"I have a great sense of moral and ethical outrage, and writing about how betrayed you feel or how pissed off you are can be a steam valve as well as a rallying cry."

—Robert Michael Pyle, page 12
"It is a funny exchange. A cattle farmer and a vegetarian, each wearing overalls – his with muddy knees and mine with bright colored patches – talking about being organic." page 6

"The bridge begins beneath a leaning madrone, and ends by a cluster of old Pacific yew trees big enough to climb." page 10

Features

6
Wide Open Space
The History of a Green Pasture
By Tracy Oulman

10
20th Street Bridge
by Becca Rose Hall

22
Our Father, which art in Birds and Fish
By Jordan Fisher Smith

26
Cause and Effect
By Robin Patten

30
Love Letter to a Sewage Lagoon
By Andrea M. Jones

Departments

FIRST PERSON
By PJ DelHomme 2

INTERVIEW
Robert Michael Pyle
On Rage and Writing
By Monica Wright 12

POETRY
By Robert Michael Pyle 14,15,25

By Tom McCarthy 9,33

JOURNAL
By Brooke Hewes 16

PHOTO SPECIAL
Snapshots from the Wild 18

LAST WORDS
By Jesslyn Shields 34
Just before an early September dawn in Yellowstone, I stumbled out of a frost-covered tent to the sound of thumping hooves. I looked into the meadow of our makeshift campsite near the Lamar Valley and realized the luck of pulling early morning breakfast duty. A bull elk thundered towards me with his nostrils flaring and his massive seven-point rack slowing him down. At his heels were two wolves that appeared to be playfully smiling, their tongues flapping as they chased him. They all ran close enough by me that I could have hit any one of them with my frozen boots. As soon as they had appeared, they vanished into the timber.

“Oh my God,” I said in an excited whisper to Max, my tent-mate. He only groaned and stuck his head into his sleeping bag. I walked over to the cooking area and found my crew leader breathing heavily. She, too, had seen the whole affair and was obviously as awestruck as I was. After we put on the coffee, our fellow trail crewmembers began to filter in one-by-one, and we shared with them what we had seen. It was apparent that some were envious, while others didn’t believe the wolves were quite as close as I said they were.

As we stood around the propane stove warming our bare hands and discussing the day’s trail re-route, through the timber came a hollow, belting chorus of howls. Conversations stopped in mid-sentence. It sounded as though the pack of wolves was only a few yards away. I hoped and imagined that they were celebrating a breakfast of fresh elk.

At the time, I thought that was pretty wild. Looking back on that experience five years later though, I now wonder how wild it really was.

In 1995 and ’96, park officials introduced Canadian wolves into the Yellowstone ecosystem. Since then, the wolves have done well preying on the ungulate populations. They have driven the elk from many riparian areas, allowing aspen stands to rejuvenate. They have also attracted thousands of wildlife enthusiasts and tourists to the Lamar Valley, but it has come at a price.

At a gas station in Gardiner, near the park’s Roosevelt Arch, one can buy a laminated sheet with Yellowstone’s most prominent wolves pictured, numbered, and identified with any characteristic markings that could help a wolf-watcher identify them. The gas station attendant noticed my smirk as I held the sheet.

“Do people really buy these?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “It lets you know which ones to aim at.”

Even though I don’t agree that any animal
should be target practice, I wonder if it is any more humane to re-locate these wolves into unfamiliar territory and subject them to the whims of management and politics. Can something be considered wild once it has been shot with a tranquilizer, collared, relocated, held in captivity for 8-10 weeks, and then either immortalized on a laminated sheet at a gas station or on the evening news when the local wildlife agency has to shoot it for killing livestock?

Personally, I don’t know how wild anything can be if it is managed to the extent that Yellowstone’s wolves were and still are. Thankfully, though, others like Paul Shepard, an environmental writer and philosopher, have taken a stab at defining and explaining wildness. In his book, Coming Home to the Pleistocene, he writes: “Wildness occurs in many places. It is composed of the denizens of wilderness—eagles, moose, and their botanical coinhabitants and all of the species whose sexual assortment and genealogy have not been controlled or set adrift by human design or captivity. But it also includes those species who have been cohabitants with domestication—house sparrows, cockroaches and ourselves.”

This issue of Camas is dedicated to the issue of wildness, which as noted by Shepard, can be found in many forms, and essays in this issue explore those many forms. Becca Hall and Andrea Jones describe their childhood haunts of a bridge in Seattle and Lake Powell respectively. Tracy Oulman remembers the family farm, while Robin Patten discusses myth and science in the natural world.

Also included in this issue is an interview with Robert Michael Pyle, who agreed to submit previously unpublished poetry. His poem, “Moonlight Redux: or, Gone for Good,” was written here in Missoula as he taught as the Kittredge Visiting Environmental Writer. And finally, Jordan Fisher Smith, a park ranger of 14 years in the Sierra, submitted his essay, “Our Father, which art in Birds and Fish,” in which he explores the spiritual side of wildness.

As you read these essays and poems, I hope that they will both entertain and get us thinking about the nature of wildness.

As for the Yellowstone wolves on that particular September dawn, I can’t recall if either one of them chasing the elk was wearing a radio collar. I was too busy staring. For those few seconds that they were running in front of me, I can remember seeing the lead wolf look over at me for a fraction of a second, and we locked eyes. In that moment, in a moment that I will never forget, I would like to believe that I saw something truly wild.

Enjoy,
PJ DelHomme
Editor, Spring 2005
Sarah Galbraith is a junior at the University of Montana studying photojournalism. She has been taking photographs for several years now and has worked for *The Planet Magazine*. She is currently working for the *Montana Kaimin*.

Becca Hall grew up in the wilds of Seattle. After homeschooling herself through high school, she majored in English at Stanford University. She now lives in Missoula where she studies environmental writing and hangs out on the bridges over Rattlesnake Creek.

Brooke Hewes grew up in Connecticut where she developed a deep fascination with the watery world; summers were spent in the ocean, winters in the pool. She received her BA in Environmental Studies from Middlebury College in 2000 and is currently working on her master’s in journalism at UM. She is trying to find a way to write about the environment and get paid for it. She smiles most when running, practicing yoga and shuffling to her mailbox Saturday mornings to retrieve *The New Yorker*.

Andrea Jones lives in central Colorado, where she is trying to learn how to garden compatibly with high elevation, high winds, and the local wildlife. At one time a greeting card writer, she now focuses on natural history, land use, and the public’s perception of science.

Tom McCarthy lives in San Francisco where he works in publishing and shares a little house not far from the Pacific Ocean with his wife and two daughters. He earned a master’s degree in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University and then got that out of his system by working as a newspaper reporter for a few years. His poems have appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Smartish Pace* and *Green Fuse*, among other magazines. He likes his pancakes without syrup.

Tracy Oulman lives in a tiny house with a giant yard in Bozeman, Montana. She would like to dedicate her essay to her grumpy dog Sophie, and her crazy Uncle Daryl.

Robin Patten is an ecologist and naturalist. She received an M.S. in Botany from the University of Wyoming in 1987 and a Ph.D. in ecology from Colorado State University in 1991. After finishing her graduate studies she returned home to south-central Montana for post-doctoral work at Montana State University, focusing on large-scale vegetation patterns of the Yellowstone Ecosystem. Most recently she has taken time off to travel and write, and is now living at the family ranch.

Robert Michael Pyle is this year’s Kittredge Distinguished Visiting Writer in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana. Readers may know his regular column, “The Tangled Bank,” in *Orion*. Pyle’s newest book, a seasonal pastoral of his home in rural southwest Washington, has just been finished, only six years overdue. A collection of poems and a novel, *Magdalena Mountain*, are creeping toward completion.

Jesslyn Shields is a graduate student in the EVST program at the University of Montana. Before she began her strict vitamin regimen, she spent most of her life in Georgia, catching colds and getting advice concerning their treatment from various family members, friends and small reptiles.

