in the coal fields of the Northern Great Plains. Twenty-one were to be sited in eastern Montana. It also outlined mine, railroad and aqueduct sites. Ranchers were not asked what they thought; they were told what was going to happen. The study was horrifyingly explicit. It pinpointed locations and used dates for start-up times and named companies interested in setting it all in motion. My parents were told the Middle East was a dangerous place to have to rely upon for energy. They were told it was their patriotic duty to supply the nation with its energy needs. They were told environmentalists had made western coal attractive and necessary because it was the only low-sulfur coal in the country. They were told they were sitting on top of five hundred years worth of coal. They watched a slide show of fair-haired children bounding through tall grass: a depiction of what reclamation would do for their dry, useless country. The study not only made it seem like people of the region didn't matter, but spoke as if they didn't exist. My parents left that meeting feeling insulted, enraged and terrified. My mother began to fight.

She was sure that the community just needed to know the news of the study. She knew the women would be outraged, and as soon as they knew, they would unify the more reticent men. Mum forgot to consider three

factors: greed, apathy and fear. So much was happening so fast and so unguided that it was almost impossible to know what was going on. Shell Oil, Atlantic Richfield, Mobil, Exxon, Gulf, Chevron, Kerr-McGee, Peabody Coal, Westmoreland Coal, Reynolds Metals, North American Coal, Kewanee Oil, and others, scratched and clawed each other out of the way to secure permits and leases.

*I used to think my mother
didn't sleep...At night, I'd
wander down the hallway
and peer into the living
room. Madame Butterfly and
wine in a glass made the
room seem dark and red.*

My heart beats fast as I search through the material that once covered our kitchen table. I page through a document called "The Decker-Birney Plan." My eyes fasten on a map of the Fort Union

Formation. I see the Tongue River Valley, Hanging Woman Creek. The mineral rights are mapped out in shades of grey. The federal government, the BLM, Burlington Northern, the Crow, Northern Cheyenne and Fort Peck Reservations own the coal. "We don't own what's beneath this house," I say out loud. I remember a phrase from my childhood, one I didn't understand—still don't. The right of eminent domain. Other words pop out of my memory: surface owner's consent. Condemnation. I remember when John and Ethel Whitham, a couple in their eighties, called my parents. Their neighbors had told them that ranches on both sides of them had leased their land for the coal. In the early days, many ranchers thought coal leases were like oil leases. It was like free money. Now and then a seismograph crew would come through. In a dry year or a year when cow prices were low, oil-lease money enabled them to pay bills. The assumption was that coal leases would be the same.

Johnny and Ethel were overwhelmed with the threat of eminent domain and instant development. They were told a power plant was going to go up overnight. Like most of us they were isolated. They lived near Otter Creek, eighty miles from Sheridan, Wyoming. They didn't know anything about the laws or their rights. Threats, lies and promises flurried. The

land acquisition-tactics were outrageous. Company agents hovered like turkey vultures, proclaiming the inevitable: "You're surrounded by sellouts and federal coal; there's no point in holding out." "If you don't sell now your land will be condemned and you won't have land or money either. Sign here." People were conned into selling for next to nothing. Others didn't have to be cajoled. Ranching was tough and thankless work; some people wanted out of debt. Others were worn down by the offers, threats. As ranchers made their decisions, neighbors and families were severed.

Strip mines began to go up all over in a giant oval from Colstrip, Montana, to Gillette, Wyoming. Seeing their land, air, water—their entire way of life—threatened, some ranchers, known for their independence, united. In 1972, they formed the Northern Plains Resource Council.

It's difficult to imagine now. My mother's fight. It seemed to go on from our kitchen. The kitchen table stands in the same place the dingy yellow curtains still hang, reminding me that those hectic mornings in the

kitchen are only memory.

I must have been seven or eight.

"Mum, guess what?" I yelled as I got close to the backdoor. As I come in, she holds up one hand. The other hand is madly scribbling on one of the long, yellow pads spread among papers covering the kitchen table. Our kitchen table is always a mess. The phone is in its familiar cradle between her neck and shoulder. I hear her serious voice. I'll tell her about the books I got from the bookmobile later. I go to put on my boots. As I head out the door for the barn she hangs up the phone.

"Sorry," she says. "That was an important call. I have to testify tomorrow. I don't know what's going to happen to all these vegetables. I've got the entire garden in this kitchen because it's going to freeze, and I have to write a speech. Tell your Daddy we'll eat late."

We always eat late, I think. "Bye," I say, but her eyes are out the window. She delicately picks at her bottom lip.



Photo: Grev Gordon

"Hi Pard," Irv says as he leads his horse out of the barn. "Got your boots on? I've been waiting for them to let you out of that school. A kid shouldn't be inside on a day like this. Did your little sister rimfire any boys today?" he laughs. He seems to be proud of Mary for dragging Matt McKinney over the slide.

"No," I say, reaching for a halter. I can't tell him what Miss Boardman did to her. He'd tell Mum and that would make everything worse. I'm glad to get away from that two-room building and playground which will never be big enough for the differences that divide the community. Irv and I ride to the top of Sheep Gulch. The grass is high up here. The wind blows, reminding us there aren't many warm days left. As the rocks change color with evening light, Irv tells me about Cayuse Bill and High Chinned Bob.

*Way high up the Mogollons
Among the mountains' tops,
A lion cleaned a yearlin's bones
And licked his thankful chops,
When on the picture who should ride,
A-trippin' down slope,
But High-Chin Bob, with sinful pride
And Mav'rick hungry rope. . .*

The next morning Natalie packs lunches for the three of us. I sit on Irv's lap while he yanks at my hair and puts it in two braids. Mum comes down the hall, all dressed up. Her long, black braid tied with a beaded hair piece by Mable Fighting-Bear decorates her back. She wears makeup—"war paint," Irv calls it.

"Come on, you three, get in the car," she says, covering the crock pot. "I'm going to be late. I have a two-and-a-half hour drive and a plane to catch." Grabbing lunch boxes, we head out the door. Just as I think to remind Irv to pick us up early from school, I hear the pickup drive over the cattle guard. He has already left. Mum didn't notice.

