Camas

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Article 1

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Camas, Fall 2002

Camas

Bruce Byers

Robert Michael Pyle

Teresa Ponikvar

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The Teller Issue

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I have separated one existence from another, walking like the deer, and knowing the barbed wire but not the signs.

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Not God's Dog, But Another

With domestication comes responsibility. It is no mere coincidence that the rise of state power in most cases accompanied, if not directly resulted from, the remaking of certain plants and animals in the shape of human needs. In Mesopotamia it was goats and wheat; in Europe, cows and barley; in the Americas, turkeys and maize. Everywhere were dogs.

As I lay sleepless in the early morning hours after Election Day, I thought about dogs and governments, and remembered first learning something about peril. My grandparents lived a street away while I was growing up, and I often walked the quarter mile or so around the corner to their house. As a child one learns from such ventures what home is, and of the risks of distance. On that walk, I passed a property on the corner where several dogs lived. A rag-tag bunch, they lounged in the daytime beneath the low branches of *piñón* trees in the yard. There was one stinker, a reddish, nappy, canine scoundrel that had clearly drawn the shortest straw in the crossbreeding game. This dog was the type to dart out in a fury of purpose after anything passing on the road. Living for confrontations, he rarely let me through his perimeter without noticing, no matter how stealthily I walked. Since he was nearly as big as I was at the age of seven, and I hadn't yet learned how to be mean, I knew no other choice than to back down the road the way I had come.

This all changed the day I ran and told my grandfather the dog wouldn't let me walk home. He got up from his seat under the *portál* where he spent much of his day watching birds and entertaining guests—many of whom were neighborhood animals—and escorted me up to the corner. Right on cue, the dog leapt into the middle of the road and barked his challenge to us, upon which Granddad reached for the nearest rock, raised his arm, and hucked it at him. The stone landed well away from the offender, as my grandfather had intended, yet I was amazed at the dog's response: he spun on his hind legs and zoomed back into the trees trailing nothing but dust and silence. Among canines, there is no more universally recognized bit of human sign language than the quick bend at the middle followed by the raised arm. It has worked for me ever since.

As I lay fretting over the election, I was overcome with the plummeting realization that, overnight, the entire country had moved in to that corner house of my childhood. Our government is our dog, and it's out front—vicious and cunning and megalomaniac—acting like it owns the whole world. It has developed the unsettling habit of indiscriminate hand-biting, and worse. We've lived with our dogs, our governments, for nearly ten thousand years—enough time to learn well the dangers of the arrangement. Some dogs kill children, some kill other dogs. What one hopes would offer service and security often presents menace.

For governments, far more than for dogs, or even people, the default setting is depravity. That power corrupts is well established, and we've certainly grown no immunity over the past two hundred years. Here's some evidence on the recent behavior of our dog. On the subject of international treaties and conventions our government has unilaterally abrogated or refused to sign, even a partial list is telling. To wit: the International Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; the International Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming; the United Nations Agreement to Curb the Proliferation of small Arms; the International Criminal Court (the U.S. government insisted that its military alone be exempted from war crimes prosecution); the International Landmine Ban; the International Plan for Cleaner Energy (U.S. alone to oppose among 68 countries): the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (here the U.S. joined Afghanistan in opposition): the United Nations Treaty on the Rights of the Child (only the U.S. and Somalia opposed). Perhaps most troubling is the United Nations Genocide convention, which our government took 50 years to ratify, and did so only with the proviso that it could be charged with genocide only if it accuses itself. For the grieving friends and families of the one million Iraqis killed by U.S. sanctions and bombing during and after the Gulf War, this is anything but a joke. While claiming to be the world's moral compass, the U.S. intentionally destroyed over 1,500 Iraqi water treatment facilities over the past ten years, knowing full well that the major toll of suffering would be paid among children and

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We invite submissions of article ideas, prose, poetry, and artwork. Please visit our website for details. Thanks.

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the elderly (See *Camas*, Spring 2002). As a result, 500,000 children under the age of five have died from disease. The U.S. provided Iraq, even after the Gulf War, with many of the biological and chemical weapons it now claims pose such a threat. Iraq is not alone; Columbia, East Timor, Chile, Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala all know similar mauling. The teeth are turning inward as well. Current legislation—the USA Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act in particular—severely curtail the very liberties our government claims to uphold. Our Constitution is at risk. This is not a case of the tail wagging the dog, for though it would be painful, one can cut off one's tail.

The authors of our Constitution attempted to emplace failsafes against governmental abuses, failsafes that have been rendered obsolete by the complexities and scale of modern society. As with the absent-minded, absentee dog owner, Americans are not paying enough attention to the way their government behaves, and we risk the failure of the experiment we hold so dear. More and more, we get wind of people voicing bitter accusations. Intead of hearing, "There goes that guy with the sweet, loyal hound—sure wish we could have one like that," we hear things like, "watch out, she's the one with the dog that killed my family."

The U.S. joined Afghanistan in not signing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Descrimination Against Women.

Our democracy was construed to serve the citizens to their benefit, at their instruction. At its inception, the designers of our system attempted to go one better and put forth beliefs about the worth and equality of all people, all nationalities. The framers took pains to segregate secular government from the concerns of religion. Ironically, it is often the loftiest idealist that sinks to the most perverse and repressive depths. We now face a government that serves mostly its own needs and those of a wealthy power elite, not those of its people, and not even remotely the needs of the larger world. Wielding a godlike dominion over the entire globe, our government has become a solipsistic religion all its own, seeing itself as the sole focus of Creation.

My grandfather protected me from possible injury by a wayward neighborhood dog. He also showed me how to defend myself. This government now threatens not only us but our children, and our children's children, on down for as many generations as we can imagine, who are with us just as our grandparents are with us. We must understand as part of our own needs, the needs of our children, our ancestors, as well as those of our international neighbors. It is time to reclaim the right of everybody to walk unmolested through their respective neighborhoods. It is time to remember what it is to be human. We've got to do something about this goddamned dog.

—John Bateman

Huckleberry Wine *(ripe for the tippling)*

Organic Standards

As of October 21, 2002, the term "organic" became the property of the government, defined by the USDA in conjunction with the National Organic Standard Board (NOSB). Now, products may be labeled with one of three USDA organic seals: *100% organic*, connoting a product whose contents are entirely organic; *organic*, for a product consisting of at least 95% organic materials; or made with *organic ingredients*, for a product containing at least 70% organic material. In each of these cases, the USDA guarantees that the product is produced without the use of conventional pesticides, petroleum-based fertilizers or sewage sludge, irradiation, or bio-engineering. Similarly, organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products must be from animals that are not given antibiotics or growth hormones. Any corporation caught taking advantage of the organic label as defined above is liable to be fined up to $10,000 for each offense.

Accompanying the recent codification of the term "organic" is a burgeoning market for organic products. Five years ago the organic sector was bringing in $1.8 billion. Since then, there has been a 20% annual increase in sales, causing the Organic Trade Organization to predict that sales will reach $11 billion by the year 2003. In short, organic products have been catapulted out of the fringe and onto the shelves of many conventional grocery stores. In fact, *Newsweek*'s September, 2002 cover story was on organics. Because of the increasing popularity of organic products and the new certification standards, many concerns have arisen regarding the corporate take-over of the organic market. Corporations like Heinz and General Mills now manufacture and sell organic products.

The concern, then, is not that corporations are nudging themselves into the organic marketplace, but the effects that nudging will be allowed to have. Previously, organic was meant to connote locally grown, small farmed, environmentally friendly produce. However, with the USDA's regulations, it's feasible that a business can grow organic products on a large farm down in Mexico and then spend kilowatts of energy to transport this product to supermarkets. The new certification also demands paperwork and regulations that some predict will push small farmers out of the market.

Luckily, the new policy allows each state to develop its own standards, with the catch being that each state needs to have regulations that are at least as strict as the national standards. Some communities, such as Marin County, California, already have begun to develop regulations that take into account factors like soil and watershed conservation. The question is whether states will follow this lead and develop a unique label that brings organic back to the pre-big business values it originally represented.

—Erica Wetter

Drop Dead Gorgeous

Last Spring, Women's Voices for the Earth (WVE) joined forces with the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) to launch the *Not Too Pretty Campaign*. This effort is aimed at identifying harmful chemicals, in particular, phthalates, in common name brand, off-the-shelf beauty products. Phthalates – a by-product and component of many plastics – have been shown to cause birth defects and reproductive impairment in laboratory animals that have been exposed in-utero or shortly after birth. Studies have shown that phthalates can impair the reproductive health in females, but the most severe impacts are seen on the male reproductive system. Exposure to phthalates causes life-long damage to the testes, prostate gland, epididymis, penis, and seminal vesicles of laboratory animals. Troubling recent studies have shown that American women between the ages of 18 and 35 have abnormally high levels of phthalates, which pose a threat to the health of their children.

Partly in response to these findings, The *Not Too Pretty Campaign* contracted with a major national laboratory to test 72 popular beauty products for phthalates. Test findings showed that nearly three quarters of the products contained phthalates. These products included all 17 fragrances tested, six of seven hair sprays, nine of 14 deodorants, and two of nine hand and body lotions. Popular brands, including Suave, Clairol, Poison, Oil of Olay, Jergens, Nivea, and Pantene, tested positive for pthalates. Many nail polish products also contain these chemicals. Disturbingly, none of the products tested lists the chemicals on the label.

To review the full text of the report, (which includes a list of all products tested and the results) or to find out how you can get involved in the *Not Too Pretty Campaign*, check out http://www.nottoopretty.org.

—Tami Brunck

Dam Voters

On election day, Montana voters soundly defeated Initiative 145 (I-145), a controversial, statewide ballot initiative that would have created a commission to study whether the state should buy 13 privately owned dams. Otherwise known as the Montana Hydroelectric Security Act, I-145 was to address public dissatisfaction with partial electricity deregulation passed in 1997 and was the focus of the grassroots "Buy Back the Dams" campaign.

Following deregulation, Montana's major electric utility, Montana Power Company, sold its dams and coal-fired plants to Pennsylvania Power and Light Montana (PPL Montana). Deregulation allows electricity generated in Montana to be sold, not only in Montana, but throughout the West at market value, resulting in high electricity bills for Montanans. The grassroots

campaign, led by Montanans for Cheap Power, argued that the state would be a better steward of the dams than out-of-state corporations and that power generated from Montana rivers should go to Montana households.

Alas, the high initial popularity of I-145 was crushed under the weight of millions of dollars spent by the corporate-backed Taxpayers Against I-145, which launched a counter-campaign playing on citizens' already-high budgetary anxiety.

Thanks to vapid television ads and the couch potato vote, Montanans squandered an opportunity to win back some control of rivers, resources and utilities. Perhaps a similar initiative will have better luck next time.

—Jennifer Sutton

Of Wolves and Wyoming

The Crow Indians tell a story in which the Sun becomes angry with the Crow people for letting a fool abuse his wife, a Crow woman. Sun caused the Crow's food sources to disappear, forcing the Crow to wander desperately looking for nourishment, until, one day, Sun's servant, White Wolf, agreed to help. White Wolf told them how they might conjure enough buffalo to survive, which they did. But Sun found out. He praised the Crow for their bravery but banished White Wolf to a wanderlust life as an outcast among the animals.

Jay Ericson

This story echoes in the northern Rockies today, where wolves continue to be treated as the lone sheep in a pasture of cows. After all, Wyoming wants to legitimize slaughtering the animals, and some Oregon ranchers are gearing up to do the same.

As the West was settled, territorial governments paid up to $3 per wolf head until the 1940s, when the animals were eradicated. Thus it remained until 1995, when the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) reintroduced wolves in Yellowstone National Park and central Idaho. Around the same time, wolf populations in neighboring Canada increased and began migrating south into northern Montana. Today, several hundred wolves wander the hills and valleys of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming and, most recently, have returned on their own to Oregon and Utah.

The FWS is satisfied enough with recovery efforts that it is willing to remove wolves from the endangered species list and relinquish management to the states, but only when the states develop plans that guarantee the animal won't fall to endangered numbers again. Herein lies the problem.

Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming, the three original reintroduction states, must produce coordinated plans for the FWS to relinquish federal control. Montana and Idaho have done so, but Wyoming insists on a plan that classifies wolves not in national parks or in designated wilderness as predators, meaning that the animals can be killed as if they were problem rodents. The FWS already said this plan is unacceptable, yet Wyoming continues, and leaders in Idaho and Montana are growing frustrated.

Meanwhile, enough of those wanderlust wolves have found their way back to Oregon and Utah that these states must now write their own management plan to update laws long on the books: $3 per head in Oregon, $1 in Utah. The debate has grown heated in eastern Oregon, where ranching dominates and where the new canines now live. But Oregon has its own Endangered Species Act, and wildlife officials there still are parsing out what that might mean for the wolves. Utah, which has seen fewer wolves, is poised with a list of its own management options. Look for Wyoming's official decision by February 2003.

—Dan Berger

We've Got Mail!

Dear Editors,

I am writing in regard to the photo essay, "Home on the Range," in the Big Sky Issue, Spring 2002. Notwithstanding the excellent photography in this story, it is disturbing that *Camas* chose to present such a one-sided portrait of the ranching industry.

Historically, ranching in the West has forced its way into the American mythology, just as it has forced itself upon the land (much ranchland was stolen from Native Americans). Furthermore, the widespread overgrazing of livestock has arguably caused more ecological degradation than any other human-caused disturbance in the history of the West. Equally destructive have been the public policies contrived by the politically powerful ranching industry, some of which continue to this day (e.g. persecution of predators and competitors of cattle). Much of this is funded by massive federal subsidies in the form of direct payments and below-market grazing fees.

Of course, not all of Montana's ranchers have mistreated the land, water, and wildlife. However, the overall cattle-caused degradation of the land and streams is indisputable and thus deeply entwined with the history of ranching in the West. That *Camas* would glorify the myth of ranching while ignoring the reality is astounding.

—Miguel Hernandez, Helena, MT

Editors respond:

Thank you for your impassioned critique of the cow pictures. While we would be the last to dispute the devastating effect wrought by cattle ranching on much of the West's landscape, it was not our intention to either emphasize or gloss over that reality in "Home on the Range." Cattle ranching is, like it or not, a part of the West's past and present—and it's liable to be part of our future. We wanted to give our readers a glimpse into life as a cow hand and let them draw their own conclusions. If the sight of a woman reaching into the guts of a living cow romanticizes the ranching life to anyone, far be it from us to argue.

Claire Hibbs

[Evening: Wilderness]

You heat water for my bath and pour it into the metal tub. I undress into the steam, narrowing my body to fit the curves. I am washed by the water you carried from the river and when I have finished, you empty it into the roots of the pine.

The lantern hums like wind against smooth rocks so that we no longer hear it. We are alone with the fire in the stove. Far away over the mountains there are no stars. Only the threat of a new war and a language based upon the other. Even you cannot wash this away.

Yesterday you showed me where you keep the axe, so I don't stumble upon it in the darkness. There is a blindness that can be made recognizable: a hand against the edge of a room without lights and the way it leads you safely.

Outside it is snowing and it quiets the night. Inside we are a man and a woman holding on to each horizon: body, storm, two worlds, borderless.

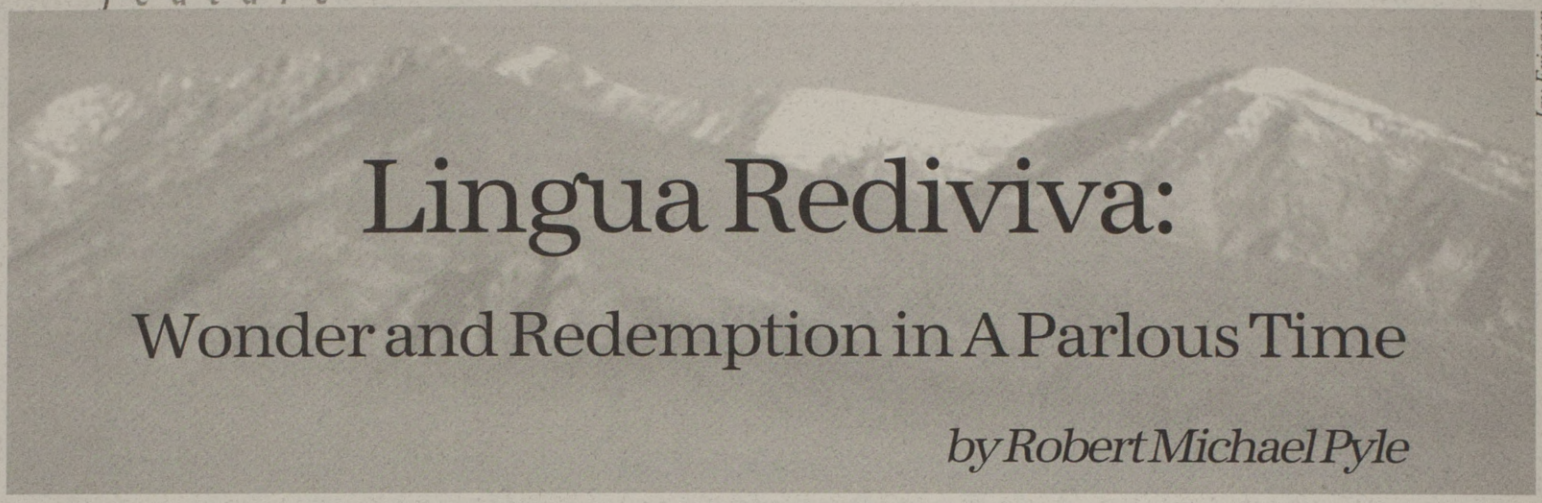
Mandy Smoker Broaddus

With/out

These days I have begun to tell myself *do not think of north, do not think of rivers.* Today it is *do not talk of autumn.* The leaves on my neighbor's oak have let go. The wind is serious as it sets off these small tornados. Small, yellow tornados circling my house, keeping in this quiet.

