Camas is a bit late this season; the result of an overly-busy semester and a magazine put together by a loose affiliation of graduate students. Our apologies. Those of you who are faithful, long-time readers of Camas had likely begun to wonder if it would ever again appear on the shelves of your favorite bookstore. We, honestly, had begun to wonder the same. But it’s here. Finally. Largely thanks to Kelley, who picked up the fumbled ball, ran with it, and kicked the rest of us into gear, taking responsibility for all the loose ends that had been left undone and had threatened to unravel the issue.

This issue represents a first for Camas: the prose herein are the winners of a writing contest we held last fall in hopes of widening our circle of submissions. It worked. We received nearly thirty submissions for the contest, a big increase for us. The writings we reviewed were of an impressively varied sort, considering their supposed common theme of the ‘environment.’ It would appear that what composes environmental writing is as of yet quite undecided. We should work to keep it that way.

This issue also features some great poetry and photographs. We are pleased to say that this issue of Camas is the first in another way: it is printed on unbleached paper.

Enjoy the issue; there’s great writing enclosed.

Cheers,

The Camas Editorial Staff

Submissions

Camas seeks work that focuses on nature and the environment. We favor regional writers who have not published widely.

Prose and Poetry: double-spaced, clean copy. If your piece is selected for publication, we will ask for a copy on computer disk (unless it is very short). Due to space limitations, works are more likely to be published if they are no more than 25 double-spaced pages.

Photographs: black-and-white prints only (no slides, contact sheets, or color prints).

We encourage submission of cartoons, pen-and-ink drawings, and just about anything else you may think of.

SASE: Please enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope, if you’d like your work returned.

The next issue of Camas (Summer ’96) will be a compilation of work from those writers participating in the Teller Environmental Writing Institute in Hamilton, MT, in early May. The deadline for the next open issue of Camas (Winter ’97) is October 15.

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Camas is a free publication and production costs are met solely by donations. The journal is organized as a non-profit group under the umbrella of the Associated Students of the University of Montana. If you would like to support this forum for new artists, please send a check payable to Camas, c/o Jennifer Mandel at the above address. Thanks.
Table of Contents

Writing Contest Winners ...................... 2

A Textual Omission? .......................... 3
   Todd Osmundson

New Ground ...................................... 4
   Deb Peabody

Old Booger's Cove .............................. 6
   Duke Richey

Gypsy River ..................................... 9
   Leslie Budewitz

Surrendering to Montana ...................... 10
   Janisse Ray

Notes on a Photograph ........................ 13
   James Bertolino

The Dare ........................................ 14
   Katie Deuel

Oklahoma ........................................ 15
   Derek Martin

The Dreamer ..................................... 16
   James Bertolino

Mount Jumbo:
   A Preservation Manifesto ................. 17
       Tommy Youngblood-Petersen

Kootenai: Turning Thirty ..................... 19
   Deb Peabody

What Water Says ................................ 20
   James Bertolino

Summer House .................................. 20
   Susan Watrous

Olympic Peninsula ............................. 21
   James Bertolino
Camas Prose Contest Winners

First Place:
Surrendering to Montana
Janisse Ray

Second Place:
Old Booger’s Cove
Duke Richey

Third Place:
Oklahoma
Derek Martin

Honorable Mention:

Mount Jumbo: A Preservation Manifesto
Tommy Youngblood-Petersen

A Textual Omission
Todd Osmundson
A Textual Omission?

I

I have heard it said that Thoreau, during the experiment at Walden Pond, occasionally left his solitary existence behind in order to take meals at his mother’s house. Such mention, however, does not appear in his celebrated account of the two-year period. A textual omission? Perhaps. Fodder for the cynics? Certainly. Disillusionment for the devout? Only for those who do not believe in emissaries, in bridges between seemingly incongruous worlds.

II

Paris, 1798, Café Procope; Marat, Robespierre, Danton withdraw to unfrequented corners in order to plot the course of the Revolution. Their beverage? Coffee, that enigmatic elixir, driver of poets, derivishes, revolutionaries, and aristocrats.

III

Breakfast at Thoreau’s, Spring 1846; Cynthia Dunbar Thoreau presiding. Henry, mouth full of coffee and Apple brown betty, pontificates on the emptiness of human existence as most people live it.

“Henry dear,” says his mother, “aren’t you due back at the pond soon?”

IV

Aren’t we all due back at the pond soon?

Coffee in the revolutionary cafés of Paris — coffee with the artists of Vienna, coffee with the legend-weavers of Arabia.

Coffee under the fluorescent tube-lamps of office cubicles and hospital waiting rooms. Where souls are under attack, where wilderness and wilderness are lacking, there is sterility.

Back to the pond, Henry David!

V

“Nothing springs from nothing,” writes the composer Ned Rorem. “The so-called creative act lies in reconditioning borrowed objects, in making them yours…”

Silicon chips are sculpted of sand, sand cleaved by nature from the remains of silicon chips. Could we consider our present state to be anything other than a brief stop along the evolutionary journey? To do so would be tantamount to Cro-Magnon man jumping out of his place in evolutionary line to declare himself unique, unrelated to any creature who has come before or is yet to come, like an uninvited guest at a dinner party jumping up and claiming to be the host.

BACK TO THE POND, HENRY DAVID ...

VI

I was reading in a coffee shop recently when I heard the song, a certain Crosby, Stills, and Nash piece entitled “Déjà Vu.” At one time I had been unable to listen to it, lifting the turntable needle from this particular track. Unable, that is, until I began to see the song not as what it at first seemed, emptiness, but as wilderness that settles into an unstable calm.

More music; Joni Mitchell, Sting — musicians from other genres who found the wilderness that is jazz. Such people have helped to bring jazz to the masses. Who will bring us back to the pond?

VII

Go back to the pond, Henry David! Find again that “wildness no civilization can endure,” and write and teach us what you discover there; let your body, buoyed by words, span the gorge separating wilderness from sterility.