In a windowless room full of men, pitchers and glasses of water, people passing around documents, she waits to give her testimony. Members of her team wait too. Men and women who belong outdoors, people from all over: Native Americans, Appalachian hill people and underground miners are all dressed neatly, their faces determined. Looking at her audience and with a voice that people can't help but hear, she begins:

My name is Carolyn Alderson. My husband and I own and operate a ranch in Birney, Montana. I am here today as a board member of the Northern Plains Resource Council, a

development

The sick apotheosis
of places into postage stamps:
dead things naming no place
into abstract life—
Willow Glen, Deer Creek, Mountain View—
subdivision office space parking lot
staked and signed, posted, named
for living dancing webs of life
forever silenced, dying into language.

A rabbit frantic on the runway,
deer along the highway's edge,
a shabby osprey who frets
the putrid river:
all the dispossessed milling
in the blurring margins.

Joel Thomas-Adams

While we work toward freedom
night and day the ovens
send the living skyward
and the harsh fences
of the camps engulf the town.
We work now where we kill;
we are killed killing:
snake frog baby slug columbine
settle out as ash
upon the sterile fields,
upon our darkening minds.

citizens group based in Billings, Montana. . . . I am here because the history, present and future, of the land and its people are in danger because of the existence of coal. . . . To those of you who would exploit us, don't underestimate us and the land together as 'overburden' and dispense with us as nuisances. Land is historically the central issue in war. We are descendants, spiritually if not actually, of those who fought for this land once and we are prepared to do it again. We intend to win.

(Carolyn Alderson, Symposium on Energy, Oct. 25, 1972)

Resting on top of all these books and journals in this lost closet are legal pads, my mother's handwriting, her words, her story. I glance at the table of contents of a social science journal: "The Social Impacts of Energy Development in the West." I wonder what happened to all those people who drifted in and out of our lives in those years. We always had people staying with us. For years we hosted "ists" — sociologists, anthropologists, journalists, environmentalists. My mother gathered important information from these people, facts and details she desperately needed to protect the land and its people. For her the two could not be separated. It had become clear to her that wherever there was destruction of land, water and air there was destruction of human culture and individual human lives. Or maybe it was that whenever human beings were devalued environmental destruction happened. People from other places, other fields, gave her the information she needed to speak the value of the place and its people. They were her allies in a vicious struggle.

They were strange people. They had peculiar accents. The men wore short-sleeved shirts and oddly colored pants, some even wore shorts and had long hair. They asked endless questions, but they thought Birney was beautiful. I wondered about the places they came from. One man took Natalie, Mary and me down the Tongue River in his canoe. One woman helped me feed animals and wanted to know all their names. I cherished a bright green bumper sticker I was given that said, "BAN COLSTRIP UNITS 3+4." But mostly I remember how important my mother seemed to these people and how important they were to her. I felt sad for her sometimes when they left.

Irv seemed to vanish when people came. They

came to see the ranch and my mother. Yet I remember in the evenings they would all talk. Voices were urgent but soft. People laughed. Dad would tell stories and play old cowboy songs. We got to stay up late. This all changed when the five of us were alone again. Voices changed. Tones turned sharp, loud; "You spend more time fighting for this country than you do getting to know it" — a comment that was meant and taken as a



Photo: Greg Gordon

blow. Doors slammed and silence felt dangerous.

But mornings would come and Natalie, Mary and I would leave for the hills. We had secret houses all over. We would change our names and invent our lives. Horses would carry us if we decided we had a long way to go. Places with rocks like giant dominoes and tangled cedar trees made the best forts. We would work hard hauling branches and rocks. When we had things the way we wanted, we would go visit one another to see if the others' places were as spectacular as our own. Sometimes we'd get distracted from our busy imaginary lives because someone, usually Mary, would find a fossil or a rabbit or a place we were sure a coyote family lived. In the spring when the red dirt turned to mud we would make

dishes for our houses. Usually it was Natalie who decided we had to quit for the day. She was the oldest and Mary and I let her be that. We were never quite ready to leave, but we knew that even if adults or school kept us away, we could eventually pick up where we left off.

The three of us have always been so protective of one another. I guess we had to be. I wonder what Natalie and Mary would think of me sitting here looking at environmental impact statements? Do they remember? We don't talk much about when we were little.

I look through a big black binder marked "Environmental Policy Center." I see a list of directors and the chairperson—Carolyn Alderson. I knew she was on boards. That always sounded funny to me. I kind of imagined someone standing on a two-by-four. The binders are full of neatly clipped newspaper articles, letters, notes. I open another binder to a photograph from the *Washington Post*. President Carter hugs Mum's good friend, Louise Dunlap. They're in the Rose Garden. Carter has just signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA). There's another picture of him shaking Mother's hand. Their smiles stand out of the picture. The bill had been vetoed four times. All those trips to Washington. Meetings with EPC, with coalitions, briefings, hearings. Irv said if Mum had an Indian name it would be Carolyn Goes-To-Washington.

Louise had set up The Coalition Against Stripmining. It included groups from Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Navajo and Northern Cheyenne, even groups from Texas and Alabama. For four years they all met in a church in Washington. A national strip mine bill was crucial because state legislatures were powerless against companies who played one state against another. Each time it was vetoed they had to start all over. The coalition reconfigured, as did the issues. The struggle became harder and harder, with each issue demanding its own battle. Most members of the coalition wanted nothing short of an outright ban on strip mining. Many Indian groups thought organizations like NPRC were not sensitive to their economic needs. Not all the groups stood firm on all the issues, so they lost fights. But when it was finally signed, SMCRA set up regulations that fit different regions: the steep mountains of Appalachia were drastically different from the semi-arid plains of Montana—which were different again from the fragile desert coal-lands of New Mexico and Arizona.

The bill set up the regional Offices of Surface Mining and most importantly, it called for written surface owner's consent. Passing it was a monumental event. But Mum was tired. She was skeptical that the regulators would hold up the

letter or the spirit of the law. The battles to keep more power plants from being built in Colstrip had been going on simultaneously and regulations were circumvented. SMCRA seemed less than they needed. They had won, but not enough. I think of Mum's friends Louise and Joe. They are still in Washington, still fighting. What happened to their friend Carolyn Alderson?