If I could go back I would remove even yellow. Each solitary larch tree branding itself against a forest quickly gathering for winter is too much.
I would ask my friend if she saw the one half-covered in black moss.
It was so near dying and still the branches facing east held on. She would say *no, such things are impossible* and I could then easily forget. These are favors I must remember to thank her for.

A light fixture in this dim room is ornamented with gold stalks trapped in a moment of wind. Do I resist here too? Do the stalks speak for themselves or break free? Should I say *no fields, no distance, no mother*—for all our sakes?
(And if one removes mother, then must *father* also be left behind?) This could go on for some time.



Jay Ericson

Lingua Rediviva:

Wonder and Redemption in A Parlous Time

by Robert Michael Pyle

Lately I've been having trouble writing with conviction and complete honesty. I have been charged with writing a) a response to the World Charter, along with other artists; and b) a "state of play" essay on "reconnecting people and nature" for a centenary issue of a highly respected environmental journal. When I first read it, the World Charter struck me as merely wildly hopeful in its prescription for how things ought to be and its invitation to the nations of the world to take it up in earnest. But when I read it again in preparation for responding, in the context of today's rapidly deteriorating environmental and world affairs, it struck me as the sheerest fantasy. As for "reconnecting people and nature," intimacy with the more-than-human has long been one of my primary concerns, both as a conservationist and a writer. But I have never felt so challenged in imagining the necessary reweaving as I do now, when the virtual subsumes the real left and right, and the places that nourish intimate connection drop out before us and behind. How could I meet these requests in good heart and hope, without compromising the evident?

We came to Teller Refuge when foothill snow had given way to balsamroot and new bunchgrass, as fresh May snow hit the high Bitterroots and bright green lit all the willow bottoms of Montana. Once there and settled in, I felt the virulent passion for land and language that accompanies people who come willingly into environmental writing enclaves. Such fervor is a good thing, and necessary. For this is hard work, getting together to pick apart lovingly assembled manuscripts like turkey vultures over roadkill. It stinks, and it is rich, and it takes a lot out of you. No one does this for fun — even in such a place as the Bitterroot Valley.

True, the company was the best: a jolly congregation of scribblers of many backgrounds, ages, viewpoints, and personalities, but all companionable, smart, funny, and wise, let alone articulate and informed. True too, the food, the garden much of it came from, and the lodgings all knocked our collective socks off, and there was good Montana beer to boot. Who wouldn't enjoy the chance to share stories and songs in splendid old haylofts and drawing rooms, as painted ladies dawdled and basked outside in the last of the spring sun? And that wasn't even the best. The best was all out-of-doors: rafting the high-water Bitterroot with rivermen and women who knew more than the way their oars worked; walking through last year's cottonwood leaves as the new balsam wafted up, in search of morels that proved even more elusive than the perfect sentence; hiking lupine-lined trails up to a vantage over singing wilderness; sharing good words across a campfire, by a perfect peninsulette glowing in the chartreuse backlight of new-growth poplars, as flickers hammer their dulcimer trunks.

Of course, we paid for it all through the hard work of getting down to the submarrow of the words, the inner linings of the guts of the stories, the cellar beneath the floor of the experiences — so much of it that sleep was the one element Teller just could not provide in abundance. And then there was that other hard part: getting a grip on the pain of loss and the hope of redemption all at the same time: a slippery assignment indeed! I believe every essay we considered involved unsatisfactory change, loss, and at least the partial dim prospect of fragmentary recovery. From the physician who grew up in South Africa, to the Southwestern sojourner who would find truth in silent ruins, from the Alaskan dam-removal shock trooper breaking trail for salmon, to the yanked-from-the-farm poet whose hometown river saved his youthful ass, each of my Teller writing colleagues confronted bereavement or metamorphosis and shook it by the nape until it cried "Uncle." Or else they asked the questions that have to be asked, while giving the praise the land is due. They did all this while paying extraordinary

attention to the delicious details of the world, and finding language to describe and celebrate them.

The two essays featured here are no exceptions. They take on loss and dolorous change and prize out the stuff of hope, however slender and tattered. Teresa Ponikvar looks into the expectant gaze of belugas, Bruce Byers into sacred pools and forests, their serpents and spirit lions. They do so in the kind of language we strove for at Teller: clear, and sometimes luminous. Teresa speaks of a coyote, "like a grey-brown secret slipping with nervous grace down the bank of a stream." Bruce quotes a spirit guide describing a snake "so big that when it crosses the road along the edge of the forest, even the buses stop." I like to think that, in their selection for *Camas*, these pieces fairly represent all of the other strong testimonies, witnessings, riffs, and righteous rumblings produced by their whole talented coterie of Bitterroot writers that week.

These two essays are also dramatically different. Bruce Byers has been around a while, worked on the astonishingly camouflaged Gaillardia moths of Colorado, and drew his essay from deep experience in Africa. His writing comes out of science, veering now toward the personal. Teresa Ponikvar is younger, and she has admittedly never laid eyes on the belugas that inspired her tale. The travels she draws upon have been chiefly in literature and her imagination. She chose humanities over science by early inclination, but now inclines the other way in college, refusing to have poetry without science or vice versa. Both authors seek to stride Nabokov's "high ridge, where the mountainside of scientific knowledge meets the opposite slope of artistic imagination." And each of them confronts the appalling prospects for the natural world and turns away from despair toward hope — a kind of hope that embraces humans instead of banishing them from a world that would be too easy to regard as better off without us.

I don't know any teachers who could honestly stand there and tell you that they don't get more from their students than they give. This was certainly true for me at Teller. Because, look, the state of play really *is* desperate! Our benighted leadership prepares for a belligerent war while admitting even more snowmobiles to Yellowstone, lowering clean air standards for coal plants, strangling environmental enforcement, undoing forest protections, lining up the drilling rigs at the edge of ANWR, and so on *summa cum nausea*. All this, while the very climate itself unravels. This is why it is so hard to write about the Earth Charter with a straight face, or make one more case for reconnecting our spectacularly eco-ignorant people with nature. Why it would be so very easy to say "fuck it" and head out for a beer and a butterfly, unmolested by the ludicrous impulse to make things better, after all these years of trying.

But, like Teresa's questioning belugas, these essays won't let me. Nor will any of the writers at Teller. They still care enough to write, they still think literature can make a difference; and so, I find, do I. As Teresa says, "if poetry can stave off bitterness and hopelessness, maybe it can change the world, after all." As Bruce found, "If they weren't sacred, the forests would have been long gone." So this is where the clear-eyed gaze and the honest response must finally meet — not in cynicism, which is its own punishment — but in hard-headed hope, rooted deep in the soft green leaves and the hard brown ground itself, where land and language finally meet.

As for "reconnecting people and nature," intimacy with the more-than-human has long been one of my primary concerns, both as a conservationist and a writer. But I have never felt so challenged in imagining the necessary reweaving as I do now, when the virtual subsumes the real left and right, and the places that nourish intimate connection drop out before us and behind.

Though Robert Michael Pyle, Ph.D., is a lepidopterist by training, his interests run well beyond the world of butterflies. Author of over ten books, including Wintergreen, *winner of the John Burroughs Award, and the recent* Walking the High Ridge: Life As Field Trip, *Pyle covers the territory with a keen and loving eye. He and his wife, botanist Thea Linnaea Pyle, make their home along a tributary of the Columbia River, in Gray's River, Washington.*

Reflections in the

The belugas will not leave me alone.

They are hanging there, glowing white in an ominous alphabet soup of DDT and PCBs, upright and sadly smiling. They have cancer, and their reproductive systems are twisted and confused by the prospect of producing another generation. They look like ghosts. Maybe they are. They float there in the murky waters of my mind, looking at me with gentle confusion. Their question is clear in their bewildered smiles and soft dark eyes: "Too late?"

I don't know how to answer them. What I want to do, more than anything, as they gaze at me with those malevolent molecules of poison bumping against their soft white skin, is hate the human race for hurting them, for making them so sad and their future so uncertain. I could do it, too: take a deep breath, gather up all my anger, see all the disappearing beauty and wildness in the world in those deep beluga eyes, and just hate. I could look at the belugas, silently populating my dreams and thoughts, and wish passionately for the day when we will be gone, and the world will be safe for wildness again. I am tempted. Hate is an easy road to walk, because it means no obligations. "Too late" is, I think, the same road. I could hate, and I could give up on my species and on the world, and it would be easy. I wouldn't have to be angry; I could kick back and turn off my mind and do whatever I wanted, safe in the knowledge that it's all going to hell anyway.

When logging helicopters chop over my house, and when people suggest burying nuclear waste in our mountains, and as species after species slouches quietly towards extinction, hate looks like a pretty comfortable option. I walk up to the very edge of hopelessness and peer down, but something makes me turn away, eventually, every time. It is the knowledge that there is nowhere to go from "too late," and that hate never got anyone anywhere. It is a deep and passionate and irrational love of the human race that I can't shake, despite everything, and a love of the earth, of wild things and wild places, that is fierce and overwhelming and will not take "too late" for an answer.

Last spring I was in Mexico City, and coming up from the metro, I saw a man and a little boy sleeping on the steps. The boy sat in his father's lap, their arms around each other, their heads tilted together with tenderness and trust, their faces creased with identical lines of fatigue and hunger. In the middle of a dirty subway station in the middle of the biggest city in the world, the beauty of their small gentle circle reduced me to tears. The next day, sitting by a river in Taxco, I prayed to whoever was listening, "Let love matter, let love matter, they loved each other and it should matter." And I found a rock shaped exactly like a heart. I believe that I got an answer from somewhere that day, and I can't ignore that. I am angry, yes, just as much as anyone with open eyes in this world, but I can't wish, with love, for humans to die off, even at the expense of wildness. I can't, with love, accept "too late." Wildness matters, but love matters too, and there has to be some way to live for both. The only answer, finally, that I can give the belugas, or anyone, is, "I don't know. Maybe it is too late, but I'm going to keep hoping. I'm going to try." Hope is an act of love, the biggest one I can think of. And environmentalism, I think, is just hope in action.

I've never seen a beluga, outside of my mind and the pages of *National Geographic*. To be perfectly honest, my direct experience with real wilderness is pretty limited, and sometimes I wonder why I'm haunted by white whales, and how I ended up an environmental studies major, when I know perfectly well that my brain just isn't built for the scientific process.

Even at the age of eight, having spent my entire life in suburbs and housing developments, I felt a passionate devotion to the environment that certainly didn't spring from frequent run-ins with wildness, much less from an understanding of the principles of ecology. Even so, I remember being absolutely livid one day because my brother had left the faucet running. I can clearly picture the page of my diary with the words "The little dork LIKES to waste water!!!!" scribbled furiously across it. "I'm an environmental NUT," I scrawled, "and he doesn't even CARE!!!!" I think I had a vague idea that if we used too much water, the ocean would dry up, and that this was an imminent threat, a matter of some kid taking an extra-long turn at the drinking fountain at recess. Still, I was on the right track. I pored over *50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth*, and wrote impassioned letters to various environmental organizations, asking them if there was anything I could do to help. The inevitable answer was, "Sorry, thanks for your interest, call us in ten years." I persevered, though, despotically policing my family's use of water and paper, singlehandedly saving from destruction forests I had never seen and the ocean I knew so little about.

It never occurred to me that caring for the environment had anything to do with science. I liked English class; no one had ever given me the slightest hint that I could like science too. The seed of environmentalism that was beginning to sprout with my frustration at the water-wasting "dorks" of the world, then, must have been primarily a result of the huge amount of reading I did. Nature was a backdrop for, and sometimes even a character in, the stories I loved, and that was reason enough to want to save it. From Laura Ingalls Wilder's longings for the West, to the life cycle of E.B. White's gentle spider, to Scott O'Dell's lonely *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, it must have been literature that shaped my early environmental ethic, introducing me to animals and ecosystems I had little contact with in real life. I had never been alone in a canoe surrounded by water and dolphins, or thrown back my sunbonnet and looked out on endless prairie, but I certainly wanted the possibility that I might, someday, know places as

Eyes of Others

by Teresa Ponikvar

vast and wild as the ones in my books. Over and over, literature impressed the importance of conservation and the deep interrelatedness of all life upon a little girl who studiously ignored anything related to science, who couldn't have been objective about anything had her life depended on it.

In high school, my environmental passions having cooled with the realization that such things went hand in hand with yucky, boring subjects like chemistry, biology, and even sometimes—God forbid—math, I discovered in myself a deep and unmet need for a closer relationship with the natural world. Feeling vaguely traitorous, I sacrificed precious reading and writing time to begin nurturing a series of pitiful little drugstore transplants in boxes of potting soil in our suburban backyard. I didn't know what to make of this alien—and desperate—need to engage in a pursuit that didn't involve some form of literature, but, limited as I was by the shallowness of my boxes and my complete lack of botanical knowledge, I couldn't stop. It was around this time, thankfully, that I discovered Lewis Thomas, who, with his intelligent, lyrical, and wonder-filled essays on biology, offered me the revelation that science and poetry didn't have to be mutually exclusive. More and more plants crowded my boxes, I voluntarily took a biology class, my world expanded to twice its previous size, and the environmentalist in me was reborn. It was permissible, at least sometimes, to look at science with a poetic eye, and suddenly there was a bridge between two parts of me that I had thought were inaccessible to each other. I didn't have to choose between them; I could have both.

Today, I still struggle with my utterly unscientific thinking process as I write lab reports and fumble my way through ecology charts and equations. The occasional literature class is a comfortable respite from the world of science. But I know what is at stake now, much more deeply than I did as when I declared myself, at eight, "an environmental nut." Today the bare facts move me far more than I ever expected they could. I am hungry for knowledge of the natural world. On spring mornings I lie awake in bed with the window cranked wide open, trying to separate one bird song from another, aching to know who sings each one, to know everything about them. Just knowing that someone out there starts singing "Chee chee

Jay Ericson

chee cher-r-r-r-r" at seven-thirty every morning isn't enough anymore. Everywhere I go now, I am confronted by my staggering lack of knowledge. Everywhere I look now, I feel my inability to name the plants and birds and insects I see as acutely as I would feel having been stricken, suddenly, colorblind. Where I might once have imagined mermaids floating beneath the waves, or mentally converted the joyful riot of orange and brown butterflies that came swirling through my yard into fairies or some other silly thing, today I want the real story.

What it comes down to is that the truth—those bare scientific facts I scorned for so long—is so much more fantastic than anything I could invent. I am going to learn, and I will tie my dreamy, literary little mind into knots and bows of all kinds to make this knowledge a part of me. My stacks of library books, these days, are often composed largely of field guides. But literature is my intellectual home, and that is where I always end up.

I wouldn't—couldn't—have poetry without science today, or science without poetry. As a little girl, I needed books to expose me to nature, to allow me love and wonder at places and things I couldn't know firsthand. Today I need them to revive my sense of love and wonder at the human race, in the face of all I know and all I am learning. It is essential to my ecological, scientific education that I be able to come home after a long day of being reminded how far gone everything really is, and hold up the contents of my bookcase next to a day's worth of lectures on degraded soil and disappearing forests and poisoned water. *Leaves of Grass, Charlotte's Web, The Bean Trees, A Wrinkle in Time, The Lives of a Cell,* written by human beings, all, look me in the face and remind me that we can be better, that we can, and sometimes do, make the choice to create and not destroy. Poetry always gives me hope.

I realize that not everyone is as moved by the written word as I am. Some people have been irreparably conditioned by horrible high school experiences to think poetry is completely beyond their powers of comprehension, and boring to boot. Far too many in this world are too busy with the business of survival to read a haiku, much less a novel, if they can read at all. I don't suggest, exactly, that poetry can change the world. But I think that, for people who are in a position to act on behalf of life on this planet, it can help to keep that action hopeful and loving, and ulitmately more successful. Bitter and hopeless people don't make things better; if poetry can stave off bitterness and hopelessness, maybe it can change the world, after all.