Ian Shive enjoys the nomadic lifestyle of being an outdoor photographer and being a witness to natural events that many never get to see. His work has appeared in magazines, books, newspapers and galleries around the world; however, Ian is most proud that his images help promote conservation of the environment—a cause to which he is deeply devoted. Ian’s web site is www.WaterandSky.com.


Claire Vitucci received a B.F.A. from The University of Montana in 2002. Much of her inspiration stems from growing up in rural areas of Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. She is currently conducting a nomadic life between Teton Valley, Idaho and Missoula, Montana as an artist, adventurer, freelance photographer, worker and world traveler. A solo exhibit of her works, “Windows into the West,” is currently on display in Driggs, Idaho.

Monica Wright is a recent product of the Environmental Studies graduate program at the University of Montana, who received her undergraduate degree in journalism from the University of Minnesota. Her dad sends her daily clippings from the ‘Help Wanted’ section of the paper. It’s not helping.
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Camas Spring 2005
A South Dakota cattle farmer and a vegetarian may be an unlikely pair, but Uncle Daryl and I have been traveling the pastures together since I was a child. We go for long drives in the springtime, and I assemble a herd of favorite cows. My herd of favorites will always include the loneliest cow, a blind cow, a motherless cow and the cow caught in a barbed wire fence en route to a greener pasture. Uncle Daryl allows me to assemble a herd of misfits as long as I don’t request any of them be permitted to live beyond their rightful slaughter season. Bad luck doesn’t mean good luck for a cow in my uncle’s pasture. His truck traces the perimeter of a large grassy field while the cows bellow their opposition to our visit. He tells me the price of beef is high as proof that somebody somewhere is still eating it.

The American farmer has been romanticized, criticized and eventually just forgotten by a nation who orders their food through a microphone and chooses an apple based on its shine. My Uncle Daryl knows this first-hand. His farm has been in our family for three generations and began as a great frontier for a relative I never met and a man he only vaguely remembers. In the beginning, the fields were filled with corn, rye and winter wheat. Cattle, pigs and sheep came soon after. The crops and animals have evolved to meet the demands of the market and the increasing need to compete with industrial agriculture. Today, Uncle Daryl is raising grass, hay, oats and cattle. He gave up on pigs in the early ’80s when the four main agribusiness corporations gained control of over 60 percent of the nation’s hog production and drove the cost of pork so low he could no longer compete.

“Kill, process and market,” he says. “They do it with chickens and milk, too.”

Uncle Daryl is telling the story of thousands of farmers who understand their land and a handful of companies who have never learned to listen.

As the old Chevy truck reaches the North Grove, a female pheasant takes flight, followed moments later by the bright colors of her male counterpart. The North Grove is a landmark on the farm. Federal money has been used to plant countless tree belts across the West, but this stand of mature cedars was planted in the mid-30s and has become more than a wall to interrupt the wind. My grandmother tells of the drought and recounts the shortest route being quite long as she carried water to each of the trees. Uncle Daryl has heard her story for his whole life and he pauses each spring on our drive so I can admire the cedars alongside him.

“I planted another five and a half acres of trees this year,” he tells me as he leans against the side of the truck and looks forward at the grove. “I love to watch them grow.”

A wide open space is vulnerable to weather and the changing sky. Livestock and plants rely on the treebreaks to stop the relentless, unpredictable and wild elements of a land which otherwise appears to lay itself out with nothing to hide. Government assistance has been used since the 1930s to contend with these forces of nature. The Great Depression, overproduction and ongoing obstacles associated
with weather created a desperate time for the American farmer and the government established price supports that remained intact until the late 1990s when Congress dismantled several programs. The Department of Agriculture encouraged research and developed hybrid seeds, a variety of fertilizers to increase grain production and a means to fatten hogs with less food. The technological advances increased production and, eventually, caused overproduction. Prices began to fall and farmers would slaughter their own cattle and let grains wither away rather than accept meager payment for their hard work. Meanwhile, the number of farms decreased from 6 million in 1940 to 2.2 million in the late 1990s while the size of the remaining farms doubled. Farms were becoming more expansive, shrinking in number, and farm families, historically the elbow grease of production, were being replaced by a whole new type of machine.

My Uncle Daryl doesn’t know who is farming the land next door to his wide open space. As the truck traces the fence of the southern border, I survey the deterioration of the farmhouse and the bright shade of green erupting through the soil around it. When they were young, my mother, Daryl and their other siblings passed time in the front yard with the neighbor children. It was an immaculate home with a windmill and a white fence separating a small section of grass from the com field just beyond. The children never wore hand-me-downs and had shiny shoes for Sunday church service. The girls had matching white teeth and perfectly straight blonde hair. The boys wore clean overalls and had their own bamboo fishing poles. The farm was sold to a national conglomerate over a decade ago, but the echo of a family can still be heard when the wind passes over the field.

When we hit the last corner of my Uncle Daryl’s wide open space, we do a small dance. I leap from the truck and pull the gate open, wave my hand and watch as the truck moves slowly through. I step back, twirl and pull the gate tight again and we drive three miles into town. The noon-time whistle sings as we pass by the grain towers and bounce over the railroad tracks onto Main Street. Main Street is a wide gravel road with a grocery store, a bar, an old brick post office, a cafe and a school. My grandmother is cooking BLTs for the lunchtime crowd at the cafe, and my Aunt Paula is loading mail into her old Monte Carlo to deliver to the rural addresses. She drives the mail route my grandfather had before his death and subsequent burial at the cemetery that I am unable to find without help.

Rural America is a quilt of stories sewn together with the thread of family, but the thread seems to be tying itself off and the new generations of farmers aren’t farmers as much as they are businessmen. This change seems to translate into emptier streets, fewer children and a new effort to quantify the symbiotic relationship between man and land that has historically existed as qualitative.

The relationship between a farmer and the land cannot be calculated. It is not a number, but an understanding. The land knows my Uncle Daryl. He turns her over each new growing season and notes her subtle changes. He bales the straw and stacks the hay and, occasionally, stops to stand in the middle of his wide open space to pass a few moments in silence. When I was very young, I would haystack jump with Daryl’s son, Jake. We would gain a running start and leap from stack to stack. I did this despite my allergies and the knowledge that in the morning I would be unable to open my eyes or Camas Spring 2005
breathe through my nose. Some things are worth
the repercussions. I am too old now and Daryl says
it is unsafe to haystack jump. DDT is off the market,
but he often wonders aloud how different can it be
from the pesticides he uses which promise to kill
anything green. His voice trails off as he talks about
groundwater and dying eagles.

I ask each spring, “Do you ever think of going
organic?”

It is a funny exchange. A cattle farmer and a
vegetarian, each wearing overalls – his with muddy
knees and mine with bright colored patches – talking
about being organic. The sun reflects off the silver
grain towers as we park the truck and sit side-by-
side in the cab of the old Chevy facing the cafe. I can
smell bacon each time the door opens.

“It seems to me organic stopped being an option
before I had a say in the matter,” he chuckles, refer­
ing to my great grandfather’s use of DDT during the
Great Depression and the years of pesticides applied
to remain competitive with agribusiness.

If the land has a memory, can the use of these
synthetic chemicals be forgotten? Today, over 85,000
pesticides, insecticides and herbicides are used
commercially. Exposure to these chemicals has been
linked to cancer and genetic damage, however the
American need for “more than enough” pushes their
use to continue at all costs. The vulnerabilities of
nature are becoming evident as Atrazine contamina-
tion appears in our water supply and our soil
becomes depleted from annual pesticide applications
and relentless extraction. Uncle Daryl knows these
vulnerabilities and counts the number of friends
suffering the effects of applying pesticides. Synthetic
chemicals used in his rural community can be found
on the hands of children picking food directly from
the field, on the clothes worn during application of
chemicals and in the dust particles floating inside the
homes of America’s providers. Organic stopped
being an option before any of them had a say in the
matter and today’s competition makes organic
farming a seemingly impossible financial risk for the
struggling farm family.