Carter signed the bill in 1977. No congratulations came from Irv or others at home. Things seemed to change after that. Fewer people came to our house. My parents had gotten used to hurting one another. Natalie left for boarding school a year later, and I followed two years later. What a relief it was to leave. By 1982 we had all three gone. In 1983 my parents were divorced.

I put everything back in the cupboard. Suddenly I have to leave this room. I go to the living room to sit down. The arms of Irv's chair are patched with duct tape. This room has changed the most. The copper pots are tarnished. Mum's drawing of the horse pasture still hangs but the huge canvasses

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Karin Schalm

of color, nudes and light are gone. The impractical, north-facing window that Irv has always hated still lets the hills into the room. At night, lightning, northern lights and the moon sweep in. Mum loves the moon. Irv goes to bed and rises with the sun. I used to think my mother didn't sleep. I was intrigued by her ritual. At night, I'd wander down the hallway and peer into the living room. Madame Butterfly and wine in a glass made the room seem dark and red. Sitting there writing, she seemed so far away. I would be careful not to disturb her world. It seemed important. Why did she need to be so far away from daytime? Now I recognize her loneliness.

I remember a few summers ago when Irv and I had one of our rare discussions of why Mum left. At the outset of the conversation I was angry. I wanted him to take some responsibility. By way of apology, he told me a story. He began to tell me about a Rural Electric Association meeting he and Mum had gone to. He told me of how Allen Fletcher stood up and said, "Carolyn Alderson has become a bad word in these parts." I didn't want him to go on with the story. I wanted to tell him it was all fine, I understood. But he had to tell me this. He continued, "I sat there, I let her take that, I didn't say a word." I don't know what his face looked like when he told that story. I couldn't look at him.

Standing in the hallway, I notice the picture of Mum at twenty-four. This girl who grew up in the Bighorn Mountains was sent to boarding school at thirteen, went to college in New York, came back to marry a cowboy because she missed the smell of horses and the colors of her home. She looks older than I do now at twenty-five. It's a bit odd no one has taken this wedding portrait down. It doesn't occur to Irv to change anything. The picture hangs above the table covered with feed bills, the *Agrineews* and a map of the Tongue River Railroad.

If the railroad goes in, there will be renewed incentive to mine the coal. Finally there will be a way to move it. Building is projected to begin in 1995. I think of calling Mum. But that won't help. This part of my life is her past. It's the middle of the day. What am I doing inside? The hills change with the weather and the time of day, but they are constant. I climb over the pole fence and start to trudge. The sky is huge. Flies buzz; something chatters and heat wafts the smell of wild rose my way. It feels good to be outside. My back hurts from sitting bent over books for so long. I get to the red and purple rocks, and from up here the house looks tiny. I keep going up, working my way through the rocks, Ponderosa and cedar. A Mule Deer bounds out ahead of me. The house is out of sight. Finally I reach the huge open flat. I can run in any direction and reach a view I might not have seen before. I always get the urge to laugh or cry really loud up here. 



Greg Gordon

Bones and Fat

One day when Raven was very hungry, but as he was also lazy, he thought, "I will go and make Boy get me some food."

So Raven flew to the village where Boy lived. Boy was playing near the water. He was throwing pebbles high into the air and catching them. As Boy tossed his prettiest pebble, Raven swooped down and snatched it right out of the air.

"Hey you nasty bird, come back with that!" Boy yelled and chased Raven.

So that Boy could keep up, Raven was careful not to fly too fast.

Raven flew and flew. Soon Boy was in a country he didn't know. But he continued to chase Raven.

They reached a ridge and Raven dropped the pebble. Boy didn't notice, for below were hundreds of caribou.

"My people will never be hungry again," cried Boy. "I must hurry back to the village and bring the hunters."

"Think how much better it would be if you had meat to bring back," said Raven, who perched beside him.

Boy knew Raven was tricky, yet what he said made sense. His family would be so happy to see him bring home some meat.

"But how can I catch a caribou all by myself?" he asked.

"You can build Stone Men along the ridges. I will cry an alarm and all the caribou will think the Stone Men are hunters and will run away from them. They will run toward you waiting at the valley mouth," said Raven.

"What a grand idea!" said Boy and spent the afternoon building Stone Men.

When all the Stone Men were built, Boy hid at the valley mouth while Raven flew over the caribou shrieking the alarm.

The caribou stampeded toward the valley mouth and Boy was quickly trampled.

Raven feasted.



winterkill

Salt girl you looked back
as I looked up at last
skewered on sour logic's loss,
passing out of the frozen zone
where winter's dead gathered
dark gardens in the snow,
boneyards and flowers,
bright wind over black jewels
cast

blind into morning I saw you
the cinnamon flash of elk
melting into alders where
wind etched spring into my face

and the winter wren shattered summer
on my shoulders from her sheltered bank,
chips and shards of living light
I took in gasping.

I am restless now with autumn
and the beasts in the trees
are restless now. Salt girl,
I hear your people skying
in the frigid dawn, Salt girl,
look back alone into the trees
before they're gone.

Joel Thomas-Adams



Photo: Bruce Morrison

Swimming off the Labrador Coast

What does the polar bear
think about, swimming
sixty miles into open
ocean? Does he peer
through the frigid deep and find
himself floating free. Or
lick his lips in salty
expectation of
sleeping seals on distant
ice. Could he be
lost or scared or all
alone, fleeing some frozen
past of carcasses, gutted
whale, broken bones. Or does
he simply swim
to pull a solid paw through the
forgiving wash of water.

Dave Havelick



Photo: Bruce Morrison

Diane Krahe

Parted from Within

Just after sunset, our world on the mesa glows cold. The snowy road behind us hints blue. The clear sky above azure, the Sangre de Cristos navy. Before heading home, we watch the full moon pop over the mountains, just south of the peak. Balanced precariously for an instant before freeing itself to the heavens, I think it may just slowly roll its way down the ridge, coming to rest in the Rio Pueblo drainage: an unhurried, silvery splash in the Taos Pueblo's sacred Blue Lake.