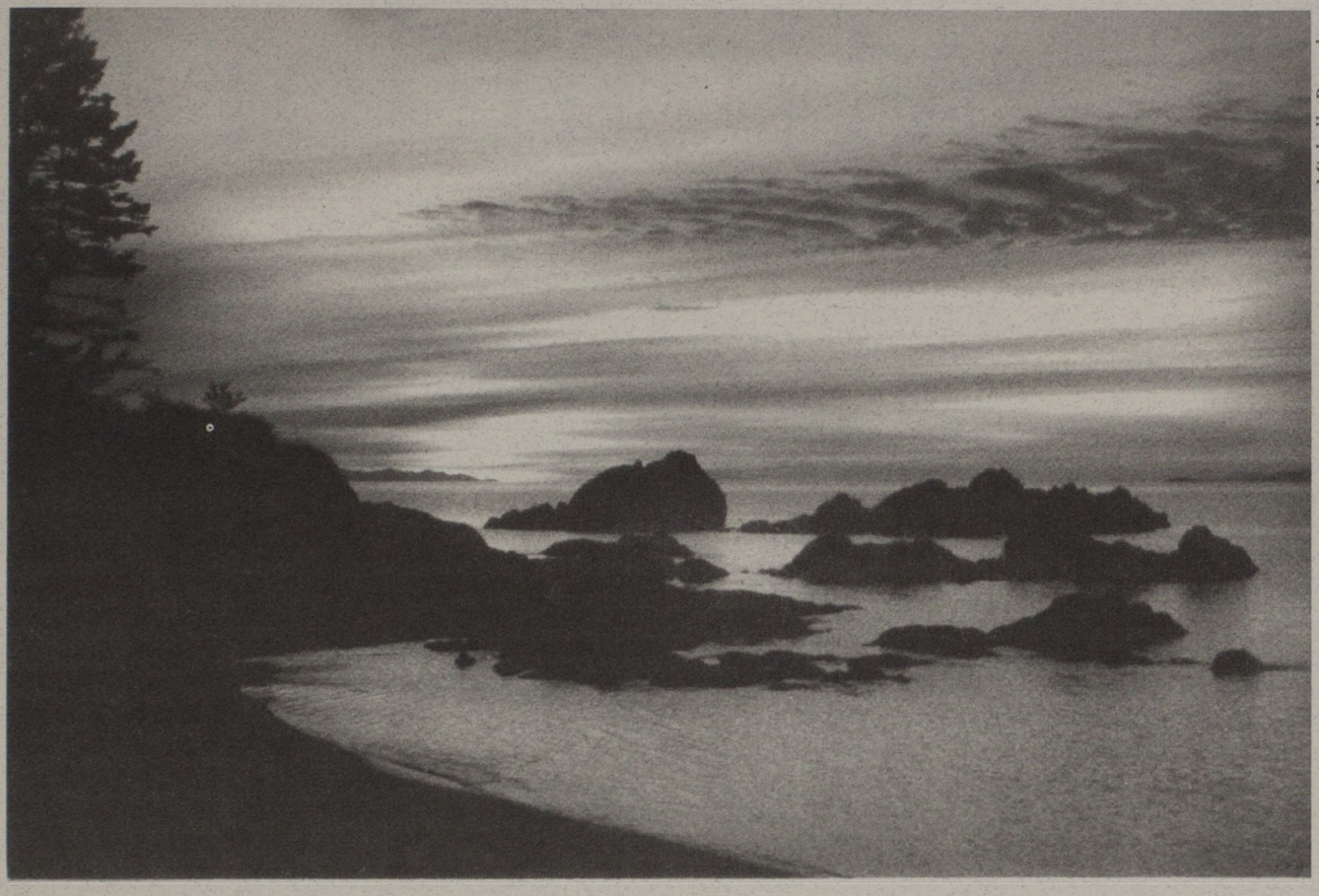
Environmentalists need poetry. We who are most deeply moved by green and wild things need to be reminded to feel for human beings, too.

I have a beautifully illustrated children's book of the Delmore Schwartz poem " 'I Am Cherry Alive,' the Little Girl Sang." My aunt gave it to me when I was tiny, and inscribed it "in anticipation of a liberated niece, with love." It may well have been the first poem I ever heard, and the lovely pictures and joyful cadence of the words as a naked little messy-haired girl celebrates her place in the world have been a part of my consciousness for as long as I can remember. Certainly it was one of the pieces of literature that was a window to the natural world from my suburban childhood. I come back to this book over and over, and each time I look at my aunt's inscription it takes on new shades of meaning. One year, this same aunt made my mom a "sisterhood is powerful!" sweatshirt, so her inscription may have been merely a well-meaning plug for late-seventies feminism, a comment on the shameless and joyful nudity in the illustrations, and the words laden with self-esteem and empowerment ("I will always be me,/ I will always be new!"). But with apologies to my aunt, I'd like to take it farther than that.

Poetry liberates, and that's what I'd like to think my aunt meant. Poetry takes me somewhere, it gives me a feeling or an experience, maybe one I've never known before, or one I've forgotten, in a way that nothing else can. A few carefully chosen words, some well-placed line breaks, a couple apt metaphors, and I have peered intimately into someone else's feelings; someone else's thoughts and emotions and confusions and joys, in the form of words, have slipped into my mind. Maybe they take root there and become part of me, or maybe they slip right back out again, but what really matters is that moment of empathy. I am taken beyond myself, or find that someone else's words and images perfectly express the deepest parts of me, the ones I scarcely know exist. It doesn't happen with every poem or story, of course, and the ones that move me won't move everyone, but it happens, and it can be life-changing, that deep and sudden *feeling* of a truth, or a beauty, or a pain that there is no other way to get at. Audre Lorde offers us a poet's take on "I think, therefore I am": "I feel, and therefore I can be free."

Environmentalists need poetry. We who are most deeply moved by green and wild things need to be reminded to feel for human beings, too. Only with empathy for our own species and its messy set of needs and wants and blindnesses and loves can we create solutions to our environmental emergencies that won't pave the way for new, different problems. Out of work loggers taking out their frustration by wreaking ecological havoc in national parks at night, for example, or a hundred moms and dads trudging home from the chemical plant with pink slips in their pockets so a stream can run clear again. If we act and live with love, we're sure to make some mistakes, but maybe we will be less likely to continuue shuffling our social and environmental problems around and trading one for another.

I don't want to sound naïve here. I would be thrilled to



Michelle Beaseley

come up with a more profound and intellectual-sounding truth and call to action than, simply, "love," but my twenty-two years of life, extensive readings, and three years of higher education haven't offered me anything that makes more sense. Edward Abbey, in his journals, rants about the book reviewers who accuse him of being a hater, who cannot see that "every hate implies a corresponding love." The alternate is true as well, and I certainly don't deny that. Because I love birds and green things and life and quiet, I hate Monsanto, and asphalt, and guns, and jet skis and a lot of other things besides, and however liberated I may someday become, I will never love them. Some things are inherently unlovable; all I'm arguing is that the human race is not, and cannot be, one of them. We are endlessly fallible. We do hideous, stupid, ignorant, ridiculous things to our infinitely lovely and miraculous planet, but we also write poetry. We paint and make music and wonder. We try. We're here, and there's no getting around it, even though some of us might sometimes rather let the trees and belugas and birds and bugs take over. Wishing us gone just isn't enough. We have to find ways to act, with love, for both human beings and wildness, because that is the only way we can save either one. Poetry is a step in that direction: "in anticipation of a liberated world, with love."

I would like to be a river, to know where I am going, and to have the determination to carve through granite to get there. I would like to be a tree, to be rooted in one place, one unquestionable home, and to stretch always for the light. I would like to be an island, to open my sandy arms to every floating seed and bird blown off course, and the small frightened mammals clinging to pieces of driftwood, and offer them fresh water, and rich soil, and sweet fruit.

I'm not sure what I am, or should be.

These are the pictures that shape me, the pictures I hold in my mind: Belugas, gentle and white and patient and disappearing, glowing under the ice, waiting. A coyote like a grey-brown secret slipping with nervous grace down the bank of a stream. Golden velvet hills shrouded in smog, and the ghosts of fruit trees hovering over the concrete floor of the Santa Clara Valley. The lawn of my high school and reading "Song of Myself" there for the first time, watching each blade of grass take on a new enormity, and my soul expanding in the spring sunlight to fit it all in. A waterfall in Uruapan, brown and putrid and foamy with sewage, and tourists paying money to see it. A perfect night sky and a sharp intake of breath as time loses its meaning and the stars, for a moment, sing, and their song is joyful. Nine years old, and finishing *The Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and crying, distraught and disoriented at returning, with a jolt, to suburbia. The warm brown circle of a father's tired arms on a dark and dirty subway stair.

I gather it all up, the beauty and the horror melting together, and hold on for dear life, and look for a way to keep going. And somehow all I can do is hope. Somehow I can't do anything but love.

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Mhondoro

Spirit Lions

"We will advance deep into the undergrowth of mythology and ritual, of symbolism and belief."

—David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerillas & Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*

Following a narrow track we pushed in through the thornthicket. Huge baobabs, as big as the round thatch and mud huts clustered under them, rose from the heavily gullied land, their smooth trunks shining silver and pink in the hot noon sun. Using aerial photos as a map, Nick Dunne and I were trying to get to a point on the east bank of the Musengezi River at the northern end of the largest remaining fragment of forest in this part of northern Zimbabwe.

Finally we reached the top of the riverbank, parked the Toyota Land Cruiser on a steep incline, and put a couple of rocks under the wheels to keep it from rolling. We were about to eat lunch when a man in a torn khaki shirt and dirty blue shorts appeared, coming up from his small, handwatered vegetable garden by the river, which was heavily fenced with brushwood against cattle and goats. He was curious and friendly, especially after we shared one of our warm beers with him. His name was Jeremiah Manhango, and his English was not bad. Jeremiah warned us immediately not go into the thick forest just south of here:

"If you do you can get lost. A lot of rain may come and fall on you, even now, in the dry season. Or you can get eaten by a lion. There is a big white snake in there. It doesn't bite you, but if you see it, you'll go mad!"

This forest was one of three places sacred to Mbuya Nehanda, an important ancestral spirit of this part of the Zambezi Valley, Jeremiah told us. This area is the home of the Korekore people, a subgroup of Zimbabwe's largest ethnic group, the Shona. As is true in many central African cultures, belief in ancestral spirits and their power to influence everyday life is a central tenet of Shona religion. Jeremiah had moved here with his family from central Zimbabwe in 1971, as a boy of fifteen. Even though he was an immigrant, and not a Korekore, he was still a Shona, and he respected the sacred places of the local people, he said.

I was here in the Muzarabani District with Nick Dunne, a young white Zimbabwean who grew up on a citrus farm in the south, near Beitbridge. Trained as a botanist, he now worked for the Zambezi Society, an environmental organization based in Harare. "ZamSoc," as its members often call it, promotes the conservation of nature and biological diversity throughout the Zambezi River Basin.

Here in the communal lands of Muzarabani, ZamSoc was interested in some remaining patches of a unique type of dry tropical forest. Most of the trees found in these forests lose their leaves during the dry season that lasts from May through November. At ground level is a thicket understory, dominated by an acacia that grows in a viney tangle and has wicked, backward-curving thorns.

Betsy Hands

This type of dry, thicket forest is rare, found only along a few rivers flowing into the Zambezi from the south, especially along the Musengezi River. The forests have an unusually large number of trees and woody climbing vines, which botanists call lianas, and many plants that are unusual

and Sacred Forests

by Bruce Byers

or rare in Zimbabwe grow in them. What Nick was most excited about, however, was that here, species common in several different types of forests and woodlands were all growing together in one place. He had the idea that this was some kind of relict community of plants, left over from the last Ice Age when the climate was wetter here. In fact, he liked to call these forests "witness stands," and argued that if they are protected, they could be helpful in understanding long-term climate change in this part of Africa.

The Zambezi Society was also interested in conserving these forest patches because of evidence that they are important in maintaining elephant movements in this part of the Zambezi Valley. Elephants move through these forests as they travel between the Mvuradonha Mountains and the Zambezi River to the north, and they sometimes linger here, especially during the dry season when wild *musawu* fruit are ripe. In 1998 a group of about ten bulls spent three months hanging around in several forest patches near where we had met Jeremiah.

People must respect nature for a very practical reason: their lives depend on it. It is good to respect sacred places not because of some abstract religiosity, but because people need food, and crops need rain, and only happy ancestors will send good rains.

We knew from aerial photographs taken between 1960 and 1993 that these forests once covered more than twice as much area as they do now. In the last forty years some forest patches have been completely cleared. Others have been reduced in size as villages and fields eat into their edges. Once-continuous forests have been fragmented into several smaller patches in some cases.

Because of their botanical uniqueness, their role as elephant habitat, and the threat of further forest loss, the Muzarabani forests had a high priority for conservation, according to the Zambezi Society. About a year earlier, Nick had approached the Muzarabani District Council and explained its interest in conserving the remaining patches of forest along the Musengezi. The District Council members said they were interested, but not much had happened, and ZamSoc wanted to move the process forward.

To do so, we needed more information. What did local people think of these forests? What would it take to keep the rest of them from being cut down? When we met Jeremiah Manhango we were just beginning to talk to local residents, traditional religious and political leaders, and modern political leaders who lived near the forests. We had a lot of questions, a lot to learn. Nick's view of the value of these forests – that of a modern, educated, white scientist – was very different than Jeremiah's view, and I wondered whether these two views could ever come together for the common purpose of conservation.

I guess the real reason I was poking around in these thickets was to explore some thorny issues in my professional field. I had come to the University of Zimbabwe for a year as a Fulbright Scholar, both to teach and do research. Because I'm an ecologist by training, most people assumed I saw things the way Nick Dunne and other conservation biologists do. But in fact I was fed up with the arguments I'd heard so often from my colleagues at home: that conservation means putting fences around natural areas and keeping people out, or that people should care about "biodiversity" because all species, no matter how tiny or seemingly useless, have "intrinsic value." Here in Zimbabwe those arguments seemed naive and completely impractical.

On the other hand, I was skeptical about the mainstream view in wildlife conservation circles in Zimbabwe, which was that unless poor rural Zimbabweans saw cash flowing into their pockets from natural resources, they would have no incentive to conserve them. The assumption was that economics was the only thing that could influence people's behavior toward nature. But if local people really considered these forests sacred, and protected them because of that belief, it meant that money isn't everything, even to poor people. It suggested that traditional religious beliefs might still be a powerful motivating force for conservation.

We drove west from Muzarabani the next morning along the base of the Escarpment. This is spectacular country. The Zambezi Escarpment is the southernmost section of the Great Rift Valley of Africa, and here the Rift rises like a rampart from the flat floor of the Zambezi Valley to the high plateau if central Zimbabwe, a jumbled wall of cliffs and hills a kilometer high. Massive tectonic forces involved in the breakup of the ancient supercontinent of Gondwanaland are recorded in the rocks, and the movement of crustal plates is still ripping the continent apart here. If the Great Rift were a giant serpent lying stretched across eastern Africa, with its tail dipping into the Red Sea at Djibouti, the Mvuradonha Mountains that brooded above us now would be its head, its eyes those cliffs on the side of Banerembezi, the highest peak, staring down on the forests of Muzarabani.

My neck prickled involuntarily and I scanned the tangle of undergrowth, but if Maskwera sei was crouching there now, watching us, I couldn't see him.

For the first few kilometers north of the Musengezi River men were working on the road, getting it ready for asphalt, and it was all torn up. After that it was good, smooth gravel. We crossed the Kadzi River into Guruve District, and soon reached Mahuwe, a busy hub of dusty shops and people waiting for buses to take them either north – deeper into the Valley, and the past – or south – up the Escarpment toward Harare, and the modern world.

Nick and I were looking for Phanuel Rupiya, a farmer and district councilor from Mahuwe. Rupiya's house was just off the road about a kilometer north of town. No one was at home in the cluster of round, mud-plastered, thatched huts that Rupiya calls home. A young mother in a compound nearby pointed us into the cotton and maizefields, where she said Rupiya's wife was working. We walked along a path for fifteen minutes or so, until we heard voices. It was Mrs. Rupiya, picking cotton with a friend. But no, she had not seen her husband for a couple of days. He went off toward Mushumbi Pools to evaluate some projects – maybe for NORAD, the Norwegian Development Agency, she thought. He might be back tomorrow, but she didn't know for sure.

