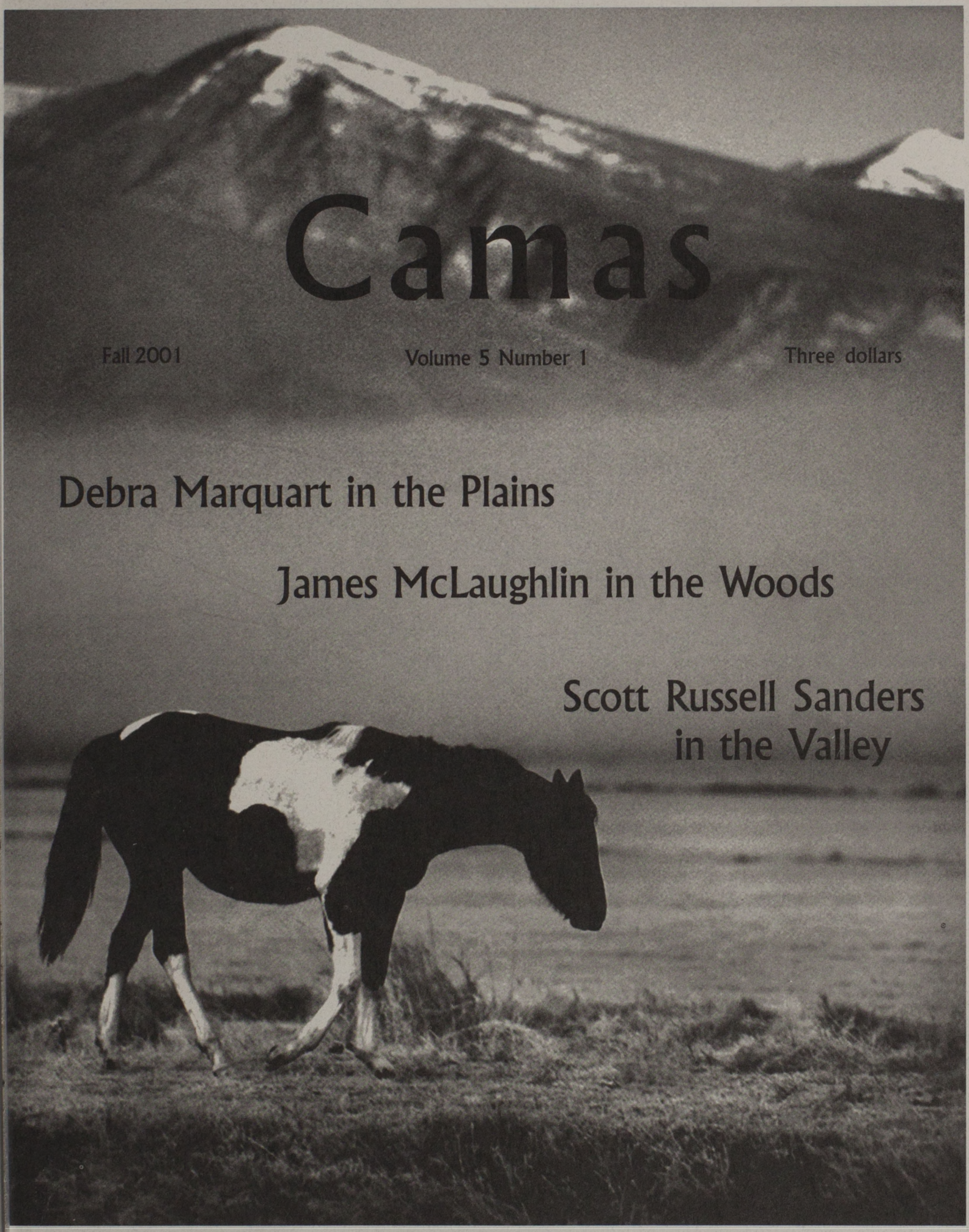
Camas

Volume 5
Number 1 *Fall 2001*

Article 1

Fall 2001

Camas, Fall 2001



Camas

Fall 2001 Volume 5 Number 1 Three dollars

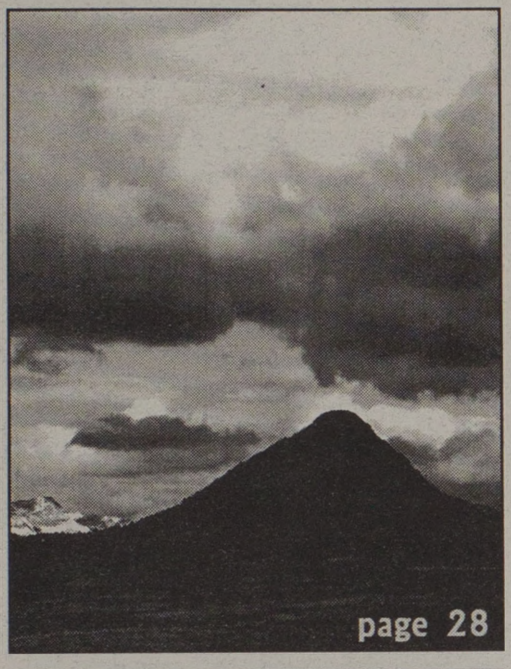
Debra Marquart in the Plains

James McLaughlin in the Woods

Scott Russell Sanders in the Valley

We, as a species, are subject to the same force that causes machines to degrade and fall apart—entropy.

—page 8



cover photo:
Sunrise, Bitterroot Valley
Jay Ericson

Inside cover photo
Wheel Well
Shelly Truman

ISSN 1092-5198

The Teller Issue

Fall 2001
Volume 5 Number 1

Features

Departments

A river called the Blackfoot runs across western Montana, and I spent a lot of time rafting it this past summer. I'd wake up in a clear, August dawn, fully intent upon applying myself that day—to thesis research or an editing project—then, usually while I was still mulling over my coffee, my friend Mel would call. "Do you want to float a few miles of the Blackfoot?" he'd ask. My resolve would waver as I gazed out the window at the lovely day unfolding before me. And then my good intentions would fly to hell, and we'd hop in our trucks and throw a few beers in the cooler and head to the river east on Highway 200, into the welcoming sky.

The Blackfoot only encouraged my lack of discipline. Its unassuming, meandering curves tried to persuade me to take my time, to let the waters take me where they would, to forget about rigid schedules that involved me finishing my thesis inside of two years. I'd lean back against the raft and watch the water-loving ospreys circle over my head. One afternoon, I saw a bald eagle, its purposeful flight tracing the river's course. I wanted to follow it, to let it lead me the length of the Blackfoot's 132-mile corridor; right then nothing else mattered as much.

This was the story of my summer. If I wasn't paddling the river in Mel's leaky raft, I'd be out at Rattlesnake Creek, teaching my pup to swim. Or spending a spontaneous afternoon hiking in the Bitterroots, south of town. I'd study at night or on rainy days—and here in Missoula, where the sun doesn't set till 10 o'clock in the summer and where the region is locked in the grip of one of the longest droughts on record, neither circumstance occurred too frequently.

Those hikes and river trips offered lessons of their own, though not ones that directly contributed to my thesis or master's degree. Day after day, I resisted my books and computer. My decisions were enough to make me examine my priorities, to make me try and recall why I'd decided to enter graduate school in the first place, especially in western Montana, the other side of the country from where I'd grown up. I'd speculate on my motivations, as Mel and I drifted down the river and the lazy waters lapped at my fingers: exactly what kind of education did I move to Missoula hoping to acquire? And how has living here affected what I've learned?

Place can significantly influence a person's outlook. I think about how my roots have tied me to a certain part of the country and how that spot fosters choices and attitudes that will stay with me my entire life. Our two featured essays in this issue of *Camas*, "Starlings, A Pig, and Four Deer" and "Things Not Seen in a Rear View Mirror," draw enormous power from their settings. James McLaughlin and Debra Marquart both reflect on the uneasy burden one's heritage imposes, and their ancestries are inseparable from their homelands. Scott Russell Sanders' essay, "Bitterroot," relates how a particular setting, in this case the Teller Wildlife Refuge in the Bitterroot Valley, changed his perspectives and provided unanticipated inspiration. Consider how places you've been have marked you with their own, unique stamp. I myself can conclude only that our experiences are enriched by the surroundings in which they occur.

Which brings me back to myself. The winter I applied to graduate school, I was living in Washington, D.C. and working for a non-profit. The windows were sealed shut where I worked, and the air in my office smelled recirculated. I caught cold once a month and developed a reputation as the person who was always sick. I was frustrated by the city, by the traffic, by the frantically sprawling suburbs, and I wanted out of what felt like an entirely

Acknowledgments

Camas provides a forum for discussion of environmental issues and is a place for creative writing dedicated to the nature of the West.

Editors/Publishers
Katherine McKalip
Jan Scher

Art Director
Jay Ericson

Editorial Board
Angie Barger
Dan Berger
John Bateman
Kinza Cusic
Jeri Larsen
Danielle Lattuga
Oona Palmer
Beth Peluso
Katherine Romano
Richarda Ruffle
Michael Sanctuary
Megan Schuknecht
Erin K. Sexton
John Sheagren
Melissa Sladek

Camas receives support from the Associated Students of the University of Montana, the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana, and many generous individuals and businesses. Thanks especially to all those who have recently purchased or subscribed to our journal—please let us know what you think about *Camas* by dropping us a line. Thanks also to our hard-working staff members; their enthusiasm and creativity are greatly appreciated.

We invite submissions of article ideas, prose, poetry, and artwork. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission. Thanks.

Camas
EVST/Jeannette Rankin Hall
The University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
(406) 243-5738
camas@selway.umt.edu
www.umt.edu/evst/camas

unwholesome existence. When my coworkers learned I was looking into grad programs, they said things like, "American University has a great environmental studies program—why don't you apply? You could take classes part-time, keep your job here, and stay in the city." Washington is a fascinating place to a lot of people, and in my more optimistic moments I can appreciate its appeal. But I found the prospect of studying environmental issues in that great, gray city utterly uninspiring. All I could foresee was a bunch of quasi-bureaucrats lecturing me on the red tape of environmental policy. The very thought made me shudder; I knew that I wanted to learn in a different way.

Place *does* matter. There's a reason why all of us in UM's Environmental Studies program gravitated to Missoula, why we found the idea of learning in this part of the country exciting. This particular segment of the northwest Rockies can infect a person with a life-altering passion. But maybe you understand that already.

The Blackfoot River serves as refuge, not just for paddlers and anglers seeking to escape civilization, but also for local wildlife. A number of species that are listed as either threatened or endangered—grizzly bears, wolves, bull trout, and westslope cutthroat trout, as well as the bald eagles and ospreys that I saw on my river trips—call the Blackfoot River Valley home. But for three straight years, 1996-98, the Blackfoot made American Rivers' list of Most Endangered Rivers, due to a proposed cyanide heap-leach gold mine that would have severely degraded its waters. In 1998, Montana voters enacted a ballot initiative that banned the use of cyanide in new or expanding gold mining operations and effectively blocked construction of the mine. When the river's sanctity was jeopardized, those who knew and loved the area worked to preserve it.

The Blackfoot is also an example of successful conservation, again due to the efforts of individuals. In the 1970s, private landowners in the Blackfoot Valley began donating conservation easements to land trusts; today, over 7000 acres are protected from development. In a nod to pleasure-seekers like myself and to minimize the toll that our presence exacts on the river corridor, these landowners negotiated a recreation management agreement with the state of Montana, whereby public river access points are designated on private land. These efforts, initiated by the community, made my summer river sojourns possible.

I learned the Blackfoot's history in a class I took this fall. But as a result of the days I spent floating its languorous waters, the lessons had an exponentially greater impact on me than they would have had I never spent any time there. It's what I would have missed had I registered for that grad program at American University, had I rationalized that *where* I chose to learn really didn't matter. Place *does* matter. The Blackfoot matters. The hours we while away on these rivers and in these mountains matter: they inspire a love that makes us more effective activists. Now if you'll excuse me, I really should get back to work. I have a hiking date up Pattee Canyon with my dog….

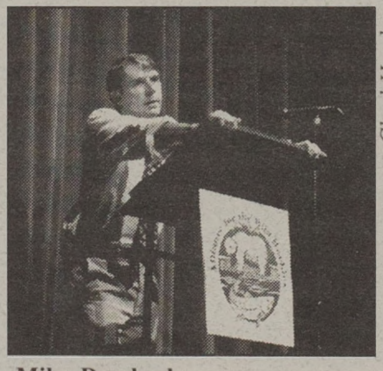
— Katie McKalip

Huckleberry Wine *(well-aged)*

Wild Rockies Rendezvous

The Alliance for the Wild Rockies held its 16th annual Wild Rockies Rendezvous in Missoula September 27-29, 2001. The Alliance formed in 1988 to meet the challenge of saving the Northern Rockies bioregion from habitat destruction. Its mission is to ensure the ecological integrity of the Wild Rockies bioregion through citizen empowerment and via the application of conservation biology, sustainable economic models, and environmental law.

The theme of this year's Rendezvous was "Making Connections, Protecting the Core." Keynote speaker Mike Dombeck, former U.S. Forest Service Chief and former head of the Bureau of Land Management, opened the event by relating what, in his opinion, are the top 10 challenges in conservation today. His list includes reforming the 1872 Mining Act, controlling sprawl and land fragmentation, preventing the loss of biodiversity, and directing more resources toward educating the public. Panel discussions and breakout sessions covering these challenges were held throughout the Rendezvous weekend. For more information about the event or the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, visit www.wildrockiesalliance.org or call (406) 721-5420.



Chad Harder

Mike Dombeck

— Kinza Cusic

ANWR

The debate over drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) continues as the nation copes with the events of September 11th and their aftermath. At nearly 20 million acres, ANWR is among the nation's largest refuges and is considered one of the most complete and pristine ecosystems on Earth.

The Bush administration has been pushing for oil exploration and drilling in ANWR since November 2000. Already the House has approved an energy legislation bill that includes drilling in the Refuge, but in the Senate, it has taken a back seat to the economic recovery plan, the airport security plan, and the appropriation bills. On October 2nd, the Senate voted 100-0 against Senator James Inhofe's (R-OK) attempt to include energy legislation—including oil exploration in the Refuge—in a Defense Bill rider. The unanimous vote apparently was a matter of expediting the Defense Bill authorization rather than opposition to drilling in the Arctic.

Proponents of drilling in ANWR say that, in light of our campaign against terrorism, development of this resource is now a matter of national security. Opponents support reducing our dependence on foreign oil by exploring renewable energy sources, and they argue that the small amount of oil in the Refuge would supply enough fuel for a mere six months. Furthermore, they claim that drilling in the Arctic won't even provide immediate benefits, since oil extracted from ANWR now may not be available for another decade.

What this means to you: There is still time (but not much) to contact your congressional representatives and other critical players in the energy legislation bill. Short-term solutions to current matters of national security, which could result in hasty and regrettable decisions concerning our natural resources, should not overshadow pertinent environmental issues.

— Danielle Lattuga

Rock Creek Mine in Limbo

On September 14th, 2001, the Kootenai National Forest and Montana Department of Environmental Quality issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Rock Creek mine, which would be built in the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness Area in northwest Montana. In the days that followed, the newspapers told an incomplete story of the status of Sterling Mining's proposal to build the Rock Creek mine. "Rock Creek mine approved by state DEQ," read the headline in the Missoula *Independent*. "Rock Creek Mine gets OK," the Spokane, WA *Spokesman-Review* reported. The *Missoulian* had this to say: "Rock Creek mine one step from reality."

The truth is this: the Rock Creek mine is still several large hurdles away from ever being built.

The story behind the story was captured in the sub-head in the *Spokesman*, which read, "Environmentalists will likely continue fight against Montana mine." The Rock Creek Alliance, a coalition of business owners, sportspeople, conservationists, and concerned citizens, has been fighting the proposed mine for years, believing that it can't be built without harming irreplaceable natural resources. Members of the coalition also feel that the state of Montana and the federal government have spent too much of taxpayers' money on cleanup from mines developed by companies that have since declared bankruptcy. For example, the state of Montana is still trying to figure out how to clean up the mess left at the Zortman and Landusky mines in north-central Montana. Both mines were developed by Pegasus Gold, which later declared bankruptcy and left a bond of 60 million dollars to pay for a cleanup that, estimates suggest, could cost the state as much as 200 million dollars. Interestingly, Frank Duval, the president of Pegasus Gold during the development of the Zortman and Landusky mines, is now the current president and CEO of Sterling Mining, the company seeking permission to mine at Rock Creek.

The next step in the permitting process will be the agencies' release of the Record of Decision, due any day now; the Rock Creek Alliance, along with other groups, is preparing to appeal if the mine is approved. If an appeal is unsuccessful, the groups will pursue litigation. A coalition of eight organizations, including the Alliance, already has filed one lawsuit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service's Biological Opinion of the probable impacts of the mine on endangered and threatened species, such as bull trout and grizzly bear. This lawsuit may turn out to be the first in a series, aimed toward a common goal: proving that building the Rock Creek mine will inevitably violate federal and state laws designed to protect water, public lands, wildlife, and overall quality of life. If the lawsuit is successful in proving these claims, the agencies will be obligated to halt development of the Rock Creek mine.