The lake's silent waters parted once before, long ago, but from within. Here the Pueblo people emerged from their former underworld. Now the lake's skin is pulled taut, like a drum's, and glistening, telling only the life of this upperworld in its reflection. With its potable water, the lake continues to nurture those it delivered. Downstream at the Pueblo, Indian women still scoop buckets from the rushing waters for household use.

My passageway to this place remains indiscriminately open to anyone who wishes to follow me. It lies beyond the mountains: Interstates 25 and 70. I don't like to think of the U.S. highway system as my lifeline. The reality of angry Safeway semis screaming past me on my three-day journey west reminds me otherwise. I know the double-ply of pavement thread across the Appalachians, the Mississippi and the Great Plains is not sacred to me. My destination, northern New Mexico, has come to be.

I've known only three changes of seasons in Taos Valley, arriving last June in time for spring's wet, final-encore snowstorm. Now, as we walk the mesa edge before dinner, the soft flicker of Christmas *luminarias* dot the protruding *vigas* of scattered neighborhood adobes below. The dry December snow crunches like baking powder under our feet. My thoughts turn to the cranberry bread I'll soon be baking, and my homeward pace quickens. The cold sets in on my toes, as the blue around us darkens. Our neighbors must be stoking their fires. The smell of *piñon* cuts the thin, empty air. Fine wisps rise straight up from their chimneys and stripe the deepening navy backdrop of the mountains. This land

holds an unnameable presence that has made its way within me.

"Do not think me affected when I say my heart ached. It was physical pain produced in me by what I saw," wrote Elizabeth Cumming in 1858. Her husband was assigned the office of Utah's first territorial governor, and together they traveled the overland wagon trails to meet her affliction, the Wasatch Range. Mine is the Sangre de Cristos.

I've witnessed these mountains bleed in the last light of day, as the first Spaniards did in the 16th century and so named the range. The mountains humble me. Their energy both soothes and pains me most as I wade through the open mesa's sea of sagebrush and jackrabbits. From here the mountains stand a bit distant and mysterious and accepting of my simple existence. Here, like nowhere else I've known, it is enough just to be.

But surely only a newcomer could be so infatuated as to know heartache. "The mountain sat there

Dixon, Missouri

The town falls dead where the strip mall went up last summer. Saturdays, soldiers lean against traffic signal poles or slope back to base drunk, thumbing rides.

While the too-young drink beneath bridges near the warehouses where the johns coast in with their headlights off, and we get dressed for the bars, the old survive slowly pushing carts, turning channels, wiping dishes after dinner and the news. A lesson in camouflage.

This Fall is a struck match. Around the river the forest burns the billboards down. The old survive. Their methods are the river's.

Barton Longacre

beaming—spread out in the bliss of effortless being,” wrote Mabel Dodge Luhan, one of Taos’ favorite daughters. Her first loving look at Taos Mountain, in 1917, was also in the frigid December twilight. “There they all waited, snow-capped, glowing like unearthly flowers, a garland of mystery beyond the known world.” The clean, simple lines of the landscape welcome us. The mountains politely conceal the added demands we will put on their water, soil, skies and other inhabitants—human and nonhuman. I am an intruder to the black bear’s shrinking mountain habitat and the golden eagle’s kingdom of the Rio Grand Gorge. I am an intruder to the isolated world of the local Hispanics and Indians, a world recognized as one of the most poverty-stricken rural pockets of the country. My presence burdens them all, but the land silently asks me to stay.

We all have our newcomer stories, we the too-numerous newcomers. Our stories could grow tired in repetition. What brought us West, how we are now so quickly bound to our new spirit places, how our optimism and skill will save the abused land. For now, I am no savior but a stranger, as Elizabeth and Mabel once were. Somehow, their humble words of awe validate my tentative sense of belonging. They were white Eastern women, too. We share a connection, with this place and our semi-conscious souls, awakened by the cold, affectionate slap of a land that breathes and laughs and hurts along with us. I am parted from within, and the cultivation of my purpose here begins.

As I stomp the snow from my boots on the front step, I catch a glimpse of my flushed, stinging cheeks in the door’s glass. The dawning moon has relaxed its race skyward, spilling more and more diamonds to the powdery blue earth as it climbs. The mountains sleep beneath their night blanket.



Never Bother to Bury Coyote Twice

I carry the smell of death on my hands.
I’ve dragged a coyote by all four legs,
leaving half his brains on the hot desert highway.

I wonder how long he’s been lying there
letting the flies lick his anus?

Glassy-eyed and stiff, he watches me
toss his carcass across the curb,
behind the creosote.

I catch the toothy flash of a grin
as I walk away,
wiping the grit from my fingers.

Sundown: Coyote’s piss drunk in a bar by now.

Scratching my hands and feet,
I curse him for giving me his dirty fleas.

Coyote’s laughing, howling at the headlights
reflected off the moon. He’s running across the road
swaggering belligerently from side to side.

Caught once again between the wheels,
he lies there waiting for the sun.

I pass his flattened body again and again
before realizing I’m walking in circles.

Come morning, Coyote has stolen the straw hat
from my very head. I find it lying in the road,
the brim crushed under with excrement.

If I see him again, I will not stop.

Karin Schalm



City of Rocks

On the eighth day, the snake who keeps the canyon
mouth
with his sharp one, rattled to my foot
"watch your step."
Muted by the unabashed burgeoning of arrowleaf
balsamroot,
I rubbed fire out of sage and heard
the canyon breathe a diminishing sigh of light.

On the ninth day, hunting out
a cranny or cave should the desert decide
no longer to sleep against the galaxies
unsheathed, like a naked cub
spread bare in exhausted afterplay, limbs askew
and dangling over the mesa rim,
but choose instead to clothe itself in the animal cloud
which skids across a clear atmospheric floor
with all four heels planted, shooting up sparks,
I sought out a place to hide.
And the place I called ideal
had been marked by an unearthed human skull.