The small, slim figure arose, placing an empty coffee cup upon the table and stood. “Mother, citizens,” he lightly, almost imperceptibly, muttered, “I take my leave of you, as I must be going back now.”
Dear Lover,
Road miles and a border between us.
The circle has broken
Letting in the line,
The forest floor has no deadfall
and avalanche chutes reach the sky.

I hold on to you in your words,
with my colors.
I knew instinctively on fall’s crimson fruits
while glancing at these mountains
which block my view.

Deb Peabody
Duke Richey

Old Booger’s Cove

None of us knew Old Booger’s real name until the obituary. Harless walked into the Forestry lounge clutching the newspaper over his head in his left hand, like a Baptist preacher holding a Bible. He had a large thermos of coffee in his right fist, and he was bouncing from foot to foot—his version of a long haired and bearded prize fighter.

“Jesus H. Christ on a redwood popsicle stick,” he yelled, lifting both hands toward the ceiling. “Old Booger was a goddamned Caldwell.”

We all looked up confusedly from the book covered sofas, chairs, and the map littered table we were strewn on and about. The sun had just risen above the Plateau, and we were whipped following an all night cram session for final exams. News of Old Booger’s death had come at dinner before we had started studying, and it had effected our evening’s progress as a crying baby will a good night’s sleep. It was morning and we hadn’t done a damned thing.

“O.B.,” Harless repeated, setting down his coffee, “was a Caldwell. As in E. Phillip. Y’all won’t believe this.”

He unfolded the paper.

“Jacob Hume Caldwell,” he read, pausing to make sure we were listening, “died Wednesday afternoon at his home in Mountain Rest. He was 73.”

Harless poured and slowly sipped his drink, then he inhaled deeply.

“Mr. Caldwell,” he began again, “was born in 1917 in Nashville, where he was a track star at Bell Academy.”

“A track star?” I asked.

“Listen.”

“A 1937 graduate of Yale University,” Harless continued, glancing at me, “where he studied Forestry. Mr. Caldwell was National Champion in the shot put. A member of the 1938 Olympic team, Caldwell would later claim that his greatest moment was watching his friend and teammate Jesse Owens defeat Hitler in Berlin by winning the gold medal.”

“No way,” cried Janie, “you sure this is O.B.?”

“Would y’all shut the hell up,” Harless spat. “Who else in Mountain Rest could have gone to Yale?”

“After serving in the O.S.S. in Europe during World War II,” he continued reading, his voice rising, “Mr. Caldwell worked for the United States Forest Service Silviculture Lab in Cumberland for 38 years. His wife Madeline died in 1986, and a son, Jacob, was killed and two grandchildren, of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He is also survived by one brother, E. Phillip Caldwell, of Atlanta. All memorial gifts can be made to the Cumberland University Forestry Club.”

Weldon and Chu’s mouths were wide open, chins dropped, as if large weights had been attached to their lower lips. A still disbelieving Janie jumped up and yanked the paper from Harless.

“It’s true,” she murmured. “There’s even a picture.”

She flung the paper my way.

Right there in the top left corner was a serious looking O.B., about forty years younger than I’d ever known him.

“Jacob Hume Caldwell,” I said, “brother to the most evil, greedy bastard on the planet.”

I first saw Old Booger on the Perimeter Trail, the eighteen-mile loop around the University property boundary. I was flying down the back of Chestnut Knob on a mountain bike when I lost control, flipped over the handlebars, and hit a tree.

I lay there for what seemed a long while, contemplating life in a wheelchair. My face was half buried in duff, both legs were tangled in a rhododendron bush, and an arm stuck through mangled spokes.

“Good thing for those helmets,” a voice said. “We had nothing of the kind in my day.”

I turned and saw his form. A big man, rays of light were beaming from his head and his face was blurry. Maybe, I thought, I was dead and this was God.

He extended his hand and with a firm and calloused grip helped me to my knees, where I rested for a moment staring at the trashed bike wheel.

“Let this be a learning young man,” he chuckled, “if you must run into a tree, make sure it’s a sapling. Why, you could kill yourself slamming into a big monster like that.”

He helped me to my feet.

“I’m O.B.,” he finally said.

I looked at him now that the sun wasn’t in my eyes and introduced myself.

“Ward Jackson.”

“A fine Southern name,” he bellowed. “Where are you from?”

“Virginia.”

“Jackson,” he whispered. “Of course. As in Stonewall.”

I looked at this man, fairly unsure of my mental state, but making rapid conclusions as to his. Fit looking, he was dressed in a brown canvas jumpsuit zipper to the neck, calf high laced up boots, and a wide brimmed straw hat. Reading glasses hung from a string around his neck. He wore an orange rucksack and carried a long sturdy stick.

He helped me haul the bike down to Tenor Road, where we tossed it in the back of his truck. O.B. then drove me home.

“Remember, Mr. Jackson,” he mused, as he pulled away from the house, “avoid the big trees, for goodness sake.”
At a Forestry Club Christmas party that same year, O.B. showed up with a mandolin and played bluegrass numbers till the egg nog ran out. It seemed he was well known within our little community, for everyone at the party wanted to be acknowledged by him. He was a legend among Forestry students.

“What does O.B. stand for?” I asked an upper classman.

“Old Booger,” came the reply.

I asked O.B. later how he got the nickname.

“That’s what my boy called me,” he answered.

“I’m not sure I understand the question, sir,” he said.

“Senator,” O.B. said, “Watson Creek is one of the main drainages coming off the Plateau into the Tennessee River. The creek bed down there has been spread across the map and it is essentially a swamp now. I went down there on Sunday and they had a big bulldozer parked in the middle, and gas and oil were leaking into what’s left of the creek there. I’m just curious as to whether or not anybody up in Washington is concerned that little Watson Creek mishaps are happening across the country.”

“Sir, Sir,” the Senator stuttered, “I am absolutely positive that our highway people, including working men and women in this crowd, are doing everything they can to see that this country progresses in a healthy fashion.”

“Senator,” O.B.’s voice rang out, “the people down valley who are drinking gasoline from Watson Creek are not progressing in a healthy fashion.”