Realistically, these issues will take several years to resolve. The public agencies must follow the permitting process as dictated by law, and the coalition of environmental groups and concerned citizens is committed to the fight. Sterling Mining, on the other hand, can save everyone a lot of time and money by withdrawing from the dispute. Only time will tell exactly how many hurdles are between the proposed mine and an operational mine.

For more information, please call the Rock Creek Alliance in Sandpoint, Idaho at (208) 265-8272.

— Rick Stern

Rick Stern is the former Montana director of the Rock Creek Alliance.

Off the Road, Again

In January 2001, shortly before George W. Bush took office, the Clinton administration issued the Forest Service's Roadless Area Conservation Rule, protecting 60 million acres of prime forested habitat—the last of the remaining pristine forests in the Forest Service system—from road building, logging, and other extractive pursuits. Upon taking office, the Bush administration promised vaguely to uphold the rule but subsequently set about amending it in ways that will surely weaken the high level of environmental protection now included. In late spring, Idaho District Court handed down an injunction delaying implementation of the rule indefinitely. This court decision is under appeal in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, and a decision is expected in December.

On July 10, citing insufficient public involvement in the development of the initial rule (notwithstanding 600 public meetings and 1.6 million individual comments, 90 percent in favor of the strongest protection), the Bush administration called for an additional two-month comment period. This new window of public input, called Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR), was based on 10 redundant "scoping" questions and would aid in implementing changes to the initial rule. The period ended September 10, and, despite its brevity and attempt at a low profile, it generated over 650,000 additional comments.

The Roadless Rule is in a state of limbo until the final ANPR comments are tallied in January 2002 and the Forest Service decides whether and how to amend the rule. Strong corporate forces are pushing for a weakening of the rule, and the administration seems to want to accommodate them. In the meantime, information on the rule is available at the Forest Service's website, www.roadless.fs.fed.us, and at www.ourforests.org.

— John Bateman

EVST Grad Leads Sierra Club

Jennifer Ferenstein, who graduated from the University of Montana's graduate Environmental Studies Program (EVST) in 1994, has been making waves as an environmental activist. Now she brings her considerable experience in Western issues to the helm of the Sierra Club, the nation's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. Ferenstein's passion for the environment has its roots deep in the Western soil. Relationships between people and the land piqued her interest during summers spent at her grandparents' ranch in central Oregon's Twickenham Valley. Ferenstein came to Missoula and EVST with an undergraduate degree in biology from Reed College in Portland, OR, and it was in Missoula that she found ways to apply her knowledge of science and the environment to her interest in conservation at a community level.

Last May, she was elected president of the Sierra Club by its board of directors, becoming the fourth and youngest woman in the Club's history to hold this title. Ferenstein is devoting her term as president to putting, in her words, "a slightly different face on the Sierra Club." For more on her views on conservation and her thoughts about her new position, look for an interview with Jennifer Ferenstein in the Spring 2002 issue of *Camas*.

— Richarda Ruffle

Jay Ericson

Jennifer Ferenstein

***Camas* Advisor Nets Fellowship**

The University of Montana community was honored last spring when one of its own, professor Donald Snow of the Environmental Studies Department, was selected as the Edward F. Arnold Professor of Creative Writing and Environmental Studies at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington for the 2001-02 academic year. In 1972, Whitman developed one of the first programs in environmental studies among liberal arts colleges and in the past decade has seen enormous growth in the program's breadth and renown. Don will build on this reputation during his tenure at Whitman, teaching courses in environmental literature and writing.

Don brings to Whitman his vast knowledge of Western history, literature, and environmental issues, as well as his skills as a writer and editor. While we at EVST are proud of Don's accomplishments, his presence in the department is missed. (Although his absence has given his advisees an excuse to postpone their theses defenses for another semester.) We're anticipating his return to Missoula.

— Katie McKalip

While Don is away, Professor Hank Harrington is the acting advisor to Camas*, much to the delight of its editors.*

***Camas* Launches New Website**

Camas has a new, improved website. Web designer John Sheagren has been hard at work since June, updating information, making the pages user-friendly, and sprucing up the site's overall appearance. Information on how to submit, subscribe, or stay in touch with *Camas* is now available at www.umt.edu/evst/camas. Check it out, and let us know what you think!

— Jan Scher

Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness

The East Half Map

A red line
jags up a glacial wall, over coarse sediment
loose piles-misplaced centuries ago.

These white areas are you

where trees no longer grow
-there are no red lines here-
roots cannot plant this rock.

Glacial ice fractures granite,
ruptures over skeleton spillways,
what spreads before you
an arctic prairie-ice
that never melts never
flows toward green-
beyond the ruptured skulls
of Mountain Pika and the murky rust of
mining dredge.

This is where you will die-

-in an August blizzard
the jeep track breaks
into molecules-
what declination have you now?
Which line will lead you out?
This white is not paper. Molecules
snapping bones, crushing your face, freezing
your eyelids shut.

-or clear skies
and a light breeze-your confidence

something of a ghost, a canyon. Abandonment-
scattering sweat into regions-Quadrants-you never
thought possible-where you never
felt cold-

empty-as the clear water of Deep Lake.

Lichen grows beyond the red
boundaries of Line Lake, above the East
Unit and under waterfalls hammering
smooth the mind—clouds
slammed together and snow
that melts-refreezes-
and cannot melt again.

Lichen makes you think life,
shaky fossils colored for life.
Molecular flowers shooting
around Grasshopper Glacier,
obscuring black whispers of flight
-icy catacombs-six feet down
and you realize silence,
you realize the years of quiet and time
untouchable and above
your extraneous face, already burned by snow.

Dave Tirrell

Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1

Manufactured Landscapes

Photos & Text
by Shelly Truman

Lawn Edging

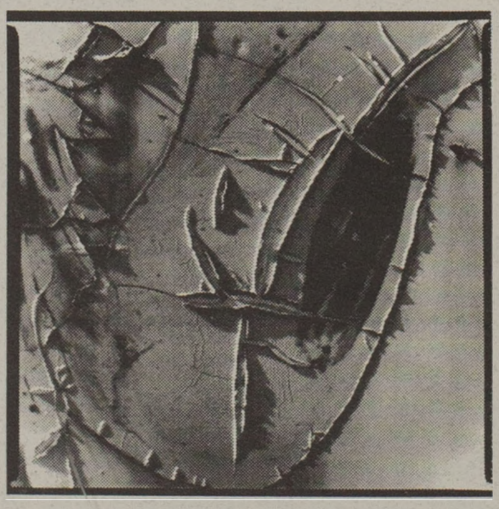
Body Trim

Body Major Damage #1

As a product of suburban America, I grew up in a disposable culture. My sense of natural order was encompassed by two simultaneous yet contradictory events: shopping day and garbage day.

Landscapes such as junkyards, construction sites, and drainage ditches represent highly controlled and manipulated landscapes created with a ubiquitously human zeal to use nature for civilization's objectives. The documentation of action and consequence, of what disposable America considers ugly and then abandons, reminds us that humans, too, are subject to natural forces.

Body Major Damage #2



Loyola School Bus

Radiator

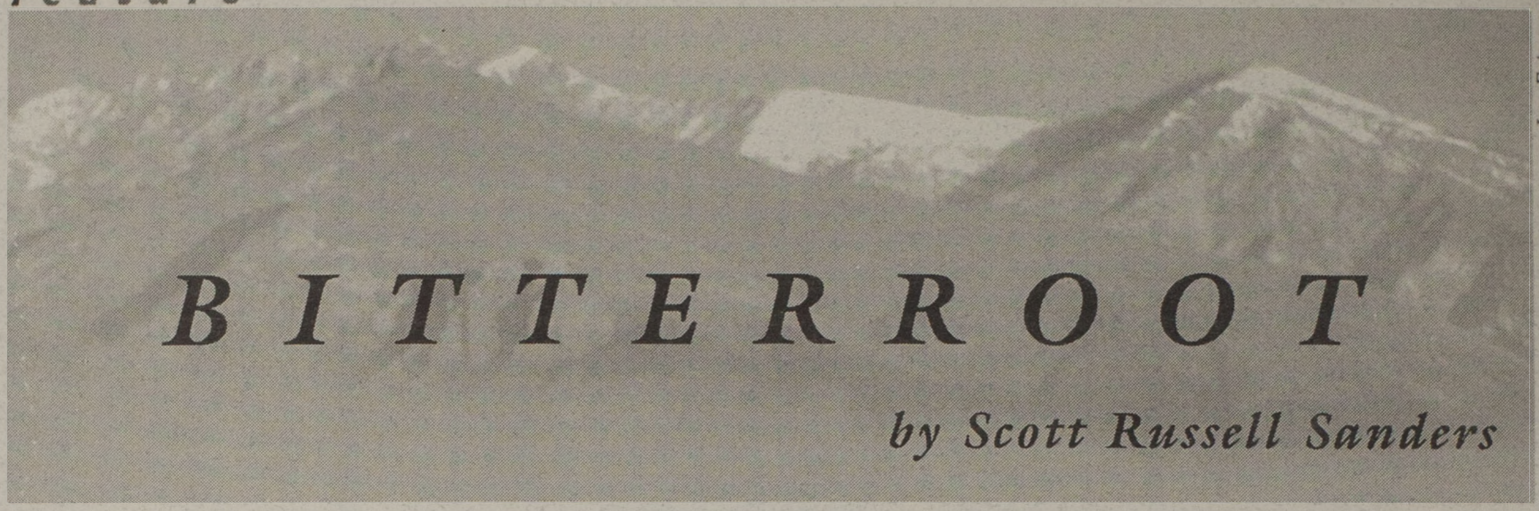
Refrigeration Truck

A delicate balance exists between the forces of nature that create and those that destroy. The camera freezes time, revealing the complexity of natural order and chaos. We see that the forces of nature have ultimate control in this world and that we are inherently vulnerable.

Feel the duality of discord and harmony. Remember the old '63 Dodge Dart you loved dearly but were forced to abandon at the junkyard. Remember the '86 Buick Century someone set afire on the reservation. Feel the powerful disorientation of geologic time compared to the fleeting moments of frozen time. Remember that we, as a species, are subject to the same force that causes vehicles and machines to degrade and fall apart—entropy.

Shelly Truman received the first Master of Fine Arts in Photography ever awarded by the University of Montana. She is an adjunct professor at UM as well as the marketing assistant at Missoula's Good Food Store. Currently, she is working on a series of drawings and photographs that focus on the human body.

Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1



Jay Ericson

BITTERROOT

by Scott Russell Sanders

For a week this past summer, as May eased into June, 15 of us sat around a grand table in an old barn on the Teller Wildlife Refuge south of Missoula, mugs of tea or coffee steaming in front of us, pages of manuscripts open before us, and we talked about the difficult art of turning experience into words. Each of us brought a different load of experience to the table, of course, and yet we all shared a passion for the wild, original, enduring world that we glimpsed through the windows.

Just outside, bevies of cliff swallows cruised for insects and then swooped back to their mud nests under the eaves of the barn, the purr of their voices wafting in through the open windows like the expectant murmur of a theater crowd before the curtain rises. Farther out, we looked across flat grasslands to a fringe of willows and cottonwoods marking the course of the Bitterroot River, and farther still, our gaze slid up the Bitterroot Mountains to the snowy peaks and then on into the luminous sky.

For the first two days of our workshop, that sky was serenely blank, extending a drought that made the locals nervous about wildfires. Spiraling high overhead, red-tailed hawks carved up the indifferent blue. Tiger swallowtails, nectaring on lilacs that bloomed beside the clapboard ranch house where most of us were staying, idled about in the still air. Sprinklers ran day and night. On our third morning, a continent of gray clouds blew into the valley, pouring rain on the lowlands and snow on the mountains. By nightfall, the Bitterroots to the west and the Sapphires to the east looked as though they had been newly fashioned out of white silk.

In the midst of so much power and glory, none of us had any trouble remembering that the world comes first and art comes after. In such a setting, it's clear that the prime impulse for writing is to pay tribute to a reality that is vast, mysterious, magnificent, and inexhaustible. And indeed, every manuscript we discussed in the company of mountains and swallows spoke of this encompassing reality, this wild weave that embraces us and passes through our own breathing bodies.

One of the manuscripts told about surviving a hurricane on a Hawaiian island, another told about fishing for halibut in the waters of Alaska, and another told about the aftermath of a drowning in California. There were essays or chapters from books-in-progress about the allure and menace of rivers, about the call and constraint of particular landscapes, about the wonder and bewilderment of meeting other animals. There were stories about searching for a home place and stories about diving down to a spiritual center. Whatever the subject or setting, every one of those manuscripts brooded in its own way on love and loss, for the authors who chose to spend this week together in the Bitterroot Valley all feel that the earth is both precious and imperiled.

The editors of *Camas* told me they had a hard time choosing which two of these pieces to publish, and I can sympathize. I'm glad I didn't have to make the choice from such an abundance of good work. Certainly the essays by Debra Marquart and James McLaughlin represent our group well. You can see in both pieces a richness, clarity, and precision that reflects not only the talent of these two authors but also the benefits of addressing a reality larger than the self. "Things Not Seen in a Rear View Mirror" and "Starlings, A Pig, and Four Deer" both reflect on passages in the authors' lives, yet those passages are moving and revelatory because they point beyond the merely personal to our shared condition and our mutual home.

The narrator in "Things Not Seen in a Rear View Mirror" returns warily to her North Dakota home for her father's funeral. She fears the gravity of the place where her family has farmed for generations and where most of her kinfolk lie buried. She fled this place as a young woman, refusing to be planted in the fields along with the other crops, hungering for the larger life of cities. Yet now, as she enters her childhood territory, she realizes that the country still dwells within her: "While it may be just another patch of flat horizon to someone driving through, to my family it's the navel of the earth—the place from which all things flow and to which all things return in time." The father returns to the earth that fed him, with a sheaf of wheat in his coffin, and the daughter comes home to pay her respects. After the funeral she will flee again, but even away in the cities, far from the captivating land, she will still "write these hard stories of love back to it."

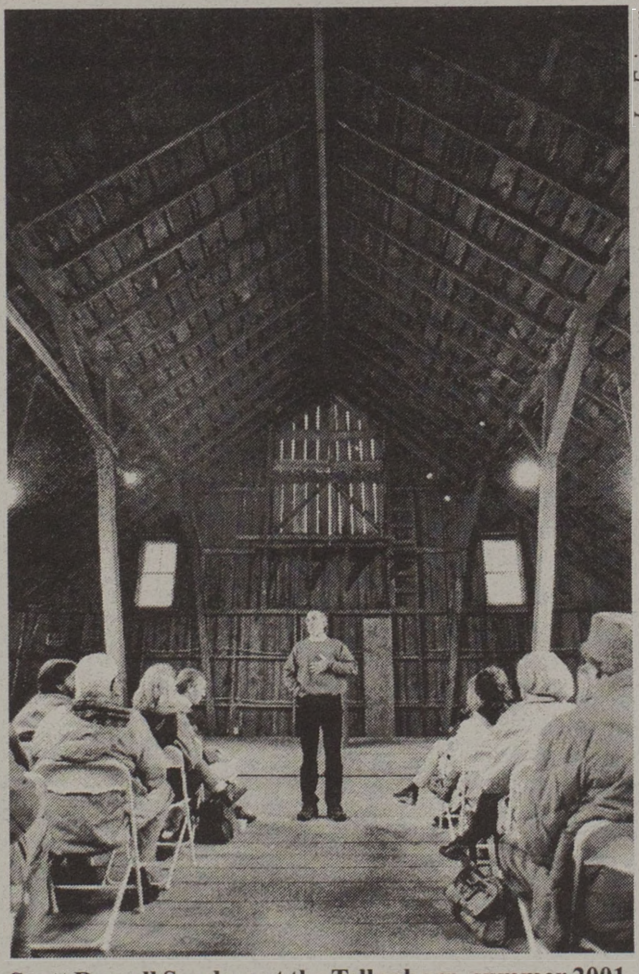
Near the end of "Starlings, A Pig, and Four Deer," the narrator shoots a deer while hunting with his 10-year-old nephew, and he wonders how to explain to the boy that life rides on the back of death. As he stands beside the warm carcass, searching for words, a great horned owl flies overhead, and all the narrator can do is gesture at the bird with his knife. "Sometimes I feel I left something of myself in that moment," the narrator tells us, "as if part of me is still frozen, exultant, pointing my knife at the world. The me that is standing there understands in some wordless way that we have reason for hope. He believes we can find a way to live in the wild universe."

In those lines, James McLaughlin spoke for all of us who gathered around that table in the old barn in the Bitterroot Valley. Our chief source of hope is the vitality, fidelity, and persistence of the wild world, and our greatest gift is to look back with curiosity and love at this creation, raising our voices, pointing.