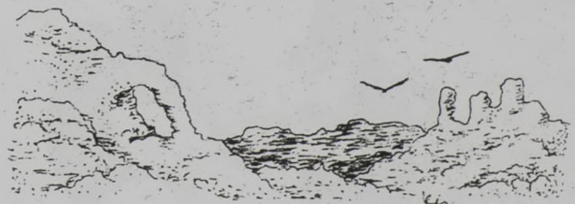
On the tenth day, white splats, a bolus
of bones, and a trail of feathers led up a chute of
basalt
to a natural tower,
a ceilingless room of black rock
where the owls sat watching
on their high altar.
Only a casket-length block of breath
stood between our unblinking pairs of eyes.
The two great, horned owls absorbed my presence
with their belonging, and we shared
the silence there, in the belly of the reaching rock,
for so long that my hands and feet grew tingling and
lost
and retrieved again in many cycles.
The softness of the owls rested on them like an aura,
and the youngest took to grooming casually
a wing, as if our friendship were old
and comfortable, and we might braid each others' hair
by the stream

or nuzzle in the thorny nest, had not the species-space
grown up between us.

It was then that I heard the first sound emerge
as if it issued from my own head.
Louder it grew into a hum, louder into a drone, a
menace,
a blare and louder
into a screaming roar, a shaking of the sky,
and clamping my ears thinking rockfall
I fought the instinct to duck and turned instead
to the blue slash above the owl's room and in
the same look I could see for an instant the deafening
slice
of warcraft swerving low maneuvers,
and the two owls,
patient, unruffled.
Their hearing, once attuned to the scraping of mice
or the breathing of hares, perhaps had already
screeched away on the backs of these devices, faster
than the speed of sound.

When the air calmed, the owls dismissed me
by closing their eyes and nestling their chins
into pillowy chests.
Later, as I lay beneath the open sky, delayed
cracks of rockfall
punctuated space long into night.
Weathering pits now widen in the rocks which spoke
that night, and badgers dig below.
But sometimes I hear it still, tucked
just beneath the silence: something dropped by
mistake,
the distant muffle, the bang,
the thud of approaching consequence,
footsteps in the irrefutable corridor.

Leslie Ryan



Jenny Flynn

Guns and White Gloves

I sat in the outhouse, happily tinkling away, watching with pleasure the moonlit view of the Swan Range over a green wall of feathery conifers. I was musing out, towards the mountains, but I was familiar enough with the outhouse's interior to see it without looking. Stolen Forest Service trail signs propped the otherwise spare and sagging walls. Behind my back, they pointed crazily to mysterious places, like Lost Creek Trail (6 miles →) and Pinto Mare Road North. A patchwork plank nailed above the seat boasted the outhouse's name: Six Mile Deep John.

I'm fascinated with outhouses because they are new in my life. In the middle-class suburbs of New Jersey, anti-septic indoor plumbing was an omnipresent and dubious benefit of the landscape. College supplied even more luxury: when I left Vassar, a student group was lobbying put t.v. screens in the dormitory bathrooms. Vassar. It's a word I can taste, but it doesn't slide cleanly past my tongue like water or beer. It lingers, rich and textured like a fine chocolate slowly melting in the heat of the mouth. The center, when reached, reveals the bitter flavor of almonds. It's a flavor I'm slowly mingling with less refined tastes. To Northeasterners, a "Vassar Girl" is privileged, spoiled, and smart. She wears silk blouses and leather shoes in matching hues.

There are some stories of wildness at the college, like this one about Jane Fonda: A Vassar Girl in the rebellious '60's, and a rebellious girl anyway, she came down to afternoon tea in the Rose Room without the required pair of white gloves. She was told: "Go upstairs and don't come back without your gloves!" She went to her room, put on her gloves, took off the rest of her clothes, and disappeared out the massive door of Main Hall on the back of a motorcycle, driven by her black boyfriend. Is this story true? I doubt it. But I like the image of a voluptuous, pre-aerobics Jane cruising over the hardwood floor and Persian rug on a motorcycle, wearing only dainty white dinner gloves.

I was never the Vassar Girl of the popular imagination. I wore sweatpants to class; I lived on the charity of

scholarships. But I gladly shared in the life of the mind I found there, enjoyed the revolving colors of daily-updated tulips resting in beds in front of Main Hall, and unself-consciously used the coed indoor plumbing (soft toilet paper provided).

The owner of the outhouse and the cabin next door is a friend from more recent, western days. He knows nothing of the multicolored tulips, fancy chocolates, and soft toilet paper one finds at elite liberal arts institutions in the East. But he's a hell of a lumberjack, and knows how to create an atmosphere of his own. I left him a few minutes before, preparing the sleeping loft with candles and glasses of homebrewed beer and lots of warm fuzzy things to keep me comfortable through the night.

Bed was on my mind. I was tired in a satisfying, physical way. I was also in pain. We spent the day cutting and dragging some downed logs to the cabin to serve as the start of next year's wood supply. Mark introduced me to the unique pleasures of log tongs, on either end of which a human being comes to know the sorry lot of oxen. The tongs grip a log, and two people shoulder an attached metal pole, one on each side, half-pushing, half-dragging the log behind them. It's crushing work. Mark is well over six feet tall and has done manual

labor all his life. I am what is politely known as "petite." I'm more used to using brain than muscle to get things done. My hands ached where I had gripped too hard in a futile and unnecessary effort to match his strength. I honored the pain. I had earned it.

This new rustic life pleased me. Noting how the bulk of the mountains shut out the stars but not the faithful moon, I thought: There's more to life than soft toilet paper and literary criticism (indeed, one could argue that they are one and the same). That evening, the residual Vassar taste in my mouth was edged with rice, beans, and Jim Beam. I liked it.

Then, into the silence behind me, footsteps rang out.

I started. The only other humans Mark and I had seen for days were hunters who regularly stumbled off of Forest Service land and onto his property in armed pursuit of deer and elk.

Again, the footsteps.