Cumberland University sits on one end of the largest wooded college campus in the country. 8,000 of the 10,000 acres were given to the school’s founders at the turn of the century by Southern Coal and Lumber, better known by its abbreviation as SGL. To me and my classmates the company is “SICKLE”, as in the cutting tool.

The biggest controversy in the history of the University involved SICKLE’s digging up the 84 year old original land deed, which had retained for the company full resource rights in perpetuity. For all intents and purposes, the company could legally mine coal from the fifty yard line of the football field, or drill for oil in the front yard of the library. Predictably, though, SICKLE looked toward Red Rag Cove, one of the last true virgin hardwood stands in the eastern United States.

For most people, learning to love the Cove was easy. The fire in the stomach ignited a flush in the face when one saw those yellow and red leaves against a blue October sky, winking like an arcane lover in church. That feeling is burned in my memory like a sizzling brand to a hide.

Protecting the Cove’s innocence was another story, for its giant trees had nowhere to run. Although it had seemed a well kept secret to the generations of students who had walked its shady slopes, SICKLE had known about the Cove all along. After a seven year legal
On Valentine's Day, Chu and Harless built the cement barricade on Brakefield, the old fire road which led out to the top of Red Rag. When leaving, they had the confrontation with the guy from SICKLE which led to Harless' arrest. Apparently, according to SICKLE's lawyers, Harless broke the man's nose while Chu sped away in a company truck. Harless claims the man's nose never even bled.

One afternoon in March, Harless and I went out to Mountain Rest to get some ice cream. O.B. came into the Dairy Queen, ordered, and walked over to our table.

"Hello, gentlemen," he said.

"May I join you?"

"Please," Harless answered.

"Do you remember me?" I asked.

"Of course," O.B. answered, licking his double scoop, "your name is Jackson, and you ride a bicycle with reckless abandon. It's been awhile since I've seen you."

We laughed and Harless introduced himself. O.B. gained a serious expression and tilted his head toward Harless.

"Oh, the infamous Mr. Harless," O.B. whispered. "What do your parents think of your recent arrest?"

Harless smiled his crazy smile, showing his two off-color fake front teeth, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't believe everything you read in the papers, sir," he said.

"Oh, were you not jailed?" O.B. asked, sitting up straight like a posture teacher.

"No, sir," Harless offered, "that much is true."

O.B. continued licking his ice cream, a white haired child at heart.

"But," Harless continued, "SCL has made me out to be a villain. In answer to your question, though, my parents haven't said a whole lot. My father went to school here and loves the Cove as much as anybody, so he knows where I'm coming from."

"They will take some trees out of there, you know," O.B. whispered again, "they won't be stopped."

I looked at O.B., wondering whose side he was on.

"But," he continued, "we could screw things up for them when they eventually go in."

I remember wondering if O.B. had been drinking the night before. The whites of his eyes were bloodshot, the pupils dilated.

"For the present, though," he went on, "all we can do is hope that the University lawyers can continue to hold the devils off."

We sat in silence a moment before O.B. spoke again.

"You know," he said softly, "I knew the founders of SCL very well, and they were great men who had a beautiful land ethic. That tree you ran into on your bicycle several years ago, Mr. Jackson, if you will notice there are many, many trees that size throughout the Property. They logged responsibly, and I know for a fact that E. Phillip was told directly from his father's mouth that Red Rag Cove was never to be touched. Never ever. Why they did not put that in writing I will never know. I suppose they trusted it would not even be questioned. I can honestly say that the old man would be outraged with the company's involvement today with all that clearcutting they do overseas. That would really have demoralized E. Phillip's father, to know that they were all over the map doing crazy things. If he knew that they..."
were even setting foot back into Cumberland, not to mention Red Rag, why he would get up out of the ground and march down there to that God-awful glass high rise in Georgia, and he would spank E. Phillip’s butt. This whole mess is a perfect example of how the corporate mindset has destroyed family tradition. Why, do you boys know how Red Rag Cove got its name?

We shook our heads.

“E. Phillip’s grandfather snuck away, to meet his love there. They had to hide, you see, because her family had been partial to the Union, and the grandfather’s daddy had been a Confederate man through and through. Now this woman ended up being E. Phillip’s grandmother. She would tie a red cloth, a red rag, you know, to a particular tree so that he would be aware of where she was in hiding. She used those big trees for cover.”

“How do you know all of this?” I asked.

“I told you,” O.B. answered, “I knew the Caldwell family very well. They told me this when I was a boy. Red Rag Cove is where I fell in love with trees as a child.”

Harless and I looked at O.B., ice cream melting down his tough old hands.

“They would be as ashamed of E. Phillip as I am,” he said.

About two weeks before O.B.’s death, Weldon, Harless, Janie, and Chu walked onto the front porch with a half empty bottle of wine and proclaimed war.

“The bastards get what they deserve tonight,” Janie slurred. “We’re going out there and spiking the Cove.”

I looked at Chu, who with a bandana tied around his head, looked like a samurai warrior. He had purple lips and teeth, and his eyes were nearly shut. Weldon could barely stand up.

“How many bottles have y’all had tonight?” I questioned them.

Weldon handed me the wine.

“Plenty,” he said, “it’s yours to finish.”

Harless went into the house and came back out onto the porch with his toolbox and a bucket full of foot long pieces of re-bar.

Earlier in the year Harless and I had made the nails, but they had remained in our back room along with the unused bags of cement left over from he and Chu’s Brakefield Wall adventure. I knew from the wild look in his eye that Harless meant business tonight.

“Let’s go ruin Mr. Caldwell’s lumber,” he said.

“If you have never spiked a tree in the dark, let me give some advice. Don’t get drunk beforehand, and take a headlamp.

“What the hell is that?” Janie whispered, as if no one in the area would have heard my scream moments earlier.

“Sounds like a drill,” I winced.

We were back at the car before it occurred to us that Harless was nowhere to be found, and I was not in any condition to send out a search party. I needed a doctor, and that’s what I got.