So we walked back to the Land Cruiser, parked in the shade of a scraggly *musawu* tree loaded with green fruit, and spread out our 1:250,000 scale topographic map on the hood. We had hoped to get Rupiya's help in pinpointing the sacred sites he had been learning about. Now it looked like we needed to lay Plan B. Just then a huge truck loaded with baled cotton groaned up the dusty road from the direction of Mushumbi Pools, bound for the climb up the Escarpment to Guruve and beyond. It slowed in front of Rupiya's road, and a couple of men jumped down with their dufflebags. We continued to look at the map. As the men walking toward us got closer we recognized one of them as Phanuel Rupiya from his unique newsboy-style cap, made of leather that once was rust-colored, but was now dark from sweat and dirt. We had found Rupiya after all. The other man was Rupiya's friend Everson Tauro. Tauro, shorter and heavier than the lanky Rupiya, wore a thin mustache and goatee.

Rupiya invited us to talk in the shade by his round mud and thatch house. The door was locked, and his wife, still in the cottonfield, apparently had the key with her, so he climbed in the open window and handed out a folding metal table and five tiny wooden chairs, the size they use in kindergarten classrooms in the U.S., painted bright orange. We sat in the tiny chairs, spread out the topo again, and started to mark sacred sites on the map.

Rupiya had been doing simple anthropological fieldwork in the Muzarabani Communal Lands, getting a few dollars a month from the Zambezi Society. He would put his bicycle on a local bus, take the bus to the area where he wanted to work, and then pedal around talking to people about sacred places nearby.

"Different types of sacred sites exist," Rupiya explained. "Places where traditional beer is brewed during the *huruwa* ceremony, usually under big, old fig trees, are considered sacred. There are sacred forests. And certain rivers or mountain ranges, such as the Mvuradonha Mountains, may be sacred too."

Sacred pools are another type of sacred site. These can be pools in rivers, or springs, or in some cases the shallow seasonal ponds that form during the rainy season. Rupiya had heard about a sacred pool in the Musengezi River, called Ngwandongwondo Pool, which local people said had been disturbed by a recent immigrant to the area.

"That man put poison in Ngwandongwando Pool to catch fish. The poison killed a python that was living in the pool, protecting it. Now the Musengezi River has changed its course and the pool is drying up."

Some tree species are sacred, including baobab, tamarind, fig, and *marula*.

"If you use the wood from a sacred tree for building a house, or for firewood, in that house you will always see snakes," Tauro explained.

"What about animals?" I asked. "Are there sacred animals?"

"The spirit mediums say the animals belong to them. They have a special name, *vakaranga*, for all sorts of sacred animals – elephants, snakes, kudus, and especially lions. When our chiefs die, their spirits come back in the form of lions, and watch over us – we call them *mhondoro*. They make sure we are respecting the land. The spirit mediums say the forests and thickets are sacred because they keep their *vakaranga* there."

I suddenly realized, listening to Tauro, that these forests may be as much a cultural phenomenon as an ecological one – that, in fact, an interaction between ecology and traditional religion may explain why the forests exist along the Musengezi. The old alluvial soils found along the Musengezi created the conditions required for this type of forest to develop. Because of the forests, wild animals are found here – the sacred animals in which the spirits of the ancestors dwell. Because of the animals, the forests are sacred. And because they are sacred they have

not been cleared, at least not completely, not yet.

As a general rule, Rupiya said, sacred things are life sustaining. "They provide food, fruit, or water, for example. The concept of sacredness is closely linked with rain, and the fertility of the land." In our Western worldview we think of "spiritual" and "material" things as very different in kind. To a Shona farmer, that distinction doesn't really exist. Religion is a very practical thing. People must respect nature for a very practical reason: their lives depend on it. It is good to respect sacred places not because of some abstract religiosity, but because people need food, and crops need rain, and only happy ancestors will send good rains.

Tauro and Rupiya talked about spirit mediums, people who can be possessed by the spirits of the royal ancestors, and who can communicate the wishes of those *mhondoro* to people alive today. Today no one is possessed by the spirit of Nehanda, who was a powerful and beloved queen of this part of the Zambezi Valley. Today, without a medium, Mbuya Nehanda is silent.

"There is a woman from the Mt. Darwin area now living along the base of the Escarpment east of Muzarabani. She claims to be possessed by the spirit of Grandmother Nehanda," Rupiya said. To prove she is really possessed by Nehanda's spirit, a claimant must pass a test: she must swim in Nehanda's Pool in the Musengezi River, a sacred pool full of crocodiles.

"If she doesn't get eaten, she must be the real Mbuya Nehanda. We had arranged for a test recently, but she did not turn up. So now we are quite inquisitive whether she is the genuine one." There is another woman from Hurungwe who also claims to be possessed by Mbuya Nehanda, but so far she also has refused to take the crocodile test.

"Chidyamauyu, a famous spirit medium from Muzarabani, and a personal friend of President Mugabe because of his contribution to the Liberation War, went to see the President in Harare to ask the government to recognize the woman from Mt. Darwin as the real Nehanda," Tauro said. "But until she enters Nehanda's Pool, no one will believe she is genuine – even if President Mugabe himself says she is!"

"People now may be becoming too modern, they may not believe this, but the spirits are still strong," said Tauro. To emphasize this point, he told us that not long ago a lion killed more than twenty people in the Omay communal lands, not far from Muzarabani. This lion killed its victims around sundown, and with deliberate irony local people named it *Maskwera sei — maskwera sei* is a Shona greeting, used in the late afternoon, which means roughly, "how was your day?"

When a lion does something unusual, there is always a question of whether it is a normal lion or a spirit lion, a *mhondoro*. In the Shona language a biological lion is called *shumba*. A *mhondoro* is something altogether different. *Mhondoro* often become active, and disturbed, when something in the relationship between the people and the land is not right. They may show their displeasure by killing those who have not behaved properly and respectfully.

Local people in Omay suspected that *Maskwera sei* was a *mhondoro*, not a mere *shumba*. They could find something in the behavior of each victim that seemed to explain why each might have been killed. Perhaps one of them cut a tree without permission from the chief, another collected water from a sacred pool using a metal container, while another neglected to share meat with his relatives. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management sent a team of rangers to Omay to track the lion and kill it as a "problem animal." Local people refused to help them find *Maskwera sei*, an ancestor, *mhondoro*.

John Bateman

Electrical transmission lines finally reached Muzarabani last year. Before that a few people in town had electric lights powered by a big diesel generator, but there was no industry to speak of. Now power flows from Kariba Dam, upstream on the Zambezi, and a new gin for processing cotton has been built in town, its corrugated metal sides a shining symbol of progress. Now that Muzarabani is on the national grid, a local politician is talking about setting up a sawmill in the

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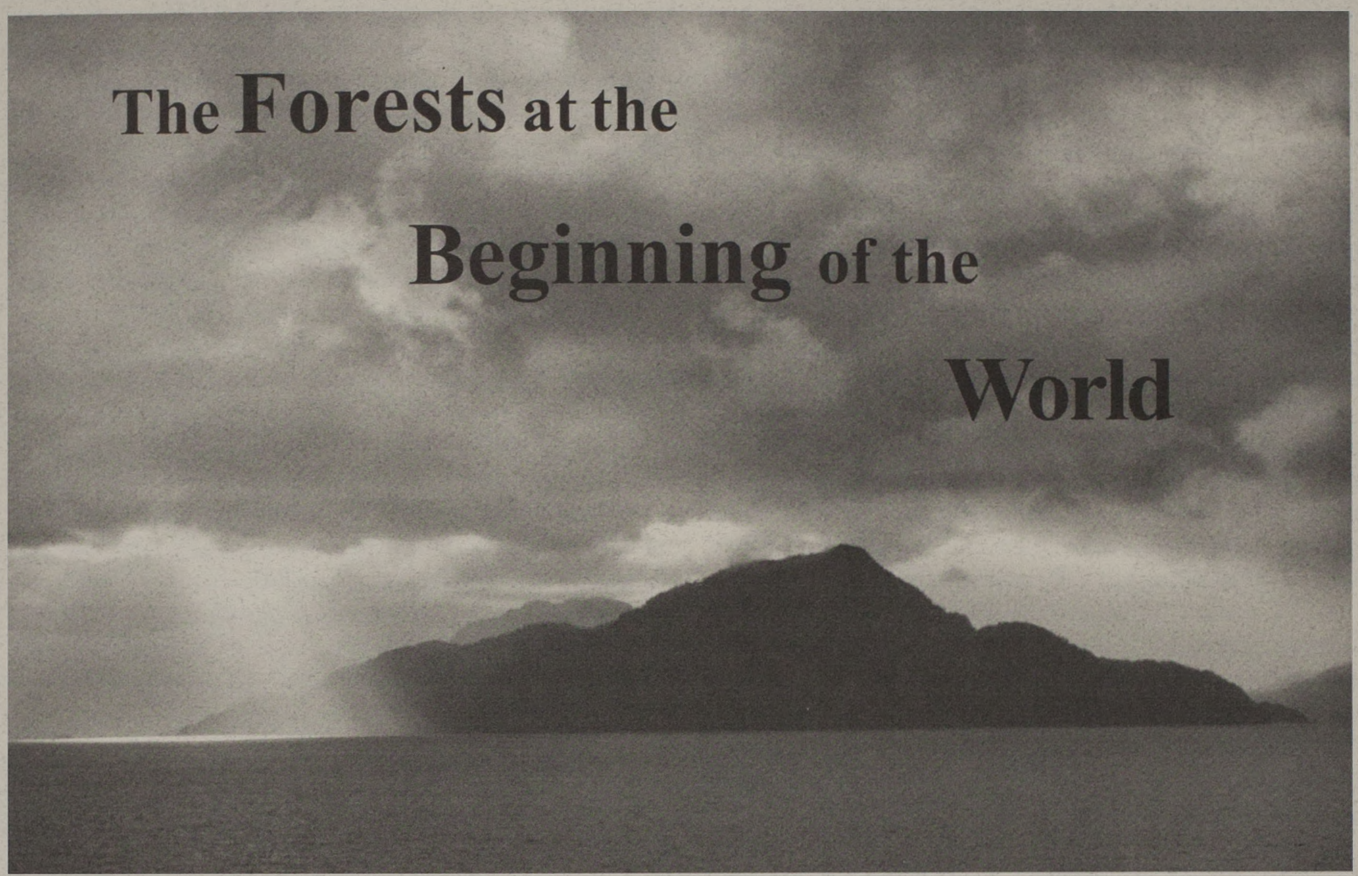


The Forests at the Beginning of the World

Story and Photos by Gary Hughes

Water ran over the top of Don Jose's calf-high rubber boots; I knew then that the river was deeper than we had expected. I could feel the horse beneath me lose touch with the river bottom as I watched the water flow over the knees of Don Jose and wash across the hindquarters of his steed, *Milagro*. Leaning backwards, I squeezed *Tesoro* with my legs and waited to see how the cold current of the milky white Rio Yendagaia would push us around. I held my breath. A steely light from the overcast sky washed out all colors but the gray glacier flour that filled the river and the silver grainy mist of rain that pursued us. The landscapes of *el confin del mundo*—the edge of the world—in Tierra del Fuego had presented yet another opportunity to immerse myself in the elements of this primeval landscape. Backcountry traveling in the Patagonian south was icing on the cake to several months of studies and volunteer work with Chilean conservation groups. Now I was getting intimate with places I had long been waiting to visit.

La Gran Isla de Tierra del Fuego—the great island of Tierra del Fuego—is the southernmost extension of the Americas. It lies among the other islands of the Magellanic archipelago and is the only significant land body other than the continent of Antarctica that extends to 55 latitudinal degrees south of the equator. The island spans both Chile and Argentina and is separated from the mainland by the Magellan Straits to the north. To the south, the Beagle Channel, named in honor of Charles Darwin's vessel, separates Tierra del Fuego from the smaller masses of the archipelago. The expanse of the here-merged Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the isolation from the rest of the Americas, and the cold, windy maritime climate all emphasize the feeling that I really was at the very edge of the world. Surrounded by a landscape with obvious lessons in the evolution of life and accompanied by legends of explorers past, I felt as though I had time-traveled back to the beginning of the world.

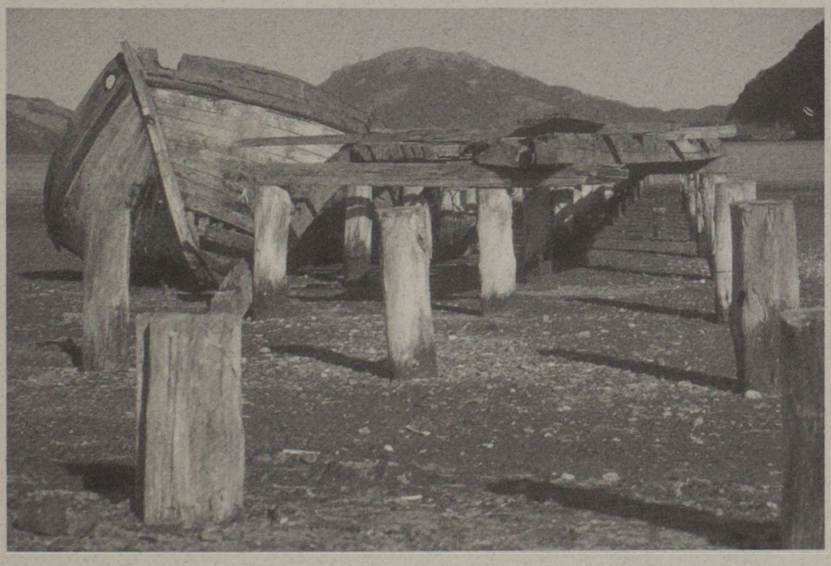
The Yendagaia River, across which *Tesoro* was carrying me, meanders through the southern part of the Chilean Tierra del Fuego, emptying waters from the ice fields of the Cordillera Darwin mountain range into the Beagle Channel. Don Jose and I had left three days before from the *Estancia Yendagaia*, a small assortment of houses on a bay adjacent to the Beagle Channel. For many decades, Yendagaia had been like other remote ranches in Patagonia, owned and operated by a family of mixed Chilean and Argentine descent that harvested timber and raised cattle to the extent that the elements and markets allowed. When a North American timber company threatened to acquire the estate in order to log it, Chilean and Argentine conservationists collaborated to protect the property. *Yendagaia*, a 40,000-hectare corridor connecting national parks in both Argentina and Chile, is now held in trust by a nonprofit Chilean foundation. The Yendagaia River was part of a shortcut back home to the Estancia after three days and nights of reconnoitering the broad valleys and forested mountains of the private protected area.

One afternoon I watched Don Jose chase down, slaughter, bleed, and butcher a cow with the large knife he always carried in his belt. The opportunistic condors followed Don Jose as though he were a horse-mounted puma—the largest nonhuman predator in Yendagaia—knowing that the hunter

would leave carrion for their flock. Condors arrived shortly after the kill and circled above us, waiting for their chance to feed on the carcass. I realized how closely these cousins of common vultures were attuned to the predator niche Don Jose filled in the contemporary Yendagaia ecosystem. The condors' need for carrion was older than time, but their relationship with Don Jose was a modern twist to an ancient story.

Don Jose had taken me on as a willing traveler who may not have been expert with a horse but would manage the foul weather, not to mention the very rustic quarters typical of the Patagonian backcountry *puesto*—a kind of shephard's or cowboy's cabin. A true Patagonian, Don Jose had traveled with his horses across much of Tierra del Fuego when he was offered the job of caretaking the Yendagaia ranch. Living year round in one of the most remote southern corners of the Americas, he continued to practice the skills of a *huaso*, as a cowboy is known in Chilean Patagonia, almost exactly as his father had taught him. His long black hair fell out from beneath his beret, and he rarely broke from smoking tobacco. I admired Don Jose, not only for his knowledge of the land and how to survive on it, but also for his fierce independence and sense of self-reliance. We would make the trek out to Lago Roca and back via a high route that, according to Don Jose, *los turistas nunca conocen*—the tourists never know. This route would reveal to us many insights on the nature of the Grand Island.

Early one morning, Don Jose and I came across a band of *guanaco,* one of the native cameloids of the southern Andes. The *guanaco* is a cousin of the famous *llamas,* often used now as pack animals in the Rockies, with similar slender necks and pointy, inquisitive faces. Their long forms and shrill warning calls left me grinning. How could something so goofy be so agile? They seemed so natural yet so alien; the feeling of being witness to nature old and mysterious was everywhere on Tierra del Fuego.