As Uncle Daryl walks casually towards the door
of the cafe, he adjusts his overalls and yells across the
street to a friend. He doesn’t know it, but I am a
vegetarian because I learned to love animals from
him, a cattle farmer, who just so happens to be an
author as well. My great grandfather began a story
about family, land and struggle, and Daryl continues
to write it today. It is a story of a frontier, and it
occurs to me, that perhaps the last great frontier isn’t
rugged and mountainous at all. Perhaps, the last
frontier is the very first frontier and the small quiet
animals matching the golden color of grain are the
most wild of all.
Yosemite Valley
Tom McCarthy

Dusk and smog settle on the campsites
tucked into the deep, narrow canyon
lanterns hiss and generators thrum,
motorhome heaves about, high beams flash
but down along a bend in the Merced
where the river murmurs to big leaf maples
and an oak stands quietly over a meadow
you never know who is ambling through the
pines across the river, so the little girl
and I bark and howl to find out.
“What are you two doing?” the ranger asks
then laughs and takes a yip and howl herself.
Down river is a small hidden meadow
where I once slept out on a September
night of stars and moon-silvered mountains
dreaming of who her mother would be
dreaming of who she would be
when I was startled by a coyote howl
wafting up out of the blackened woods
out of my fears
certain I would run from an argument
but howled back on a dare to myself
if I could ever stop being alone
I knew what I’d teach my daughter
at night out in the meadows.
Concrete, green metal. The green old city things are always painted: mint-chip ice-cream green, dirty and peeling now on this old bridge. Metal and concrete spanning a deep cut of mud, and trees, and blackberry tangle. Suspension, an arc with a pause in the middle, all trees and rain and sky, cold metal. A place to dream in the crisscrossing splash and rush that is Seattle. My needed place.

While other kids my age attend high school, I wander daily to the bridge, restless and hungry for the knowledge of something I find there. I seek wildness, of the green kind mostly, and this is the closest to it that I can find, as I am not allowed alone in Ravenna Park, which the bridge straddles. It’s a dangerous, beautiful place, that woody ravine. Strange, dissonant people inhabit it, which is why I stay out. Funny, how the fear of humanity, not nature, keeps me from immersing myself in the wildness I am drawn always toward.

Still, because I need nature like I need water, I skim the edges of the park, dipping in a few feet sometimes to examine a cluster of forget-me-nots or a decomposing opossum. But I never submerge myself fully in the woods, and I end up, always, on the bridge, a spectator. Looking down into the rioting blackberries, the bursting maple leaves, the slight slide of the tiny creek, my breath comes easier and if I need to cry, I do.

The sky is big here, and there are trees. The bridge begins beneath a leaning madrone, and ends by a cluster of old Pacific yew trees big enough to climb. In the middle stands a fir. I have never determined what

Becca Rose Hall

Camas Spring 2005
kind, but I have known this tree since I was a small child out walking with my mom. She would always stop and say hello to it, and I have kept up the acquaintance. Years ago, someone threw a heavy rope into its upper branches, and I always felt an urgent need to reach out and pull the rope off, but the tree was too far away. The rope has since rotted away, but the branches are still too far off to touch.

I often stand by the fir tree and lean on the cold metal of the railing, looking over into the ravine, thinking my thoughts. The bridge is closed to cars, which lends it a sense of stillness. But I am never alone. Bikers, neon blurs of Spandex, speed by. Moms with trendy haircuts and jogging strollers power-walk in pairs. University students riding old bicycles or wearing dark coats and combat boots head back and forth between class, their shambly houses, and the nearby food co-op. Old men with dogs and plaid shirts come slowly, but daily. A woman with a shopping cart full of things precious only to her shuffles past, not looking at anyone. In late afternoon, the straggling clusters of teenagers with their backpacks, pop bottles, and restless testing will chatter by. And the lone boy with the ugly shoes, walking just out of range. Children on tricycles, loud and often wearing pink, charge in front of their fathers, who hang back, for dignity. Each person’s passing shakes the bridge, movement rippling out ahead, announcing an approaching presence. Between passing people, a moment of stillness, the wind in the trees.

Standing on the bridge, I daydream, often about the woods, and often about boys, and sometimes about running around in the woods with boys. I look out over the trees and imagine that they spread over the hills farther than can be seen, no streets or houses. I watch the seasons passing like slow cloud shadows over the landscape, the leaves turning, falling, budding again. I pull the hood of my old Gore-tex raincoat over my head and hope no one will notice me. I push it back, and hope that I’ll be noticed just by the right person in some incredible love-at-first-sight-on-a-city-park-bridge scene. (Neither objective is successful.) I sing to myself, when no one is near. I write bad poetry. But mostly, I watch crows.

They come in twos and threes in the summer, loud and unafraid. They perch in the fir top, peering at me and cawing. They are saying something important, but I’m never quite sure what. In the winter they swirl in dark flocks, rising in their murders with a tremendous racket. Winter mornings they head north from their rookery in the cottonwoods by the lake. Winter evenings they gather like dusk to fly home, thickening the sky, and I know it’s time I headed home as well.

I watch crows because they are easy to watch, being loud, large, and common. And by watching crows, I see hawks. There’s an old rivalry between the species, and crows heckle hawks incessantly, giving their hiding places away. And so it goes. By close attention to the mundane life of my neighborhood, I see the miraculous hidden within it. The more I look, the more I see. Soon, I see hawks from my living-room window as well, spiraling above the trees like it’s no big deal. Wildness, suddenly everywhere.
On Rage and Writing

Robert Michael Pyle joins art and science

Monica Wright

Sitting outside on an uncharacteristically warm and sunny spring day on the University of Montana campus in Missoula, Kittredge Visiting Environmental Writer Robert Michael Pyle smiles at familiar students, marvels at the temperature, and calmly explains, “I have great rage.”

It’s hard to imagine Pyle, founder of the Xerces Society, winner of the John Burroughs medal for Nature Writing, and professor of the Environmental Studies department’s course “Writing as if the World Matters,” in anything close to a rage. But for Pyle, it’s not “if” the world matters. It does. And therein lies the rage.

“It’s the extinction of experience,” Pyle explains. “When we deplete neighborhoods of diversity and we make things more homogenous we risk being environmentally alienated. We become apathetic, we don’t act.”

Pyle is counteracting this extinction by “attending to the more than human,” and by uniting the head and the heart, and art with science, in his class of 16 graduate students. Assignments in the class are purposefully vague – Pyle instructs that any topic is open, and the students are given the latitude to use whatever writing form they want to marry the artistic with the scientific, within the bounds of specific cues.

The concept of joining art and science is one Pyle has long believed in, and which he feels is best explained through a Vladimir Nabokov quote: “Does there not exist a high ridge where the mountainside of ‘scientific’ knowledge joins the opposite slope of ‘artistic’ imagination?”

Those familiar with Pyle’s bibliography will recognize part of the quote in the title of his book Walking the High Ridge: Life As Field Trip, which covers his experiences trying to occupy the space Nabokov describes – a balance that is hard to achieve but essential for a good writer. “Access to both the analytical mind and the artistic heart creates writing that matters and makes a difference,” says Pyle.

Luckily, Pyle believes specific tools exist to make students into the kind of writers that breathe such rarefied air, and they are typically instincts and abilities that simply need to be honed. One such tool is the capacity to pay attention and be aware of the environment around us. “We should all try to be the best naturalists we can by learning about the plants and animals we live among as if they were our neighbors,” he says. “Today we are deeply environmentally illiterate. There was a time when you had to be a good naturalist or you died. We’ve traded our mammalian vigilance for comfort and security, and we can’t get that back. But we don’t have to be so ignorant.”