The next morning I awoke in the Franklin County Hospital barely aware of where I was. The night before, I recalled, had been interesting, listening to Janie explain to the nurses how I had managed to fall off my roof at three in the morning.

“We’re college kids,” she told them, “we do stupid shit every now and then. Some shit more stupid than others.”

I was beginning to wonder where everybody was when Harless walked in the door with bagels and orange juice.

“Where did you go last night?” I asked.

“Find out what that drill sound was.”

I had forgotten the drill sound.

I looked at Kim and chewed on something firmly in my left hand.

“I’m not so sure,” I said, “that I am prepared to hear the rest of this story.”

A smile broke across his face and stayed there.

“What was it?” I whispered.

Harless had a twinkle in his eye which shined larger than normal.

“It was Old Booger.”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“Doing what?”

Harless shut the door to the room.

“He’s drilled in a thousand spikes down there since January,” he said, holding his hands outstretched. “Some of them are two feet long, all up and down the trees. You should have seen him. He had ropes and stuff, man, climbing gear. He was all over the place. I helped him for three hours. Scared him like hell when I came up on him. I thought he was gonna shoot me, at first. Then I said, real loud, “It’s Scotty Harless,” and he goes “Well, I was wondering when y’all were gonna come out here and help me.”

A week after they buried O.B., we all walked through graduation with red rags pinned to our backs. Several miles away, out in the Cove, the SICKLE boys were beginning to mangle their chainsaws on Old Booger’s trees.
Gypsy River

i took the extra words
the other poets gave me
and shook them in a hat.
i will wear my poetry on my head
turn it in my heart
and see what becomes.

oh river
take me somewhere
that will be home
i am tired of traveling
and want to be there
do not tell me the journey is my place
that i am a gypsy with a carpet bag
my earrings dangling
and tarot in my fingers
do not tell me i will never rest
in this life
i do not want to hear that
i am a river.

once i was a song
but i am done with that
this coming into being at someone else's call
rising and falling with their breath
my own bit of air
that sounds good and is gone.

in a dream a woman told me
to find a river of my own
name it watch it change
name it again and again in my life,
and today one of the other poets said
my poem was like a river
how it flowed and rose and fell
had its own rhythm.

i cringed inside knowing it was true
knowing i sometimes do not want to be
what i am
because what i am
is hard.

if i am a river
pain will wear like stone
that once was rock
banks will hold
or let the waters return
if i am a river
follow the course
and know it deep inside me
every pool and bend and shallow
and rapid
every drop of rain
changes and moves on.

river sing rock
root
down below where fish won't swim
gypsy lives come for freedom
silence
the sound of her song ripples
down below where fish don't swim
and no one sees
she lives.

oh river
i am my own song
rising and falling
down below
my own rhythm
wears like stone
that was once rock
and stories dangle from my fingers
like jewels.

Leslie Budewitz
Janisse Ray

Surrendering to Montana

“Only love can quiet the fear of love, and only love can save from diminishment the love that we must lose to have.”

Wendell Berry

“The work of belonging to a place is never finished.”

Scott Russell Sanders

At night on the prairie of Wild Horse Island, in western Montana’s Flathead Lake, the coyotes seem to never stop howling. When they woke me, the half moon had risen finally, and Orion was directly overhead, like a sentinel. The coyotes had two camps, one to the east and one to the west, and their songs passed back and forth across me: bays, trills, howls, barks. Theirs was a night-tongue, calling interdependence and belonging; and I lay awake a long time listening and understanding none of it.

Every time I woke after that I could hear the coyotes, and I expected to sit up into the prairie and see one of the he-dogs poised, gray in the trickle of moonlight, but that although I was there, in my grandmother’s grassy arms.

I saw from the map I’d taken from the info center that the trail, bordered with purple asters in places, started to climb, and after a couple of hours I came to a damp, woodlands cliff. I was lost. Not knowing their names was like having poetry taken from me. The world was flat. When I flushed a meadowlark, I wondered if the bird species were similar as well.

The drainage of Skeego below was blue-green and blurry with Ponderosa pines, but what I saw was longleaf, the pine of my home with its similar natural history. Fire-loving longleafs historically dominated Southern uplands, but they were rapidly disappearing. I’d been defending them for years. I missed them.

And the island itself. Just before I left Georgia, I made one last trip to Cumberland, a wilderness barrier island off the coast, and a national seashore. There, sitting on a high bluff above tidal Christmas Creek, fasted, I’d seen so many wading birds, mostly white ibis and snowy egrets, that I’d thought water lilies were blooming throughout the mud flats. A mother raccoon with three young had passed through camp, and a flock of wild turkeys. The wild horses had let me get within 20 feet of them, and at night coyotes sang on Crooked River. The West was renowned for grandeur, but Cumberland Island bordered me through my blood and who would want more than that?

My son felt the same. Just days before, he had asked, “What have you done with your life?” I answered that I was creating my place in the world.

“My son felt the same. Just days before, he had asked, “What have you done with your life?” I answered that I was creating my place in the world. I ran into pygmy nuthatches first thing. One Ponderosa pine was absolutely alive with them, so that the tree seemed to wear dozens of dangling earrings. They fed mostly from the cones, but also from beneath the bark, flaking and tossing it away with little rips of the head. Their tapping kept the tree chattering.

Did I want to follow pygmy nuthatches for two days? Did they have something to teach me?

On footpaths that turned to animal trails, I headed eastward along the north shore of the island: a shy belted kingfisher wont shrinking away. Two dark-eyed juncos hid in a cedar loaded with light-blue nuts.

The trail, bordered with purple asters in places, started to climb, and after a couple of hours I came to a damp woodlands cliff. The cliff was threaded with ungluate trails, and harebells bloomed along one steep, cool face. I saw from the map I’d taken from the info box at the bay that the terrain got steeper and rockier. I headed inland toward the highest peaks. My breath said “flatlander, flatlander, flatlander.”

I watched for sheep, bears, mule deer, mountain lion, but there was nothing except all the unidentified squirrels one desired. They left stump-faces littered with pine cone stripplings like piles of artichoke leaves after dinner.