Several days before, I had hiked solo up the river valley to camp in a forested corner just below the tongue of the Stoppani Glacier, a trip in which I encountered a fox, several owls, and sentinel groves of *lenga* forest. The lenga, *Nothofagus pumilio,* is one of the "southern beech" tree species that can be traced back to the ancient Gondwana super continent of more than 160 million years ago. Not a true beech, the *lenga* is descended from tree species that once adorned Antarctica in a truly prehistoric tropical forest. At once temperate, but with a tropical heritage, the small, oval leaves of this broad-canopied tree shimmered moist in the wind. Larger trunks of older trees reached up to ten feet in diameter. Neighboring trees intertwined their branches and roots in a tangled support network, making for dense treetop greenery, and offering protection against the fierce Fuegian winds. It was while camped under a grove of sighing *lengas* that the fox came to visit. He came right into my camp, and it was as though the trees stopped their creaking in the wind to accentuate the stealth of the elusive hunter, who calmly examined my camp before disappearing into the twilight.

The miniature forest of lichens and mosses that adorn the *lenga's* trunk contain a complex and diverse microcosm. The microscopic forest is best explored with a hand lens, carrying the viewer into the colorful world of small, old and simple life. The mosses and liches are living fossils, hinting at the primeval roots of these truly ancient ecosystems. For early naturalists like Charles Darwin, investigating the Beagle Channel was a route into the planet's evolutionalry secrets. Many years later, delving into the wild nature of Tierra del Fuego was my own journey into the geography of the beginnings of life.

Watching the river billow over my thighs, my own demise—in water—seemed a distinct possibility. I quickly realized that I was over-dramatizing the situation. With a quick glance downstream at the broad expanse of the river I recognized that though the swim might be long and cold, there was more discomfort than danger should the horse's footing fail. *Tesoro* seemed to sense my mind easing and went to work, his powerful legs churning wildly for a moment, before finding solid ground. We clambered ashore to meet the smiling gaze of Don Jose. "*Llegaste mojado"*—you arrived all wet—he said with as much seriousness as he could muster. I laughed and started to dismount. "*Tengo que quitar mis botas"*—I have to get my boots off. My black rubber boots were full of water from the crossing. With a shiver and a smile, I sloshed Yendagaia river water out of my footwear as Don Jose did the same. As the misting winds of the beginning of the world swirled down from the mountains, the horses waited for us, dripping as we were, ready to start again. The rains insured that we kept moving, and in no time at all I was back up on *Tesoro* and following Don Jose towards the ranch house, dry clothes, and a warm fire.

Gary Hughes is pursuing a graduate degree in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana.

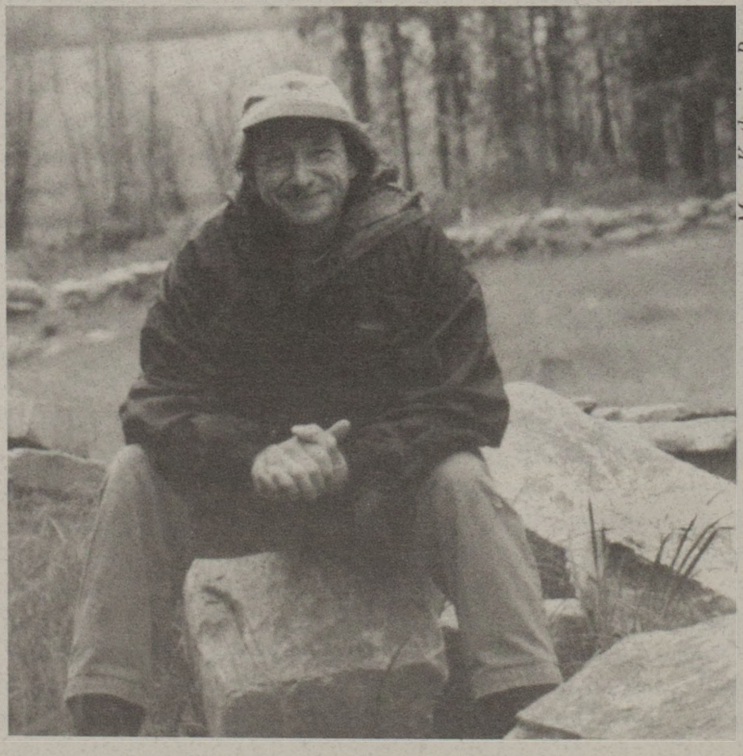
The Road Stops Here:

an Interview with Rick Bass

by Kathy Marieb

On that late October morning before the interview, it seemed the Yaak valley was already used to winter. My nose stung from the cold air, and the frost on the lightly frozen trail crunched under our feet. Hoskin's Lake was our destination, a place remembered from a project I did for a class last year on roadless areas in the Kootenai National Forest. The lakelies in one of the few roadless areas left in the Yaak valley, one of the few places that has not seen a bulldozer or had forests cleared for our consumption.

Sitting at the water's edge, the larch beaming golden and the sun finally warming us with a strength that is always surprising this time of year, sounds began to emerge from our surroundings. Two woodpeckers hammered in the snags of the multi-layered canopy, spooked deer bounced away breaking twigs, and the soft cracking of ice thawing at the lake's edge gave the impression that this place was still alive, still functioning. There are only 15 roadless areas of 1,000 acres or larger left in the Yaak Valley. Twelve hundred miles of logging roads crisscross the hillsides of this valley, and yet, the Forest Service keeps trying to chip away at these few remaining refuges.



Mary Katherine Bass

It is these final vestiges of wild land that Rick Bass, author and activist, has been working to protect. He has lived in the Yaak Valley since 1987, and the land and he are now a part of each other. Ask him a question and you hear in his gentle, elongated drawl the deep love he has for the place mixed with the slow burning pain of its loss. Author of 17 books of fiction and nonfiction, he needs to tell his stories. *Camas* was lucky enough to acquire some time in his busy life for an interview about the organization Rick helped form, the Yaak Valley Forest Council (YVFC), and its involvement with the current Kootenai National Forest Plan Revision.

K: How did the Yaak Valley Forest Council come about?

R: In 1996, a woman who lived up here, Robyn King, read my book, *The Book of Yaak*. She was not an environmentalist, not a woodsperson; she was like everybody else up here: she loved looking at the uncut woods and the beautiful views. In 1997 she said, "Why don't we form a group?" I said, "Okay, sounds great." And then we had six people agree to sign on with us, contingent on a mission statement with two goals: to protect the last roadless areas in the Yaak and to work to support a sustainable local economy based on the forest.

Danielle Gardner

For a while I was the roadless guy and Robin was the people person and the community person. We've now got over 70 folks in our group. I've found myself drawn to the community and economic alternatives issues, which shocks the hell out of me because they are boring compared to the woods, and especially compared to the pleasures of fiction writing. But it also seems to be more important.

We're at a critical juncture with the forthcoming Kootenai National Forest's Forest Plan, and with so many watersheds hammered so hard and so many thresholds being exceeded and with such a reduction in harvest opportunity. We are facing prolonged, accelerated, attenuated suffering if we don't come up with some good ideas, and also, frankly, some help from the government. For the last 50 years, the government has kept its hands off the Kootenai and let it be a colonial outpost for extractive industry. There's some debt owed by government for that lack of judgment.

The Forest Council is made up of activists who have chosen to sign on to a letter demanding that the Kootenai National Forest stay out of the last roadless areas. We've got 15 roadless areas left in the Yaak. There is not a single acre of protected roadless area here, not a single acre of designated wilderness. The Forest Council is not focusing on wilderness bills; we're just saying keep out of the roadless areas and protect them permanently by whatever mechanisms you can make it happen, whether it's a roadless initiative or a wilderness bill's passage. We've got road builders, loggers, log-home builders, nurses, schoolteachers, mechanics, engineers, retired military personnel, hunting and fishing guides, and artists in our group.

I think our diverse mix of supporters attests to the simplicity and the purity of our message: keep jobs available in the woods for people, and stay out of the roadless areas. We're not saying stay out of the woods; we're saying stay out of the roadless areas with extractive industry.

The Yaak is so diverse. This rainforest ecotype has incredible vegetative species, incredible animal species. The roadless areas in the Yaak are also the bottleneck of the Yellowstone to Yukon wild corridor. They are at the critical juncture for the connectivity of that entire region. They are at the thinnest point of that system, at the lowest elevation of that system, and nothing has gone extinct there yet, unlike other places in the Y2Y project. It's a lot easier to hang onto what you've got than to recover something that has gone away.

Our failure to protect the Yaak's roadless areas comes from the fact that the Yaak is a biological wilderness, not a recreational wilderness. In the past, protected wilderness has been composed almost exclusively of rock and ice spines like the Cabinet Mountains. Even the Cabinets have less than 100,000 acres protected as wilderness, but it's all up above 6,000 feet. It's crazy, just a slender spine of rock and ice wilderness less than a quarter mile wide at its narrowest place. I mean, a human being can run a quarter mile in 40 seconds. That's not wilderness, that's recreational wilderness — pretty hiking. The Yaak is wilderness. It's a place that still has grizzlies and all the other threatened and endangered and sensitive species that form that braid, that spirit, that essence, that physical imagery of wildness in this country.

K: Could you describe some specific options for the Yaak community to preserve both their way of life and the woods in which they live?

R: The Yaak has always been a real independent hunter-gatherer kind of place, and whatever it is that folks do here, whether it's selling firewood, guiding for hunters, gathering mushrooms or antlers, making wreaths or tanning hides, teaching school or tending bar, or working out of their homes with small businesses, it is these options we want to maintain. Like most people in the West, we want to keep what's good the way it is. It's that simple.

Everybody's in the Yaak by choice. It's not a place you come to looking for work. It's a place you come to looking to make sacrifices, usually financial. We like this valley and we don't want it to change. That speaks to logging, and we want the logging culture to remain. There is a lot of underutilization of opportunity in this geographic area for jobs in restoration and small-diameter fuels reductions. The economy can be more diverse and still honor the forest while using the forest; there needs to be more giving back, not just this ceaseless taking.

Our group has been working with a pilot restoration project that's employing people to do stream surveys and catalog the degree of degradation in damaged areas for the Forest Service. That is good work in the woods and it is the legacy of 50 years of excess.

We have also filed appeals to try to get the Forest Service to put up more small sales for local loggers. We have worked with a stewardship project to employ local loggers instead of out-of-state loggers. We're having some real arguments about what kind of logging we'd like to see in the project, but as far as who we want doing it, we want the loggers who have an investment of place and home to be doing the work.

K: What strategies are being used, on a local level, to garner support for the protection of these roadless areas?

R: Our goals include encouraging people who live here to speak about their place-based values, of which roadless area are a very major part. We have been publishing anthologies in which local people, as well as visitors, look at the roadless areas and then write about their experiences and impressions. In the community, we have been giving public presentations about forest ecology, wolf and grizzly ecology, wildlife photography, mushroom ecology, geology, and archeology. We are mainly trying to nurture, where we can, expressions of the wild quality of this place and to get people thinking about how they'd like to see the valley 10, 20, and 50 years from now and to realize what steps are going to be necessary to achieve that, because it's not going to happen on its own. We have to be active in testifying to our love for the wild quality of this place and active in asking certain questions.

"Wilderness" is still a hard word to say sometimes because it carries the baggage of battles. I don't wish to go to battle, but it is an important word and it's one of the most important words in the Yaak since we don't have any of it up here.

K: Is promoting this wild quality of the Yaak what inspired *The Roadless Yaak*?

R: First we did a little book called *Archipelago* that was just local folks giving impressions about their most favorite, beautiful, powerful, or significant moments in the valley. And that was such a rewarding project that we thought, let's see if the impressions of outside folks are similar to ours when they come into this valley, or if they have different opinions. Of course, they likewise fell in love at first sight with the wild places. And they all agreed unanimously to stand up for the roadless areas in the Yaak. They also agreed that the community of the Yaak had something special, too, worth hanging onto.

Putting that book together was hard near the end, but it was a rewarding project. It's always a joy, even more so the older I get, to show people this place. I used to feel funny about showing folks, even friends, places in the valley, as opposed to just hoarding them to my own secret interior. But the older I get, the more pleasure I take in sharing the valley with friends or folks who will help get that message along. Being quiet about this place has hurt it, not helped it. People need to know just how awful the Forest Service has been to our public lands.

I know there are more people driving up and down this valley because of my writing, stopping in at the Dirty Shame for a burger and beer. The folks there don't mind, but I do sometimes. I don't like seeing license plates

from other states, sometimes I don't even like seeing plates from other parts of Montana, but I have to remind myself that it's public land, it's their land. Overall, writing about this place has definitely done more good than harm. If we want to win this battle with the Forest Service, we have to do everything we can to promote the Yaak's wildness.

K: Has the book resulted in more public input for the Kootenai National Forest Plan?

R: I don't think it so much affected the Forest Service's comment period as authenticated what we have been saying locally for a long time that roadless areas matter, that they are special, that they are different, that they are priceless, and by the way, they are totally unprotected, so do something about it. Having outside authorities come to those same conclusions empowers our message, which previously might have been easy to dismiss as parochial whining. We are not just wild-haired Yaak hippies agitating for peace and love; this is a gross injustice that has been going on. Some of the most moderate scientists and naturalists agree that Big Brother has stepped into a smaller country and pushed us around too much. We are not asking for a combative situation in this dialogue, but we haven't been heard.

K: You say in your essay, "The Community of Glaciers," that there has been a cultural opposition to the word wilderness such that people are scared of using the "w" word. Do you see that changing?

R: People are definitely more accepting of that idea. We're realizing what wilderness is, and we're realizing what wilderness isn't. Wilderness is the Cabinet Mountains, and people are glad that they were protected. I think people are making that connection. The Yaak is special, too. We're not asking for the whole pile, we're asking for the crumbs. "Wilderness" is still a hard word to say sometimes because it carries the baggage of battles. I don't wish to go to battle, but it is an important word and it's one of the most important words in the Yaak since we don't have any of it up here. I mean, every year there is more and more pressure to carve away at one or more of the roadless areas, and every year we have to work harder to prevent this from happening. It's crazy.

K: You have spent so much time fighting for the Yaak that you no longer have time to do what you love most. When these roadless areas are protected, what do you plan to do?

Jay Ericson

R: I hope to get back to writing fiction. I hope I have enough life in front of me to settle down and begin a long term reassembling of the mind, the perspective, the attitude of a fiction writer, which I have not been able to afford to do for a long time. That's who I feel I am, that's what I feel I am, it's what I'm most comfortable doing. It's not what I do best — it's really challenging for me — but it's a challenge that makes me feel alive and engaged with the world, and I miss it.

To comment on the revision of the KNF Plan or to just show your support for the maintenance of the remaining roadless areas in the Yaak please send a letter to:

Forest Supervisor
Kootenai National Forest
1101 U.S. Highway 2 West
Libby, MT 59923

And send a letter to the YVFC so they can forward it on to representatives and keep track of the Forest Service files:

YVFC
155 Riverview
Troy, MT 59935

which Bird

by Carrie Naughton

Language may probe the mystery of the Other,
but the Other remains a mystery.
-Jack Turner

near Winter

Expecting to see something – always expecting to see some thing. A trail offers a trial, proffers its evidence and I measure expectations. Anywhere, anyhere equals this moment of departure from parking there, arriving to walking. Lee Metcalf, Wildlife Refuge dead senator, do you walk here with me on your Montana land? Rustle of dead Leeves in an autumn ending wind. Maybe no one walks here at all today. I smell the clouds dragging winter bellies across the sky.

Deer. White tails waving, bounding over the downed cottonwoods. Yes, you better run, until you blend your camouflage with the dead leaf rustle. In my blue coat I blend into nothing, not in these human colors. I think of hunting with no guns. Bow and arrow. It would take weeks for the strength to draw the bow, I could earn it. Death, could I string your bow and nock your arrow? Hamlet says now I could drink hot blood and do such things as the day would quake to look upon. In dayglo orange I would quake. I must wear my blue with a difference.

I find myself looking for looking. What to look for? What to find? I come here for November birds. I come here to come back. I've never seen this place before.

The prattle in my head I have tried to lock in my car outside the gate, beyond the fence. I have separated one existence from another, walking like the deer, and knowing the barbed wire but not the signs. *Molesting government property is punishable by imprisonment.* Water rushes through the culvert beneath me into the slough. I walk on water on government property, inside the fences and inside of the law. The law of land permits my presence here. The law permits the presence of deer and this flutter of sparrows. Chill riverwinds blow government property past the culvert the entrance the fence my car and onto the dirt road: dry leaves scraping and skittering. The leaves skitter outside my head. A torrent of thoughts on a dry day, all swept from me.

A trail through bluegrass, swaying golden in dim flat light, and I follow. If silence finds me, I do not know it from birdsong yet. The highway drones on the other side of the river. Branches shiver, clack together like fingerbones. Sound knows no borders and I travel as sound. Grass pinecones leaves twigs brambles. Underneath shades of brown, shadows of darker shades of brown whisper ssshhhh underneath my footsteps and those of chipmunk, deer, squirrel. I pause in the hush. Paws, in the hush.