“When we deplete neighborhoods of diversity and we make things more homogenous we risk being environmentally alienated. We become apathetic, we don’t act.”
Another skill Pyle emphasizes in his class is employing personal experiences in stories and essays. He explains to students that environmental writing is at its best when the writing carries the smell, taste and feel of actual experience - and when that happens, writing has the ability to both influence people and change minds. “Why go through life with only one arrow in our quiver? When you touch the complex heart of readers and appeal to them intellectually, it’s effective writing,” says Pyle. “If you can’t delight yourself, you won’t delight them.”

Pyle also adds that the right amount of the aforementioned rage, when channeled into writing, can affect the reader as well. “I have a great sense of moral and ethical outrage, and writing about how betrayed you feel or how pissed off you are can be a steam valve as well as a rallying cry.” Pyle cites a personal 20-year battle to protect a small stand of old growth forest near his home in southwest Washington state as being profoundly influenced by environmental writing. When the old growth forest was saved he said he was “extremely gratified” to see that the pen was mightier than the saw.

But even with all the right tools, Pyle admits that life as an environmental writer has a list of challenges – beginning with the unlikelihood of making a living in the profession. “I doubt any of the students in my class will live entirely off environmental writing. Realistically they will be activists or non-profit employees who organize their lives in such a way as to keep writing,” says Pyle. “Annie Dillard once said you have to take a broadax to your life and chop out the inessentials, the things that are less important than writing. It’s a blunt metaphor, but it’s true.”

Pyle himself finds that mixing his writing with projects like teaching and activism allows him to have a life that is fully realized in several areas. This summer, the first in 15 years without an outstanding book to be completed for a publisher, Pyle plans to add to that list by finishing his first novel, which he began more than 20 years ago. *Magdalena Mountain* intertwines the stories of a rare Rocky Mountain butterfly and several characters who encounter it.

Once again, Pyle shows how everything comes back to the high ridge of combining both art and science: “I hope the book will attract people who like fiction but might not read nature writing, and people who like nature writing but might not read fiction. It’s all about finding that place on the ridge.”
Horseback at Dawn: Monument Valley

Robert Michael Pyle

The night before, we watched a western in the motel room: Indians chased the stage in black-and-white, as bullets flew and the same stone spires rolled past again and again. “Tomorrow we’ve gotta ride,” said Gary. Ofelia and I swapped rueful looks.

There they were, those pillars, at five A.M., but this time in color, standing still. Harold the albino trail boss met us at the stable. Ron and Alex took half an hour to lasso and saddle the little Navajo ponies, tough and matty. Then we rode into the red silence.

“Now you guys got to take your imagination out of your back pocket,” said Harold. And “Now let’s gallop!” Bones and balls whammed that saddle on horsehide, hoof, and rock. It was all my imagination could do to keep me in the saddle when I yelled “Whoa!” and my once-white pony whoa’ed on a dime. Ofelia nearly shot off too.

At the end of how far we could go, Harold said “Now you guys get to hear a prayer.” The wranglers sang a Navajo chant as Raven looped a slow ink scrawl against vermilion walls—a prayer, I guess, for the return trip. Heading back, I didn’t yell. Whoa’ing was the last thing on my mind.

As in the movie, the monuments flashed by and the Indians surrounded us. But no one was shooting, and only the ponies, barn-sour, were running away.
In the City of Rocks
Robert Michael Pyle

A valley like the crowded mouths
of oreodonts, before dentition settled down.
Between the wagons and the Humboldt
stood these jumbled jaws, where none
but a crazy scout could imagine passage
for wheels or families. They huddled in the shade,
scratching charcoal hints of hope on certain walls.
That maw was hard on hope, sucked it up
like marrow from a desert bone. Those teeth!
Gleaming like ice against the homeless night.
There are no lullabies in granite.

Now when you go to the City of Rocks,
history and scenery are served up for free.
Climbers skim the stones in spandex, campers snap
the aspens for photographs and kindling. 4X4s
and SUVs dandle the old passes and chuckle
at the challenge that used to be. But this is not
just another pretty park, like the Tetons
and their mirrored selves in Jenny Lake: more
teeth than teats, peak meeting peak in perfect
occlusion, in soft, pine-flossed water; where tourists slumber
to motorhomes' hum, resting easy in postcard peace. No,
sleep came hard in the City of Rocks. What
gnashing in the night there? What cringing
from the dawn's rude truth?

It might be so, that no one will know that terror again,
traversing row on row of rotting rocks toward God
knows what. It might be so, that everyone needs to know.
Journal

Enter Spring
Brooke Hewes

Watersheds fold over the earth, gathering and creasing like silk at the whim of topography. Prodded by the hand of geology. Solid, then liquid, water runs, chases and dribbles from mountain tops, down ravines and into basins where our cities and towns settle. We live according to water. I know water best here, beside my house near Rattlesnake Creek, where I watch spring enter.

February

Submerged, the thermometer settles on nine degrees Fahrenheit. It is so clear and shallow. Quenching. It is still winter, but the light suggests spring, as does the warm air that chases the current downstream towards town. Winter remains in the water, though. Cold. Still, I want to dunk. I wouldn’t dare—just as I wouldn’t dare scream in a silent, library. I cannot conceive of that cold, sitting here, at a dry distance. My cheeks are red and cool to touch but warmed by the blood beneath them, pumping from my walk. Soon the sun will warm my skin as well.

This time of year is deceptive, say the confused aspens reaching upwards with green-tipped branches. Blue skies are usually saved for the three months of summer that settle into the valley. We are a long way off. Tilting my chin up, I close my eyes. My lips relax upwards, naturally. Warmth. What a gift in the midst of winter’s short, dark days. The sun touches more than just my face.

Air and water handle heat differently—water never feels as warm at noon as the air that settles beneath my south-facing windowsill. Heat capacity: it takes a heck of a temperature spike to warm water, and a heck of a drop to cool it. It likes to hover. Air likes the drama of fluctuation, dancing between hot and cold leisurely. Playfully. I don’t blame it—variety is the spice it seeks and that spice bodes well with a four-seasoner like myself.

If I were to dunk, I am sure my breathless scream would carry, pulling my two cats from their warm, sunny-carpet slumber a quarter mile up the road. Humans are not made for such extremes, and freezing water is among the greediest extreme I know. It snatches the breath from my chest, relinquishing it only after my lungs are on the verge of collapse—as my mind swings into panic. Panic followed by a confused, ironic calm. Thankfully I have always recovered my senses. Cold has always given them back. Still, I am all talk—I wouldn’t really dunk. It’s just the heat—swimming inside my down jacket and sneaking under my skin—talking.
March

Where I sit the creek is braided—separated by sandbars, down logs and irregular boulders. This segmentation is confined by the banks, which stand tall despite the power that rushes between them, urging erosion over stability. The Rattlesnake does not begin with such confinements though. Numerous small creeks and alpine lakes spill their contents towards the valley that shares the creek's name. Much is shared along the way. The Rattlesnake lends much of itself to evaporation, transpiration, and groundwater. It borrows, too, from snow and springs. Intermingling, inter-changing. Hard to imagine how skinny it was when it began, within the wilderness 20 miles to the north.

Rattlesnake Creek scuttles over two dams in its run from wilderness to recreation area. Abruptly, it butts its head into suburbia where a third dam waits, just west of a horse farm, just east of the North Hills. With dirt and snow, it now shuttles oil and dog poop and gravel. The caravan creeps between Mount Jumbo and the peaceful ridge, joining the Clark Fork, where it permeates the largest river in western Montana.

In my backyard there is a wooden bench. It sits alone beneath a large maple. If I stand on the bench and close my eyes, I can just hear the creek. I can't see the water 'til I walk a ways, to another bench on the river right beneath a broad cottonwood. Today that tree is naked, preserving its energy for its own, internal survival. Most trees are naked today. It's still winter in Montana, and the sound of the creek fills the small park next to my home easily.