Late in the afternoon, I came out onto a high, grassy meadow.
A substantial bird in a pine 200 feet away spooked and circled out over the now-visible basin of Flathead Lake. Then I saw another, closer. Onyx lines of tears dripped from its eyes, and its tail flashed russet in the lowering sun. Kestrels!

Like a traveler who sees one familiar word in a foreign language, I seized kestrels, as if they might unlock something for me. I wanted to jerk my body up and down, nodding vehemently and mutely; I wanted to flail my arms and say it over and over, kestrel, yes, kestrel. We have them. If I could erase the series of mountains that swept away from me, and replace it with a field of broken cotton stalks, with the kestrel perched on the barbwire hunting, I'd be home.

My good friend Milton, a naturalist and a farmer, had written in a letter just days old that he'd seen the first kestrel of the fall. We both looked forward to their return south for winter, when they abounded. Driving through the rural, bleak farmland of southern Georgia, we'd looked forward to their return south for winter, when they abounded. In a letter just days old that he'd seen the first kestrel of the fall. We both looked forward to their return south for winter, when they abounded. In a letter just days old that he'd seen the first kestrel of the fall. We both looked forward to their return south for winter, when they abounded.
I rode with Aunt Fonda in the slow burial procession, following the glossy, black hearse from Spring Branch Church along a clay road that turned toward Carter Cemetery. Behind us a long line of cars crept past the houses of Grandma's neighbors, farms she'd passed all her life, places she'd stopped to visit. It was her last journey of this world, back to a clayey hill where she'd chosen to be buried, beside Granddaddy, among all the dead of that country.

That evening in Hank's cabin on Wild Horse Island, people who weren't more than strangers told urban myths around emptying wine bottles. When I dragged my sleeping gear out into the dark field, the sky was a hand-painted bowl, silver on black, and I circled the edge of Hank's property like an animal, sniffing out a good place to bed down. The grass was dry and stringy.

To the east a strange, amorphous glow crowned the tallest mountain. Could the Pleiades look that huge? I found them. The Dippers. The Milky Way was a sash tied across the revolving sky. It was so thick with stars it looked like cottage cheese. As I stared up, a raptor's dark shadow winged noiselessly past. An owl. Not long after I went to sleep the hooves of a galloping wild horse, thudding against the ground, woke me, but I returned immediately to sleep.

My grandmother had loved birds. For years she was the only person I knew who kept bird feeders, homemade ones Uncle Percy fashioned, just outside her kitchen door. "Won't you look at this purty little yellow bird," I'd hear her say. Or red bird. Or blue. I used to spend Saturdays with her, and those days at the farm would be long and slow. One noon, as we cleared up after dinner, she came back through the screen door from throwing scraps to the dog, smiling. "Listen at that," she said, in her sweet and royal way. "That big old woodpecker is just a laugh." I went and looked at the pileated clinging to the tongleaf in the backyard. I'd never known anyone to notice, let alone take such pleasure in a bird call.

"Bless gracious," she'd croon. "You're a fine little fellow." Then it would whir away.

At dawn I headed toward the canyon where I'd last seen the kestrels. I passed through the orchard I'd stumbled upon the evening before. There were no more than 15 trees in the orchard, mostly apple, some pear, and all the trees were thick with fruit. The wild apples were no bigger than a child's fist, and reminded me of apricots. Just as I had entered the grove, a fruit hit the ground. It seemed both a gift and an invitation, sour and delicious. I had shaken the tree and gathered a handful, knawing at them as I traced the pretty trees.

A coyote bounded from the orchard, toward the drainage, and I smiled at the rugs of beaten-down grass beneath the trees. On the ground not an apple could be found. I shook loose a few and came out onto the prairie. Five mule deer watched from a wale of land, attracted by the thudding of the fruit. Their antlers were silhouetted against the pink promise of sunrise.

Meadowlarks, birds truly gifted with voice, sang all about. Then, in the middle of that, a coyote howled. I instantly crouched in the grasses that were fat and silent with dew. Just below, in the drainage, a coyote barked a reply, followed by another 150 feet northeast of me. A yelping commenced, punctuated by long, mournful howls that came from a coyote that I could see through the trees, poised on the next hill. On hands and knees I inched closer, staying behind small pines that invaded the prairie in absence of fire. It would not take long to learn the voices.

I knew that my presence — early out, the sun no more than thin streaks painted above dim, dark-green mountains, signified something to them. I knew that the coyote conversation told of my presence as much as it told their own, just as a hollerer in the great Okefenokee Swamp back home sings not only to locate himself to his neighbors, but them to him. I was connected to the coyote through lengths of song-ropes, and to hear myself in animal song humbled me. I knew then, much as I resisted the island, that in one brief visit I had become part of its legacy: in vanishing grasslines my feet laid against the earth and in the unrecorded songs of coyotes. And having heard the songs, and been met with trails, neither could I go free of it.

Not long afterward a kestrel landed at eye-level on a flank ahead. It simply sat, waiting for the dew to evaporate and the sun to warm grasshoppers into motion. No breakfast, yet, for them either. I headed toward a rocky cliff, above the waiting kestrel, and while I was yet 300 feet away I saw it was a good place. I was on the western side of the canyon where I had observed the birds the evening before, and already I saw two kestrels there. They perched in a snag intertwined with a shorter, live pine, which cradled the dead tree in its arms like an elder. The trees were rooted below where the talus slope leveled into a run of rocks, so that the tree's upper branches brushed the craggy cliff.