Oh shit. I childishly imagined a psycho elk-marauder discovering me with my pants down...I pulled up my

*As he passed, he
handed me a small,
ivory-white pistol.
"Oh no..." I said.
"Take it. It's a .22.
It won't stop anyone
but it'll make them
think."*

Carharts and clomped over my own rutted track back to the cabin. Upstairs, Mark was still shuffling around.

"You didn't just go outside, did you?" I called up to him hopefully.

"No."

"Well, it may be nothing, but I thought I heard someone out there."

"What?"

"Well, I heard footsteps behind me."

"How close were they? Did you hear any other sounds?" He questioned me as I ascended into the loft where I found him standing, shotgun already in hand. The sight did not shock me. I wanted him to protect me. My feminist self balked and teased, but my fearful reaction to those footsteps in the dark had cast me into an old story I knew from books but had never lived before. I needed to play it to the end.

We were both more nervous than usual. Each day at dusk, the woods around Cold Creek became a firing range. Some hunters, anticipating an unsuccessful end to their day, emptied their guns into the creeping shadows in haphazard frustration. And that morning, while Mark was checking the creek bed for coyote tracts (he loves coyotes and was hoping a pair had set up shop on his land), one rifle shot, then another brushed past his arm. He called out, but heard nothing, no more shots and no answering voice.

"I'm going out to see."

He started downstairs. As he passed, he handed me a small, ivory-white pistol. "Oh no..." I said. "Take it. It's a .22. It won't stop anyone but it'll make them think."

Before I had time to express my philosophical opposition to the use of force, he was down the stairs and out the door. I stood alone in the candlelight holding the tiny, beautifully worked, feminine-looking piece.

The moment held an aura of inevitability, as though I realized I was lost only as I stumbled into the center of the labyrinth.

I had shot before. Last summer, Mark took me to a dump and passed me weapon after weapon which I aimed at a series of tin cans and wood blocks propped fifty yards away on a plank. We started with a rifle. I cradled it in the crook of my arm, like a baby, and waited for the kick that never came. The shot was a distant occurrence, only obliquely

related to the touch of my finger on the trigger. The surge of power I had expected and dreaded remained aloof: target shooting is a mechanical, calculated act, more akin to chess than murder. Later I discovered the fun of the shotgun, which can blow away a whole line of cans with one vaguely aimed shell. I came to enjoy shooting the rifle; the scope gave me an accuracy my unaided eye does not possess. Only the pistol made me nervous; it was too much like an extension of my own hand.

The experience in the dump was a controlled experiment, conducted on moral high ground, for the sake of knowing tools I associated with the foreign world of men. Shooting targets last summer didn't help me make sense of what was happening now. This was something new. What was I—liberal, female, intellectual, East-coast, vegetarian, basic good gal—doing standing in a Montana sleeping loft holding a gun which I may use to shoot another human being for the crime of disturbing my midnight pee?

I focused automatically on the contrast between the frilly appearance of the gun (it looked like a fancy two-step boot) and its solid weight on my palm. I tolerated it with repugnance and fascination, the same twinned feeling I have as I repatriate summer spiders I find in my bedroom back to the outdoors. When I summoned the courage to listen beyond the rise and fall of my ballooning lungs, I heard only the usual creak of branches along the roof.

Then, I did the two things Vassar Girls do best: I started to think, and I started to cry. The thoughts rushed from everywhere, incriminating, contradictory little beasts yammering all at once for my attention. One wore a T-shirt proclaiming, "You get what you want." Another counseled patient faith in Mark. The most powerful whispered in pictures. It spoke of Eskimo murders in the winter

darkness, and the clotted backbone of a butchered elk on the snow; from it's narrative flowed the danger and evil and dirt inherent in this rustic life.

Then I thought about the death of a caribou I had witnessed a few months before in Alaska. Three wolves tested a small group by chasing them. A spring calf lagged behind. The wolves worried it in turn. Finally, thrashing though a braided glacial stream, it fell. It died quickly on the gravel bar.



Photo: Bruce Morrison

The wolves performed a ritual, sniffing and touching each other, raising their heads up to the sky. I took it as a kind of grace. Then they began to eat.

I witnessed only the moment of death, but I could imagine the birth: A few weeks before, a panting mother had revealed her tipsy, bloodied calf to the waiting herd. When the wolves killed it, the herd absorbed the loss as it had the gain—it moved quietly on to feed, as though relieved.

A basic and comforting realization emerged through my fear and moral discomfort in the loft. Death is misleadingly obvious. Viewed alone, it bleeds the individual out of existence. Yet each death is a moment in a long, subtle narrative. The story of death begins with the wringing of blood into empty bone, an apparent zero. But death doesn't nullify; it frees.

So it was not death that made me cry in the sleeping loft, or killing. It was violence. Unlike death and killing, violence seems to be a human characteristic. Human, but not omnipresent. I have rarely felt that thing that makes one person want to kill another, or an animal. I am trying to unravel death and killing from violence, for the sake of understanding. Is violence present when a hunter—wolf or human—kills for food, only for food, and with respect? I don't think so. Death and killing—for eating, for self-preservation—are morally neutral. Only violence is wrong.

When I heard heavy foot steps on the porch, and then in the living room, I gripped the gun closely in my fist. I had my tool; I thought I was ready. But what exactly was I ready for?

"It's me." Mark called upstairs.

"Well?"

"I looked for tracks behind the outhouse. You're sure the footsteps were coming from behind you?"

"Positive."

He laughed, and climbed enough stairs that his head poked into the loft.

"Well, there are tracks all over the place alright: elk tracks."