April

It is 7:30pm, and light still guides my steps. Spring is coming. My first greeting is the sweet, wet smell of cottonwood buds—the smell of a youth spent by the water; it was a smell I didn't know the name of until I moved to Montana and found it in my backyard. The water has risen far above the wide, shallow winter run to the Clark Fork. Oxygen and sediment bubble, replacing the steadiness of winter. Snow and dirt fold into the creek as it tugs at its bank.

May

On either side of the creek thrives an oasis—a wet haven in a parched valley. Dank riparian vegetation crowds the shores, obscuring the raging creek until I am just a few yards away. Leaves are now broad. Lilacs line the park's entrance, filling pockets between the ground and the canopy with a sweet, violet fragrance. They are safe here, sharing the moisture most lawns are missing, where many lilacs lie, lazily. They are thirsty there, too far from the creek for their own growth.

It isn't until August that I can safely submerge and swim. Honestly swim that is. I dunk in July, maybe June. But I can't swim 'til August. Even then, I will lose my breath for a moment and my skin goes red. That's how we'd know water if we really lived by it, according to it. I like the feeling—weightless, suspension.
Snapsots from the wild

Photos this page:
Ian Shive
Left: Claire Vitucci  
Top: Anna Swanson  
Bottom Photos: Ian Shive
Our Father, which art in

Birds and Fish

Jordan Fisher Smith

If you think about it, it’s easy to see how God and His miracles suffer as badly as men, women, and dogs do from being kept indoors too much and how badly God’s creatures have fared during His long captivity in churches.

Several winters ago now a glowing image appeared on the inside wall of St. Dominic’s Catholic church in the little town of Colfax, on the top-lands west of the North Fork canyon of the American River, where I was working as a park ranger. If you squinted a bit the luminous apparition bore some resemblance to the Virgin Mary, and within a few days hundreds of the curious and faithful were lined up around the block in the cold waiting to see it. Before long, remote broadcast trucks from television stations showed up on the streets around the church, and once the Colfax Marian visitation made the evening news, the line stretched out for blocks, and people brought sleeping bags and lawn chairs and camped on the sidewalk for a chance to witness it.

After a couple of weeks, a professor of physics from California State University Sacramento appeared in Colfax to investigate the phenomenon at St. Dominic’s. After inspecting the premises and interviewing the priest, the physicist announced his findings to the assembled press. It seems that a light fixture had been moved during recent repairs in the church, he said, and it was now arranged in such a way that it caught the morning sun shining through the stained glass windows and refracted the colored light onto a nearby wall. There had been an unseasonable spell of clear weather at the time, and the professor predicted that on the next cloudy day the Virgin would fail to appear. Sure enough, a couple of days later a big storm blew up into the mountains and made a lot of people feel foolish.

For my part, I admire those people for expecting miracles. But in my opinion a great wrong has been perpetrated on those who are convinced that God or the Blessed Virgin is more likely to show up at a church than somewhere else. I never got around to seeing the pretty light on the wall in Colfax, because at the time I was busy watching other events unfolding a few miles to the northwest. No one lined up around the block to see these things, so they were denied the legitimacy a crowd and a few television cameras can lend to any scene, conveying the impression that something important must be going on because if it wasn’t, the television cameras and crowd wouldn’t be there.

Paddling my canoe on the lower Yuba River, I saw winter run salmon returning to spawn. They ripped the surface of the water all around the boat with their shiny backs, surging up over the cobble bottom in the shallows where the water was barely deep enough to cover them, then stopping with their
gills sucking and heaving, then bursting forward again.

I eased the canoe into an eddy and wondered how Pacific salmon, who hatch from eggs in some obscure stream and swim down to roam their adult lives over thousands of miles of ocean, navigate back to their home stream years later to lay their eggs and die. It is supposed that they can distinguish the flavor of their natal waters from all other tributaries they encounter as they swim upstream. But at the mouth of San Francisco Bay where these fish leave the ocean, the smell of their home tributary is watered down and mixed with hundreds of other streams, effluent from municipal sewage treatment, surface drainage from our towns and streets, and the bottom paint of ships in the Bay and in the Sacramento River. How salmon manage this feat is a miracle that will never tarnish in the face of an expert’s explanation. A belief in the miraculous could reside in this simple fact of salmonid life for another thousand years without danger of ejection by a professor’s explanation, providing that the salmon themselves survive. But healthy salmon runs are getting harder to find.

It wasn’t long after seeing the salmon that I saw a flock of about two thousand snow geese flying south for the winter. They covered the western sky in a huge white sheet, shimmering with individual wingbeats and “V” formations forming, breaking up and reforming. Snow geese spend the summer breeding on the Arctic tundra of Alaska among creatures such as musk oxen, caribou and grizzly bears. They had flown about 2,400 miles south when I saw them. How their bodies endure a flight this long with only a few stops to peck at the post-harvest leavings in frozen fields is beyond my comprehension, yet similar feats are repeated annually by a multitude of other species, most of them smaller and frailer than snow geese. It doesn’t seem possible that there is that much energy in a bird. This is God, no doubt, in the form of bird. If you were God, wouldn’t you show up in some common aerial form so you could keep an eye on things from above? Why not a thousand snow goose eyes for a thousand generations, looking down lovingly from the cold heights along the Pacific Flyway at our houses, roads, mountains, fields, and rivers.

There is great danger in not seeing God’s hand and eyes in these things. Human destructiveness is blind, and the blindness is chewing through God’s creation at a prodigious rate, finding a better use for
almost everything than the use originally assigned to it. And for this reason the list of things that no longer share this earthly paradise with us grows daily.

My particular brand of heresy will be to suggest here in print that we start attending such events as fish runs and bird migrations as if we were attending church; no doubt some of us have already been doing so for years. Migrations in particular are the sort of miracles that tie the world’s places together in your mind, making it hard to separate some of them out for condemnation to usefulness. The lines between religious and secular affairs are now being blurred all over the world, whether we like it or not. Given this extension of spiritual authority into the houses of government and other formerly secular realms, might religion be presumed also to have something to say about how we conduct ourselves outdoors? Maybe it no longer serves us to reduce land and waters to purely materialist regions. The regard for the holiness of wild things that is discernable in the cave paintings of Pleistocene people has been losing ground for three millennia, a development that has paralleled the disappearances of wild things themselves. This might be a good time in history to reverse that trend. Surely people who are in favor of extending religion into secular life will be pleased at the prospect of conducting their daily affairs in a sacramental place. There will of course be some complications: If God is allowed to escape from church and His Focus on the Family into the great outdoors, the line between expediency and sacrilege will have to be walked more carefully. This might slow things down for a while. Then again, slowing things down may prove an entirely practical thing to do.

In the mean time, on any night when the wind blows hard across the ridges above the American River, you can hear the world’s greatest organist perform a requiem for all the kinds of things that no longer walk, crawl, swim, or grow on earth using the branches of pine, cedar and fir and the granite notches and pinnacles of the Sierra Nevada as a great instrument. However you conceive God to be and no matter what country you come from or in what language your name for God is spoken, you can go out in the morning and see holy writing in the tracks of little birds in the dust, in the tracks of deer and coyotes in the mud and snow. All that is good is here right now. God is in heaven and so, dear readers, are we.

"Human destructiveness is blind, and the blindness is chewing through God’s creation at a prodigious rate, finding a better use for almost everything than the use originally assigned to it."
Moonlight Redux: or, Gone for Good
Robert Michael Pyle

Coming down from Sentinel, walking the few blocks home past the notice on the telephone pole to watch out for the neighborhood black bear, I notice a bright light on the mountain: some beacon I hadn’t seen before? No! It is the moon! All full, just cresting the ridge. I have missed the moment of rising.

And then I realize: I could walk back up the street, and the moon would drop again beneath the climbing mountain’s flank—I can get the moonrise back, after all! Strange, at this late date, that this is news to me. So I backtrack, and watch the moon rise thrice: the slow cool fire spreading along the ridge, the silver rim appearing like a hubcap in halogen, every blade of bunchgrass, each sprig of chokecherry etched against the Mare tranquillitatis.