Trees have their own geometry, and where I stand now they love the parallel. Black cottonwood and ponderosa in their complementary tones race for the sky. Cottony dun bark with its furrows and running lines like water in a storm. Ponderous rosy charcoal dark skin cracked and peeling like deep fire without flame. Among them, the idea of age becomes endless rings rising higher and wider from a single center seed. Outward from the axis, roots and branches in parabolic curves and perpendicular intersections allow a nurturing mimicry between up and down, a never-complete but ever-replete circle. One half hidden, one half silhouetted. In winter I sense a slow slumber of circumferential cycles. Trees, in the hush.

No one has heard when some of them fall, heard the sound of mighty becoming meek. This crashdown of ponderosa. I might yet dare and regard the tumbled length of this one as somehow mightier in its flagrant decay. Sunbleached pine needles rust in fans on the black branches. This labyrinth of straight and curved, coiling and twisted arms complicates vision from every angle, alive with small, chittering birds. I name them as they arrive and depart. Black-capped chickadees. The nuthatches vex me. Pygmy or white-breasted? Not knowing, I realize the worth and the burden of names. The nuthatch does not call itself a nuthatch anyway. Even I walk unnamed here.

The chickadees I think appear as emmissaries, for now I discover a subtle movement throughout the patterns of the trees. A flicker knows its name, red-shafted flickering wings pumping as it whickers like an arrow past me. I lose the idea of my shoes, the idea that I have legs at all, ambling in a sad yearning for flight under a preponderance of lusterless light. A downy woodpecker keeps close to me, sweeping from branch to shrub to trunk, investigating. Or perhaps not caring at all. A brown creeper tries for obscurity, but I seek him out and focus my eyes from feathers to bark to feathers, marvelling. Maybe I play the role of emmissary. The secrets sing.

Feeee-bee. Chickadee-dee-dee. A twitter. A

hiccuping tweet. A hyena laugh, from high and deep around me. I learn new languages.

The linguistics of lines: brittle explosions of cottonwood water shoots, tangled willows bending gracefully around each other, the exposed venation of red-osier dogwoods. I listen for crossing and conversing.

The wind awakens the ancient, murky smell of fish scales. Bitterroot. I gather you into me, river. I hear the cackle rattle of the kingfisher before I catch the flash of smoky blue and white diving from a slender branch. The riverbank hides her splash. She arises and finds a new perch. I find her with my binoculars, that brief umber streak of female feathers so bold in a close view. At this point in time, I know my place so painfully: the observer and intruder. What I change, and what changes me, I try to discern, like translating the noises of the river cobbles into human speech.

Half the day flees unnoticed. I poke among the reeds and rushes with canada geese. Soon the soft forest path crosses with a black tar trail. I wish to forget my personhood today, though with binoculars and a birdbook cannot. Along the slough I stroll down a wide overgrown gravel two track. Rolling off the slopes of the Bitterroot mountains, the air tastes like the icy grit of rock. A man and a woman stand watching. We exchange glances, and I remain far from them. Something in the grove of trees, in a dense complexity of loops and knots, widowmaker and snag, waits. I do not breathe. I breathe. We humans step forward, pass, and the man says *he's pretty imperturbable – there are two of them in the trees there.*

For a solitary moment, I do not comprehend a word, as if I have exchanged my own language for another. An other. Then I hear my voice *oh thank you* and I worry, for what? There where? My right and my left no longer differentiate the realms of space. Everything circles, turning me forward toward treeward. Owl. Then two.

Owls, my self whispers, believing only in seeing, only in owl. Everything circles, the mind reels out and out and great horned owl great god Pan is alive a live owl. Cold air on the curve of my eye. Owl eyes open. My hands and feet evaporate in the frosty breath I exhale. Numb, I know no I, only eye and owl. No surprise gleams in the opening of owl eyes to my presence. I present my existence in expectation, always expecting, expecting to see. Owls, seeing me into existence. Do I? Do I exist when your eyes are closed?

They hold calm quiet palaver in the cottonwoods,

Danielle Gardner

grey as stones in the river, brown mottled and snowy flecked. He-owl, she-owl. A squint and blur and they join color and stillness with each pigment of foreground and background. They disappear, they reappear. They do not move. Do you compose yourself of feathers or of smoke: the composition of a forest in winter? *Strix, strega*, witch birds hooting words. *Bubo virginianus*. How your silence now belies your names.

hu-tu-tu tun-ku-lu-chu te-co-lotl pa-cu-ru-tu hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo hoo

Cherokee *tskili*. Witch. Night hag. Tiger of the air. Cat-with-wings, I dream to know your real name, unfamiliar familiar one. What must I do to know you? My knees lock, my eyes tear, my brain skips into bursts of gravelly Tom Waits love song *you know your eyes are enough to blind me you're like lookin at the sun – come on and whisper tell me I'm the one...*

You upstage your material here, bird watcher. Might as well look at a fake owl on a telephone pole. I play at scenes from a drama in the woods in the woulds the walds the wilds. Draw me in the woods, preaching, reaching, beseeching, placating and seeking some thing between knowing and needing. Birding entails conquest: which bird, witch bird, check off the list. Listen. To this. Naming denies inquest. When naming, I miss.

I close my eyes before avian eyes that absorb and reflect the light around me. Avianized, I close and open. My cheek waits for the silent brush of wing. What have you seen in the air and in the dark that I in my present darkness will never know? The ember afterimage inside my sockets of your eyes the size of my own reminds me of a poet asking *have you ever stared into the owl's eyes? They blink slow, then burn...* We burn and burn in the near winter gloom.

I try to swallow the owlness of you headfirst, as you swallow your prey. In the casting out of bones, fur, and feathers you create microcosms of life and death, compressed universes waiting for invitation back to the beginning of the earth. The entire refuge takes refuge in your sight. Dilation and contraction like an oracle speaking and oh how I try to listen, engulfed within an iris, in and out with the light. Shifting, sifting down like a curtain, dusk fills the void between us. The late day haze slips over us like a third eyelid. I know my feet, walking from this place. I know a dizzied blankness, expecting that something sees me while I see so little.

approaching Spring

Perturb me. I need the shattering of stasis, the evaporating mirage of an oasis. Instantaneously, bufflehead wings can explode off the surface of water. I come down for a landing, for land, this land of Lee Metcalf and the federal government. Mine and yours and not ours at all. *Oh my land is like a wild goose...* I drive the gravel road, Gram Parsons singing me by painted wooden cutouts of two birds in flight. *Trumpeter swans protected. Snow geese open.* Learn the difference, painted in the shadow of the glide over ground. Learn to distinguish the white plumes and the long, fragile neck. Memorize the nightblack tips of snowpure wings. Then let fly that inexorable force with a trigger touch, and hear the windshriek of gravity pulling birds to earth. My own heartbeat rises and falls with wingbeat. I need contact with the pressure of atmosphere outside this roof of automobile.

Ending of engine and emergence into. Into dust in my nose, into fizzing bursts of midges tickling my face, kissing hi. I kiss the air hello. Hello, to the ripe brilliance of air here, slippery as breeze, freighted with passengers, buoying up rocking turkey vultures, spiralling myriad pinpricks of midge life in funnel whirls around my hair. Into the sun and the sun into me. So much clamors in my crowded psyche: the dredged manmade wetlands, smears of roadkill on Highway 93, the golf course bordering this place. I let all thoughts of death and manipulation bake in the sun, just this once, burn away into nothing. Alive in a fleeting solar redemption, I step into the light of the refuge.

Trees have their own geometry, and where I stand now they love the parallel. Black cottonwood and ponderosa in their complementary tones race for the sky.

Vibrato and volume. The size of sound engulfs every motion. Every motion betrays the sound of size. What scurries under the log, breaks cover among the bunchgrasses? Squirrels and chipmunks vibrate on the tree trunks, squeal and chatter. Juncos flush with a white tailfeather flick. *Cheep cheep cheep*. They have the voices of tiny bodies.

Other tiny voices hum at my toes. The warm sweet scent of buttercups rises with the buzz of honeybees. The song of bees becomes the song of shiny yellow petals opening.

The path mulches through a willow flat, contorting itself within under and between bowed branches. Bent in halfdrawn moons, wood limbs retain anticipation, energy and release imprisoned in the possibility of snapquick catapult. In the middle of the knot, sunbeams interlace my own limbs with the tension of the trees. I pivot, turn, and free myself into a cacophony of river and redwings. No winter rivercourse now, the Bitterroot banks ripple and trill with the reedy notes of blackbirds. Salty seasmell burbles in the heat and urges inhalation. I ponder driftwood scrawl scattered on a gravel bar and cottonwoods reclining in various poses, while my pulse jumps in flopswish blurps, trout hurling into flylight. In the radiant collision of sunflare and liquid, particle and wave, this humble river transcends itself. Recreates its own essence in the union of water and flame. I rest on

the moist sand and dissolve.

People nearby. Like ghosts, I encounter them and they move on. They linger on the shore with their dogs or their children, but not for long. Snatches of conversation loud and soft enter my ears as incomprehensibly as the flight calls of bank swallows. A woman with a giant golden retriever speaks *we went for a walkies and a swimmies good boy!* I wander back into the cool forest and notice the various interpretations of my steps on the surfaces of the earth. The wobbly knocking tone of cobbles and the thick slide of sand. The solid crunch of gravel and the soft swish of blond grass. The sinking comfort of dark mud, imprinted with the brute traces of my boots. I must remember that every one of us stamps an indelible footprint.

Marching toward me, a young girl leads a straggling group of small children like ducklings. *She's a naturalist! She's looking for things!* They point at me with chubby hands; I clutch my binoculars. Looking for things.

If I could draw the curve of blue above me, I would outline it through the filtering net of still bare branches. Black veins of dormancy filigreeing a dome tinged lavender with an approaching storm. Pine needles spiking the rolling billows of cloud. I can understand the gentleness and sharpness of the end of each needle in the unexpected brief crawl of a spider along my startled arm. But I blow on my skin without thinking and launch the poor arachnid into the void. The wind shifts suddenly, laced with pungent woodsmoke. Why does this seem so complementary to my sudden embarrassment? I love the smell of burning trees. I kill spiders. *She's a naturalist!*

Then, a slap on the eardrums of rhythmic pounding. Hollow drumming. Wood pecking. Pileated woodpecker, high up on a dead battered cottonwood. Jutting out from the trunk, he hangs there like a vampire cloaked in folded wings, bloodred crest fierce like a knife-edge. A bill like a pick axe hammers splinters out of the silvery treeskin. *Thud, thud.* A furtive plucking at uncovered insects, a glance around, then the trumpet of that hyena laughter. Ratchety, penetrating calls echo off the conifers. *Thud, thud.* I believe he could tunnel to the other side of anything with the force of those blows.

Reverberation follows me back to the steep, root-gnarled riverbanks, collapsing on themselves in sandy acquiescence to time and flow. Here, the teeth of beavers tunnel their own way through trees, round and round to the core. I put my palm on raw tender exposed cambium, the colors of outer and inner cottonwood revealed in concentric densities, fringed and ragged. Grey white tan beige umber red. Yes, I know the power of the beak to open up the wall of a tree, and the porcupine's earnest gnawing, but my truest awe I keep for the beaver chewing down the treebody entire. A link between jaw and will that fells whole worlds. When we take up saw or axe, we would do well to notice our own dental deficiencies and the cost of overcoming them.

Along the slough and past the culvert, a sleek brown shape cuts through the murky water, then dips below the surface. I think of teeth. The sunlight shifts and changes. Over the Bitterroot range, anvil clouds bloom silently and overtake the refuge. To the east, the Sapphire Mountains glory in a play of brightness and whiteness, curtains of distant rain and spotlights of blazing sunshafts. Caught between two notions of weather, I conclude that the owls are hiding from me today. In this instant, I meet the same couple who introduced me to the owls in winter. *Any owls out today?* the man smiles. We exchange birding gossip *it's a good day for birds.*

Eugene Beckes

Day use only. These signs all gesture toward truth of one kind. If I wandered in the night here, which bird would I find? Which bird would find me? This use that I make of the day differs from bird use, and I defer to that. I wish for one thousand lifetimes of days, and for the use of the night. Nocturnally visiting, I could round out my own circadian rhythm of communion. Or so I dream, inhabiting the margin of day into night, of a turning time teetering between coming and going.

I dream of stormlight and thunderclouds bulging in blue the very tint of a heron's outstretched wing.

I stand in the glowing grass on the edge of a wetland, a wet land of life in every drop of water. A turtle family with painted bellies of scarlet-streaked sunset aligns itself on the wobbly cosmos of a drifting log. Kestrels bickering on the wing swoop and dive. On the horizon, snow geese glitter in the sky. Ospreys ride on thermals with crooked wings. Ground squirrels dart from standstill to burrow.

I dream awake, in a wake of floating, murmuring bodies: coots, burbling unseen in the fluffy cattails; Barrow's goldeneye and pintails mingling in champagne sparkling currents; trumpeter swans, pristine in royal serenity.

And in the distance, in green crowns of bull pine, great blue herons find home. Somehow among the swaying branches, a rookery. They glide down with necks kinked like the curled branches of the pines, legs dangling in the wind. In a dance of creation, nests grow twig by twig. I count at least seven nestled in the realm of shimmering bough and cloud. I do not dream. I count the great blue creatures on my fingers. The herons descend and ascend among their kind. I walk to my car, grasping my key as countless, fingerless, swimming birds ignore me. I measure myself as no more and no less than my own kind, descending and ascending on the wings of others.

Carrie Naughton, a Missoula resident, is considering graduate study in creative writing in hopes of learning to use the verb "to be."

On Be a

Jay Ericson

Gin is my father; it is my nightly kiss to his lips. Its taste and smell, mingling with those of Spanish olives and cocktail onions, have imprinted themselves on my chapped lips, on my soul. The taste of it on my tongue strikes a chord deep within me, the way that the smell of woodsmoke or Grandma's perfume does for some. My father's evening beverage—a martini glass filled nearly to the top with an assortment of pickled vegetables, a few jiggers of gin, and a splash of vermouth—he referred to, with a self-congratulatory chuckle, as a "vegetini." His cocktail is now mine. I omit the onions, add olive juice, and call it, in a husky voice, a "dirty martini," but the flavor is essentially the same. I drink it because nothing else tastes so good going down, especially on a summer porch night. I drink it for an excuse to eat garlic-stuffed olives. I drink it because its flavor is as familiar to me as Kool-Aid was when I was little. Mostly, though, I drink a dirty martini because it is as close as I will ever get to kissing my dad goodnight again.

With garlic and gin-stained breath, my father taught me about wild beauty. Tired and small, I often leaned against his huge, hard belly on my mom's side of their bed and traveled around the world to the cadence of his rich bass. His stories were usually about his Uncle Josh. Each story began with Josh's arrival at my dad's childhood Milwaukee home in his personal helicopter. Uncle Josh lived in Africa, was able to communicate with animals of all species, and was often in need of my father's help on his heroic expeditions.

My dad colored my four-foot-high world with tales of their journeys—the time a honey monkey saved his life, the time he killed a wild boar with a stick, and about the tail of a whale that he and Uncle Josh ate when they were stranded on a wild coast. He showed me Uncle Josh's picture at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, along with the taxidermied honey monkey and wild boar of his stories. With my nose pressed against thick glass, I met the celebrities of my childhood.

On my seventh Valentine's Day, I received a letter from my great uncle. In it, he included photos of his animal companions—zebras, giraffes, ibex. I dreamed fervently of one day meeting him, of traveling in his helicopter over the ocean and landing in hot and mysterious Africa. Naturally, I treasured that letter and re-examined it obsessively. I remember noticing, as the paper grew thin and sticky from my fondling, that the pictures glued to the letter felt different than those in my mom's photo album—thinner and more crinkly, like the pages of a magazine. When I asked my dad about it, he explained that African cameras and photo development techniques were different from ours. His answer satisfied me for a while, but when I realized that Josh's handwriting was just like my father's, I had a bold epiphany and confronted him, crushed. He chuckled, of course, as only men who closely resemble Santa Claus can, and took indignant me into his powerful arms. I was angry with his seven-year game of make-believe. I had loved my uncle. I had loved the idea of someday joining him on his adventures, of being in the middle of a vast nowhere with honey monkeys as my traveling companions. I had tasted the idea of a beauty utterly unlike anything my geometric, suburban world could contain. It was the true loss of a hero, the first fissure in my little heart.

Why did my dad do that? Why did he let me believe that I was related to a man who had killed a tiger with his bare hands and that my dad's solid gut was really the undigested remains of a whale's tail? Was it the cruel manipulation of a child's mind, gin-infused humor, or simply the unintended result of my readiness to believe thick tales? I remember a conversation with him years ago over chocolate malts in which he explained that he had created Uncle Josh just for me because he wanted me to fall in love with adventure and wild places. It seemed then a meager justification for manipulating my little brain and heart, yet an ache for wild beauty does command me. For that I am piercingly blessed.