I'm glad to have been able to spend a week with such dedicated writers in such a beautiful place. I'm grateful to the staff at University of Montana's Environmental Studies Program, especially Don Snow and Tom Roy, and to the staff at the Teller Wildlife Refuge, especially Diane Boyd and Kate Wimmer, who made my visit possible and also made it pleasant.

In the garden at Teller the bitterroot was blooming, pale pink flowers the size of silver dollars. I'm told that the starchy roots are indeed bitter when eaten raw but are tender and delicious when cooked. For generations, native peoples, mountain men, and settlers hereabouts have fed on these roots. Even when dried for a long while, the roots, if moistened, will send up shoots. From this ability to preserve its vigor through droughts, the plant earned its Latin name, *rediviva*, which means "brought to life." Just as rain quickens the slumbering root, so imagination brings forth new life out of our own depths.

Here, then, are two fine examples of this life-giving work.



Jay Ericson

Scott Russell Sanders at the Teller barn, summer 2001

Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1

Starlings, A Pig, and Four Deer

by James McLaughlin

Photo Illustrations by Jay Ericson

I was about 10 years old when I instigated a BB gun crusade against starlings. I had read somewhere that the whole boisterous, swarming lot descended from a flock of 80 British imports, released in Central Park as part of a plan to establish in the United States all the birds mentioned in the works of Shakespeare. That seemed unpardonably silly to me, and I began shooting *Sturnus vulgaris* out of trees, at bird feeders, and off telephone wires; I shot into the noisy flocks streaming overhead in early spring. Not that I understood the ecology of alien incursions—I was simply reacting to the starlings' sheer abundance, their unprettiness, their despicable behavior at nesting sites—and I felt a righteous outrage that the birds *didn't even belong here*. They were obnoxious, naturalized Europeans. I was a kid, my own Scotch-Irish heritage as ordinary and invisible as landscape.

I began to invite friends from town out for weekends on my family's Virginia farm, and the carnage spread as we progressed from shooting starlings to shooting any creature whose death we could rationalize. During unsupervised play time, we made forays into the fields and scrubby woodlots within calling distance of the house, armed with innocent-looking air rifles. Before long, we graduated to more powerful pellet guns, and occasionally my mother would allow us to use—under strict conditions—a .22 rifle or my uncle's old 20-gauge shotgun. We made our own rules: no hawks, vultures, owls, woodpeckers, or black snakes. And no cardinals (the state bird). Otherwise, almost nothing was safe. We shot blue jays, grackles, and the diverse but, to us, nondescript brown birds we lumped together as "sparrows." We shot pigeons in the barn because they shat on the hay, groundhogs because they dug holes in the pastures, crows because they were crows. At the pond, we shot snapping turtles, painted turtles, water snakes, bullfrogs, newts. We even shot my mother's poor Angus cows in the butt with BBs to make them run. In the yard, we shot squirrels out of season, and between us and the house cats we must have extirpated the chipmunks, because I never see them at the farm anymore.

I don't mean to suggest that all we did was shoot animals. We also shot soda cans and paper targets, old fighter plane models and plastic soldiers. And I spent endless hours simply wandering the farm with my dog, intent more on exploring than shooting. But the experimentation with killing stands out in my memory—it preceded real hunting, and it troubles me as a kind of vaguely pathological aberration in my youth. I can only imagine that my natural curiosity was unrestrained by any sense of my own place in the world, by any inkling of identification with the animals themselves. Lacking respect and ritual, my friends and I were carried away by a childish fascination with the guns themselves, with their power, with the physics of shooting "things." We found it delicious to reach out and smite wild animals, to make them fall, to reduce elusive creatures to possessions: the warm, feathered body limp in our hands; the hard, shiny bill; the little clawed feet; the colors so rich and specific—details we hadn't imagined.

My random killing stage ended, at least in part, because I learned to hunt. My father had died when I was four, so it was my older brother, my sisters' husbands, my uncle, family friends, and even my mother who took me out hunting. They would drive me to a neighbor's cut cornfield so I could crouch in a fence-line and wait for doves. Or they would walk with me in the forest, showing me where to look for grouse, squirrels, and rabbits. I tagged along on deer and turkey hunts, breathless at the gravity, the adult seriousness of it all. I was told that you're supposed to eat what you kill and, conversely, you shouldn't

kill any animal you don't intend to eat, a practical and non-mystical rule with its provenance in the Scotch-Irish aversion to waste of any kind. Eventually, "real" hunting—the ritualized, rule-bound killing of animals for the table—became clearly distinguished in my mind from what my friends and I had been doing with our BB guns. I stopped shooting sparrows, newts, and my mother's cattle. I learned to eat what I killed.

By the time I was 12, hunting had become my primary obsession, and life derived much of its order from the schedule provided by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. I always kept the pamphlet handy: dove season followed by squirrel season followed by rabbit season followed by turkey season, and so on. I was attracted to what I took to be authentic depictions of wild and primal nature found in certain books, which I read and re-read: *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild*, and all 24 of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* novels. I tacked magazine pictures of wild animals on the walls of my bedroom—turkey, deer, elk, and moose—as well as pictures of fellow predators such as wolves and pumas, golden eagles and great horned owls. I constantly toted a big knife and waterproof matches, and on weekends I would camp out as far away from the house as my mother would allow. When she finally trusted me in the woods by myself, I often would stay out all day, shooting squirrels and rabbits. Around midday, I would bivouac beside a stream and start a fire with cedar twigs; wash the little, naked, rat-like bodies in the chill water; and roast them on green poplar skewers. I would eat them all in a sitting with a piece of bread from home, afterward leaning my face into the stream to drink. If the sun was warm, I would curl up in the leaves and sleep, sometimes waking to the snorts of deer startled by my scent or a flock of turkeys feeding nearby.

When I was 13, a pig escaped from a neighbor's pen, and for several months it ran wild, rooting our pastures and leaving them pocked with shallow dirt scars. No one could catch the pig, and while there was some loose talk of shooting it, after a few weeks the pig began to blend into the landscape, and the grownups didn't pay it much attention. I had the opposite response: as the pig grew wilder, it became more interesting to me, as quarry. My family had said they wouldn't let me hunt deer until I was 15, but a pig was not a deer, and I imagined a hero's welcome if I managed to kill this animal that had become a bit of a nuisance. I did, however, have sense enough to keep quiet about my preparations.

The only gun I had control over at the time was a pellet gun, which I didn't think would do the job, so I made a spear by duct-taping my grandfather's World War I bayonet to a straight hickory stick. I practiced throwing it at hay bales in the barn until I thought I was ready, and after lunch on a warm September day, I snuck out with my spear and the overweight Weimaraner bitch my mother had named Liebchen.

We found the pig in a pasture way back at the foot of the mountain, feeding near the woods. Satisfied that my quarry was indeed acting more like a wild animal than livestock, I crept through the forest around the pasture's edge to hunker with the dog behind a thicket of multiflora rose. We waited and watched while the pig rooted in the field, Liebchen glancing at me every minute or so, her sweet, silver-grey face apprehensive, eyebrows scrunched together in what I thought at the time was a predator's intense concentration.

I dragged the carcass away from the creek and left it for the crows and vultures, and I never told anyone what happened.

Eventually I realized the pig wasn't coming any closer, that it was, instead, wandering farther out into the field. We were going to have to run it down. I took a breath—surely I could outrun a pig—and burst out of the multiflora, my spear-arm cocked beside my ear, Liebchen charging at my side.

The pig grunted and turned to face us. Stolid as a boulder, it lifted its pink, round muzzle to the breeze and watched us approach. I felt a flutter of doubt, which grew into a minor panic as we sprinted toward it and I realized that the pig was much bigger than I'd thought, probably a couple hundred pounds. I stopped about 10 yards short, the spear raised over my head. Liebchen skidded to a halt, too, standing just in front of me and whining. The pig eyed us with irritation.

In my memory, the pig pawed the ground and charged like a bull. While I doubt that actually happened, I do know that ultimately I threw the spear in a defensive, as opposed to predatory, frame of mind. I threw poorly, the bayonet only grazing the pig's chest, cutting a gash that didn't look very deep. The pig squealed and, for some reason I still don't understand, veered toward innocent Liebchen, who took off across the pasture with the pig in pursuit.

I picked up the spear and ran after them, glad I'd been spared the thrashing but starting to worry about what the pig would do to my dog if it caught her. Liebchen's adrenaline-assisted burst of speed eventually petered out, and she circled back, big-eyed and accusing, to stand behind me and bark. My solicitude evaporated, and I tried to shoo her away, but she clung like a shadow, keeping me between her and the incoming pig, which by then was bearing down and showing no fear of either of us. At the last moment, I turned and threw the spear again, the shaft turning sideways in the air to give the pig a loud whack on the shoulder. For some reason that slap spooked the pig—it nearly turned a flip reversing direction and ran headlong into the forest. Liebchen gave a brief, halfhearted chase and returned with her head high, triumphant.

Nobody got hurt that day, not even the pig, really. The episode is more remarkable for the hard lesson I almost learned than for any wisdom actually gained, but I felt relieved and humbled as I walked home with my dog. I unwrapped the duct tape from my spear and replaced the bayonet on the bedroom

mantel, resigned to a couple more years of hunting squirrels and rabbits. The pig ran wild for another month or so, until our neighbor finally caught it and returned it to the world of animal husbandry, where it had other concerns besides boys with spears.

During the spring following the autumn of our failed pig hunt, Liebchen and I were wandering the woods one afternoon when she disappeared into a hollow nearby, barking an excited, high-pitched *yip* I hadn't heard from her before. I followed, and when I found her she had brought a whitetail doe to bay, the deer standing hock-deep in a small stream, rearing away when the dog grabbed at her throat. Liebchen wouldn't listen to my yelling, so I picked up a big, sturdy stick and smacked her across the haunches. She yelped and backed off, but the deer didn't try to run; it just stood swaying in the creek, wheezing, staring past me. Then I noticed the dangling left foreleg, the dry white bone of an old compound fracture, the wasted muscles. The deer herself was emaciated, covered with ticks, surely dying.

A strange calm settled on the three of us as the deer and the dog waited for me to do something. I could have pulled the dog away and left the deer to die on her own. I also suppose I could have tried to capture the deer, wrap her in a blanket, and take her to a vet. But neither plan occurred to me. I felt responsible for the deer's suffering, since it seemed obvious that a person had wounded her, whether with a gun or a car. I recall a teenager's melodramatic sense of tragic duty. We waited there for a long while before I spoke to Liebchen, apologizing, saying I was sorry about hitting her with the stick. Then I apologized to the deer, though I don't think she was listening. I don't recall what I said; to be honest, I mostly remember crying and then clubbing the deer to death with that stick while the dog leapt about, growling and barking.

Killing large animals up close is different from killing small ones at a distance: the doe bleated and looked at me with panicked eyes the same size as my own until I finally knocked her unconscious. I stood panting and sweating, holding the club in both hands, watching blood from the doe's broken head curl out into the muddied stream and disappear. I think a person feels a desperate urgency in the act of killing, a wanting to get it done in a hurry that to an observer—and even, in retrospect, to the person who did the killing—can seem like brutality.

Liebchen whined and sniffed the doe's bony flank. The woods were quiet and huge around us. I said once more that I was sorry, speaking to the doe but also, I suppose, declaring my sorrow to the world in general. As if to answer me, several crows landed in a tree overhead and started calling in excited crow voices. Probably they were rejoicing over the meal I'd just provided, but I was struck by the sense that they were speaking to me, telling me something. I listened but couldn't quite grasp what they were saying. It sounded familiar, like something I had dreamed, but the crows flew away before I could figure it out, and the moment passed. I started to worry about getting in trouble for killing a deer out of season. I dragged the carcass away from the creek and left it for the crows and vultures, and I never told anyone what happened.

I was in my late teens when I killed my first buck. I wanted to be a skillful, careful hunter, and I passed up dozens of not-quite-ideal shots. I became an expert deer hunter without shooting a single deer. The buck was a young eight-point, and he was so rut-addled I was able to stalk to within 50 yards and kill him before he knew I was there. I did everything right, and there were no glitches: he died instantly, and I gutted him and dragged his carcass through the woods to the field. I was calm but elated. I was a little proud of myself. I wasn't paying attention.

I rinsed my hands in a stream and walked home for the tractor and wagon. When I returned, I brought my camera and tripod and took two self-timed photographs of myself kneeling in the dry pasture with my rifle and the dead buck. I turned the camera 90 degrees for the second shot, from the vertical to the horizontal.

When I got the slides back, I saw that the film had advanced only a quarter-frame for the second, horizontal shot, and I had accidentally exposed the same film twice, superimposing the buck's ethereal form over my own. I had guessed wrongly at the framing of the second shot, anyway, and cut off the top of my face, leaving only my nose, cheekbones, and mouth—a mask of my face. Looking at the slide now, I see I was wearing a camouflage baseball cap, a plaid wool shirt, green wool pants. I must have draped my jacket over the buck's rent abdomen. The background of the image is a chaos of crosshatched grass and brush.

continued on page 34

Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1

Things Not Seen in

On the morning of my father's funeral, there was a house on the road that blocked, for a time, all flow of traffic on Highway 3, the two-lane blacktop in central North Dakota that stretches south of I-94 to my hometown. I spotted the house first as a sliver of roof and eaves in the distance, weaving like an apparition above the horizon.

"Is that a house?" I asked my husband, Peter, who knows best to drive and remain quiet the closer we get to ground zero. We had driven 600 miles the day before and collapsed into bed late, 75 miles away at a hotel in Jamestown, the nearest city, in order to avoid the crowded bedrooms and cold morning showers that a wedding or a funeral or any kind of family reunion can create in one household.

I kept expecting the next curve or rise to correct my vision, for the growing roof to slither to the right or left and become simply one more farmhouse on the side of the road. I know the topography of this drive from every conceivable angle, can read it with my fingers like Braille. If you installed my memory like a slotted reel on a player piano, the ghostly keys would play out this tune: there is the gravel turnoff to Grandma and Grandpa Geist's old place; there's the farm where the Doll triplets lived; there's the ruin of the old country store where the little boy was run over by a milk truck. This is the place of dust where I spent my childhood.

Although writing about Kansas, Willa Cather most accurately captures the enduring feeling of these plains when she describes them as "flatland, rich and somber and always silent; the miles of fresh-plowed soil, heavy and black, full of strength and harshness; the growing wheat, the growing weeds; the toiling horses, the tired men; the long empty roads," and "the eternal, unresponsive sky." And "against all this," Cather writes, "Youth, flaming like the wild roses."

I know the plains as that flaming, impatient youth, a 17-year-old girl scanning the horizon for all possible methods of escape, and I know it from the next 20 years gazing through the air-tight windows of cars, arming myself like an astronaut entering a rarefied environment every time I pass through for a short visit. For a long time, it seemed to me, North Dakota looked best only when glanced at briefly, framed in the rear view mirror.

Highway 3 is only a few miles shy of the hundredth meridian, the north-south line of demarcation generally considered to be the beginning of the West and the end of the Midwest. Drive another 40 miles to the west, and you'll see the Missouri river take a deep crook and begin to flow south, on its way to joining the Mississippi. This was the route that Lewis and Clark took on their famous voyage north and west into what they feared to be nowhere.

West of here as you travel toward Montana, you'll notice that slopes get deeper and roads get lonelier. Towns get smaller, fewer and farther between. Many of the buildings look broken down, boarded up, and thirsty for paint—a

a Rear View Mirror

by Debra Marquart

Watercolors by Beth Peluso

post office, a bar, an elevator. The per-square-mile population figures drop along with annual rainfall averages. It's possible that the only statistic on the rise is the number of guns and bibles per capita, but aside from the "Get US Out of the UN" sign painted on a sloping barn near Dawson (right next to the "Honey for sale" sign), you would not have a sense of anything unusual while driving Highway 3—just an endless succession of farms, fields, and fences.

The pioneers—especially those who had just made an ocean crossing—saw the sea in the level plains and mixed grass prairies. "I believe this was once the bottom of a great inland sea," one pioneer woman wrote in her journal as she crossed Kansas. And her observation was correct. Somewhere around 100 million years ago, much of the interior of what is now the United States was submerged under the waters of a shallow ocean extending from the Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean.

This great Cretaceous sea, as geologists have called it, divided the continent into eastern and western shores and deposited several strata of shale, condensed layers of mud and clay that even today, when they are penetrated through digging, reveal the fossils and remains of oysters, fish, crocodiles, and extinct animals such as a diving bird and a swimming reptile.

For the next several million years, what is now the Dakotas was a swampland with hundreds and thousands of square miles of shallow lakes fed by rivers. At that time, according to A.G. Leonard in *The Geology of North Dakota*, "coniferous trees, such as Sequoia, cypress, juniper, and arbor vitae proliferated in the western part of North Dakota in the swamps and small lakes [that] formed the numerous lignite beds that are now mined for coal and oil."

More recently, within the last one million years, the topography of the Midwest was once again transformed by what geologists call the great ice plow-up—the movement of two glaciers that smoothed and flattened the land to its present state of undulating hills and ridges and deep sinuses of level earth.