One month later I come outside to find the next moon already up. But this time I know exactly what to do. I have to walk fast, but I catch it—just before it tops the summit of Sentinel. Imagine! A chance to reclaim what’s been lost, simply by adjusting your position viz a viz the mountain, the moon.

But in between these moons, fetched up on the Maryland shore, I wake ungodly early to watch the sun rise over the Atlantic. I hit the January beach in time, turn my back on the high-rise wall, and face the sea, the scoters. Then two women catch me in conversation, until I turn, and—damn!—there it is, that mango fire, already limning the eastern curve.

Oh, I see most of the rise, that cerise tomato plopping up atop the wave, then yellow, then white, above the white shell sparkle of the beach. But I missed the moment of ignition, that second when the ocean gives up the secret it doesn’t know it knows: that neither the ocean, nor the night, go on forever.

So if you find yourself in mountainous terrain you may catch the moon, and make it rise again. But the sunrise over sea is unforgiving: once lost, it’s gone forever. Like most things, most of the time.
Cause and Effect

Robin Patten

Photos by Ian Shive
There is no water in the depths of Grand Gulch, where I walk alone through the southern canyons of Utah. In places, I can see where mud has cracked and curled as it dried, coming to match the curves of the pottery shards that lie hidden in the high alcoves. Nothing but broken brown puzzle pieces are left to mark where pools once rippled in the sand, back when the rain fell and water slid down the red cliffs to gather in this deep wash that runs like an inverted backbone through the desert canyon. Seeps and drips that mingle with moss under shadowed overhangs promise that moisture still exists. But not here. Not down where the mud lies cracked and broken.

Nestled in the underside of the mud shards, where shadow and dew sustain life, there are small toads. The kind of toads that require a pond to persist, that need water to create the next generation. They are the size of fat quarters, currency of rain clouds yet to come and streams running in the past. The small toads sit motionless until my feet crunch the sand on the edge of their dried mud puzzle home. The sound sends them into frantic hopping—up, down, then back to their shard shade, having expended much energy to unintentionally announce their existence and remain in the same place.

Watching the amphibians here in the desert, I trust the rains will come again, as they must, for the toads sit waiting in the wash. Just as spring will come as the red-tailed hawk returns, pulling it along on its feathers, and winter will settle in when the bear goes to sleep, lulling fall into slumber as well.

It is perhaps human nature to want to weave mystery into the story that is before us, to experience something more than the immediate, tangible world. Confronted with a natural world that is both beautiful and complex, I find myself acknowledging something more than facts. I am in the company of many myth makers and poets in this acknowledgement. It is why the words spoken by a friend of mine, a professional story teller and a naturalist as well, linger in my memory: "If your world view involves serious magic, it is easy to exchange cause and effect. What's not to say that Bear went to sleep and thus brought on winter?"

What's not to say that Toad needed water and brought on the rain?

But there must be a balance in nature, and in our tangible modern world, a balance in world views is probably just as important.

Early in my graduate student years I endured the ritual of comprehensive exams. I stood in front of a room of scientists and was questioned, examined, and grilled until I hit the extent of my factual knowledge. The questions wrapped around every aspect of ecology that a budding ecologist should know, from predator-prey interactions to nutrient cycles. My answers came from the textbooks and the research that had been a large part of my daily activities for the previous few years, studies that illuminated a great deal about the natural world that surrounded me on my frequent wilderness ventures. The organisms and interactions I read about in books and measured in the field were displayed before me in the pine bark beetle chewing the lodgepole and the leaf decaying in the stream. Science is a potent tool for the wandering naturalist. I reveled in my growing knowledge base.

Yet, standing in front of five senior scientists, I unthinkingly responded from a different realm of study when asked the question, "Do you believe there is order in nature?" My reply came quickly. "Not as much as we would like to think." I went on to explain in stumbling words that I believe scientists put nature into boxes and connect those boxes with arrows and equations because humans need to think like that. Although there is a truth to our equations and our models, there is another element beyond the box. "Hmmm..." my committee responded and left the exchange hanging in the heavy air.

Later, reviewing my examination results, I was told that single response almost led to my failure. The committee felt strongly that a person could not
be a scientist unless they firmly believed in the order of nature. Atoms and planets and cycles that are predictable and orderly. I was stunned.

Of course my advisor was right, and in retrospect I would withdraw that answer and give another. I believe in science and I believe there is order in nature. I have measured and quantified and made correlations about the land, even creating a model to predict vegetation patterns based on physical factors of the environment that let me ‘play God’ and see what happened when I tweaked the geology or sent in a drought. I never questioned the value of these studies, and have never questioned the need for scientific understanding of our natural world. I do believe there is order in the natural way of things.

But I believe there is something more. That ‘something’ is here on this winter day that finds me skiing in the backcountry of Yellowstone. Looking up, the sky is clear and empty, no ravens today and the red-tailed hawks have left for many months, having learned long ago that the south is warmer in winter, the food more plentiful and the flight not so long for a large raptor that is friend to the wind. So the hawks are gone, leaving behind smaller kin that flit and fly in the forest, eating the seeds and bugs and hidden insects that can’t pick up and forsake the winter snows that blanket this valley. Perhaps the hawks are now down over the canyon where the toads live, having tucked the warmth of the sun neatly into their banded feathers and taken it with them.

The ouzel is here though, in the dark stream that flows through this white valley, his darkness matching the water itself with a multitude of feather oils to glisten like the waves that rise and fall, dip and bob. Just as the ouzel does. Dip, bob, dip, plunge, and the ouzel disappears under the dark water to find his meal in the banquet that lies in the rocks.

Standing on this bridge watching the ouzel, all is quiet except for the burble of water and rustle of ice crystals mixing in the flow. The white valley is full of life in the tracks left by moose and ermine, coyote and mouse. The stillness embraces the distant tapping of the downy woodpecker as it flicks the bark off a dead lodgepole pine to find a meal. Standing on this bridge there is no conflict—death yes, hardship yes, but there is a raw sense of rightness in the blood spot in the snow surrounded by the fanning marks of the owl’s wing, in the remains of the old cow elk that succumbed to winter and now runs in the blood of the wolves that consumed her. There is a sense of unbounded order, both predictable in its patterns and otherworldly in its spirit.

Both an order and a spirit, here in this stillness. Standing in that white valley I feel part of something that I cannot find in city streets. It is a world beyond our wars and hunger, media messages and fumes. Would our world change at all if each person had the chance to see toads leap from under the mud shards in a silent canyon, or to watch a lone ouzel ripple through a dark running stream that is held from freezing only by the very motion that carries it forward? Perhaps not, yet perhaps a bit more mystical hope would carry over to the streets where we live.
The modern western world has reached a point where myth and magic are no longer needed to explain the ecology of natural areas. After all, there are field guides describing the life cycles of desert toads and bird books listing the qualities of the water-diving ouzel. Since the mid-1800s when Darwin’s theory started a scientific revolution and Ernst Haeckel coined the term ecology, science has made considerable progress in better understanding the world around us, and also how we as humans affect it. This critical field of endeavor has allowed us to protect and maintain many natural places and properties, and has become increasingly important and broader in scope as humans chip away at the limited natural resources that must sustain us and all living organisms on this planet.

But what is needed for explanation and what is wanted are not necessarily the same. Recently a phrase in the book *The Highlanders: A History of the Gaels* by John MacLeod caught my eye. It stated that in the years following Darwin “… the Christian faith was increasingly stripped of its supernatural elements; as man is incurably superstitious, men and women were eager to find mystery and wonder in other fields.” These people turned to myth and natural lore, looking beyond even their religion to hold on to the intangible. As science came to explain the nuts and bolts of the world around us, the human spirit craved something larger. The magic of nature is wrapped up in the many myths created by cultures old and new throughout the world. The telling of them is not lessened by ‘facts’ that say the events are not possible in our daily lives.