Indeed, it was the quest for grace and wild beauty that drove me West. The first home I made west of Lake Michigan was in central Arizona, tucked between low hills and covered in ponderosa pine and sagebrush.

u t y

by Becca Deysach

I fell in love for the first time there. I fell in love with the sweet smell of the burning dry air; with the smooth red bark of the manzanita that always seemed to be turned inside out; and with the igneous evidence of the earth's toiling and churning visible out my front window, under my feet, and below my fingertips.

I studied at a tiny experiential college in Arizona's central highlands, and my field-based classes took me through diverse ecosystems, down variegated canyons, and into the painful place of loving something that is sick. Into the painful place of being a member of the species that has the unique gift of intellect and the blatant inability to use that gift to guide our actions with respect to the planet we all share.

During my college years, I walked inside the five-hundred-foot-high concrete wall that is Glen Canyon Dam, grimacing north at the red rock lake that exists at the expense of a canyon as striking as The Grand. I sat at a coffee shop perched on the edge of Jerome, Arizona, and focused my eyes on the layers of rock that define the Mogollon Rim, trying to block out the glowing pools of mining tailings that punctuate the valley below. I ate Indian food in a strip mall surrounded by prickly pear cactus and watched movies at the three-story theater that squeezed out the independent downtown joint. I watched the topography that I had grown to love fiercely become leveled, watered, and consumed by sterile stuccoed cubes. I learned that what is beautiful in the land is not often echoed by the edifices of my people. My desert years brought me to the understanding that we, as Americans, have betrayed beauty.

Jay Ericson

What is beauty, anyway? My 1941 Webster's describes it as "that quality or aggregate of qualities in a thing which gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit." Given that the word "pleasure" is equally slinky, I have a hard time creating a formula for beauty. And it scares me to talk about it in any other way. I am scared to talk about beauty because I am afraid to be cheesy; I am afraid that I will be to words what disposable cameras are to landscapes; I am afraid that I will betray beauty. And yet how can I not talk about it? My nighttime journeys to the African bush gave me my earliest rush of an exalted spirit. They revealed the power of wild beauty that now commands me. I have to talk about it.

Paleontologists insist that the ability of our ancestors to express themselves through art marked a profound step forward in the development of our intellect. So profound, in fact, that our own species is distinguished from all of our extinct upright relatives by the ability to express ourselves through art. Over 200 caverns filled with paintings, sculptures, and engravings dating back to the last Ice Age have been discovered in Italy, France, Switzerland, and Spain. The oldest known works of art line the walls of a cave in the valley of the Ardeche River in France, dating back to 32,000 years ago, about 170,000 years after anatomically modern humans first walked the African savannah (and about the time the Neanderthal people disappeared). Those who have been privileged to visit our species' earliest art gallery have reported that the pieces are accurate depictions of the creatures with whom we shared the Pleistocene landscape. Witnesses of this art say that it is spectacular and beautiful, comprised of clean, sweeping lines and fine detail.

What prompted our predecessors to portray the world around them on cave walls? The highly developed brains that gave us the ability to use tools, create language, and form complex communities also caused a shocking recognition of ourselves as a part of a vast and mysterious universe. Art, then, be-

came a way to make sense out of the complex world that our intelligence forced us to see. We re-created hunts on the walls of our dwellings and in ritual paintings of our totem animals and spiritual leaders. We brought the beauty of the natural world into our homes in hopes of understanding it.

Not only did we decorate our walls with images from the wild world, we created our early sacred buildings to resemble it. By doing so, art historian Vincent Scully suggests, we hoped to draw upon the powers of the environment. Teotihuacán, a ceremonial site of pre-Columbian America in central Mexico, provides a perfect example of this environmental architecture. Scully describes the Temple of the Moon, behind which rises the mountain called Our Lady of the Stone. "That mountain, running with springs, is basically pyramidal and shaped and notched in the center. And the temple imitates the mountain's shape, intensifies it, clarifies it, geometricizes it, and therefore makes it more potent, as if to draw water down from the mountain to the fields below." The architects of that temple were struck by the aesthetic vigor of the natural world and sought to honor it in their building. Their work, along that of our Ice Age ancestors, suggests that our humanness is as embedded in a veneration of wild beauty as it is in the ability to use tools. Can the attentiveness to beauty that makes us human keep us human?

The same father who taught me about wild beauty impressed upon my brother the aesthetic inherent in the process of creation, in the texture of the grain of woods, and in the joy of sharing these things with others.

If cave art and environmental architecture were the expression of the exalted minds and spirits of our predecessors, what, exactly, lifts the human mind or spirit now? While what inspires mine may not move another's, most would agree on the beauty inherent in an ancient forest, a raw mountain range, or architecture that echoes the integrity of both. The ache I feel for these things is exactly what makes me glad to be alive, grateful for my sentience. This ache is made more profound by the knowledge that they are being destroyed by the communities we create. Somewhere along the line, our humanness has become defined more by our ability to create imposing structures with speed than by our ability to celebrate the beauty of life, which has taken four billion slow years to evolve.

The Gallatin Valley of southwest Montana, my home before I moved to Missoula, is a long, wide basin with vistas that scream "big sky country!" and enough flat land to have sustained early settlers with huge acreages of cattle ranches and farms. As in much of the West, these generations-old family businesses are being sold to developers. Over the course of the three short years I lived in Bozeman, I watched two sprawling mall complexes rise from once expansive fields and more new housing developments than I could count infest the open valley with which I had fallen deeply in love. It is difficult for me to believe that anybody finds beauty in these cul-de-sac ridden, cookie-cutter communities exploding across the landscape. Beauty, however, is not the question for architects of strip malls and housing developments. It is not a priority for the corporate developers of the country's last open spaces. Speed and financial efficiency are the investors' primary concerns. They can move on, while those of us who live in places of wild beauty are forced to gaze through acres of chain stores and identical houses to find it. We shop at those shiny stores and live in matching houses because our profit-driven culture leaves us few other options. What has this infrastructural abandonment of beauty done to the minds and hearts of the people who are a part of that culture—to all of us?

A brief glance at the events of this spinning world gives some clues. Take away that which exalts the mind or spirit, and in return we are a bunch of flat souls who have become numb to tragedies that would otherwise break our hearts. Take away a cultural responsibility to beauty, and we have no reason not to rip down entire forests. We have no cause to hesitate at destroying landscapes or societies sitting on the oil we need to fuel the vehicles that, in our commercial dreams, will bring us to a place of wild beauty. Take away a commitment to beauty, and we soon will find that even our biggest SUVs can't get us there.

Put beauty back into the human-altered landscape, and we may become a world of raw and sensitive people bowled over by the mysteries of the universe, of the earth. We may find that those mysteries thrill us with their elegant beauty and fill us with gratitude for the chance to experience them. We might find that they pain

us, remind us of how small we really are. Our hearts might ache as we behold the intricacies of the natural world, knowing that we can never fully contain their beauty, knowing that it is ultimately fleeting. Put beauty back into the contours of our hearts, and we may find that pain is as essential to our experience of life as exaltation, for with being in beauty, as with being in love, we risk getting hurt. Put beauty back into the stories we live by, and we may find that the very pain it causes is what urges us to maintain it.

Shortly after September 11, 2001, I spoke to my brother from a payphone in Cooke City, Montana. I was working on a trail crew in Yellowstone National Park when the planes crashed, and days passed before we were able to get into town for a paper and the news. Seeing President Bush drawl out the words, "terrorism," "evil," and "infinite justice," on TV made my teeth itch. I felt confused and powerless against the landslide of nationalism and violence that was suffocating our nation and drowning our sorrow.

I talked to my brother that night about the anger that permeates this world; the ease with which our leaders deploy the machinery of death; the degree of arrogance that governs our species and our country; and my desire, yet complete inability, to change any of that. My brother spoke to me of beauty, of his life goal to fill the world with beautiful things, with clean lines and the texture of wood.

My brother is a furniture maker. Sculpture is his training; wood is his passion. Last summer, I spent two months in Chicago, where my sister, my mother, and he still live. I hung out at the apartment he shares with my sister, escaping the wet heat, drinking dirty martinis, playing cards, and being beckoned into his basement studio. "C'mere, quick!" I ran the first time he said this, certain that he'd left a limb in the table saw. But it was quiet down there, still. He gestured me over to the far end of his studio. Leaning against the wall were several two-by-eights, ragged looking, boring. "Aren't these beautiful?" he asked. I laughed for a second and almost teased him about stealing me away from my game to see them. But I caught myself. He was serious. I had never seen him look at something that way, get excited enough about the physical beauty of anything to grab me from 20 feet away, needless to say a whole flight of stairs. Those unfinished boards were of curly maple, and the shaggy parts were exactly what made the sanded, finished wood look iridescently in motion. He then showed me all of the boards leaning against the cement wall. Oak. Cherry. Walnut. He showed me his veneers, his inheritance from our father. Zebra. Birdseye. Paduk. He talked about quarter-sawn boards versus plane-cut. I tried to listen. But it was hard because I was in awe of his excitement, his grade-school "show-and-tell" energy. And it was hard because this little voice in my head kept asking, "And what endangered cloud forest did these boards come from, and how did they get here?" What made it even noisier in my head was the third voice admonishing the second, "Can't you see he is glowing, can't you see how vibrant this wood is, this moment is?"

Jay Ericson

The same father who taught me about wild beauty impressed upon my brother the aesthetic inherent in the process of creation, in the texture of the grain of woods, and in the joy of sharing these things with others. The irony of my brother's beauty mission being dependent on the felling of ancient trees does not elude me. But shining through my confusion is hope. I like to imagine him in his camouflage utility kilt and sweat-stained t-shirt, glowing pale as he runs his fingers down the smooth surface of a sanded board of curly maple. I like to imagine that the same urgent joy with which he beckoned me to his studio is infused into each cut of wood, each joint, and each final caress he gives a piece before delivering it to his client. I like to imagine him saturating the concrete maze of Chicago with the qualities that make his work beautiful so that aching beauty may, for a moment, be less fleeting.

Driving along the contours of the Lamar River just before dawn, I follow Orion. It's bold and beautiful, and I can't draw away my eyes. Jupiter hangs below it, the earth falls from them both. Elk, only visible because of their bright white butts, bound away from my truck. I feel bad for being this naked, little *Homo sapiens* in a big, heavy vehicle on a stretch of pavement that disrupts their ancestral travel routes. But I feel grateful to my father, who taught me what it means to be a *Homo sapiens* on this wild earth, who showed me how good it feels to be in the middle of a vast nowhere with elk as my traveling companions.

Greg Brown grumbles out of my radio as I park next to the river to wait for sunrise. I can't see the sun yet, but its light is making black paper cut-outs of the mountains. River and snow and fog mingle. Awareness heightened in the predawn darkness, my stomach clenches as I mistake boulders for grizzly bears, which I both yearn and dread to see. Well fed by now, they are sprawled out in their dens, gestating and snoring. I envy them, but not enough to regret waking up at four this morning to a moonless sky, to Pleiades, Cassiopeia, the Great Bear, Orion. No, I don't regret witnessing this 7:30 sunrise and these thinly spread cirrus clouds growing rosier by the second. I want to catch the moment the clouds turn from pink to white, when morning becomes day and the mysteries of this landscape are revealed. For maybe in that instant, as fine as the boundary between my breath and the winter air, I will seethe from the pain of being in beauty. I will be human.

Becca Deysach is a graduate student in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana. She looks forward to savoring the beauty of her first Missoula winter.

Muriel Zeller

The Blackbirds

I walk to the mailbox and a scatter of black rises.
Each year at this time they come, seeming to sense winter in me,
but they come because my husband is a feeder of birds.
He pours seed into feeders he has made
with rough, functional hands, nourishing
a promise to his children and the birds
that they should know one another.
He is right in his roughness, and in the sun-
cast flint blue glint off their black feathered bodies,
I see the color of my husband's eyes as the blackbirds wing up.

Danielle Lattuga

Shadow of Longing

Beneath the broad sky
I can stretch my limbs
In four directions

The Wind
Ties spaces together
Linking fingers to toes to the tingling ends
Of my hair
And Sagebrush
Whispers to me
In the smell of your skin
At dusk

The clouds
Pull me upward
Eye to eye with the butterfly
Where blue is a memory
That does not fade

I mistake
The song of the river
For the color of your voice
Entering me when my eyes
Are closed

And mountain meadows
Billow and surge
In golden waves
Like silk sheets
Belonging to lovers
Who have yet to fall

Suddenly lost
In the depth of a night sky
I cling to stars
As they pulse and let go

Dropping

Plink –kerplunk
Into your dreams

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area. A sign in front of the new gin says: "Bring your cotton to us. Build a better life for your children." People want progress, a better life.

Still, when the new gin was built, construction workers carefully avoided a big old baobab that is still standing inside the high chain link fence around the factory. If the tree had been cut, according to Chidyamauyu, the local spirit medium, the spirits that inhabited it might have caused problems for the gin or its workers. So it was spared.

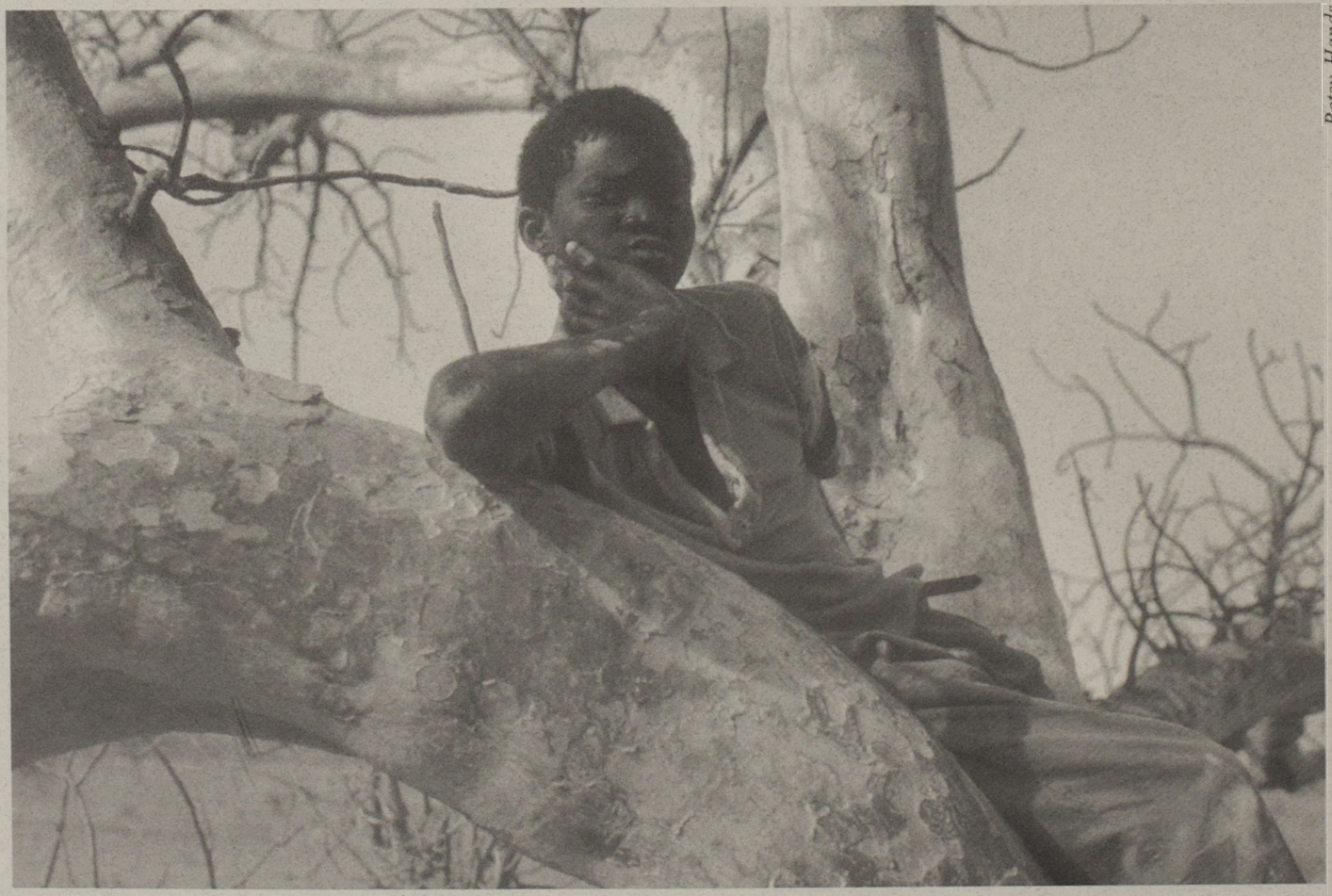
Cotton cultivation is expanding rapidly in Muzarabani. For the small farmers here, cotton is the main cash crop, from which they earn roughly half of their annual income of a few hundred dollars a year. The *mopane* woodlands in the area have been extensively cleared, because the heavy soils on which they grow are good for cotton. Cotton also grows well on the alluvial soils where the dry forests are found, and those soils are sandier and easier to plow with oxen than the *mopane* soils. If they weren't sacred, the forests would have been long gone.