The first glacier, the Kansan, spread some four million square miles from northeast North America down to the Ohio River and central Missouri. The Kansan covered all but the most extreme southwestern corner of North Dakota, carrying and spreading rocks from as far away as the Hudson Bay. It's difficult to imagine the power of glaciers—how they could move massive boulders thousands of miles. Geologists explain that as the glacier moves, the weight of the ice forces the ice on the bottom to spread deeper and wider across the land mass.

Under the crushing weight of this ice, the earth is flattened and smoothed, and the boulders that move and clash are eventually reduced to the size of small stones and pebbles. Massive rocks are reduced to a dirt so fine that it sifts like flour through one's fingers. This glacial drift is a heterogeneous blend of limestone, clay, sand, gravel, and pulverized boulders of quartzite, granite, and hornblende. The mixture now makes up the flat, farmable drift plain of central North Dakota that, by some estimates, goes to depths of 200 to 300 feet in parts of the state.

As Highway 3 cuts south from I-94, it weaves through a hilly belt of glacial debris, known to geologists as the Altamont Moraine. These hills mark the stopping point of the Wisconsin ice sheet—the last glacier that moved across North America—and is characterized by rolling, rock-studded terrain where the glacier ceased its forward movement and began to melt and recede back to the Arctic circle. The Moraine, a band of gentle hills that runs 10 to 30 miles wide in places, cuts a southeastern path through all of North Dakota, bisecting the county where I grew up, Logan County, running just north and east of my family's land.

Much of the land in the morainic belt is too rolling and rocky to be farmable and has been kept as a short grass pasture for livestock. Aside from acres of fences that follow the curves and rises and the occasional monster electric towers, this belt of hills appears the same as when settlers first arrived. The Altamont Moraine is also a drainage watershed—precipitation that falls west of it flows first to the Missouri then south to the Gulf of Mexico; water that falls a few miles east flows to the Red River, which eventually drains north into the Hudson Bay.

Did I know as a child that my home straddled an awesome confluence of geological occurrences—the gateway to the West, the hundredth meridian, the Missouri plateau, the Altamont Moraine? Not at all. The rocks were heavy things that had to be picked and moved on the hottest day of the year, and the earth was simply dirt, something to keep out of my shoes, something to move across toward a highway, toward a city, where with any hope life would improve. All my life I have wanted to lift off that spot of earth, be free of it as

the rocket is free of the launching pad. But it always succeeds in pulling me back.

On the day of my father's funeral, as we came over the next rise, I saw we had three miles to go. This is Logan County. While it may be just another patch of flat horizon to someone driving through, to my family it's the navel of the earth—the place from which all things flow and to which all things return in time. In front of us now stretched the low-lying land that once belonged to my great-grandfather, Joseph Marquart. Although I did not know him—he was born in south Russia in 1856, exactly 100 years before me, and he died a wealthy man in central North Dakota in 1937—the headline of his obituary describes him as the "Logan County Wheat King for a Quarter Century."

This is big: to be king of wheat in a part of the country where wheat is king. In my own day, I was Dairy Princess of Logan County, a short-lived title I was stripped of when I refused to attend the state Dairy Princess competition and pit my creamy milk maid thighs and flashing farmer's daughter eyes against those of beauties from across the state.

How many times did I ask my father to recount for me the number of sections Great-grandpa had owned? He'd tick them off on his fingers—the north fields, the south fields, the ones that bordered the lake, the gravel pit, the ones by the wild woods—nine full sections of land, 5760 acres, not counting the lots he owned in town, and the land in western North Dakota he inherited from his brother-in-law, and the land in Canada he bought during his salad days.

What must it have been like for him, an immigrant refugee from Russia, to come over this small ridge in the second half of his life and know that everything in sight belonged to him, had been shaped by his hand and the hands of children of his blood?

Before he died at the age of 80, my great-grandfather distributed his wealth by "set[ting] off in severalty a parcel to each of his children," the obituary says, "in appreciation of their co-operation." Even this description, which was written by Jay A. Bryant, the longtime editor of the Napoleon *Homestead*, makes him sound kind of baronial—dispatching his land in parcels, like there was an ermine cape, rolls of parchment, bowing servants, and hot wax seals involved.

As the eldest son, my own grandfather, also named Joseph, took over the heart of the farm, the land with the orchard and the original farmstead and these low lying fields surrounding it. And in his own time, my father Felix, who did not have the temperament to be a farmer—who had no aptitude with machinery, no affinity for livestock, who was impatient with nature and believed he could will it to deliver sun or rain if he just got angry enough or stared out the window at it long enough—took over this farm and the life of frustration that went with it just so the land would not leave the family.

In the end, my father fulfilled his generation's part of the agreement. A mile ahead and to the right was the nest of white buildings on a gentle hill at the center of what was now my brother's farm. The land spread out flat for miles. It was early June. The fields lay in rich black furrows; the seeds buried deep under the topsoil were just cracking their husks and letting go of tender green shoots; the grass in the pastures was lush. We were close to home now. If not for the small rise on the northern edge of town, I would have been able to see the three elevators jutting into the sky and the thin spire of the church bell tower that would be ringing, in moments, for my father.

The funeral was at 10:00, but the rosary vigil began at 9:00. It was now 9:15. I imagined my distraught mother at the funeral chapel, clutching a ragged Kleenex, her nose red from crying. She sits in the front pew as mourners pass by to view my father stretched out flat in his coffin. My brother and his wife, all my sisters and their husbands, and all the grandchildren will have arrived by now. But where is Debra, she will be wondering. Has she been killed in a car accident? My mother is a woman who believes in multi-part tragedies, in life unraveling in complex and ironic ways, and as her youngest daughter, I have given her much grist for her worry-mill.

All my life I have wanted to lift off that spot of earth, be free of it as the rocket is free of the launching pad. But it always succeeds in pulling me back.

If we had come upon this magnificent house on the road on any other stretch of Highway 3, we could have just pulled off the lane, hung in the ditch at a fierce angle, and stared in wonder for a few moments as we passed. But on this day, we meet up with the house precisely on the spot where county workers have decided, this anonymous morning, to repair a 40-foot stretch of the road. Men in orange vests are shoveling and packing down the soft tar. The right lane is cordoned off with a line of reflector cones.

Peter pulls our van onto the gravel shoulder, and we join a growing column of cars. Down the road, on the south side of the tarred lane, we see the house hulking and bouncing on its springy flatbed like an overanxious bull.

This is not one of those sad double-wides with its backsides marked "wide load" and its vivisected halves roaring by you on the freeway. When I'm passed by one of these trailer houses, its cross-sectioned walls battened down by tarps, I stretch to look inside the blowing corners, always hoping to see an entire mobile home life: a man in a sleeveless t-shirt sprawled on a couch and watching a grainy TV, a woman making cupcakes in the small island kitchen, and a collection of Holly Hobby collector's plates resting on wire

pedestals in the space above the cupboards. But all the tarp reveals is a hollow cavern of wind-blown emptiness.

Not so, this house on the road. Here is a sturdy, brick, two-story, complete with a wraparound, three-season porch and an attic full of spooky gables. This is a house worth tearing off its 100-year-old foundation and rolling with logs and pulleys onto a monstrous flatbed. And on this day it makes its 30-mile journey north to the town of Dawson, where it will become, I learn later, a lodge house for weekend hunters. But for now it is solemn and dignified, moving at a queenly pace, as if rolling through a parade in its honor.

The flatbed is flanked on all sides by the flashing red lights of police escorts and the nervous moving crew. Also shadowing the house, moving as it moves, are several orange trucks from the power company, their hydraulic baskets hoisting men in hard-hats into the air. Wearing long rubber gloves, the men stretch the electrical wires over the complicated matrix of eaves and chimneys with long, slatted poles. This is delicate work, dangerous. A small slip and more than one person could die right before our eyes this morning.

I look at my watch. It is now 9:20. Peter doesn't say anything, just gets out of the car and approaches one of the road workers. I watch them talk for a while on the side of the road as only men can talk. The county worker spits a prodigious wad onto the blacktop; Peter lifts his shoulders and sinks his hands deep in his pockets.

My husband doesn't look like he belongs in this part of the country. He's Greek-American, has a thick head of dark, wavy hair and soft, coffee-brown eyes. He has deep, slanted cheekbones and an arching, Roman nose. Even in the more populated and slightly more diverse eastern part of the state where his family lives, people will approach him in stores and say, "You're not from around here, are you?"

If I were to have gotten out of the car and approached the county worker, the man would have said, "Oh, you're one of the Marquart girls." So identifiable to the region are my family features—a kind of narrowness of chin and angularity of eyes—that I'm sometimes called Little Felix by perfect strangers. But this is how small my hometown is. Even when Peter approaches him, the county worker still says, "Oh, you're on your way to the funeral in town." How does he know this? Who else would be on this road at this time of day except someone going to the funeral. I look at my watch. It's now 9:25.

Peter turns in the wind and walks back to the van. I can tell by the look on his face the news is not good. "Twenty minutes," he says, getting in and slamming the car door. "They've got to move the house before we can pass."

I look around at the standing water in the ditches. There's almost enough dry room to pull the van off the blacktop, down the grassy incline, and make a quick getaway into town. But with all the cops around, I'm not about to transform into Cousin Daisy from the Dukes of Hazzard and invite the pursuit of the drunken sheriff. This is how

continued on page 36

Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1

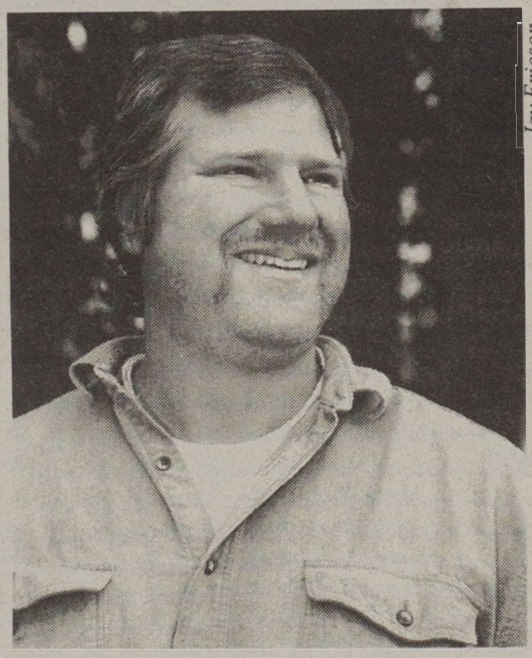
A Road Less Traveled

an Interview with Jake Kreilick

by Melissa Sladek

Jake Kreilick's passion is saving forests. Kreilick, who currently heads the National Forest Protection Alliance, a coalition of groups fighting to save remaining public forests, has been an environmental activist for the last two decades. His forest activism has led him to places as diverse as Australia, Nicaragua, and South Texas. Right now, he and his organization are based in Missoula, Montana.

Kreilick, originally a Midwesterner, came to Missoula in 1985 to pursue a master's degree in University of Montana's Environmental Studies (EVST) program. His prior experiences interning with such federal agencies as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resulted in a growing distaste for a "huge governmental bureaucracy" and led him to refocus his energies toward direct action. He and a fellow classmate, Dan Funch, started a new campus environmental organization called the EVST Advocates, whose goal was to generate environmental awareness within the university community. They also became involved with the activist group Earth First!. It was during these years that Kreilick discovered ways to express his ideals and also to apply them at both the local and the national levels.



Jay Ericson

Kreilick has struggled for years to bridge the gap between activism and economic realities, both on the personal and the organizational levels. His continued involvement with Earth First! and his efforts to get his own group, Native Forest Network, off the ground obliged him to live "incredibly low on the food chain." For much of the 1990s, he eked out a classic activist existence, often working a variety of odd jobs, dumpster diving, and living communally to support his passion of "fighting for the forest." The sacrifices of impoverished living have paid off in the effectiveness of Kreilick's work.

Native Forest Network, an organization dedicated to protecting the Earth's remaining forests, opened its doors in Missoula in the spring of 1994 under Kreilick's leadership. Several years and a number of successes later, he founded the nonprofit organization that he currently heads, the National Forest Protection Alliance (NFPA). NFPA has 124 member groups around the country that do everything from monitoring and commenting on Forest Service decisions to initiating lawsuits and conducting scientific surveys. The organization has worked to hone its role as a watchdog organization for the public forests in the United States. Kreilick admits that he's walked a long road to achieve financial viability for his organizations but concludes that finally, for him, "It's all started to happen."

M: When you were growing up, did you spend a lot of time in the forest?

J: I think I was pretty active, but not to the point where I was out every weekend. My dad didn't have that type of predilection, but my brother and I did some backpacking trips in high school and college together. We definitely got outside.

M: How did you get involved with the environmental movement?

J: It built up over time. As an undergrad, I was a history major, and I also got a political science minor. I think that it wasn't until later that I knew that I was really interested in the environmental realm.

It was while I was down in South Texas [on a Student Conservation Association internship] that I applied for graduate school. I got accepted by the University of Montana and wanted to come out West and get out of the Midwest. I was sick of the suburbs. I was sick of the existence of growing up in an upper-middle class family. I just had all the things that every American family had but really wasn't interested in them.

M: What does your family think of what you do?

J: I had a weird relationship for a while in terms of how my folks interpreted what I was doing. I definitely had an attitude about their kind of life and how privileged the whole upper-middle class lifestyle was. Looking back now, of course, I appreciate what they provided for me. My dad got to the point where he became—and still is—very supportive of the work I do and of the organizations I work for. His loyalty shows me that he respects what I do. He understands that there is a balance there. That's good because he owns a small lumberyard in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

M: What direction did your activism take after you finished your master's degree?

J: We did a lot of things from '87 to '92. We worked on getting Earth First! off the ground. It was just a flurry of actions and activities around here ranging from the wolf issue to the buffalo issue to the wilderness bill battles. We really felt like our backs were up against the wall, and they were.

1989 was the high cut on the National Forest system, when they cut 12 ½ billion board feet. People can't fathom how much lumber, pulp, and wood chips were coming off the National Forests in the '80s. It was all part of the Republican administration's plans to exploit federal lands and natural resources for as long as possible. We had to battle back. There were skirmishes across the land—a little action wherever we could get it going. This is all borne out in the work we are doing now in the National Forest Protection Alliance and the coalition of groups around the country trying to stop the federal timber sale.

M: So, physically, you would be out there in the forests?

J: Yeah. We stopped numerous timber sales for a few hours at a time or sometimes a day at a time. It came at a tremendous cost to many of us, including myself. I was sued by the road-building company. A lot of people spent a month in jail. But this was all a microcosm of the larger battle of what was happening across the country in terms of our public lands and how Americans perceived them. These were the finite moments in terms of showing citizens how to stand up for their lands.

M: You've seen a lot during your time in the environmental movement—from the Reagan and Bush era to the Clinton era and now back to another Republican administration. How has the environmental movement changed over the past 20 years?

These national forest issues, they're not going away.... Protecting our public lands is everyone's patriotic duty.

J: The issues are every bit as relevant; in fact, they're probably even more pronounced than when I showed up in '85. Certainly, issues like global warming…most countries around the world, most people around the world accept that we've changed the climate. Issues like deforestation—I certainly feel like a lot of our claims have been validated by numerous scientists and numerous public opinion polls. A lot of politicians, too, now are coming around—not as fast as we would like them to, however. But I think the issues are really in the news. I was impressed by the amount of coverage the environment got in the last presidential election.

These national forest issues, they're not going away. That's why we're going back to work. It's time to gear back up. Protecting our public lands is everyone's patriotic duty. The tactics have changed some. The problem with the Clinton era was that they sugar-coated everything. In the end, we did make some changes, but we're still fighting tooth and nail to hold on to those few changes that were made. We didn't change any of the real core resource policies, programs, or funding mechanisms. We haven't really tackled the issue of corporate welfare and how the rich can get richer and our public lands all the poorer. There are a lot of really pressing issues out there like the roadless initiative, and this national fire plan is a tremendous joke.

Now we're talking about a bill, the National Forest

Protection Restoration Act, which would end the federal logging program. That's something that would fundamentally change the Forest Service, and that's going to take time. But it is happening. We are making progress. The federal timber sale program…as a nation, in 1989 we cut 12 ½ billion board feet, and this year we're probably going to cut about two billion. We've definitely had some effect. But we really believe we have to take a fundamentally different approach to work with communities and provide jobs, jobs in restoration.

M: So, the same issues are still around. Do you think that the public understands them better now?

J: Definitely. That's a lot of what we've been doing for the last 10 to 15 years: educating the public, getting into the media, solidifying the basic political support.

M: You've obviously been using different strategies throughout your time in the environmental movement. How have the strategies changed?

J: In the direct action days, when our backs were up against the wall and we had nothing to lose, direct action was necessary because the public didn't care. We did direct action well up into the Clinton years. But we started to ease back as we got the National Forest Protection Restoration Act introduced in Congress.

There will be more direct action in George W. Bush's term. I'll guarantee it. We already have people out in the trees all over the West Coast. It takes a lot of resources and energy to pull these things off, but they will happen.