I have found that balancing different world views, different ways of perceiving the natural world, results in a deeper connection and consequently a better understanding of that world. Perhaps this balancing act works as myths do, providing a storyline link between the tangible and the intangible. There is poetry in the toads that hop in the dry wash in Grand Gulch and the dark ouzel that flies through the rocks in the bottom of a half-frozen stream. There is also magic. When I walk that canyon and stand on that bridge, there is an intangible spirit in the air, in the stillness, in the order of things. This cannot be put in a box.

What is the worth of wild places? Perhaps it goes beyond what we can quantify. The better we understand wild places and our impact on them, the better chance we have of maintaining them, so hopefully science will move forward wisely. But I hope to never forget what can be found by standing on a bridge in a white valley watching the ouzel, or the magic of toads that bring rain to the dry desert.

The air is bright and cold, filled with crystals shed from the trees, icy diamonds created sometime during the clear, starry night. Snow patches linger where the sun does not directly shine, yet the ground is emerging from under its winter blanket. Against the blue sky the hawk circles, screaming to announce his return. He settles in the top of an old snag and preens his feathers. On the ground below, nestled in last summer’s brown grass, a buttercup bursts from bud to bloom. Spring has arrived, coming with Hawk. In the beauty of the morning it is not hard to believe that Hawk has released the warmth of the season from where he tucked it neatly into his feathers and brought it back from the south.

1 Thanks to Jim Garry for this inspiration
Love Letter to a Sewage Lagoon
Andrea M. Jones

Folded mountains are the topography of home. To my eyes, the horizon is properly serrated by peaks and the dominant background color is the black-green hue of conifer trees. The scents of pine and spruce, sharp as their needles, are comforting, as is the sigh of wind through their branches. Shadowed creekbeds, wildflowers crouched in the understory, the chatter of birds hidden in criss-crossing branches are details so familiar to me that I sometimes have to remind myself to notice them.

The family vacations of my childhood did not revolve around museums or cities or Disney glitz, but were spent camping. I slept under tarps in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, near lakes or rivers where my Dad led the family on his time off. In the mid-70s, when my parents were able to afford a boat, we began to also camp on the rocky shores of Navajo Lake, a nearby reservoir. We ate catfish and crappie rather than trout; the ground was sun-blasted and rocky rather than shaded and padded with duff; and the sky, when I stretched out in my sleeping bag, was a broad expanse of stars unfringed by pine boughs. Even so, the landscape was pretty familiar, since Navajo Lake was barely an hour’s drive south of where we lived.

Lake Powell was another matter entirely. Powell was a half-day’s drive and another world away. I remember jouncing over the dirt roads that accessed Hall’s Crossing on those first trips into Utah, the bow of the boat jiggling in the dust out the rear window of the camper shell. My brothers and I rode in the back of the pickup, reclining on sleeping bags and camping mattresses amid the rattle of chuck boxes, ice chests, cases of beer, fishing gear, and cans of pop. Through the side windows, the view shifted from forested mountainsides to sandy flats flecked with piñon and cut by dry washes, then finally to a landscape dominated by sandstone. A sea of rock spread around us, rising and falling in rounded waves. Cliffs rose up like islands, or the sides of huge ships.

We watched hoodoos, mushrooms, domes, cones, cracks, buttes, and notches roll past the windows, all composed of bare sandstone, pink and tan. The black streaks of desert varnish staining sheer rock faces were a visual echo of the streamers of virga trailing from distant thunderheads. Amphitheaters arched across rock faces like eyebrows. Green tufts of cottonwood gleamed incongruously in canyon bottoms. Small caves yawned like mouths.

We arrived at the boat ramp at Hall’s Crossing, where a flat expanse of bluegreen lake stretched before us—the age-old miracle of water in the desert writ large. When the boat sliced beyond the broad bay on which the marina was situated, we entered a canyon where walls of solid rock rose straight up from the water’s surface. There were no trees, no distant vistas, nothing but planes of liquid and stone intersecting at sharp angles. As we rounded each curve in the watercourse, the
walls closed behind us and a new segment of the canyon opened: the long, narrow lake revealed itself like a scroll. Aside from the twin white lines of distant vapor trails and the occasional passing boat, it seemed that the vessel I was riding in was the only manufactured thing in a world otherwise composed simply of water, sky, and rock.

In the impressionable brain of my pre-adolescent years, the contours of this landscape pressed in deep. In the mountains, with their fur of evergreens, I had always felt soothed and at home. But the desert’s undisguised geography was a new kind of terrain, a place where the land was not hidden by a pelt of grass and trees. In its strangeness, the desert called attention to fundamental details about my surroundings—the smell of water, the blare of sun against my skin. The whispers and chatters of foliage were absent.

Hiking across slickrock, I left no tracks. In the canyons or from the bottom of a split of stone, the sky was a ribbon instead of a dome.

I don’t think there’s a set formula for falling in love, but I suspect that surprise, wonder, the invitation to thoughtfulness, and meeting the other on its own terms are all important. I inherited much of my devotion to the mountains from my father, but Lake Powell provided the opportunity to discover the character of one small part of the world for myself. On the shores of that paradoxical desert lake, I learned what it meant to fall in love with a place.

Love, of course, is seldom simple, and it wasn’t long before complications set in. Lake Powell had the power and presence of wildness—beauty, mercurial weather, indifference to the well-being of the human individual—but a representative of untrammeled nature it was not. Although it often seemed as if boats were the only sign of human technology, I knew that the lake itself was a reservoir, a gigantic human artifact imposed on the red rock land.

My oldest brother, a fan of Edward Abbey and an aspiring monkey-wrencher himself, talked about Glen Canyon, a narrow, deep, and wondrous river gorge now drowned under the waters of Lake Powell. I walked into enough side canyons, sipped from enough potholes, admired enough hanging gardens, stared up the sheer face of enough cliffs, rested in enough puddles of cottonwood shade, and poked my head into enough Indian ruins to have an inkling of what was lost when the reservoir filled. Later I would learn that the Colorado River no longer flows into the ocean, the Glen Canyon Dam fouling the dynamics of an entire river system.

Reading Abbey’s books myself, I discovered that he put words to some of my feelings for the desert. These writings resonated deeply for me, even though my sole experience of the slickrock desert transpired, for years, along the shoreline of a reservoir that Abbey despised. He called Lake Powell, the waters of which I saw as an oasis, a “sewage lagoon.”

A few years ago, I was standing in the living room at a neighbor’s house and saw a perfectly round sphere of ruddy sandstone displayed on a ledge. I picked it up and rolled it in my hand. My recognition was stirred in the heft and grittiness of the orb. I said to my neighbor, a dedicated environmentalist, that my family used to find them at Lake Powell.

“We hate Lake Powell,” replied my neighbor. I set the stone ball back down, and became shy about professing an affection for Lake Powell beyond the circle of people who shared my history there. As I’ve become more tuned in to issues of conservation and the environment, the divergence between the tenderness of my memories and the environmental dimensions of Lake Powell has become wider, and my affections more complicated still. To many people, the reservoir is a potent symbol of overweening human ambition, of unsustainable appetites for electricity and water, of a disregard for the subtleties of natural systems. I acknowledge the arrogance, the folly, and the ignorance. And I recognize the weight of these legacies across the western lands that I know and love. When I read about the movement to remove the dam, part of me sympathizes, but part of me mourns. I am grieved by the possibility of losing the place that holds some of the most clearly-defined memories of my childhood.

A bridge is usually a plane of access across water, but for me the waters that drowned Glen Canyon were themselves a bridge, a gangway toward the desert’s interior. I might have never ventured into that stark and thirsty country—at least not while I was young enough for it to carve such a deep and visceral reaction—if it weren’t for the reservoir’s waters, floating our pale blue boat
across the lost fissure of Glen Canyon.
When I seek out slickrock nowadays, I go to places that are more true to their arid character.
Once I park the car I don’t climb into a boat but strike out on foot, into the red rock country that has become the place I crave when I wish to be reminded in blunt, tangible terms that I am defined by what lies beyond my skin, when I feel the need to remem-ber what is elemental in myself. The nakedness of the desert invites feelings of intimacy, yet the harshness and strangeness of the land make me feel vulnerable. Yes, it is still very much like love.

