Camas

Volume 10
Number 1 Winter 2006

Winter 2006

Camas, Winter 2006

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Borderland  

The house my father built has fallen,  
melted into ground, battered by rains  
and wind. Adobe is only mud and grass, dried  
around framed windows and doors  
of planks, erected over a foundation of stream  
stones, dug with short shovels in preteen hands.

His Stetson, mashed down with calloused hands,  
stained with sweat and sand fallen  
from winds blown from Mexican rains  
driven out of the South Pacific, wetting dried  
brush, us four kids hidden in tents with net doors.  
The seams leaked, puddles slopped in streams  
of flash floods cutting meanders off dry streams.  
I, the oldest, shivered out of water, my hands  
caked in desert, split nails. I had not yet fallen  
to manhood, Arizona had not shifted rain  
over my summer. We waited for wind and sun to dry  
our bricks to stack. My mom, from a tent door
called us for dinner. We all slogged through the door of lost wars my father fought, one real, one a dead stream. We took plates of beans, and bread as thick as my hand. Scuffling at the edge of camp, two dogs looked fallen, waited for scraps or a shot rabbit, drank pooled rain, wet, wagging draggled coats, caught with dried burrs. Cochise fought in this land. The army dried his chances with fire. He stopped them at a rock doorway. The US waited—supplies don’t stream into box canyons. He tired of his people’s warring hands and went out from Southern Arizona, like the Fallen cast down. Did he miss the monsoon rains?

The long flowing storms of heat and wet. Rains rolling lightning, pushed out of the south, behind dry pressure. Father knelt by the drowned fire ring, like a door gunner caught in the Southeast Asian jet stream. He struck pointless matches. I cupped water in my hands, saw my reflection, clear and fresh fallen.

A stream ran from the mud doorway, widened, and cut along the foundation. Rain filled arroyos dried up like money or myth. I flexed my bloodless hands, already among the fallen.
Contributors

Any number of situations makes Jessica Babcock smile—having her hands in the dirt, making pies, canning, creating flower bouquets, growing vegetables. The rest of her time is spent getting a Master’s degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana. In her ideal future, Jessica will make a living doing all of these things. To put it plainly, she wants to be a farmer when she grows up.

Jill Beauchesne graduated from the MFA and MA programs in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Montana in 2006. Her poems have been published in *Octopus, Gargoyle, at Position, Backwards City Review, Fourteen Hills, and Pebble Lake Review*. She currently lives in Missoula, Montana.

Heather Cahoon is from the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana where she is an enrolled tribal member. She received her MFA in Poetry from the University of Montana in 2001 and an Interdisciplinary PhD in History, Anthropology and Native American Studies in 2005, also from the University of Montana. Her poems have appeared in regional and national publications, including *Big Sky Journal* and *Hanging Loose*. She currently lives in Missoula, Montana with her husband, Jesse.

Jacob Cowgill was born and raised in Montana. He is and continues to be shaped by the state’s geography and people. He currently resides in Missoula where he pursues a Master’s degree.

Jay Ericson began carrying a hand-me-down Nikon in his pack while working as a professional mountain guide in the Sierra Nevada range of California during the early 1990’s. A former University of Montana photojournalism instructor, he works to convey the beauty and mood of a location through images that capture the relationship people have with their environment. His work has been published in *Forbes, Men’s Journal, Newsweek, Powder, Skiing, Vermont Magazine*, and many others.

Greg Gordon received his M.S. in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana in 1992 and since then has been teaching university field studies programs in wildlife conservation and environmental policy. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in History at UM. His first book, *Gringos in the Mist: A Naturalist’s Journey Through Ecuador* examines the social and environmental implications of both tourism and oil exploration in the Amazon. His latest, *The Landscape of Desire: Nature and Identity in Utah’s Canyon Country*, combines natural and land use history with our psychological relationship to landscape.