When the sun topped the mountain I had to shift positions, crawling up the slope so as not to be blinded. Four or five bighorn ewes, bedded down 50 feet above, watched without panic. From the canyon bottom I heard a clatter, and looked down to see the mantle of rock fragments struck by the hooves of a hugely antlered mule deer. Though hundreds of feet below, it broke into a run when it spotted me. Another, following a few minutes behind, did the same. Two kestrels flew out from the rocks below and performed an aerial stunt, flying in unison, making a twisting W, then separating. Watching through binoculars brought the open space into my throat and I felt sick. The glasses had the effect of suspending me in the abyss, and I tightened my grip...
A
ll morning I watched kestrels, one of the most striking birds on the continent, flashing their copper tails, arrested in flight, the sun washing their slate-gray backs to midnight blue. At one point I counted seven different kestrels around me. The fresh sunlight laid yellow-green ribbons down the backs of the ridges, and dusted the meadows gold.

After Grandmama’s funeral, after everyone had eaten the last helpings of chicken-and-rice and pineapple cake back at the house, and had fled to their new cars and left all that history that was no longer relevant to their lives, only Mama, Daddy, Uncle Percy and I remained.

I watched until the kestrels had spread across the morning. When I stood to go, tying my sweater around my waist, I felt suddenly grief-stricken. Looking upward, I saw that the ewes had vanished. A kestrel landed and clung to a mullein stem. The dried stalks stuck up like birthday candles, and here and there a new rosette of hairy leaves grew. I knew that frost would soon kill these, and it would not be long before most of the kestrels would be gone.

I would not be leaving.

In that moment I would have become a kestrel. I stumbled, then folded into a niche of boulder that overlooked the magnificent chartreuse relief of Wild Horse Island. I thought to pray, but instead faces would appear: my grandmother, who had known the kestrels and would not be there when they returned, and Milton, and my parents. So I cried.

Even as I grieved for my own land and its people, I knew something else was happening. The morning had been a movement of such beauty that at times I had gasped aloud. I had come from wild sleep, sat in meditation with bighorn sheep stretched behind my shoulders and rock wrens at my feet, watching a suite of falcons in panoply, their secrets unguarded.

In healing the wounds of my departure from the South, this place — these Rockies, with their strange bighorn and ravens, with their chill days steeped in the amber vestiges of summer — sidled its way into my heart. I knew that I would say it: the tears showed me that.

After awhile I stood and started downward, but within 20 feet the sobs loomed again. Thus I made my way to the cabins, red-eyed, rent by the creatures of unfolding mountains. That is the way love grows, I knew. To deny it would be an unnatural act. That’s when I knew I would take the West as a lover, and that I would be devoted to it, and faithful for a time.

But I wouldn’t stay.

James Bertolino

Notes on a photograph of an Orangutan mother holding her child:

They are so clearly family, our family, though it’s with some wistfulness, some shame, that one suggests kinship: her face shaped by loving intelligence; the child’s eyes round owls of discovery and awe. Yet there is hard experience in the mother’s forehead and in the sad pockets below her eyes. Central to the composition — because this is a photograph, not reality — is her contented smile, which visually balances the brain-shaped cranium of her little one.

In all ways, from the passionate, earthy color of their hair, to the delicate pink of the child’s ear, these are beings whose existence incarnates the Buddhist ideal of Ahimsa: We do no harm. We come in love, in love we leave. When we are gone, for a brief time before the darkness, the earth will glow with our absence.
The Dare

Up on the mesas, dense
with juniper and spirit,
words are created, transformed.
Years pass, they hold to their silence
until the wind laughs reckless:

so starts the race.

In winter’s twilight, sunset
comes lavender. Venus hovers
the margins of the night - daunting,
so predictable. Be attentive

to her performance - the way moon
eclipses her light, then confers it
back again.

Venus starts the race, challenging wind;
cougar becomes scent, riding the breeze

coyote races himself
into the slot - he vanishes!

If you come alone, move silent
in December’s half moon, holding
eyes in front of you like offerings,
etrs wider than the sun at noon,
you might
get a glimpse

cougar and coyote and wind.
You might hear the stories, reckless
among the trees. You might

vanish.

Katie Deuel
Derek Martin

Oklahoma

Here the world is flat, perhaps the flattest anywhere. Mile after mile of fields, mile after mile of grass; interminable flatness. The only things that rise above the surface are man-made or man-allowed. Man-made are lines of barbed-wire fences crossed by towering power lines, wood-frame houses and barns, white silos like skyscrapers. Permitted are a few deciduous trees, if they serve a purpose like blocking wind or sun; cows, even "genetically engineered" cows as a large sign painted on a barn I passed attests; and grass, where the land isn't furrowed, fertilized and planted.

In the fields I see pumps that petroleum geologists have placed here and there, gracefully pumping, pumping, looking like those plastic birds that sit on the rim of a glass, bobbing to drink. I imagine geologists divining for oil—coming to this flat land excited at the possibilities under the surface. I pictured them like fathers with an ear against their wife's stomach, listening for a tiny heartbeat, imagining amazing bounty—their ears and face even taking part of that warmth of creation, maybe even snuggling with a trace of a nose, a kiss, the small gift of a tickle. Even the action of these oil-pumps hint of something sexual, a gift shared between earth and man.

I turn off on a two-rut road to inspect one of the pumps. As I near I hear the mechanical phut-phut of the motor, the never-changing pitch I stop beside the pump; it looms above me, iron glistening with oil that slowly seeps onto the ground feeding a black shadow, staining the soil pavement-black probably as far down as the water table. The pump here, in its dirt, noise and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than lovelmaking, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists, taking, calling it a "resource"—like everything else we take—stripping it of its very identity with a generic term, a term that makes it sound like it is cheap, cheapening, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists taking, and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than love-making, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists taking, and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than love-making, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists taking, and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than love-making, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists taking, and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than love-making, of taking rather than sharing. The geologists taking, and filth, in its unfailing regularity, reminds me of sex rather than love-making, of taking rather than sharing. As I drive away my mind strays instead to the air. It was flat places like this where people were first drawn to fly. One of the oldest airports anywhere is in Albuquerque, about 150 miles southwest of here, in desert nearly as flat. Just south of that is where the first nuclear bomb was developed, and the second, just to make sure, each given a personal name, "little boy," "fat man," before they were dropped on an unsuspecting country, making it flat too, polluting it with light, sound, radiation, and the shadows of its former citizens.