M: It sounds like you see direct action as the future, at least for the next four years.

J: Direct action is a tremendous equalizer. Many of the timber contractors think twice about picking a federal timber sale if they know it will be controversial, if they know they are going to be challenged in court, if there is going to be a direct action campaign.

But we're not going to give up on political approaches. A lot of our NFPA network groups are engaged in Forest Watch, litigation, public education and outreach, plus a lot of media work.

Since September 11th, we have been very sensitive about direct action and don't want to use it at the wrong time. However, the tree sits up at Eagle Creek [Montana] are still going on. They've been going on for three or four years, and they're not coming down just because the nation's at war. However, for us to go out there right now and attack the Bush administration doesn't make a lot of strategic or common sense.

Direct action is a tremendous equalizer. Many of the timber contractors think twice about picking a federal timber sale if they know it will be controversial.

M: Because you wouldn't get a lot of public support?

J: Not a lot of public support and probably not a lot of media attention, either.

M: It seems that, if this war continues, there may be numerous bills proposed allowing for more resource extraction due to the increased need for these resources. How do you foresee the environmental movement responding?

J: I foresee us being at the forefront of stopping all of that—as vigilant as we can be, which includes getting arrested as a prisoner of conscience. This war isn't about natural resources. This is about foreign policy blunders, diplomatic incidents, and 50 years of the CIA. This is a different kind of war.

M: The scope of the movement has broadened, and your views have, as well. Is this true?

J: We're bigger. That's the fundamental difference. We have brought the grassroots from around the country. We have a long way to go; don't get me wrong. But we're much more prepared to deal with the Bush administration because we have a pretty solid grassroots footing.

We have Forest Watch groups around the country who are watching their own ranger districts, national forests, and regions. In the '80s, we didn't have these folks in place. We were just doing direct action to get into the media and to let people know they were cutting down these huge trees. We were the ones who were shrill, the ones who struck and looked emotional and not very professional at times. Now, I think that the shoe is on the other foot. Now other interests, like the wise-use movement, are resorting to those types of tactics.

M: Do you think that these emotional tactics are helping groups such as the wise-use movement gain attention?

J: They're helping them get noticed. They have to do things to get media attention, get coverage, get issues out there. It's the environmentalists who are taking the upper hand in terms of public authority, ability to use the media, and projecting issues fairly. We've worked hard on that.

M: Have scientists helped the environmental movement, too?

J: Scientists are the ones who have given us the most credibility. A lot of us activists have become scientists and experts in our own right. That gets you more confidence [from the public].

M: For those in the University of Montana's Environmental Studies program and similar programs, there are so many different ways to be an effective activist. Which avenue do you favor?

J: The tendency is to specialize, but the forward-thinking activist in this day and age is trying a number of things. I think the greatest strength you can have is diversity, but diversity, at times, has to come together. There are times when it's important for us to come together and really show some strength and flex some of the collective muscle. That's hard to do, but I believe the Environmental Studies program should be one of the places where there is some catalytic behavior going on, where there are people taking the initiative.

M: Of all the campaigns that you've worked on, which do you feel was the most effective?

J: The biggest campaign I have been involved with was the Cove Mallard campaign. It involved two roadless areas on the Nez Perce National Forest. The Forest Service proposed selling 81 million board feet and building 145 miles of new roads in this area. Of course, we would fight something like this. It turned out to be an eight-year campaign in which they cut three of the nine timber sales they had proposed.

This was the most effective and the most inspirational campaign I've been a part of because of its longevity and because of the number of different people who were involved and who touched my life. There were just some magical moments amongst the very frustrating and demoralizing times. In the end, we did prevail. It really was a victory, even though land and forest was lost. I think it really helped in turning around the whole approach toward our roadless lands, and that's a big accomplishment.

M: You've talked some about your road—that it's hard to see the end of the road because so much more needs to be done. Do you ever feel like you're going to burn out?

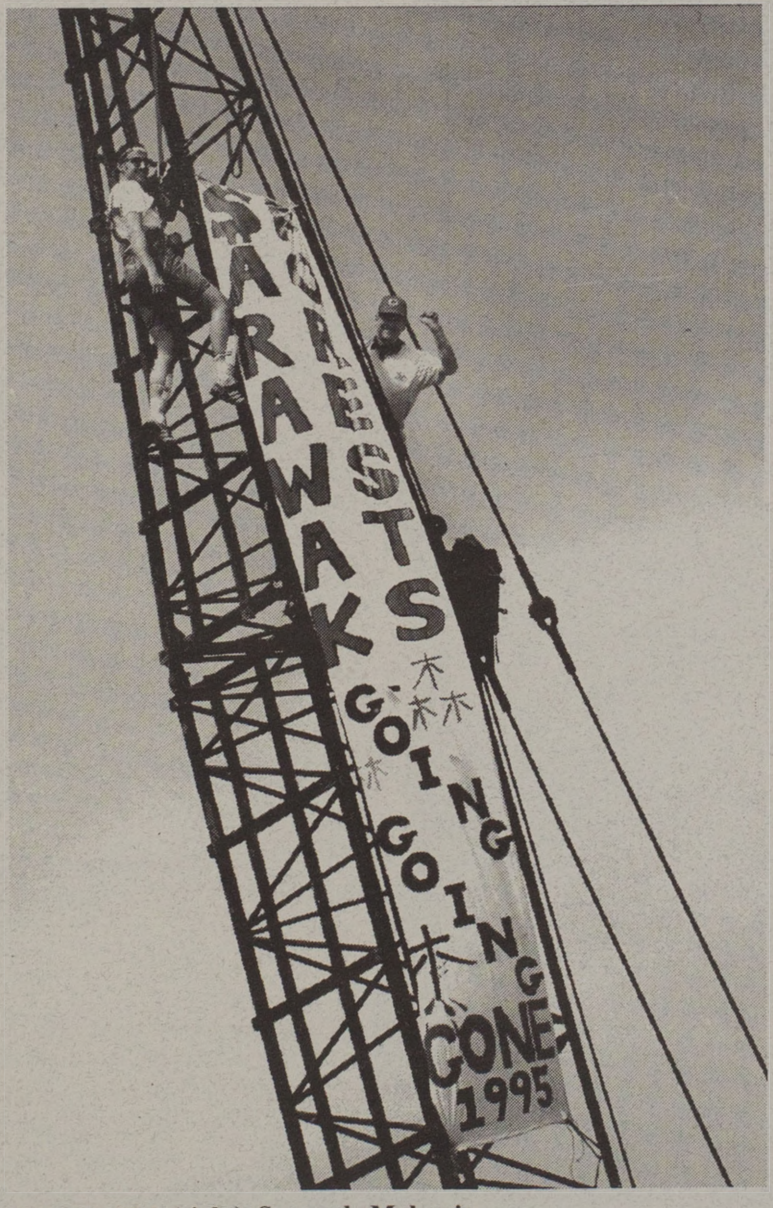
J: One of the main things activists are so guilty of is burnout. I'm pretty lucky because I have some outlets. I work a lot, but I try and have my diversions and take my trips. I figure you have to do things like that. You can't think about work all the time. And you can't hang out at the bars all the time.

Some of the folks in our network—and I love them dearly—are so committed, so passionate, but so dysfunctional. If you can't survive long enough to actually be in the game, you can't influence the debate.

We've got to project a winning strategy and to assume that we are going to prevail. In order to do that, we really have to be able to look a long ways down—there's no question in my mind, having been in Missoula now for 16 years. Look [how much has changed since] I started. Sixteen years down the road—maybe by then we'll have actually accomplished many of our goals.

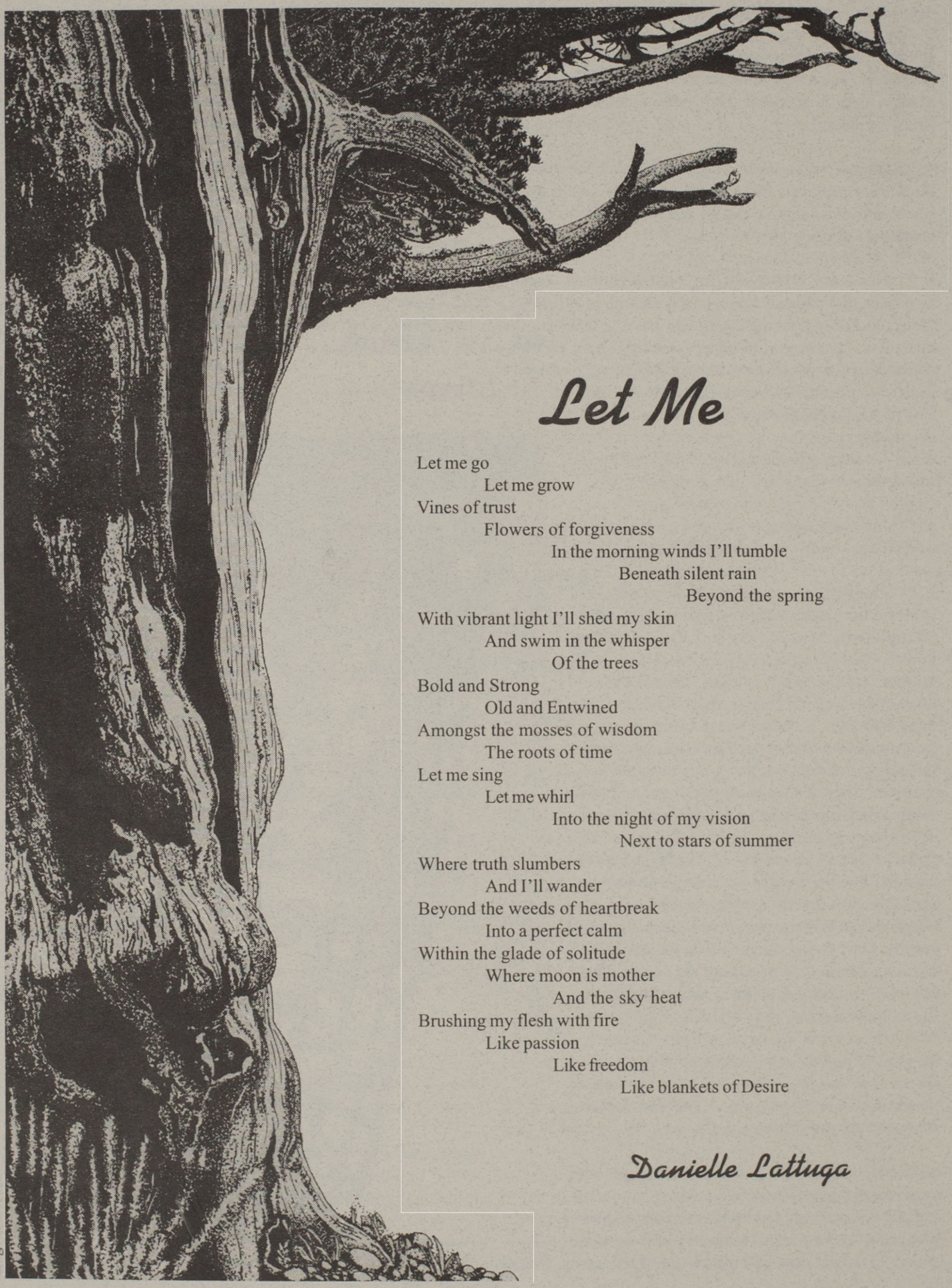
M: It sounds like you already have worked hard and accomplished a lot. But like you said, since you're in it for the long haul, you have to have fun in the meantime.

J: We do. We do.



Mark Alan Wilson, www.picturetomorrow.org

Jake Kreilick (right): Sarawak, Malaysia



Eugene Beckes

Let Me

Let me go
Let me grow
Vines of trust
Flowers of forgiveness
In the morning winds I'll tumble
Beneath silent rain
Beyond the spring
With vibrant light I'll shed my skin
And swim in the whisper
Of the trees
Bold and Strong
Old and Entwined
Amongst the mosses of wisdom
The roots of time
Let me sing
Let me whirl
Into the night of my vision
Next to stars of summer
Where truth slumbers
And I'll wander
Beyond the weeds of heartbreak
Into a perfect calm
Within the glade of solitude
Where moon is mother
And the sky heat
Brushing my flesh with fire
Like passion
Like freedom
Like blankets of Desire

Danielle Lattuga

Lassen

Standing on the side of a mountain
watching the lightning play in the distance
feeling the wind rise.
I wonder how long cast iron will hold heat
with a storm playing around it,
how long will the food stay warm?

I watch,
I have all day,
the storm build.
Coming not from one direction,
but many,
swirling across the lake,
reaching this mountain at dark.

I think about a man I could love,
how there is not one known path to a heart,
how the storm does not blow straight in,
but spins

how iron holds the heat in the wind.

Clara Sophia Weygandt

Sour Neighbors

One woman's battle against a sweetening plant on the Front

by Erin K. Sexton

"Don't ever give up fighting for what you want."

Janet Main said this to me as she squinted off into the distance at the slow movement of her cows. I had only known this woman for a few hours, and she had just laid some profound advice on me. I was listening. We stood side by side, facing the Eastern Front of Alberta's Rocky Mountains and, more immediately, the Shell Canada natural gas processing plant. The pasture where Janet's livestock grazed was spitting distance from the plant, which also borders her ranch. "Sometimes the hard part for me is figuring out exactly what I want," I responded quietly. *I thought I wanted to fight for places like this, but look what happened to you.*

Janet humbled me, perhaps because her battle is so blatant and raw. She is fighting to maintain her livelihood and keep her dream alive. She built a ranching life in a pristine landscape and then became the closest neighbor to one of the largest sour gas processing plants in Alberta. Sour gas is natural gas that is laden with hydrogen sulfide, a toxic gas that will kill you after just minutes of exposure at high concentrations. In order to sell the gas commercially, the hydrogen sulfide is removed at facilities called sweetening plants, where sour gas becomes marketable, or sweet.

I met Janet through a graduate field course designed to bring graduate students from Canada and the United States together for a collaborative investigation of the vast transboundary bioregion that extends across our border. Our course began in southwest Alberta, and I quickly realized the singularity of the region. The transboundary Eastern Front is visually and ecologically spectacular. I've always been a sucker for beautiful places, especially those with dramatic alpine peaks, deep green watersheds, and enough intact land to support remarkable predators, such as grizzlies and wolverines. In my eyes, the value of the region exceeds the scientific rationale of conserving an area solely for its biodiversity.

Northern Montana and southern Alberta are separated by the 49th parallel, the imaginary line which delineates Canada from the United States. But the landscape formed at its own will, extending continuously to the north and south, without regard for the arbitrary boundaries of humans. The Eastern Front of the Rocky Mountains encompasses a diverse mosaic of ecosystems, and the region's wildlife mirrors that diversity. Riches beneath the ground compliment the riches above ground. Here, too, where the plains and the mountains collide, are embedded the dreams of the oil and gas industry. The Albertan Front holds hydrocarbons in its belly, wrapped tightly in the rocks beneath the surface, and the energy industry has riddled the land with access roads, pipelines, and sour gas wells.

As our course traveled the transboundary region, initially I was most offended by the damage being wrought on the physical landscape. The freshly clear-cut slopes of barren dirt and the roads spider-webbing throughout made the situation appear urgent. But I didn't fully comprehend the human element until I met Janet. She was part of our tour of the Front because she has taken an active role in conservation in the form of an easement. Our class visited her ranch to discuss that easement, a unique arrangement that permanently protects her land from ever being carved into a housing development. But that morning on the Front, Janet imparted much more than a lesson on ranching and land trusts.

Early that day, Janet sat on her porch and enlightened us on what it is like to share a fence line with Shell's sweetening plant. With her hands tied in knots, she described her powerlessness and loss. "The policy of Shell is very difficult to live with, environmentally and economically," she explained wearily. "I have only been compensated once for damages, when two of my new calves drank from an abandoned sump and immediately died. They are careless neighbors." Our class took detailed notes, but when she started to cry, we uncomfortably averted our eyes, toward the looming Rockies.

The previous day, we had visited Shell Canada, and their environmental scientist explained to us how the hydrogen sulfide is removed from the natural gas and converted to less toxic compounds. Shell's personal relations representative assured us that peoples' concerns were unfounded, that the processing of sour gas is eminently safe. He gave us confident facts: 99 percent of their drilling permits are approved, and no case against Shell has ever gone to court. Perhaps it was his bluntness that alienated me. "Look, we're not in the business of promoting protected areas; we have to be impartial regarding land use in this area." I bristled at his words. The splendor of that landscape does not warrant impartiality. I left the sweetening plant feeling skeptical of Shell's environmental policy, but I wasn't prepared for the feelings of hate that surfaced in me the following day, when we met Janet and listened to her "unfounded fears."