Noah Jackson is a working photographer based in Missoula, MT. His work focuses primarily involves conservation stories that occur along the edges of communities and forests. Some bodies of work included Forest Users in the Philippines, Community Restoration, Organic Farmers, Haitian Refugees, and Watersheds. Writing often accompanies his photographs. All his Montana work is carbon neutral, proceeds from images help organizations with fundraising and on the ground work. To collaborate, discuss ideas, assignment work, his teaching, and image sales contact jackson.noah@gmail.com.

Ellen Kress is a native of Bozeman, Montana, and has always loved nature and the creative arts. She started drawing and painting as a young child, later trained as a flutist, and took up photography 11 years ago. She also went to Papua New Guinea with the Peace Corps, earned a Masters degree in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology from the University of Colorado, and does immunology research at Montana State University. Ellen loves travel, hiking, canoeing, and climbing. She is currently exploring ways to make more of her living from photography and less of it from lab work. She can be reached at kressphoto@hotmail.com.

Originally from Illinois, Mike Lommler’s mind is usually somewhere on the Colorado Plateau. A first-year Master’s student in EVST, Mike believes Ed Abbey, bitter cold knee-deep river crossings, and howling are good for the soul.

Jerry D. Mathes II has been published in numerous journals, won various writing prizes and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He is a recipient of a Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship, and was named the Outstanding Humanities Graduate at Lewis-Clark State College and the Outstanding Graduate Writer at East Carolina University. He fights wildfire on a helitack crew in the summer and is in the MFA program at the University of Idaho, Moscow. He loves his wife and two daughters very much.

Genevieve Jessop Marsh has relocated to Lake Tahoe, after graduating with a Master’s degree from the Environmental Studies program at the University of Montana. She enjoys having a good long stare at the ceiling to sort her thoughts, playing liars dice, and, like her grandfather, the feel of the sun warming her back.

When not wading over the ancient rocks of a Montana trout stream, fly rod in hand, Peter Metcalf can be found most often in Missoula enjoying good work, meaningful relationships and a contented life. He coaches high school track and cross country, works as a river guide and is a full time graduate student in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana. He recommends Bitterroot Macintosh apples.

Sharmann Apt Russell has published a number of award-winning works of natural history, including *Hunger: An Unnatural History*, *An Obsession with Butterflies: Anatomy of a Rain, When the Land Was Young, Kill the Cowboy, and Songs of the Fluteplayer*. Her work has garnered a number of awards, including a Rockefeller Foundation Residency, a Pushcart Prize, and the Mountains and Plains Booksellers Award. She lives in Silver City, New Mexico, and teaches writing at Western New Mexico University and Antioch University in Los Angeles, California. She earned an MFA from the University of Montana’s Creative Writing Program.

JOSH SLOTNICK is the manager of the Garden City Harvest/Environmental Studies PEAS Farm at the University of Montana. He also works with his wife at their family farm Clark Fork Organics in Missoula, Montana. He says, “Farming gives you the continual opportunity to experience rapid biological change, to feel the kiss, and the slap, of the seasons, and to spend more time than you can imagine in your head.” Josh’s energy is blurred between farming, teaching, and being part of a family. Those crisscrossing activities provide the inspiration for his life and poetry.

Jonathan Truesdale is a freelance photographer based in South Carolina. Using a large variety of camera and film styles, he is moving away from fine art into journalism, where he can “shoot verbs instead of nouns.” His photographs here are a result of a trip last summer with his family to Clarke Mountain Lookout in Idaho, where his father was stationed during the 1970s.
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Cover photograph by Noah Jackson
Camas Winter 2006
Published by ScholarWorks at University of Montana, 2006
From the Editors

First Person

The smell of forest fire is gone. An icy gauze is beginning to materialize on the surface of the Clark Fork River. Frozen sheets float downstream, catching on the iron supports of the pedestrian bridge on campus, collapsing into themselves with strange, empty intensity, making enough noise to stop strolling students in their tracks. Winter has arrived in Missoula.