Guns, as I experienced them target shooting in the dump, are loud and obnoxious toys. The gun I was still

holding in my hand was not a toy, but not necessarily a tool of violence either. In my hand, in that moment, it was for self-preservation. If some friend had asked me in a late-night Vassar conversation if I would use a gun to defend my life, my repugnance with guns as tools of violence would have caused me to say no. And if that friend had asked if hunting was wrong, I would have answered with an unqualified yes. It was easy to be righteous with words in that white-gloved place. Now I see a more complicated world, like the happy forgotten poet who asked,

*O why do you walk through the fields in gloves,
Missing so much and so much?*

*O fat white woman whom nobody loves,
Why do you walk through the fields in gloves?**

I understand Jane Fonda's need for rebellion. It's not just rebellion, it's embracing the world beyond the limits of childhood and class and culture. In my case, I want to know the worlds of chopping wood, coyotes, midnight elk, and stars over the Swans. That means knowing something of killing

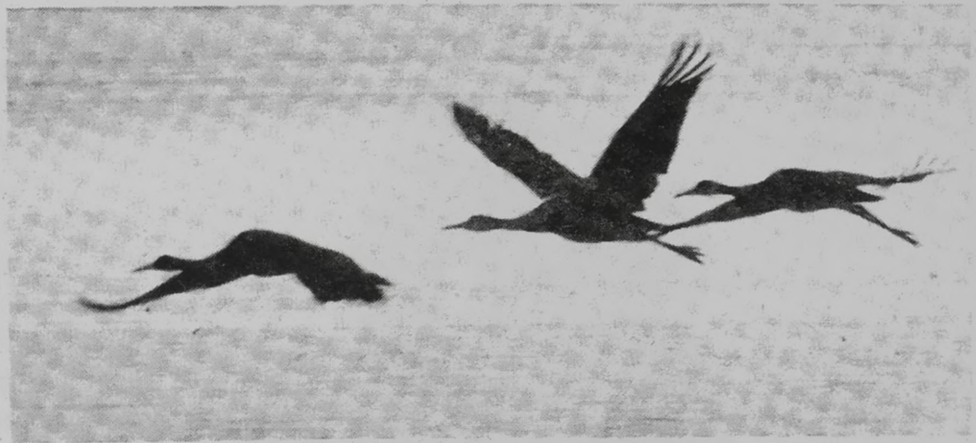


Photo: Bruce Morrison

too. And here in Montana, here in the human world, it means knowing something of violence, and of guns. These lessons are not taught by teachers and students wearing, if only mentally, white gloves. These I need to find outside, in the grip of a log tong, in the fearful smack of a bullet against a creek bed, and in the raw sweet taste of whiskey.

* Frances Cornford, "To a fat lady seen from the train"



Face to Face on Apgar

a nameless
terror grabs
me as I stand
with more
before my eyes
than I can
stand to see
a closeness
that threatens
my civilized
mind so used
to four walls
now this huge
circle
beyond my possible
self
a sky so blue
my name
is lost
peaks so jagged
I have no mind
I want to escape
this voidness
the beauty
it holds
is more
than any word

Photo: Bruce Morrison



The Ground
Squirrel Buddha
of this place
keeps an eye
on us all
I am nervous
from last night's
beer breakfast
coffee sex thoughts
beside the point
this wind
this wind!
keeps us
all alive
like a broken
down medicine
man I can hardly
stand
I must bow
to the Four Directions
and love
the wind

What?
this radio
antenna?
this lookout
shack?
the repeater
station with its
tower? These
things? Parkwide
communication: Mount
St. Nicholas
talks
to Mt. Brown
in cloud
language
the sun listens
like chlorophyll
coursing leafy veins
in a huckleberry
patch grizzly shit
on the switch back
trail.

Dave Thomas

Crazy Fish Lake

In this lake, cutthroat talk.
Listen, you say, put your ear against the waves.
This is sacred land to the Salish. I step lightly
so sticks won't echo that I'm white.

Following you through trees,
I push branches from my eyes to watch
branches in front of you move
gently from your way, whispering
Salish in your moving.

In your fishing spot, you listen to waves.
Cutthroat give themselves to you I catch
nothing. I put my ear to shallow water
and hear small fish laughing.

At camp, you try teaching me to talk Salish to sticks,
ways of breathing wind to become sky, buckbrush, pine-
the way to talk cutthroat in by listening.

I pay too much attention to the sounds
of strange shadows growing around me.
I catch nothing you say.

Kevin Goodan

in the flyway

Birds come back to clearcuts
not from blank necessity
but luminous desire—
this the defiant joy of birds,
winged and singing, many-minded love,
this is bird art.

Who are you
there on the edge
of this ravaged place,
your face full of birds?

Joel Thomas-Adams



Photo: Bruce Morrison

Deborah Richie

The Humming House

Feel the pulsing in the living room wall. Press close and the hum fills you like the ocean surging in a seashell. Sleep beside the wall upstairs and whirring wings join your dreams.

Honeybees. Thousands upon thousands inhabit the dark, snug space between inner and outer walls. Living insulation. Their hive extends from the ground to the second floor. During the long summer days, they flow in and out of a crack near the upstairs window without pause, yellow pollen clinging to the legs of returning bees. Years ago someone tried to cover the hole with a license plate painted dull brown to match the house. Once I watched a Red-naped Sapsucker in the old cottonwood—the one with the rickety treehouse nailed to its fissured bark—flit from a branch and snap a plump honeybee from the sky. Just the needed diversion from a life of drilling holes for sap.

In winter, the bees vanish within the hundred-year-old home nudged against a prairie knoll beyond the aspen, fir and pine that sweep down from the Continental Divide. Gene says the bees have lived there maybe 10 years. Of course, he talks about the barn burning down from an errant firecracker on the Fourth of July as if it were yesterday; that was 50 years ago. Wrinkled and gnarled as wind-bent limber pine, Gene hunches over his sputtering, rusted tractor. He rises stiffly, wipes his brow with an oil-blackened hand, swears and heads to the pile of wheels, spokes, engines and axles half-hidden among the hill's lupine, fescue and wheatgrass. Soon he's back with the perfect part to mend the complaining machine.

Like the bees, Gene moves across the land on familiar pathways. He was raised in the house my husband and I were renting. He wept when his children sold the ranch in 1990. They left, but he remains on the

place he has known for eight decades, living in a nearby cabin with his wife. He spends his days as he always has—removing rocks by hand from a plowed field, haying, grappling with 1940 vintage machines.

The two years we lived there we learned the rhythms of the local wild creatures. Antelope racing. Foxes and skunks on the night prow. Warblers and wrens trilling in the unruly stands of chokecherry, willow and lilac overtaking abandoned outbuildings.