Janet's ranch is a modest place, tucked up against a low ridge in a narrow valley. The Waterton Gas Complex sprawls across the land above the small ranch, out of sight but never out of mind. Forty-five years ago, Janet manifested her dream here; she bought a beautiful piece of land in the Eastern Rockies. Twenty-five years ago, the new neighbors moved in. Shell Canada had obtained leases for the subsurface mineral rights on the land around her and beneath her. Like most private landowners, Janet does not own the subsurface rights to her land. They are owned and dispensed by the Canadian government to energy

corporations like Shell. When the oil and gas market showed promise, Shell constructed new roads and began to drill exploratory holes deep into the ground. To the delight of the energy industry, those drills tapped into one of the largest sour gas reservoirs in Alberta.

Not a day goes by without some interaction between Shell and Janet. She described a few of the more traumatic consequences of living so close to a sour gas sweetening plant. There was the time when the plant's smokestack accidentally burst and set fire to her fields and the nearby foothills of the Rockies. And the time when the new red paint on her house changed to black, overnight. Janet doesn't know what caused her paint to transform, and she can't afford the studies that would answer that question. As she spoke to us quietly from her porch, she apologized continuously for being distracted, for not having enough time to talk to us because she needed to deal with three of her cattle that had died recently. Our class was reluctant to abandon the story unfolding in front of us, so we went, mesmerized, into her pastures.

Surreal is an overused word, but the parched field separated from the sour gas plant by a token fence truly was surreal, made more so by the bloated cow lying legs-up in the grass. My stomach and head fought the rancid odors of decaying flesh that suffocated me each time the wind shifted. I wanted to flee after the first putrid gust of air washed over me, but I stayed to be near Janet. The veterinarian was at war with the cow's corpse. Removing layer after layer of the internal carnage, he sweated and gasped, unwilling to take a deep breath of the gas and acids spewing from the kidneys, the liver, the lower intestine. Janet was right there up front, peering with concerned eyes into the remains of her cow. She and the vet knew each other by name. He'd been to this pasture for other necropsies, and she anxiously quizzed him as he performed the foul job. "Are you going to take a liver sample today? Has she been dead too long to determine the cause of death?" Desperation riveted her to the spot; the vet was contracted by Shell, and accurate tissue samples meant the world to Janet. She walked purposefully around the butchery, looking for a different angle, as if scrutinizing a necropsy was something to which she was accustomed. And it was.

I had heard about Janet from other environmentalists during our tour of the Front. "That woman is made of iron," they said. "She bears the weight of the world on her shoulders." So I stood next to this iron woman and tried to absorb some of her steel. After the dead cow was turned sufficiently inside out and the vet drove away with the precious tissue samples, our class offered to help move the rest of the herd out of that pasture of death, to a field farther from the sour gas plant. I turned away from the destroyed flesh that had been Janet's livelihood and shakily inhaled a clean breath of air.

My classmates and I fumbled as cowboys, and as the tired cows were on their third lap around the pasture, Janet pointed out a gaunt female to me and sadly stated the obvious: "Look at that poor girl with the white markings around her eyes; that is one of my breeding cows, and she is definitely not doing well." That was an understatement. Thick, yellow streams of foam hung from her head to the ground, spewing from her mouth as she gasped for air. Fifteen minutes later, her knees buckled and she collapsed in the grass. I watched, horrified, as her head swayed heavily back and forth until it dropped to the ground and she died. I've never had any special fondness for cows, but I was devastated to witness the death of that one. That made for a total of four dead cows in the last week.

"How many cattle have died like this since you've been here?" I tried to glean facts because that's what graduate students do, because I was desperate to understand why her cows were dying. I sought the impossible, a direct line between cause and effect. Janet laughed hollowly at the insanity of my question. "So many, I have no idea. Including the stillborn young and the ones born without hair?" I was dumbfounded. She told us about the cows that could only run around in dizzy circles, about her children growing up sick with chronic nosebleeds and migraines. It appeared that this woman had no recourse against Shell's impact on her life. She was being polluted out of her dream.

Jay Ericson

Rocky Mountain Front

The studies are inconclusive. Some studies find no environmental or health impacts from processing plants; others do. Scientific results are rarely tidy and absolute. Thus far, research has not proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the processing of sour gas kills cows or that people suffer chronic sleeplessness, headaches, and nosebleeds from exposure. We do know that the processing of sour gas has impacts on humans,

continued on page 40

perspective

Eyes Like Deep Water

by Katherine

Not long ago, I dreamt that I was in the hallway of a schoolhouse, cozy with warm yellow light. I was walking back in time toward the doorway of my old nursery school classroom. Peering into the room, I could see fingerpaints, cubbyholes with lunchboxes, and a red rocking horse motionless in the corner. The scene was inviting, but I stopped at the door, sensing the eyes of something or someone upon me. Up high on one of the thick wooden rafters, a dark owl perched. Its silhouette stood frozen on the beam while its insides swirled black and brown, a liquid mud animal glaring at me with its whole body. Locked in its gaze, I stood there like a human stone, paralyzed by the power this animal possessed. In the owl's presence, the schoolhouse grew cold, and the colors of all the toys paled. The owl's mud swirls cast a new spell into my universe, creating a vortex where before there had been none. A creature of the wild had come to disturb the peace.

When I awoke, I learned that my grandfather had died. I spent the morning feeling numb and empty. But by sunset, the shock had worn off, and I let sadness envelop me. I headed to the graveyard on the north side of town, where even the tombstones pulse with life, where nothing feels dead. It was there, after I hopped the fence and sat with the stones a while, that I remembered the owl's timely visit in my dream. And afterward, I couldn't help but think of the owl as a harbinger of death.

Months later, I was bundled in my sleeping bag at a campground in southern Alberta when I heard an owl call out five times into the night. Its call seemed to come from everywhere, like the noise of night itself. It sounded like a warning. I strained my ears in the thick stillness and began to worry that maybe someone I knew was about to die. Turns out it was me. I finally closed my eyes and dreamt my own death.

In my dream, I was dying, wandering the streets of Missoula with labored breath and heavy legs. My strength was fading, and I knew I had only hours to live. I made my way to the graveyard I love and walked through the open gates along a carpet of electric green. It was a good place to be; the whole graveyard hummed to the rhythm of the dead, a frequency that mirrored my own heartbeat. *I could die in a place like this,* I thought, and I stretched out on the grass under an angel

photo by Kevin Doherty/ photo illustration by Jay Ericson

ROMANO

with smooth silver skin. Her poised shadow fell on me as my own began to dim. I was disappearing. My pulse quickened, and I began to grow nervous until I noticed a little owl clinging to the angel's shoulder. When it hooted, I recognized it as the same owl whose call had frightened me as I was trying to sleep. An owl from the wild had entered my dream, not as an omen, but as a bird, perched there in the sunshine to teach me how to die.

Owls are not simply messengers of the underworld, sent to warn me of impending doom. I have to remind myself that, like all creatures of the wild, they belong to themselves. But as a human animal, I am kin to the wild elements around me and am guided by the wild, not because I am privileged but because nature is wise. It knows that death is as simple as breath and as critical to human existence as is the quality of wildness itself.

AN OWL FROM THE WILD HAD ENTERED MY DREAM, NOT AS AN OMEN, BUT AS A BIRD, PERCHED THERE IN THE SUNSHINE TO TEACH ME HOW TO DIE.

I haven't ever looked into the eyes of a wild owl, the supposed windows of its soul. Perhaps looking into those deep-water eyes would reflect a truth of the natural world that I have yet to fully embrace: that nature is the physical manifestation of spirit but that the natural world is only a temporary home for the soul. Spirit can't be contained; it travels the physical world like a nomad, relinquishing its home when it needs to move on.

The day after an owl greeted me in my dream, I saw the only owl I've ever seen up close. It was dead, lying limp near some picnic tables with only holes for eyes. I looked down at the dead owl and wanted to thank it for the gifts its kin had given me, but it was too late. Without its eyes, its spirit seemed to have departed already. I felt useless thanking a bunch of old feathers.

I walked down to the Belly River and stood on the rocks at the river's edge. Next to me was a butterfly drying its wings in the sun, holding them upright against the wind like black and yellow sails. A fly approached, hopping along the rocks for a closer look at the display of color and light. It jumped back and forth like a curious spectator and then leaped onto the butterfly's wings, sending the butterfly flapping through the air. It landed on its back in the running water and floated upside-down, straining to pull its wings up while the water kept them glued to the surface.

At first, I wanted to rescue it from the river's cold embrace. Instead, I stood back and let it float, watching the sun shining through its wings to the sandy bottom of the riverbed. There, shadows mixed light with dying butterfly, a kaleidoscopic concoction of leaking spirit deciding where to go next. I squatted next to it, intending to witness its death with grace, like the owl had done for me in my dream. But in the end, I panicked, fished the butterfly out with a stick, and placed it on a rock. It drowned there, under its saturated wings. I winced at my efforts to save it and left, without even watching it die. Another owl may be visiting me soon, as I still the owe the river a butterfly.

Katherine Romano is currently pursuing a master's degree in UM's Environmental Studies program. She likes writing, frogs, and reflective clothing.

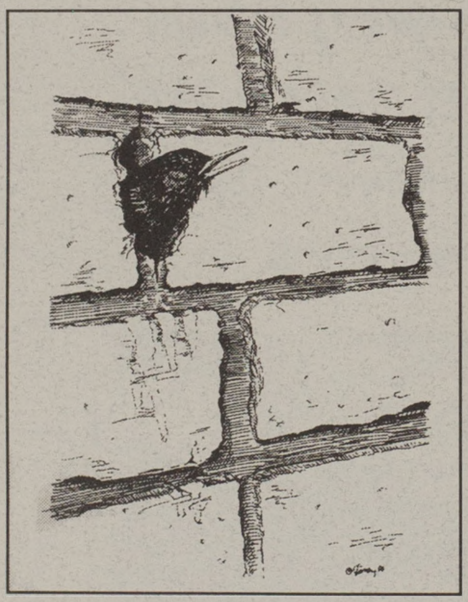
Camas, Vol. 5, No. 1 [2001], Art. 1

Tinkering With Eden:
A Natural History of Exotics in America
by Kim Todd, W.W. Norton and Company, 2001

reviewed by Maggie Sommer

Kim Todd opens *Tinkering With Eden* by depicting a landscape filled with dandelions and house sparrows, starlings, brown trout, honeybees, and thistles. Sound familiar? Many of us live side by side with these species, which are now common throughout much of the United States.

These and many other organisms, however, are not native inhabitants of America. The issue of non-native species—also called introduced, exotic, invasive, alien, and non-indigenous—has received increased publicity recently. News has spread even outside the science and conservation communities to the general public, carried by a vanguard of high-profile invaders that can cause significant ecological and economic harm. Zebra mussels, for example, were brought to the Great Lakes on European ships in the late 1980s and since have spread rapidly throughout the eastern and central U.S. They have become infamous for causing millions of dollars in damage to infrastructure such as hydroelectric generating equipment. They are also responsible for incalculable ecosystem changes due to extremely efficient filter feeding, which has removed most of the plankton on which native aquatic food chains are based.



Claire Emery

Todd's timely book blends science, history, and imagination to relate the stories behind the introduction and spread of 18 different species (plus some attempted but failed introductions) to U.S. soil and waters. Pigeons, mosquitoes, sea lamprey, ladybugs, reindeer, mountain goats, nutria, and rhesus monkeys are just a few of the stars of *Tinkering With Eden*. Although many non-native species arrived accidentally, stowaways in shipments of agricultural goods or in ships' ballast tanks, others were intentional introductions. Todd focuses on the latter: her aim is to examine *why* people wanted to release exotic species in the first place, and she does a marvelous job of providing the social, environmental, and scientific context for each occurrence.

In some cases, the motivation for an introduction is clearly known; in others, it seems speculative. I found Todd's liberal use of artistic license to be somewhat intrusive. Regarding gypsy moths, she writes, "Here my imagination yields to three different accounts of the accident. The [gypsy moth] eggs, resting on a table, blow out the window with a gust of wind, or the eggs, enclosed in a vial, are knocked from the windowsill and set free, or wind rips a hole in the netting covering Trouvelot's experimental plots." The line between reality and fantasy is often indistinct in Todd's tales, and her admittedly fanciful rambling left me wondering exactly which parts of her accounts are factual. However, Todd succeeds in providing a fresh look at the topic, going beyond a laundry list of the effects of introduced species or prescriptions for their extermination or control.

Kim Todd holds a master's degree from the University of Montana's Environmental Studies program, where illustrator Claire Emery is currently a student. Todd writes with greater authority on a local problem: spotted knapweed. In this chapter, Todd details part of the battle against knapweed and other invasive weeds that are turning native Montana prairies into weedlots, incapable of supporting wildlife or livestock. In attempts to balance the introduced pest plants with their natural enemies, U.S. scientists have imported seed-head flies, root weevils, and moth larvae from knapweed's eastern European homeland, with great trepidation and limited success. With each new introduction for biocontrol purposes lurks the danger of unleashing a new threat to native wildlife, vegetation, or crops. However, the risk of delaying action to control invasive pests may mean significant economic or biological loss. An apt quote from Dave Carr, manager of The Nature Conservancy's Pine Butte property near Glacier National Park, expresses the dilemma of biological control of non-native pest species: "There's a risk if I do [use non-native biocontrol agents such as seed head flies], but if I don't do it, we're going to lose the whole shebang," that is, the native ecosystem.

Todd's position on the issue is obvious. At one point, she compares the spread of some introduced species to invasions by evil aliens, describing the gypsy moth as "[a] repulsive creature invading a suburban neighborhood." She emphasizes that the stories of introductions are really stories of subtraction—of the loss of native species or habitat due to the competition, predation, or other effects of the invaders. "Instead of a world with passenger pigeons and rock doves, we have only rock doves." However, she points out that many non-native species are inextricably tied to the way most of us live and that their presence permitted the success of European colonists (who also could be considered a non-native group) in this land. Often casting the individuals responsible for introductions in a sympathetic light, Todd writes in closing, "Many of the motivations spring from traits that make us proud to be human, even though we look back and find the actions inconceivable."

My Story as Told by Water

by David James Duncan, Sierra Club Books, 2001

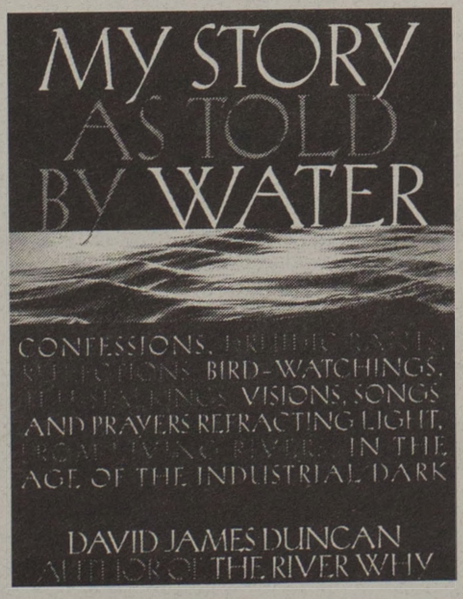
reviewed by John Bateman

How does one develop close relationships with both people and the natural world, suffer the loss of those relationships, and live to tell about them? Not only live, but, in fact gain some sort of grace and wisdom, some buoyancy, from the experience? These questions are at the heart of David James Duncan's latest work of nonfiction, a nominee for this year's National Book Award, *My Story as Told by Water.*

This collection of almost two dozen essays and one piece of satirical fiction is arranged under three thematic headings: "Wonder Versus Loss," "Activism," and "Fishing the Inside Passage." Its chronology outlines Duncan's life from his years in Oregon, his birthplace and longtime home, to his move to western Montana in the 1990s, with a lot of river miles covered in between. Throughout the book, subjects both sublime and sorrowful are illuminated by his sharp humor, innovative perspective, and lucid prose. Early on, Duncan writes, "My two best childhood mentors were a brother and a creek, both now dead." From this sobering start he proceeds not into a hopeless, eddy-like lament but to an honest telling of the hard-won insights available both in the development of love and the suffering of loss.

The book's first section includes essays that deal with the reverent experience of wholeness that Duncan calls "wonder." This notion reveals itself in attentive relationships with both the human and non-human world and is the thread, or fly-line, that runs through the book. Wonder is at once the currency and the product of heartfelt, earnest relationships; it is the spark of understanding in the face of the inexplicable.

One of the most affecting essays in "Wonder Versus Loss" is titled "Birdwatching As A Blood Sport." Here, Duncan develops a philosophical-spiritual model of connection between the seer and the seen, the inward state and the outward reality. On a wind-swept Oregon coast littered with stumps, trash, and dying birds, we see him at his darkest, most hopeless moment. The landscape and rivers he loves are at the zenith of their ruination by the Reagan-enabled, clear-cut rape of the 80s. Herds of elk, retreating with the fast-receding forests, are concentrated in watersheds where they trample the spawning beds of the last wild salmon. "When wild elk, to remain alive, are forced to wipe out wild salmon," he writes, "it is time, in my book, to get sad." An encounter with a stranded grebe crystallizes a new way of seeing that offers him an escape from despair. He writes, "Seeing, I have come to feel, is the same kind of process as speaking.... This visual exhalation, this personal energizing and aiming of perception, is the eyes' speech." For Duncan, the "antidote to despair" (to swipe an Abbeyism) is to take on the responsibility, in even the direst of moments, of perceiving light, of maintaining fidelity with the instances of hope and the will to survive, no matter how small, that still exist in a battered world.