Perhaps the problem with flat land is that it inspires our dreams. The American dream: petroleum, the airplane, fat man.

I drive along, putting these thoughts out of my mind by watching the sun slowly set behind me in an increasingly red band that hugs the earth. The fullness of the red comes from the soil storms I passed—the more airborne particulate matter reflecting the sun, the deeper the sunset—which may be a tragedy for farmers, and likewise us all, but it is aesthetically pleasing. At least to the eye if not to the heart.

At the same time I look ahead for a place to camp for the night. Everywhere, it seems, I can see houses and the land is fenced and claimed. I feel like an intruder here, an intruder among people who claim the very land, who have denuded it of trees and brush that could conceal my camp. It gets darker and darker, as yet no moon. The houses have become points of light. I feel trapped on this ribbon of oil, funneled between fences that I can no longer even see. I'm too tired to keep on. Under cover of darkness I sneak off on a little road to a railroad shack. I cross the tracks and aim for the fence on the other side to be as far away from the tracks if a train might come (waking to a train—the roar of engine, the screams of steel against steel—is how I imagine hell must sound).

The truck lurches, engine, screaming, the roar of steel against steel, the screaming of steel against steel, the screaming of steel against steel. I feel trapped on this ribbon of oil, funneled between fences that I can no longer even see. I'm too tired to keep on. Under cover of darkness I sneak off on a little road to a railroad shack. I cross the tracks and aim for the fence on the other side to be as far away from the tracks if a train might come (waking to a train—the roar of engine, the screams of steel against steel—is how I imagine hell must sound).

Perhaps the problem with flat land is that it inspires our dreams. The American dream: petroleum, the airplane, fat man.

As I drive through the grass I soon realize that there is no fence. Ahead I see the silhouette of trees with no light, meaning no people, and head for them. I find the two trees growing from almost the same point, both arcing out and back in a heart shape, the space between them just wide enough for my truck. In the ghostly white light of my headlights I see a tiny cabin, it's planks a dull weathered gray, a few rough boards concealing it. I feel trapped on this ribbon of oil, funneled between fences that I can no longer even see. I'm too tired to keep on. Under cover of darkness I sneak off on a little road to a railroad shack. I cross the tracks and aim for the fence on the other side to be as far away from the tracks if a train might come (waking to a train—the roar of engine, the screams of steel against steel—is how I imagine hell must sound).

Perhaps the problem with flat land is that it inspires our dreams. The American dream: petroleum, the airplane, fat man.

I leave the back window of the canopy open, welcoming the breeze, and look through branches at the stars, feeling protected by the dark and the trees. The breeze sways the branches, sweeping them occasionally against the side of the canopy. A pat on the shoulder I imagine. Even a caress. The gusts also gently rock the truck, sporadically, gently, and just before I fall asleep I hear the howl of the coyotes, also relaxing in the safety of night. And as they sing I sleep...
The Dreamer

He knew she was a Dreamer, that during love her limbs would map the universe.

He needed to find her before the Cavern Men ran their ruinous plan, their autumnal theology.

Together they might prevent the planetary fall from sentience.

When at last he held her, they rocked through each other under the wet oaks of ritual.

A curled leaf rustled as a slug moved its rich muscle past. Greenish yellow and spotted black—the planet steadied for such intimacy.

She said, “Now kiss, my love, your long-eyed sister in the damp grass.”

James Bertolino
Tommy Youngblood-Petersen

Mount Jumbo: A Preservation Manifesto

Only a fifteen minute walk from downtown Missoula and a half-dozen steps past the trailhead, and I already feel the change. Cobalt lupines quietly brush my calves and mind instead of streetnoise; the pungent scent of yarrow filters to my nose instead of diesel fuel and rubber; and my eyes are filled with the open space of the summer-browned grasses of Mount Jumbo.

As I lean forward to huff up a steep incline, Bitterroot hugs the ground, and I pause to examine them closer. The light green leaves look like a bladed ceiling fan. As I carefully hold these small blades I remember that the root of this plant was dug by the Salish, Kootenai, and Blackfeet tribes for thousands of years. The root was sustenance and healing, and Montana’s tribes taught Lewis and Clark how to find it. The Flathead Indians say an old woman cried bitter tears as her family was starving to death. A spirit bird took pity on her and sent the nourishing...
covered 500 cubic miles, with a depth of 2,000 feet. When the ice dam broke, the water rushed in torrents down the mountain and through the Missoula valley. There is evidence that the lake drained and refilled at least 41 times over a thousand year period, a little lower each time, as these ice dams would waste away, break, and reform again. Each time the ice dam broke, the hundreds of cubic miles of water drained in a matter of two or three days, releasing the greatest floods of known geologic history. The force was so great that bedrock carried off of Jumbo has been found near the Pacific coast in Salem, Oregon, over 400 miles west.

From the saddle the trail climbs again, up and over a bald, and down into thick dark green Ponderosa Pine and Douglas Fir forest. These fifty and sixty foot trees shield me and the air is still, warmer now. I break off a small piece of ponderosa bark, lay my nose there on the trunk, and breathe in. The strong, pleasing vanilla smell rushes up my nose and into my memory of distinctive western odors. I want to be able to come to this place and breathe that odor the rest of my life. I turn and look at what's called the South Hills — lower, soft oranges, easy vermilions.

Out of the corner of my eye I catch movement in the high branches of Doug Fir and turn to see a sparrow-sized bird. But the colors in this bird are like no other I've seen around here: brilliant red head, bright yellow breast, and black wings with two wing bars of yellow and white. I find out later that this tropical-colored bird is a Western Tanager, migrating over three thousand miles from its winter subdivison just below the saddle, and onto the trip of the hill near the summit, of billboards facing Hellgate Canyon and the interstate; winter hikers and skiers continue to chase deer and elk who feed on her remaining, to be seen.

The estate still owns 1,100 acres that "look like this, feel like this, smell like this. Hurry, time is short. "Earlier when I was near the summit of Jumbo, I saw two red-tailed hawks hanging in the wind a hundred feet above me, suspended like stringed kites. They searched the ground below them for prey. Their heads turned slightly at my every movement, their focus intense, their bodies not like this, smell like this. Hurry, time is short."