We soon discovered that we were merely additional tenants to a house only superficially vacant. Chipmunks scrambled through the walls as if wending their way within a cavernous tree. Hairy Woodpeckers and flickers systematically inspected the outer house for signs of insects within. The determined rat-tat-tat served as our summer wake-up call. Cottontail rabbits burrowed beneath the house in the fall, and each spring, waters from the hillside welled up beneath the house, filling the dirt basement waist deep. Salamanders perhaps?

And the mice. The house was permeated with entrance ways. All year we caught mice in plastic Hav-a-Heart traps that looked like matchbox car garages. Sleek deer mice with liquid eyes, scruffy house mice, and once a shrew all found their way in. We established a routine of shaking the mice from their garages into airy jars, and on our way to work we released them in an open field close to wires where Kestrels perched from spring through fall, or fenceposts favored by Rough-legged Hawks in winter.

For two years we inhabited the story of this ranch, of Montana homesteads, of honeybees. We felt the winds slicing through the cracks in the windows and doors on bitter nights. We felt the weight of the loss of the ranch to out-of-staters who saw the rusted parts on the hill as trash, the wild tangle of bushes sheltering birds as weeds, and the honeybees as a menace.

We secretly hope the new owners will be driven from the ranch by the winds and the snowdrifts. We dream of the house gradually slipping back to the earth, its last years filled by chipmunks, mice, rabbits, squirrels and skunks, all living in humming walls.



We felt the weight of the loss of the ranch to out-of-staters who saw the rusted parts on the hill as trash, the wild tangle of bushes sheltering birds as weeds, and the honeybees as a menace.

Bear Story, continued from p. 1

of pack mules that for two or three months traversed the park like a busy intersection at 5 p.m. in a fair-sized city. When they came in from a ten-day trip the trail boys were ready to hoot and howl.

My friend was no exception. He was a big lean guy, at first glance sort of ugly—perhaps because he regarded the world with a perpetual glower as though contemplating some imperfect object he was about to wrench into its proper shape. But he was fairly intelligent, and realizing the enormity of such a task, usually settled down to beer and whiskey which would for a while soothe his frustration and then later aggravate it.

It was a Thursday evening and I'd had maybe two or three beers, my hair and beard were full of sawdust and my hands still smelled of wood putty. I'd spent the day cutting toilet seats out of plywood, puttying the voids and sanding them smooth for the painters: the kind of thing that invites a beer or two after eight hours. I took the invitation and was sitting on the stool nearest the window when I noticed Joe leave the bridge and lurch in the direction of the bar. He walked in a sort of purposeful lurch, perhaps due to football-injured knees, perhaps due to some inner drive. Then again, ten days of walking trails did no favors to what he referred to as his "sub-standard feet." He sat down next to me and ordered a beer. The bartender was glad to see him, "Well Joe, good to see you, just get in? How was it?"

"OK," he nodded to her. "Put that on my tab would ya?"

"Sure." Joe was the mainstay of the West Glacier Bar and his tab assumed legendary proportions but he always paid it. To me he said, "Man, this was some trip let me tell ya." He spoke low, almost in a whisper as though he'd just seen something that had awed him speechless. He swallowed some beer and decided it wasn't enough and signalled the bartender and she brought him some whiskey. "Yeah man, I saw one."

"One what?" I asked. He had a tendency to be cryptic and it irritated me.

"One whaddya think?" he replied with a nervous chuckle.

"Agrizzly I suppose," I said, swilling some of my own beer.

"Yeah a grizzly, I've seen 'em before man, but not like this." He shook his head, snorted a quick laugh, sipped some whiskey, chased it with a beer and began his tale:

"Me 'n a couple other guys were headed up this trail a couple days ago. It was early in the morning, we were still digesting a couple pounds of pancakes a piece and were not all that awake. We had some brushing to do further up the trail;

the trail itself was pretty well mulched so it absorbed our footsteps and we were walking into the wind when suddenly we saw this hump. He was havin' a little breakfast courtesy of some huckleberry bushes and didn't notice us. But then he heard or felt something because he did a 360 man, spun all the way around tryin' to get a scent. The guys with me were by this time in a tree but I just stood there—hell, what was the point man there wasn't any place to go the trees around there weren't all that big anyhow, the one those others climbed was damn near bent to the ground. He was so close man I swear I coulda reached out and touched him. He spins around with his nose in the air and then stops and looks right at me and not with the eyes of some dumb animal but eyes that said 'Who are you?'

"The sun was behind him and caught the silver tips of his fur in such a way it seemed he was emanating a golden light, not reflecting it; it radiated from him. All I could do was stand there and look at him. What a magnificent, powerful being! He turned his head to give me a profile shot and muscles rippled in his chest and shoulders like six-inch cables and I thought 'Well this is it,' my knees were trembling with a variety of terrors but I just stood there and thought to the bear 'I'm not here to hurt you I just want to see you' and he showed me, man, he showed me his entire being! Oh, that light! And those eyes fixin' me down that long triangular snout! He woofed at me and I woofed back in the same tone and he looked at me and I looked at him. It was so crisp and so clear! It was like he didn't quite know what to make of me. It seemed like half an hour we stood there looking at each other, though probably more like thirty seconds, then he dropped down on all fours, gave me a false charge, turned and loped up the trail. I just stood there awhile and the other guys climbed out of their tree."

He polished off the whiskey and called for more. Then we went out on the porch. There was a bench beneath the window and seated on it was a stocky sorta moon-faced guy with balding brown hair that looked like it'd been brushed with a pine cone. He had a close beard and a big grin. We knew him—he manned the fire lookout on Huckleberry Mountain. He raised a plastic government canteen, "Fern Creek and Jim Beam boys, have some shooter." We take a drink. "Well, ya see any bears?" he asks.

Joe looks at him, takes another drink, gives him a slow grin and says, "Yeah."





Photo: Bruce Morrison

Breath

I will sleep outdoors.

Why squander on walls

the warmth of my one expiring

when a night kiss could fall

and rise to the stars?

Leslie Ryan



*Printed on
recycled paper*