While reading this book, I had a conversation with a friend of mine who is also a science professor. "Why," he asked rhetorically, "should I care if grizzly bears live or die? What difference does it make to me?" He held me rigorously to the empirical strictures of his tradition and consistently labeled my answers—which cited notions like the web of life and biodiversity—"specious" and "untenable." I got nowhere with him; my emotional answers did not match up against his rational criteria. Duncan takes up the same question—why care about other lives?—in his essay "Native." And he runs up against the same wall of distinction between humans and nature that is always invoked by the pilots of progress and development. However, he musters his instinctual faith in the connectedness of life, in the mutual responsibility between species that is the essence of compassion, and he leaps over the wall like a spawning-run salmon over a dam. Again, wonder comes into play in arguments for preserving the natural world, and wonder is not quantifiable. He argues that activism in the service of the natural world must depend on a spiritual quality of faith—a faith in the wonderful diversity and connectedness of all of life.

The final section of the book, "Fishing the Inside Passage," includes some of the finest and most imaginative writing on fly fishing that I have ever read. For my money, the best simple description of the essence of fly fishing is found in "Idiot joy"—a term that, for him, defines the giddy rapture of wholeness that is the object the sport. "Fly fishing," he writes, "as we nonhunting nongathering catch-and-release nerds practice it isn't even fishing, really. It links us not to the Food Chain but to the Idiot Joy Chain.... I don't fish to sit atop some predatory or evolutionary hierarchy. I fish to hook into an *entirety*."

And so this collection has as its center two emotions familiar to the ecologically-minded—the magic of communion and of the loss that can follow. Heartbreak is attended to with a striving for grace, while the lighter occasions are rendered as light as mayflies by Duncan's supple humor and insight. In lesser hands, Duncan's subjects could have caused a descent into self-pity or angered, aimless attacks. Neither is the case here. In *My Story as Told By Water*, Duncan the river mystic strikes again with a potent spell. May his hook be set deep and wide.

continued from page 17

My eyes are hidden—in one shot they're cut off; in the other they're closed or cast down—but the buck's eye is open and ghostly pale. His face floats in front of my shoulder, one modest but graceful antler sweeping up under my chin; two tines seem to rest against my lips. There is a swipe of dried blood on the antler. One image of my rifle lies across the buck's neck. My hands are pale and stand out against the drab background—one exposure shows them tight on my rifle; in the other they are relaxed, my left hand resting on my knee, or on the buck's shoulder. I might be scratching him behind his ear. Viewed horizontally, the slide shows the deer and me alive together, kneeling over our twins, dead or sleeping in opposite corners at the bottom of the frame.

My hand holding the knife pulsed with blood even as the doe relaxed and let her leg fall away from mine.

A few years ago, I shot a yearling whitetail buck with a rifle intended for elk and moose. A friend had borrowed my regular deer rifle, and I wasn't expecting to shoot, but I did, thinking the deer walking past was a female. Given a choice, we try to shoot does, because everyone agrees there are too many deer for the habitat, and we're trying to thin the herd. I was sorry to see he was a buck, and I remembered why we don't shoot small deer—the antlers aren't yet developed enough to be easily visible, so it's hard to tell the sex. Usually, I would gut the carcass, drag or carry it home, and then drop it off at the butcher shop the next day, rationalizing the hands-off convenience in any number of ways. This buck was small, though, and the bullet had torn him nearly in half already, so I decided to skin and quarter him there in the woods.

I had finished and was cleaning my knife on the buck's skin when the friend who had borrowed my rifle walked up. He's a thoughtful, sensitive person who doesn't hunt much, and he was shocked by what must have seemed a grisly scene. The deer's body was in parts—his quartered torso and limbs, his skin, and his entrails all lay separately in the cedar needles, which had been sprayed with blood from the impact of the bullet. I explained that I would wrap the meat in the skin and carry it home to the freezer. Raccoons, skunks, and opossums would feast on the guts overnight. The deer's severed head, however, was harder to address in practical terms. It lay on the ground on its side, tongue protruding, little nubbins of antler obscured by the thick hair on the forehead, the drying eyes under graceful lashes. After a moment's hesitation, my friend picked it up. He quoted Hamlet—*poor Yorick*—and neither of us laughed. He didn't put it down. He held the deer's head gently, as if it were still alive.

I had never learned any formal rituals to perform over the animals I killed. It wasn't the sort of thing people talked about when I was growing up. Contemporary popular hunting culture wasn't much help, either, suggesting nothing more than a whoop and a high-five before bungee-cording the carcass to a camouflage four-wheeler and riding home in time to catch the football game on TV. So my friend and I were on our own that afternoon in the cedar forest. Neither of us is religious in the conventional sense, and a prayer seemed contrived and awkward. We could've recited a good poem—something by Gary Snyder or Robinson Jeffers—but we had nothing committed to memory. Looking back on it now, I see two white guys standing in the cedars, staring down at the dismembered parts of a recently-killed whitetail deer, struggling to respond to the animal's death. A jet airliner passes 3500 feet over our heads, but we don't notice the faint roar. We're wearing manufactured clothes and holding high-powered rifles made in a factory by people we don't know; our bellies digest mass-produced food grown in a place we've never seen. Our minds are full of second-hand information. Flies buzz around us, and the deer's blood is beginning to dry on the cedar needles. We know something is happening to us, but we're not sure what it is.

Eventually, we decided to wedge the little buck's head in the crotch of a cedar tree. We imagined that vultures would come to carry his eyes into the sky and everything but the skull would be consumed. Several times since that day, I've tried to find the tree where we left the head, hoping to see a bleached white deer skull held fast in enveloping cedar-flesh, but it's as if the tree and the skull have disappeared, as if I dreamed it all.

My nephew was 10 years old the first time I took him deer hunting. His father, my sister's husband, was one of those generous adults who taught me about the outdoors when I was young. He used to take me fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and snow goose hunting in the rice fields near Houston, and he had died the year my nephew—his first son—was born. I try my best to show my nephew things about the world without preaching, without collapsing under the poignant weight of my responsibility.

We had walked around in the woods during the day with no luck, and in the late afternoon we hid in some cedar saplings to watch a pasture where deer would often feed at dusk. Sure enough, a group of does wandered into range just after sunset. I shot the largest, and she fell in her tracks, but when we walked to where the doe lay, she wasn't dead yet. She lay on her side, breathing. I shot once more, and she jerked, kicked. I found myself sidling between the boy and the deer, and as I stepped in close with my knife, she moved again, pushing her warm foreleg against my shin, resting it there. The gesture was intimate, almost a caress. My nephew was quiet behind me. In the dim light of the afterglow, he may not have seen the doe's movements or my own paling. There was nothing to say.

What, I wondered for the hundredth time, exactly is it that I have done? I have a theory about the persistence of empathy, that it's not always sentimentality or childish anthropomorphism.

Rather, I think human beings have retained, despite several thousand years of teaching to the contrary, an intuition for the stark interrelatedness of everything in the world.

My hand holding the knife pulsed with blood even as the doe relaxed and let her leg fall away from mine. I felt the chill onset of night, and I sensed my nephew watching me, watching the deer on the ground. I was shooting starlings and beginning to hunt with his father when I was his age. I wondered what this experience would mean to him later. I wondered how much of this kind of thing I should wish on him and whether I should try to explain.

Movement caught my eye, a great horned owl flying overhead, huge and blunt, her wing-flaps weirdly silent. I stood and raised my knife, half in salute and half pointing, hoping my nephew would see her. I couldn't speak, not even one word. I held my hand high until the owl disappeared into the dark forest to the west, where she would hunt that night. I must have looked fairly ridiculous to a 10-year-old boy, but it was all I could do. Point. There it is, I thought; there's the warm carcass of a deer; there's the owl, the forest, the blue-white evening sky. There's the mountain gathering night in its shadow like pooling blood.

Sometimes I feel I left something of myself in that moment, as if part of me is still frozen, exultant, pointing my knife at the world. The me that is standing there understands in some wordless way that we have reason for hope. He believes we can find a way to live in the wild universe.

None of that is accessible to me now, though I have become unpredictably startled by blood. I gash my finger loading stone into the truck, or cow blood from a Styrofoam package of T-bones leaks onto my hands. I accidentally run over a light-blinded rabbit on the highway—the memorable ka-thump and, later, dried gore on the differential. I kill a deer and slit open her abdomen to remove the stomach, intestines, heart, liver. My own stomach constricts, and I think, Oh, that's right, I'd forgotten. The shock of recognition feels new every time, though I find it harder each time to recover from the epiphany, to re-imagine a separate, civilized world in which I can go on living the way I'm used to. Sometimes I wonder if I'm losing my mind. The ground shrugs under my feet, and I see strange shadows in the hot light of a September afternoon. I hear a voice nearly lucid in the calling of crows. I live with a gnawing dread of the day when nature will once and for all shake me out of my complacency, the way a dog shakes a woodchuck. In the end, I can only hope that the flashes of light in my life persist, real and crystalline and existing somewhere, while I am carried along with the rest of everything, ragged and forgetful, in the present.

James McLaughlin is a native of Virginia, recently transplanted to the West. He holds a law degree and an M.F.A. in creative writing, both from the University of Virginia. James and his wife live in a canyon near Salt Lake City, Utah, where he writes fiction and essays and consults in private land conservation law. The essay published here is part of a longer work-in-progress.

continued from page 21

catastrophes happen, I know from experience—one bad decision follows another.

Had I done this on purpose? Gotten up a little later than I should have at the hotel and taken a little too long to get dressed before we checked out, so that I could arrive here at this moment? Three miles down the road, my father lies in the funeral chapel, the spooky building we kids passed by on our way from school, to the rec center downtown, hurrying by that corner because we were so repulsed by the faded green funeral parlor sign stuck in the lawn.

We used to play a game when we passed that corner. First, you made a palm sandwich by cupping one of your hands against someone else's hand. Then you'd run your thumb up and down the side of your hand and your first finger along the side of the other person's hand. *Yuck*, we'd scream and pull our hands away. You can feel the backside of your own hand with your thumb, but the other side, the part that is someone else's hand, is numb against the stroke of your finger.

This is what death feels like, we'd whisper creepily to each other. It was as if the other half of your hand was nothing more than a numb shape in this world—busy, we theorized, doing advance work in the other world, being a hand for you across that unknown threshold to which your now half-a-feeling hand would eventually be pulled.

I thought of my father's body in that building, wearing his blue suit inside a steel-blue coffin lined with satin. I didn't want to see his hands folded in eternal prayer, a black rosary wound around his fingers as if to help him keep track of his Our Fathers and Hail Marys during his long journey. I didn't want to shake the hand of the sympathetic undertaker or admire the sheaf of ripe wheat bound with a blue ribbon and placed inside my father's coffin as a parcel of seed for the fields he would plant in the afterlife. I didn't want to hear family friends tell me how good he looks, and I didn't want my mother to force me to get up close and stroke his lapel one final time.

I wanted to remember those hands shuffling a deck of cards, dealing 10 to me, 10 to him, picking up spares and slapping down discards as he looked to complete his run of queens or diamonds or hearts. And when I snapped my fan of cards down on the table and gave him my rummy smile, I wanted him to rise again and scream in playfulness, "You had my gin card!" and chase me around the house with a shoe until my mother makes us stop.

I wanted to remember him scruffing the top of my head, tickling me, bending my ears, messing my hair, saying, "Ah, you're just a rotten kid." *Wah*, I wanted to protest back, *I am not.* I wanted to remember him on the couch with the remote in his hand or in the hospital after his last heart attack with the plunger in his hand calling for more medication.

One spring when I was about 13, my mother asked me to drive the pickup to the north field to take my father his lunch. He had been seeding the land for weeks, and this section was the last to be done. The water levels were high that year, and this particular field had a slope and a small spring in the center that, even under normal conditions, never dried to more than a slough halfway through the summer.

But with all the cops around, I'm not about to transform into Cousin Daisy from the Dukes of Hazzard and invite the pursuit of the drunken sheriff. This is how catastrophes happen, I know from experience—one bad decision follows another.

My father adored straight, even rows, and he couldn't bear wasted acreage. Each year, he circled the wet spot like a jealous husband, seeding as close in as possible. How many times as a child had I seen him walking home after he had gotten the tractor stuck in that field? From the second story of our farmhouse, I could observe him coming along the section line, his short legs jutting sharply in front of him as he stamped toward the house to get another tractor to pull himself out.

When he got closer, you could see him swinging his seed cap by his side. And with his cap off, you could make out the leathery, sunburned darkness of his face, smudged and dirty from planting, set against the pallor of his bone-white forehead—the one place that lived a pristine, sunless life under the constant protection of his seed cap. And when he'd get close enough to be addressed, my mother would dare to ask, "What happened?" and he'd just storm by saying, "Godammit."

That day when I was 13 and got to drive lunch to Dad in the north field, I sat on the gravel road in the pickup with the cooler beside me on the seat. I watched him go around in circles seeding the circumference of the wet spot. It was common to have to wait like this. Farming was serious business, and you were just a kid. You could afford to wait and listen to the radio until the next row was finished.

He circled and circled with the tractor then got too close to the spring, cut too deep with one of the big back tires, its deep grooves spinning in place, clogged and slick with dark mud. And I remember him trying to back his way out of the mess, jackknifing with the seeder attached behind

the tractor and then his other back wheel sliding down the incline and getting sucked into the mud.

The angry groan of the tractor's engine roared against the quiet backdrop of the morning. The grinding gears gnashed and rocked the tractor back and forth as the wheels dug down looking for pay dirt, anything solid for the deep rubber grooves to catch on; but they only spun and kicked up more mud.

And just when he was about to give up, just about to cut the engine, pull the brake and hop down, the front end of the tractor began to lift off the ground—first, lighting gently into the air, then elevating higher and higher, rising into the sky. It happened so slowly that there was time to contemplate the outcome. Would the balance shift and the tractor flip backwards over him? This is the most common story of the plains; each year some farmer must die on his machinery, sacrifice his blood to this dry land.

My father held firm in his seat. High in the air now, he grasped the steering wheel and leaned his small body forward to counteract the light front end. I watched from the pickup, unable to move or help. It was a moment of sheer weights and balances—the physical world ticking off its equations, none of which included me. And that is when my father looked in my direction, to see if I was registering all this, and our eyes met. And I could see that he wasn't afraid at all, that he was just his usual self—small and fierce and impatient to know what would happen next.

That's the way I want to imagine him, that last day in the hospital. Except for the beeping equipment and the health workers trying to save his life, he was alone. But I wanted to be there, floating above him. And when that part of him that is now gone began to lift up, I wanted to meet his eyes, so that I was the last thing he saw, so that he would remember me—the daughter who watches silently by the side of the road, the one who is getting this all down.

I recall being excessively worried about gravity when I was young, conscious that it was pulling on me. And I felt my life to be a wound clock, a kind of suspended pendulum that started ticking each time I lay my body down on the land. Whether to sleep or partake of its fruits, I was binding myself into its earthly contracts. I tried to tread lightly there, to move through like a shadow, to keep my appetites and desires to a minimum, lest I start the clock ticking. As soon as possible, I moved away from Logan County and lived in places where gravity seemed to pull less.

"My home is where my dead are buried," Crazy Horse said about his love of the Black Hills. And each year I understand more the fierce emotion behind this statement. Just north of my hometown on Highway 3 is the hill where most of my family is buried—the Catholics, my father's side, in the graveyard east of the highway; and my mother's side, the Lutherans, on the west side. I don't want to be returned to that hill, to be planted in it like another seed, held in place by a slab of granite. I fear returning to Logan County, afraid that it will become jealous of my wandering and claim me as its own.

By some weird logic, I believe that if I avoid that place, death will have more trouble locating me. "Please," I beg my husband at times when I feel really desperate. "If I ever get sick, no matter what happens, please don't send me home to die." I say this as a joke, so it doesn't sound demented.

It's usually in the middle of the night when I can't sleep, and I'm usually crying when I say it. I have woken him up (he, Peter, the one who plops face down on the mattress and sleeps without trouble or worry) to tell him all the things I'm concerned about. And when I get to this part—*don't send me home to die*—we usually both start laughing, it sounds so ridiculous to our ears.

But we laugh for different reasons. He laughs because he doesn't have a place in North America where all the bones of his ancestors are collected on a hillside, and I laugh because I know that hillside waits for me. It's easy to act like you've forgotten about it. All my teenage life I roared down Highway 3, past that long row of gravestones with my family names on them—on my way to Bismarck or places more exciting. But as I get older, the population of the hillside increases, and it becomes more difficult to pass by without reflection or sentiment.

Sitting on the side of the road that morning of my father's funeral, watching the construction workers pat down shovels full of tar, was really not so bad. The sun was shining; the breeze was cool and light. It was 9:30. I would have been happy to spend the whole morning there. This is *axis mundi*. Between the land in this township where my father was born and raised and the land in the township directly north and east where my mother was born and raised, everything of significance that has happened to my family on this continent in the last hundred years has happened on this 12-mile by 12-mile grid of land.