Someone like my neighbor would likely assert that moving through a landscape less modified than the shoreline of a reservoir, under my own power, constitutes a more mature love of place than my childhood crush on the engineered shores of Lake Powell. I would agree that my relationship to the desert has grown up, but I also recognize that any elevation of my sensibilities toward that environment—or any other aspect of the natural world—has been built on experiences with developed and altered landscapes. Establishing a relationship with a place—extending my heart toward an entity that did not return my devotion with gifts or hugs or words—was more vital to the development of an environmental ethic than the degree of natural purity exhibited by the object of my affection.

I am haunted by thoughts of what was lost beneath the waters of Lake Powell, but I have not learned to hate that place. I’ve decided that I cannot afford to dismiss this opportunity to feel tenderness, in spite of the murk from which it springs.

"Lake Powell had the power and presence of wildness—beauty, mercurial weather, indifference to the well-being of the human individual—but a representative of untrammeled nature it was not."
and gone now
Tom McCarthy

in the bones of her hand
was the structure of a bird
a very old bird
    and gone now

across the face of land
was the movement of the herd
a very large herd
    and gone now
It was a thin and bureaucratic soul who named “the common cold.” It is a meager name, lacking all the extravagance the illness allows for: multicolored mucus, the barbaric halloo of a cough, the feeling of having inhaled an attic full of fiberglass insulation. I am prone to colds such as these, especially in January when the weather in north Georgia is unpredictable. I have learned to blame the plunging and spiking temperatures, the freezing rain, the balmy, bathing suit sun for these afflictions. It serves me every bit as well as my grandmother’s conviction that I get colds because I don’t own a blow dryer.

I was sick in January of this year, marooned at my parent’s house, my voice entirely lost, my sinuses burdened with viscid phlegm. It was 72 degrees, sunny, and I lay under a pile of quilts on the back porch, drowsily watching Daddy’s chickens scratch for insects under the beeches. Through half-closed eyes I watched an anole, no longer than my index finger, hop from wrung to wrung of the porch railing. It is rare to see an anole in winter. They are delicate animals with ill-fitting skin that changes color like a chameleon’s, though they are not near relatives. This was a green anole, but its skin was the color of a paper bag, and I watched its flanks puff and collapse for a few moments before I drifted off to the rattle of my own breath.

Soon, awakened by the swift, cacophonous lovemaking of rooster and hen, I creaked to my feet, bellowed into a damp handkerchief and shuffled away to the bathroom. Returning to my nest, I discovered that my knitting basket had been occupied. The anole, propped on its hands, was lying with its narrow chin in the air, atop a skein of white kid mohair. I sneezed wetly, explosively, and the animal turned its neck and fixed me with a keen reptilian eye the size of a carrot seed. I was in no condition to defend my territory, so I let the matter go. Groaning softly, I eased back into the pillows, turned to the wall, and slept.

Presently, I opened my eyes. What had pulled me awake? I stared at the yellow siding of the house for a moment, listening to the chicken chatter and the clack of dry beech leaves still clinging to limbs. I lowered my gaze, and at the corner of my pillow I discovered a tiny wedge-shaped head set with golden eyes watching me, blinking with beaded lids. I examined the delicate brickwork lips, the pinhole ear, the fishhook ribs, while the lizard took in my weeping, swollen face with its pale alligator mouth. For a moment, we observed a companionable silence, the anole and I. Soon though, the tickle in my throat began, and I let loose the hollow, bovine cough of the truly miserable. The anole darted along the side of the house and shimmied up the aluminum drain pipe, where it watched me until I fell asleep again.
Thanks for reading

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2004

---Fall 2004: New fiction by David James Duncan; Robin Patten discusses living with wolves on the border of Yellowstone National Park.

---Spring 2004: Annick Smith discusses wild places and the wild life in her own backyard; Interviews with Bill McKibben and Jack Turner.

2003

---Spring 2003: Kathy Marieb looks for grizzlies in the North Cascades; Katharine Hyyzy on restoration, human and otherwise.

---Fall 2003: John Elder reflects on poetry and the meaning and practice of “conservation”; Susan Tomlinson finds beauty of mortality in an ephemeral moment; Danielle Lattuga listens to elephants of Africa and hears a message for humanity.

2002

---Spring 2002: David James Duncan meditates on compassion and respect in our society, post-9/11; Clara Sophia Weygandt relates how an encounter with a peregrine falcon changed her life.

---Fall 2002: Robert Michael Pyle on language in a time of peril; Teresa Ponikvar searches for hope despite the odds.

2001

---Winter/Spring 2001: Peter Stark discovers a hidden monastery while trekking in the mountains of Tibet; Ari Le Vaux recounts a wild ride from one chakra to another while bumping and grinding at Snowbowl; James Lainsbury shares his story of horse logging and biking in Maine.

---Fall 2001: Scott Russell Sanders introduces Teller essays; James McLaughlin shares lessons learned over a lifetime spent killing things; Debra Marquart reflects on leaving—and returning—to North Dakota.

2000

---Spring/Summer 2000: Mary Anne Peine shares a journey of two histories: one of the environmental movement in the Northern Rockies and another of the Environmental Studies Program at the University of Montana.

---Winter/Spring 2000: Leean Drabenstott introduces a possible addition to our National Trail System; Dan Brister gives an inside look at his work with the Buffalo Field Campaign.

1999

---Spring 1999: Terry Ryan focuses on the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem to present an investigative look at the increasing tension between human land development and mating patterns of migratory and resident birds.

---Summer 1999: Ethan Hasenstein explains why no one should dump a bucket of non-native northern pike into a Montana river drainage.

---Fall/Winter 1999: William Kittredge introduces two of the essays featured at the Teller Writing Institute; Clara Weygandt discovers an intimate connection between the desert, people, and plants; Michael Kustudia examines environmental reform in the Dominican Republic.

---Deep Winter 1999: Malcom Brooks confronts what can go wrong in the field; Steven Rinella takes us into the murky world of mushroom hunting.

1998

---Spring 1998: Ron Scholl considers our need to define the unknown about wolves in Yellowstone, which are burdened with plenty of labels-threatened, endangered, experimental, even tourist commodity; Pete Murney introduces open letters sent to Senator Conrad Burns by Cheryl & Gordon Belcourst and Alan Mikkelsen.

---Summer/Fall 1998: Chris Arthur makes a provocative case for elected officials, the legislative process, and even that old stand-by democracy; Sarah Helm-Jonson considers the public debate over cows on public and private lands and gives the good news: ranching practices that work in concert with the land and water; Ian McCluskey suggests that the recognition wildlife mortality on roads is gaining may not be enough; Bethanie Walder, Hal Rowe, David Havlick and Phil Knight comment on the interim policy on roadless areas that has Westerners wondering about the impacts.

1997

---Spring 1997: Kent A. Curtis questions whether a smelter town can cover up its toxic past; Emily Cousins recounts the history and mining debate of the Sweet Grass Hills.

---Summer 1997: Lisa Kerscher reveals how community gardens help satisfy basic needs; Leann Drabenstott shares how northern rockies farmers brace for national organic standards; Rob Lubke tells of the controversy surrounding the future of farmers' markets.

---Fall/Winter 1997: Dan Crockett shares his father’s life and death with the Neosho River; Christine Paige reflects on time spent at a biological station in Manu NP.

1996

---Fall 1996: Henri Bensussen and Doug Johnson

1995

---Summer 1995: First Issue; Rick Craig and Colin Chisholm
“In God’s wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness.”
—John Muir