I am alone, in a wild place, and I breathe in the stillness and fresh wind. I lay down, my back pressed against her firm wide shoulders, and she carries my dreams.

Western Meadowlarks sing me down the mountain as I descend Jumbo's bare, steep southern flank. Five mule deer silhouette the eastern ridge. I stop at a four foot wide rock jutting out from the grasses. Etched on its surface are a series of seven wavy lines, set an inch apart, each line representing the high point of a Lake Missoula shoreline. I close my eyes and follow these wavy lines with my fingers, Braille-like, reading part of the geologic history of Lake Missoula's ancient shorelines. In twenty minutes I am down.

It is back on the valley floor that Mount Jumbo greets my eyes with a landscape of pure and open space. In summer I have seen Jumbo's hillsides basked in golden glow with the long light of evening sun, her tanned shoulders transformed in the waning light from bright yellow, to amber, to a deep scarlet red. In the winter her often snow-dusted summit reflects a gentler light and color, the shorter rays of mild yellows, soft oranges, easy vermilions.

There is no development on her steep sides, yet. But when I turn and look at what's called the South Hills — lower, rolling hills south of downtown Missoula — I am met with a landscape of houses: roofs, fence lines, and walls, row after row after row. It is a complete absence of planning. I look back and forth: Mount Jumbo, South Hills, Mount Jumbo, South Hills. I feel even in these quick moments, the beauty that is and the beauty that was.

Although Mount Jumbo looks open, like it "belongs" to us, it is not ours. Two dozen landowners control 94 percent of the mountain. The remaining six percent is city-owned open space. The largest piece of land, and the one that provides wintering elk with their route onto the open hillsides, is owned by the A. J. Klapwyck estate and Lucille Klapwyck. A. J. Klapwyck once owned most of the western face of the mountain, but sold parts of it some years back, including what is now the Lincoln Hills subdivision. Some of these parts were called the "Ponderosa trees", and sold for $1,000 each. The city bought them from the boundary of the Lolo National Forest to the north, across Jumbo's saddle, and onto the top of the hill near the summit. Much of Mount Jumbo is zoned one house per 40 acres. If the Klapwyck estate developed all of its allowable houses representative of the estate, said his company has a responsibility to "create some liquidity" and protect the asset represented by the 2.7 million board feet of timber. The timber is worth about $1 million according to a forest consultant for the estate.

It appears that the logging is planned to minimize impacts to critical wildlife on Jumbo. Marked for removal are all the diseased, dead and dying trees suitable for milling and pulp wood. Snags used by birds and other forest creatures will be left standing, as will much of the emerging young Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir, desirable native tree species. Whether those logging practices actually appear on the ground remains to be seen.

Her body is being impacted in other — and possibly greater — ways: subdivisions continue to crawl up the saddle of Jumbo's neck; winter hikers and skiers continue to chase deer and elk who feed on her grasses; and she could be sold outright, with restaurants and cable cars forever scarring her smooth, tan skin.

Earlier when I was near the summit of Jumbo, I saw two red-tailed hawks hanging in the wind a hundred feet above me, suspended like stringed kites. They searched the ground below them for prey. Their heads turned slightly at my every movement, their focus intense, they felt the fear of a field mouse. For a moment I sensed that the hawk could have easily gripped my earth-colored, tangly hair with its talons and try to carry me away. The hawks and I stared at each other, still, for a full five minutes. Then they turned, banked, and sailed the winds upslope, soaring the elephant's curves.
Kootenai: Turning Thirty

I have felt this desire before
To go out
Beyond the known
Just keep going

Never return

Into the needle green
Dusty brittle brush,
Into meager vegetation,
vast meadows,
Down into water courses, and
a womb of canyon corridors,

And never return.

Or if I do, under a figure unrecognizable
from the one who
began.
An outward form, with an appetite
Lungs full, and chest clear.

And still a
Longing
For something yet unknown.


Deb Peabody
What Water Says

Leafless aspens groom
the iced breeze, while below
a brook descends the mountain
with its musical story, remembering
the serenity of sky, and lightning’s clear passion.
Water knows what is far will be near.
Water says choose that which closes distance,
choose touch. When snow falls,
and a green mystery is carried
by all that moves,
choose love.

James Bertolino

Summer House

This is his summer house. Deep verandas face all directions. A bent willow rocker, creaky, sturdy, on the southwest corner facing the saddle in the mountains where the sun sets this time of year. Thick walls hold in heat—and cool. Stones old and cool to touch, and the evening wind wraps the eaves, seeks opening, finds the sill and falls in, lifting the thin curtain, cooling the sheets and brushing petals from the roses in the vase.

This is his summer house. On the shelves, books. On the desk, notes, held down by a nugget of bleached coral, skeletons of small animals from free aquamarine past. Bear and deer and felce concolor guard the shadows beyond the meadow, beyond the garden, beyond the ruts of truck, and where there is no gate. Hawk screeches then through the empty blue, sends mice, mole, voles skittering silent still.

This is his summer house. Wide boxes, beds of tomatoes, bean tipis, marigolds make fusty spicy pollen, and among the large green leafy triangles, dark squash waits, ripens. This is his summer house. And above, near the high lost end of the box canyon, in the watery light chuckling the aspen trees with their white trunks thick with age, the grass grows tall and blue in the shadows where he wanders, where he nods and sleeps, dreams his summer dreams.

Susan Watrous
Olympic Peninsula 1994

I walk all day
Along the lip of the ocean's home
Watching the morning's mist
Give away Her secrets.

As I move in with the tide,
High above in the skyward forest
Eagles wait
For out going waters.

I put down camp where ancient cedars gather,
I cook dinner over their bones,
And find slumber easy in their arms.

Enormous bodies from shores unknown
Chewed up into slivers,
Swollen from their passage,
Sun-bleached and salt pocketed.

Deb Peabody