Nick and I left Phanuel Rupiya and Everson Tauro sitting in the shade, and drove east along the Escarpment, back to Muzarabani. Now penciled on our topographic map were two dozen sacred sites that Rupiya had identified. We wanted to visit some of those if we could, but that required the permission of the ritual assistant of the local spirit medium, called a *mutape*, who keeps his eye on sacred sites and makes sure they are respected. At Muzarabani we turned north toward Kapembere village, where Rupiya said we'd be likely to find the *mutape*, Mr. Chipendo, "boozing it up" at the village bottle store.

When we reached the Kapembere shops we found that Rupiya was right. Mutape Chipendo was there, drinking beer with the district councilor from Kapembere, Crispen Honde. We explained what we wanted, and they quickly drained their beers and jumped in the back seat of the Land Cruiser. We drove a few kilometers back down the road toward Muzarabani.

Just off the road to the west was the Rukonde Forest, the largest fragment of this type of forest remaining in Zimbabwe. At its widest point Rukonde is about two kilometers across, and extends along the Musengezi River for about five kilometers. We had met Jeremiah Manhango at its northern edge yesterday, and now we parked by a cluster of huts west of the road that belonged to Jeremiah and his kin. The village occupied an alcove cut into the wall of trees, and the forest that used to stand here had metamorphosed into wooden structures – corrals for goats and cattle, racks for drying maize, chicken coops, and the huts themselves.

We walked a couple of dozen meters and stopped at the edge of a gully. On the other side stood the forest. A few candelabra euphorbias, which looked something like giant cactus, rose above an impenetrable maze of thorny vines, and above them stood the trees, forming a tangled canopy of branches over our heads. Councilor Honde said that the *mhondoro*, like to rest under euphoribias during the heat of the day. My neck prickled involuntarily and I scanned the tangle of undergrowth, but if *Maskwera sei* was crouching there now, watching us, I couldn't see him.



Betsy Hands

Mutape Chipendo searched for a certain plant, picked some leaves, and rubbed them in his hands with a scrubbing motion. The crushed leaves had a faint, acrid smell. A small flock of grey louries flew from tree to tree calling, a slow, sad call that sounded like "go-away, go-away, go-away." We squatted and clapped in a steady, slow rhythm while the *mutape,* Mr. Chipendo, began a chantlike beseeching of the spirits of the place. This went on for what seemed like a long time, but it may only have been a minute or so. When the chanting stopped, we continued to clap until Chipendo stood up abruptly. The spirits apparently knew we were here, and it was safe now to talk.

"A big snake guards this forest," Honde began. "The snake is seen maybe once a year and is so big that when it crosses the road along the edge of the forest, even the buses stop."

"A python?" I asked. African rock pythons are the biggest snakes in Africa, up to six meters long.

"No, it's not a python – it's much bigger than that! As big as that tree," Honde said, pointing to a tree a foot in diameter. "People are afraid of the big snake."

"No one is supposed to settle to the west of the road between Muzarabani and Kapembere, in the edge of Rukonde Forest, because of its sacredness," Honde said, and in the old days no one would have done so. Many houses now lie to the west of the road – the village of the Manhangos.

"The chief has asked these people to move, and even asked the District Administrator to make them pay a fine," Honde said. "They haven't, but the D.A. won't make them pay, and the chief won't evict them. It's a big problem."

We left Rukonde and drove north, with Chipendo and Honde directing from the back seat. When the track we were following dead-ended in a cotton field we got out and walked toward a circle of trees surrounding Chikampo Pool, another sacred site on Rupiya's map. The pool was shallow, about an acre in size, and a well-worn path crossed its edge. A group of women and girls appeared, walking home from the fields. One pushed a wheelbarrow overloaded with three bags of newly picked cotton.

The water of Chickampo Pool is used to brew ceremonial beer for the *huruwa* ceremony, a rainmaking ceremony that comes at the end of the seven-month dry season, in October or November. The purpose of *huruwa* is to enlist the help of ancestral spirits in bringing good rains. In the past, when traditional rules were followed, the pool held clean water throughout the dry season, Honde said. To protect the water, certain things are not allowed. Washing with soap is taboo, for example, and only traditional wooden or gourd containers – nothing metal – can be used for collecting water, for fear of scaring or poisoning the spirits of the pool. No livestock are supposed to drink here, only wild animals, some of which may be *mhondoro* or other ancestral spirits. Traditional rules strictly forbid wheeled vehicles near the pool.

"People are no longer respecting this place," Chipendo complained. "They should not be pushing a wheelbarrow through here! This wouldn't have happened in the old days!" Hoofprints indicated that lots of cattle and goats had been here to drink.

"This is the Number One Sacred Spot in the area," Honde said, "even more sacred than the Rukonde Forest!" I didn't ask why, but guessed it had something to do with the role of the pool in the *huruwa* ceremony, and of that ceremony in keeping the ancestors happy and bringing rain to the living.

A rising tide of immigration and settlement makes it difficult to maintain respect for these sacred places. Only about a fifth of the inhabitants of the area now are long-time residents, the rest are recent immigrants. In the past decade small-scale cotton cultivation has expanded rapidly, pulling land-hungry immigrants from the high plateau of Zimbabwe, where cotton doesn't grow. The new gin will only increase the pull.

"New immigrants don't know the sacred places here, and even if they know, they don't respect them," Honde said. "The ancestral spirits here aren't *their* ancestors."

"What would be the solution?" I asked.

"Put a fence around this place!" the councilor said.

"Really?" I asked, taken aback to hear him propose a technical solution to what I thought of as a social, not a technical, problem. I had once heard a traditional leader speak against fencing sacred sites, saying "Spirits don't want areas to be fenced. They don't like metal, they don't like wire." But Honde said at least a fence would keep the livestock out, and it would indicate that this was a sacred place.

We walked slowly back to the Land Cruiser, and I wondered what would happen to this pool, these forests, to the elephants, lions, and other wild animals who still live here, among these villages and their fields of maize and cotton. What are the prospects for the future? Can these people really preserve their traditional beliefs in the face of the rapid cultural change that is happening here? And if they do, will the belief that certain forests or pools are sacred really protect them in the face of technological and economic changes that are coming? I didn't know for sure what would happen, but I did know that many people still hold strongly to the traditional beliefs, and that those beliefs *had* conserved these forests until now. And I suspected that the Shona worldview I was learning about could help build a bridge to a new view, a practical conservation ethic locally-grown from ancient roots.

The bare branches of the big trees around the pool shone in the late afternoon sun, wound with lianas thick as giant snakes. A two-wheeled wooden cart came down the track toward us, pulled by a pair of trotting donkeys. An empty metal oildrum bounced on the cart.

"*Maskwera sei*?!" The driver greeted us with a big smile – "How was your day?"

Obviously his day had satisfied him so far. He was driving his cart to the sacred pool to fill his drum with water.

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What Do We Know

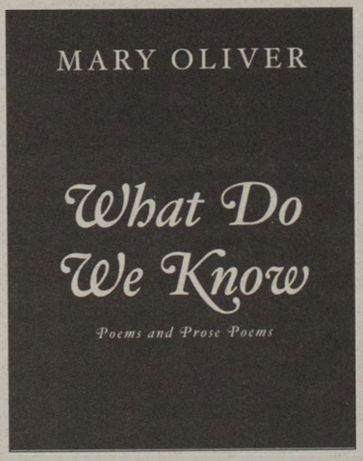
Poems and Prose Poems

By Mary Oliver, Da Capo Press, 2002

reviewed by Erica Wetter

Following in the successful footsteps of her last book, *The Leaf and the Cloud*, the poet Mary Oliver has produced *What Do We Know*, a collection that chronicles her continued attempts to grapple with the world and its mysteries. "I love this world,/ but not for it's answers," she writes in "Snowy Nights," explaining, in short, just why her inquisitive title omits question marks. She isn't searching for definitive answers; she simply is striving to experience both life and the natural world as directly and honestly as possible. Her title acts as the kind of humble shrug one might give after presenting a series of profound and important observations. Although Oliver begins by suggesting that she doesn't know much, after reading her poems it becomes clear that she knows a great deal about the workings of the world, both human and otherwise.

Opening her collection are two epigraphs that present the world's most riddling paradox: the meaning of life is ultimately unknowable, yet our lives are ultimately defined by the process of seeking meaning. With Emerson's "The invisible and imponderable is the sole fact," Oliver suggests that all we can do is acknowledge and appreciate the grand mystery of life. She juxtaposes this observation with a statement by St. Augustine, "My mind is on fire to understand this most intricate riddle," presenting the undeniable truth that life is a never-ending quest to make sense of the world. This dichotomy between the unknowable and the known is a theme throughout the book.



For Oliver, the desire to write stems from a need to mediate between these two conflicting interests, to know and to accept the unknowable. Luckily for the reader, both her attention to detail and her linguistic precision result in poems that are vivid and engaging. In the collection's first poem, "Summer," Oliver sets off with the reader on a journey through images and metaphors that seem sweetly sincere.

Despite her genuineness, some of Oliver's poems border on the overly romantic and sentimental. In "Her Grave, Again," Oliver meditates on death through remembrances of her dog. "For now she is God's dog," strikes me as old-fashioned and maudlin. Similarly, "O, what is money?/ O, never in our lives have we thought/about money. O, we have only a little money" in "On Losing a House," seems 'o'-ver the top in its attempt at profundity. In these moments she is uncharacteristically and rather uncomfortably trite.

Yet I cannot condemn Oliver's emotionalism too harshly. After all, it would do all of us good to be as fearless and open in our expression as Oliver. She sometimes seems childlike in her directness and candor; her poems often feel like the cry of delight or pain that a child un-self-consciously releases in moments of awe. "Yes! Yes! Yes!" she exclaims in "Wind," affirming life and her joy at being a part of it. Her persistence in questioning and exploring the world seems particularly reminiscent of childhood, when days rotated around looking for bugs, listening to birds, and seeking frogs. Indeed, Oliver does all of these things in her poems, drawing on her vast knowledge of natural history to produce tributes to the natural world that are likely to stir the most urbane readers.

What truly separates Oliver from a child, though, is her wisdom and insight—both of which she offers freely in this collection. Despite her announcement in "Wind," that she is "tired of explanations," Oliver continually presents the reader with earnest suggestions about the world. Sometimes she offers direct admonitions. In "Moonlight," she warns, "Take care you don't know anything in this world/ too quickly or easily," once again reiterating the tension between seeking for answers and being content with mystery.

Oliver seems to feel that the search and struggle to understand the "imponderable" is a burden lightened only by the wonder of interaction with the natural world. In the prose poem "Clam," she describes clams that are tossed ashore, filled with sand, and forced to open up to the world. "Perhaps, on such days, they, too, begin the terrible effort of thinking, of wondering *who,* and *what,* and *why,*" she muses, communicating how a life of discovery and apparent meaninglessness can feel like a weight. Simultaneously, she states that "the fire of the world" touches them in this moment of opening, revealing the passion that infuses all existence.

For Oliver, her passion and her poetry expresses itself as a deep gratitude directed toward nature. In "Gratitude," she issues a series of questions and answers designed to remind the reader of the solace found in the simplest of natural details. "*What did you think was happening?"* she asks herself, replying with a series of images that range from the "wet face of the lily" to the "red tulip of the fox's mouth." She concludes with the pronouncement, "So the gods shake us from our sleep." Clearly, however, Oliver's poetic precision is doing the awakening in this case.

Other reviewers called Mary Oliver's book a "revelation." After experiencing the deep gratitude and astonishment for life that Oliver expresses in her poetry, I can only agree that reading *What Do We Know* is a riveting, awe-inspiring experience.

The Roadless Yaak

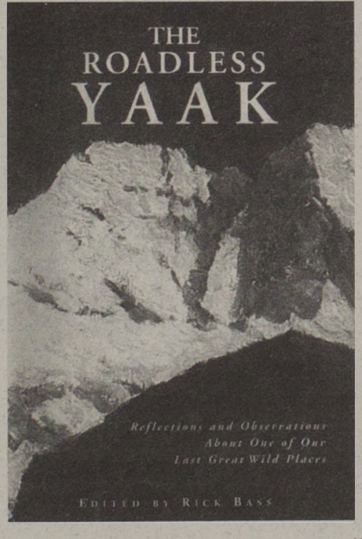
Reflections and Observations About One of Our Last Great Wild Places

Edited by Rick Bass, Lyons Press, 2002

reviewed by Tami Brunck

In the extreme Northwestern corner of Montana lies the enchanting and endangered Yaak Valley. *The Roadless Yaak* is a collection of 36 essays written by an eclectic crew of loggers, teachers, poets, and scientists. Edited by longtime Yaak advocate Rick Bass, the book is a tribute to this place and a compelling plea for readers to protect it. Blessed with unparalleled biological diversity yet scarred with clear cuts and logging roads, the Yaak Valley retains a core of true wilderness. The Yaak possesses an astonishing diversity of wilderness-dependent species, including grizzlies, lynx, wolves, wolverines, mountain lions, golden and bald eagles, mountain goats, and bighorn sheep. It is a crucial link in the biological integrity of the Northern Rockies.

I find it difficult to believe that a portion of the earth beloved by so many and critical to the health of Western wilderness still has not garnered permanent protection for its precious remaining roadless areas. I found it especially unbelievable after reading *The Roadless Yaak,* whose contributors include such eloquent writers as Terry Tempest Williams, Doug Peacock, Robert Michael Pyle, Jannisse Ray, David James Duncan, and William Kittredge. These essays communicate how the Yaak has changed each writer. Even essayist Chris Wood, a member of the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Team who has, admittedly, never been to the Yaak, acknowledges that its protection is of utmost importance.



The *Roadless Yaak* reads like a collection of family anecdotes. From the down-on his-luck fiction writer who decides on a whim to travel 2,300 miles to the Yaak with his cousin from Alabama to the high school teacher who finally overcomes his wanderlust to settle in the valley, all the essayists find some vital element missing from their lives before their visits. Many of them are drawn to the valley by their friend Rick The accounts of their visits often feature an elaborate meal prepared without electricity (or, in one case, running water), and they always include an excursion with Rick into profoundly intact wilderness areas, as well as those dismembered by vast clearcuts. Like the hidden, interwoven strands of 3,000-plus species of mycorrhizal fungi in the valley's soil that sustain the Yaak's diversity, the richness of this work is nourished by the fact that many of these writers' stories are connected. As I read, I began to see a complex support network of friends emerging from the Yaak's ability to enchant them and sustained by their urge to protect it.

Like the Yaak itself, this collection of essays resonates with contradictions and mystery. The valley's remote location and wild character contrasts oddly, yet perfectly, with the essayists' experiences of community as they reference other contributors, share idyllic visits with Bass and his family, and describe visits to local haunts such as the Dirty Shame Saloon, the Yaak Community Center, the Yaak River Tavern, and the Yaak O'Mat. Besides Bass, certain local characters reappear, including the owner of the Dirty Shame and his huggable wife, Willie. It soon becomes clear that the complexity and contradictions inherent in the land are matched only by relationships among the locals. The "us versus them" mentality between outsider environmentalists and locals is largely absent, though one is reminded periodically that, while many share affection for the Yaak, few locals speak in favor of wilderness designation. Ironically, this is in large part why it thus far has not come to pass.

If the purpose of this book is to cause its readers to fall in love with the Yaak so deeply that they are compelled to protect it, I can attest that it is a success. By the book's end, I felt as if I, too, had visited the Yaak, encountered enormous, 600 year old larch, kneeled with Douglas Chadwick to contemplate the profundity of the richest living soil in the world, and stumbled upon the bulldozed path of a juvenile grizzly. I stood with Janisse Ray in the lookout on top of Mount Henry, gazing out into a virtual sea of clear cuts, observing that "threaded through it all, like tapeworms, [were] skinny, white logging roads." I sat quiet in an audience that included loggers and assorted refugees from modern culture, listening in awe as Terry Tempest Williams, Rick Bass, and Robert Michael Pyle read their tributes to wildness in the Bull River Lodge outside Libby on a leg of the Orion Society's Forgotten Language Tour.

At its heart, this book is about the responsibilities that attend the love of place. Consider the words of essayist Tom Franklin: "I'd traveled here because I was after the Yaak, as if this valley were a place you could mine for the opposite of loneliness, whatever that is. Maybe it was wrong to come here wanting to take something, rather than give. Maybe that's true for every place." To be touched by the Yaak and its community of human defenders is to be moved to action. For me, not supporting its protection has become unthinkable.

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