I try to imagine what it would be like to live out your whole life, as my parents and grandparents did, in one place—to walk and drive its length every day of every season, to know all its turnings, the colors that its slopes will take on at each time of the year, to loathe leaving it for even one day. To know its smells and the names of all the plants and trees that make up the smells.

It's hard to describe how thoroughly my father loved this gentle bowl of land. On Sunday nights in August when the crops were coming ripe, he and Mom would trundle us into the Ford, and we would drive the section lines as the sun hung like a glossy pearl on the horizon. He'd slow the car to a crawl, the wheels kicking up dust, and we would stare at the ripening wheat or flax or alfalfa, the low sun casting long shadows across the fields.

Some of the section lines were only narrow paths where the grass was worn down from the movement of tractors. We were going deeper into our own land in this low-hanging car full of kids. The rocks bounced off the gas tank; the grass rubbed hard on the bottom of the car. But my father always got us through, relief returning to our

faces as he flipped on the blinker and turned right onto Highway 3, on our way to the Dairy Maid in town for ice cream, our reward for having to look at the crops.

Even after he retired and moved to town, my father took a drive out here each day. He always had some excuse—a screwdriver he needed to borrow, a question he had for my brother—but really he came just to be near the land. If he would have had a choice on any given day, he'd rather be sitting here on this land, admiring the gentle rises and burgeoning green, than be anywhere else on earth.

But I was never at peace in this place. I find a spiritual companion in Meridel LeSeuer, who wrote, "Like many Americans, I will never recover from my sparse childhood in Kansas. The blackness, weight and terror of childhood in mid-America strike deep into the stem of life." As a child I walked these roads and wondered how many people had claimed this land before us, lived on it believing that it would be theirs tomorrow and all the tomorrows to follow.

This land was once home to the tribes of bison hunters with partially agrarian-based cultures like the Arikara and Hidatsa, as well as the Teton Sioux and the Mandan. As a child, I walked these miles endlessly searching for traces of them—an arrowhead, a carved rock, a cache of buffalo bones—some artifact to demonstrate their presence in this place that seemed to me then so empty and devoid of history.

When I went to college, I met a Lakota storyteller, Mary Defender Wilson, at a symposium. When I told her I was from a small town east of the Missouri river, she told me that some of her dead were buried near there, on a distinctively shaped hill. "Do you know it?" she asked hopefully, then described the hill. It was near *this* creek and *that* bend in the road, she said. She gave me place names and descriptions, and I gave her town names, county names, highway numbers. We hoped to find each other on that same strip of land, but we were lost to each other. We had no common language to describe it—so effectively had her layers of history been buried under my layers of history.

"The land belongs to the future," Willa Cather's land-loving character Alexandra says on her deathbed in *O Pioneers!*. "How many of the names on the county clerk's plat will be there in fifty years?... We come and go, but the land is always here." I think about Cather as I drive through the Altamont Moraine, remembering what the geologists say: that it's likely we're in the middle of an interglacial and that the ice will come again, crush through, brush and plane down this land to new, unrecognizable shapes.

In geological time, millions of years, I realize this is not something about which I need worry. But I think about the generations of my family who have given their lives to keep our name tied to this parcel of land for 110 years, using all their strength, imagination, and energy to outwit the forces, natural or otherwise, that would so easily strip us of this sense of belonging.

It was 9:35 when I told Peter to turn around, away from the house on the road. The starter zinged to action, and he pulled the van out of the long row. He did a textbook three-point turn on the highway.

A few hundred feet behind us was the turnoff for a section line. "There," I said, "turn in there." As a kid I had driven the pickup along this road, taking lunch to the men in the fields. As a teenager, I had brought carloads of friends out here to find a safe place to drink and party. As a young woman, I had directed men out here to park. Surely, I knew the pathway to circumnavigate the house on the road.

I recognized the pile of rocks immediately. Every generation of my family had added new layers to this pillar—the heavy stones on the bottom had been placed there by my great-grandparents; the ones near the top placed there by my own and my brother's and sister's hands. It looked like a shrine with the bright sun gleaming off it, and that morning it included a special treat: three foxes sunning themselves, grinning at us with their long snouts as we drove by, moving deeper into the heart of the country.

The section line we were on looked like a good road by my estimation, then it lost its shoulders and dwindled from two clear lanes down to two cow paths. When it disappeared, we turned onto another road that diminished quickly into a faint path through grassy pastureland. For a moment, I simply thought I didn't have my father's skills for navigating the section lines—only a mile away from the highway, and already we were lost.

But very soon I saw how much the shape of the land had changed. The strict squares of my father's cropland had turned into roving fenceless fields of grass because of a government program my brother later told me about, the Conservation Reserve Program, which gives farmers financial incentives to take land out of production and seed it back to grass.

With the crops had gone the need to drive heavy equipment through the sections, and so had gone the fences and the pathways. We finally came to a halt on a road that had looked promising but then dipped into a large pool of standing water. On the other side of the hill, we could see the tracks from the road lead out of the pond and proceed over another rise.

"I think I can make it," Peter said, revving the engine to get a running start.

"No," I screamed, before he could downshift. I was imagining us, in our formal black clothes—me, in my high heels—walking the three miles to town after wading through the mud. We had reached a dead end, it was clear. We sat there and appreciated our stuckness.

I remembered how, as a teenager, I had spent some wild late-nights on this land—drinking, 20 of us packing into two cars, doors thrown open, radios blaring in the still night, the sweet forgetting that spreads through the brain, the way the body opens with alcohol. The land lay around us like a telluric body on those nights, giving us the protection of its impassive largeness, its silence. The land loved us in our youth; it would never reveal to our parents what

we had done in its presence.

Once, over 20 years ago, I brought my first lover here—a man much older than I—before he was my lover. And I remember how we lay in the backseat of his '56 Chevy and panted for each other, two bodies that burned to be one unbroken skin. "Demeter lay with Iasion on the newly sown ground, at the beginning of spring," Mircea Eliade writes in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. "The meaning of this union is clear: it contributes to promoting the fertility of the soil."

In this view, sex is a blessing to the land, a reconsecration of the act of planting and fertilizing. The union of the lovers produces children, and the land produces fruit. This is the essence of husbandry—the fruit of the lovers (children) feed off the fruit of the land (corn, grain). The succeeding generations of children insure that the land will be husbanded through the unending cycle of seasons.

But the daughter who refuses to be planted is also the daughter who will not be seeded. I will lie down on my father's land and rise satisfied with only my pleasure to show for it. I will bring lovers to this land during my youth and thwart the seed that wants to bind me to this contract with the land, to make my body something to be planted.

The land lay around us like a telluric body on those nights, giving us the protection of its impassive largeness, its silence.

And on this first night, with my first lover who is not yet my lover, I will stop his hands, move my mouth away from his hot breath, and I will say something a teenager would say, something like, "I thought you loved me even without sex," or "I can't, I can't, I can't do this." And I will force him to slip on his pants, pull on his shirt. He who will move into the front seat, disgusted, and quietly suck a cigarette down to a thin wedge of cinders.

And when he cranks the ignition, angry in his frustration, his hands heavy with yearning, something strange will happen. A part of his motor, something small and whirring, will zing up and shoot from his engine, leaving two small hot punctures like bullet holes in the hood of his car. And we will get out of the car and touch them with our amazed fingers. And we will turn around in the black night and feel our aloneness in this ancient place, until he agrees to walk the mile across the fields to the house, where my father will be waiting, ready with his high-powered tractor to remove the wreck of his car from our hallowed land.

On the day of my father's funeral, when we were stopped by the house on the road, after we took the back roads and got stalled out at a dead end, I looked around and finally recognized the tan, rock-studded hills of the Altamont Moraine all around us—the stopping place of the great Wisconsin ice sheet, rocky and rolling, full of language, full of ancient, untold stories.

"Okay," I said to my father, who was a trickster in life, "what is it you're trying to show me?"

On the other side of the pathway was an abandoned farmstead. Most of the buildings were broken down to shadows of partial frames, but from what remained I could see it had been a two-room house, a small barn, a chicken coop. Somewhere behind these buildings was probably a shallow graveyard.

The triangular stand of a windmill rose into the sky, but only a few of the tines hung on, long ago abandoning all hope of catching enough wind to draw water from a well. From the architecture of such a ruin, it's possible to date the period of abandonment—early 1900s.

Here was someone's 40 acres and a mule, a hopeful beginning followed by an anonymous tragic ending. The Midwest is full of such stories. The people who lived here are known forever to no one and belong nowhere—the land spread around us so willing to return all stories to silence. But there is another story here, Richard Manning says in *Grasslands,* a story that our European ears were not tuned to hear. Manning writes, "We found the American West a curious place, alien and bare to our eyes. Because of this, we failed to allow it to tell us its story, to give us its name."

And while we who survive on this land fear being lost to it, we also never will be free of it. While the generations of my family struggle to keep our name tied to this land—my father by plowing it up, my brother by seeding it over—so that we as a people will not become unmoored and disappear, I run away to cities and write these hard stories of love back to it.

Just as I did that day of my father's funeral—backed the van out of the dead end road, made my way through the maze of fading and disappearing paths, back to the rock pile where we parked by the three smiling foxes and watched the house on the road solemnly pass. It was only 9:45. Amazing. Without question, we would make it to town in time for the funeral. After the house passed, we pulled onto Highway 3, turned on the AC, and cruised into town. But some story I have not yet been able to tell has remained with me since that day. It was clear—the seed of something had been planted.

Debra Marquart is associate professor of English and coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at Iowa State University. Marquart's poetry collection, Everything's a Verb, *was published by New Rivers Press in 1995. A short story collection,* The Hunger Bone, *won the 1998 Capricorn Fiction Award and was published by New Rivers Press in 2001. A poetry collection,* From Sweetness, *is forthcoming from Pearl Editions. Currently, she is at work on a memoir,* The Horizontal Life: On Rebellion and Return.

continued from page 29

animals, and the environment, but there are infinite shades of gray regarding what those impacts are.

Sweetening plants release by-products. They release minute amounts of nasty compounds with sterile names, which are so toxic they have to be measured in the parts per million and trillion. Among the many by-products are sulfur oxides and nitrous oxides, which bind to moisture in the atmosphere and descend back to the ground in the form of smog and acid rain. In addition, they release benzene, a deadly carcinogen.

Not only are the studies inconclusive, they are also few and far between. This could be because most sweetening plants are located in rural, beautiful areas, where few people live. And it is the energy industries, not the rural neighbors, that can afford to conduct the studies. As we heard repeatedly during our class, ranchers in the Front are land rich and cash poor.

Yet the lack of scientific evidence is accompanied by a wealth of personal testimony—stories like Janet's—which don't achieve statistical significance but definitely involve dead cows in the grass. Janet is not the only one to make claims against Shell. Thirty years ago, 14 families in Janet's community filed a suit against the mega-corporation, citing damages such as migraines, nosebleeds, and cattle born with neurological defects. The case was settled out of court with a courtesy check from Shell for the damages. There was only one stipulation: every family had to sign an agreement legally binding them to never discuss the case again.

Janet might not have the scientific evidence to prove that she is suffering, but she has 15 years of personal experience. She can't prove that the processing plant is killing her cows, but the bank refuses to mortgage her land due to contaminated water and overall environmental damage, a result of being Shell's closest neighbor. Janet refuses to settle with Shell for money. She refuses to sign away her rights. The management at the Waterton Gas Complex knows Janet Main well; she calls them every time she finds another bloated cow in her pasture. She refuses to give up and move away.

Social justice is not a new term to me. In the past, I have focused my work on the negative impacts our human appetites have on the non-human earth, but when that macro-consumption picture was reduced to a tiny window on one woman's dreams, I felt renewed distress. Janet lamented that she could not afford to conduct any research herself. Yet no tidy scientific study would convince me of Shell's guilt more than the four hours I spent with Janet Main. She shared her story honestly and humbly and then only because we asked. We saw her dead cattle only because she had just discovered them the morning that we visited. I was appalled that this woman apologized to us for our inconvenience. That morning on the Front, after experiencing just one minute facet of Janet's life, I simply wanted to fight for her.

A graduate student in UM's Environmental Studies program, Erin Sexton is writing her thesis on the impacts of the energy industry in the transboundary region. Originally from Utah, Erin's goal is to have lived in all 13 western states before she turns 30.

last words

Roots

by Jan Scher

Autumn, if I had to choose, would be my favorite season. Besides being a beautiful time of year, for me it has always been a period of introspection. It's a time to pause and remember my roots, a time to acknowledge the people and events that have shaped my life.

The season stirs memories of fall in Missouri, where I was born and raised. By mid-September, relief from August's stifling heat started creeping across the plains, and we all emerged from climate-controlled homes to revel in the crisp air. The apples in our yard began to ripen, and by the end of the month, our oaks and maples started their own transition. Summer's lush green withdrew slowly as though, while we slept at night, Mother Nature hand-dipped every leaf—a little deeper each evening—in autumn dyes. Soon the entire countryside radiated scarlet, crimson, plum, tangerine, lemon, and coral. As a teenager, I used to stroll through the woods of the nearby wildlife refuge, soaking up the season's last rays of warmth and listening to the hush of the forest as it settled down for the winter.

Missoula's autumn, 1500 miles from my birthplace, offers a slightly different, though no less stunning, display. The Norway maples that line the city streets remind me of the Midwest as they lay a golden carpet on the ground. I walk through, not around, the piles of drying foliage just to feel the leaves crunch beneath my feet. From my backyard, I marvel at the transformation of the western larch on the nearby mountainsides. Day by day, their yellow cloaks brighten as they draw their energy inward—toward their roots—in preparation for the arid chill of winter. Then, almost overnight, the glow vanishes, replaced by a calm, earthy hue.

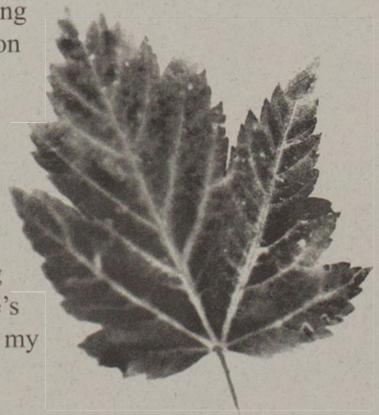
I have apple trees in my front yard here, just as I did growing up. This year, for the first time since my parents sold my childhood home, I watched the tiny fruits swell and ripen. As I monitored the trees' progress, my mind drifted to my grandmother's farm in eastern Missouri, where we dedicated one fall weekend each year to making apple butter. From my porch in Missoula, I could almost smell the freshly cut hay in the barn and hear the echo of the horses' whinnies.

The women—my mother, grandmother, and aunts—straddled worn wooden benches on the lawn, cutting apples and chatting about us kids. Dad and my uncles sipped Bud Light over conversations about business and politics. My brother and I rode tandem in a western saddle on old Goldie's back, circling and re-circling the house until our bottoms ached.

Meanwhile, sliced apples simmered in a huge iron cauldron hanging over a wood fire. As the water boiled, the kettle of fruit and broth slowly transformed into a uniform mixture the consistency of oatmeal. At just the right moment Grandma added cinnamon and sugar—lots of sugar. Each family member took a turn stirring; I took two. I could taste the cinnamon-spiced sweetness of the rising steam as I paddled slowly through the thickening stew. And when it was finally ready—after what seemed to me like days—we spread warm spoonfuls onto slice after slice of Grandma's bread. This ceremonial feast was our family's way of celebrating autumn's passing.

Those apple butter weekends still hold a sweet place in my memory. Amidst the myriad colors of the autumn oaks, hickories, and maples, I never felt closer to my family or to the land. At the time, I didn't realize how fleeting such moments are, nor how rare. And it never occurred to me that any of it would change.

My grandmother passed away over 20 years ago, and Mom and her siblings sold the farmhouse shortly thereafter. The old iron kettle sold at an auction. I don't know whether it was because my mother, too, was attached to the custom or if it was because my brother and I refused store-bought spread, but for the remainder of my childhood she made apple butter each fall. All the kids from our neighborhood would gather in our kitchen with watering mouths, begging for toast with the warm spread. I was proud to share our family's tradition with friends.



Now I'm the one who makes the apple butter, but I've had to adapt the recipe to my new home. I cook it indoors on the stovetop rather than outdoors over an open fire. And now, since I live too far to travel for a weekend gathering, I mail the sealed jars to loved ones across the country. While I miss the apple butter days of my childhood, the spiced-apple aroma wafting through my house still evokes those celebratory feelings. As the last maple leaves drift past my kitchen window, I can smell the crisp breeze blowing across Grandma's pasture. I can feel her gentle touch on my shoulder and hear my uncle's laughter. Over great distances in time and geography, the tradition provides a link to my family and my homeland—it connects me to my roots. And for that, I'm grateful.

Jay Ericson

Camas

EVST / Jeannette Rankin Hall
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812