Ten years ago, some of these musical barges of ice became large and solid enough to threaten the integrity of an old dam five miles upstream from our campus. The Milltown Dam in Bonner is no longer important as a power source, but it does work very well as a barricade for a century’s worth of toxic sediments trickling down from Butte (of Anaconda Copper Company mining fame) a hundred miles upstream. Human efforts halted the iceberg-like structure of 1996, and prevented the blowout of Milltown dam, but not before the frozen chunk dug down into the riverbed, slinging plumes of toxic sediments downstream. Arsenic, copper, lead, and manganese permeated the gills of fish and invertebrates, deadening over half of the river. It is still recovering.

The stretch of beach-glass green Clark Fork River edging our campus is the first part of the Clark Fork River, downstream of Butte, that is not part of a one hundred and twenty mile long Superfund site. And that’s mainly because Milltown Dam is holding back the bulk of the toxic sediments that would otherwise be here. Estimates on the amount of contaminated muck behind the dam lie at well over six million cubic yards. Nearby households, whose wells are contaminated with arsenic, drink bottled water courtesy of ARCO, the purchasers of the Anaconda Copper Company legacy.

When the Environmental Protection Agency was considering whether to place the upper Clark Fork River under Superfund designation, they received over 10,000 letters concerning the decision. While local nonprofits led by the Clark Fork Coalition pushed hard for clean-up of the river, ARCO, which would be held responsible for a large portion of said clean-up, was quietly working overtime in rural communities, cajoling landowners to raise hell over the proposed designation, insisting that the restoration would be critically invasive and disruptive to their way of life.

The Clark Fork Coalition, and their supporters, won. But restoration of the Clark Fork will be an intensive process, and one that has come to embody many difficult decisions. During the Milltown Dam removal, the thirty-foot-wide river will be knocked from its course and re-channeled. As the EPA dredges up contaminated sediment through both public and private lands, in regions where open space is already threatened by development, ranchers will lose their prime grazing area for a yet undetermined amount of time. And the thousands of tons of sludge laced with heavy metals from along the one hundred and twenty mile section of the river will be loaded up, trucked to and buried in the town of Opportunity.

Ultimately, the success and sustainability of any clean-up and restoration project will depend on the local community’s ongoing level of concern and involvement with it. It was with that in mind that the Clark Fork Coalition bought a ranch on the Clark Fork River within the Superfund corridor, though the level of distrust in the community towards environmental organizations from Missoula made it difficult. The Clark Fork Coalition is offering their Dry Cottonwood Ranch as a place where the EPA can first test the Superfund clean-up plan. They also plan to experiment with ranching practices that maintain or increase the ecological integrity of the landscape, and are economically viable in the face of the clean-up and restoration. They look forward to sharing what they find with the rural community that they are working to become part of.

Our Environmental Studies program has students
and faculty working both in Opportunity and in communities along the Superfund corridor, trying to be good enough listeners to understand the on-the-ground ethical implications of this environmental restoration, and trying to be good enough researchers to provide some information and assistance through the process. There is some hope in this collaboration. Environmental philosophers argue, in fact, that the main value created in restoration lies in the inclusion of the human community - in its planning, achievement and monitoring. What this creates then, really, is a restoration of humans to a more considered, if not considerate, relationship with the landscape.

This issue of Camas is dedicated to exploring the considered relationships that humans create with their landscape. Genevieve Jessop Marsh’s essay illuminates an old ranching family’s stoic tenacity, born of their close work with and dependence upon the land. Sharman Apt Russell explores an intuitive pantheism by watching sandhill cranes in New Mexico. Greg Gordon’s work reminds us, through the eyes of his young daughter, of the simplicity of instigating positive relationships with the natural environment. And in an interview, Anna Lappe encourages us to consider our food choices carefully, for those choices carry implications for our health, for the well-being of others, and for our environment and communities. And our talented poets and photographers, including a wildlands firefighter and an organic farmer, take us to Alaskan boats, run-down prairie houses, luminescent apiaries.

What we can learn from this issue of Camas, and from the long, watery Superfund site behind Milltown Dam, is that our landscape, whether pristine or polluted, is a mirror with which to reflect upon ourselves. Our landscape will continually challenge us to be stronger and wiser in our relationships with it, if only we let it.

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

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History

for Isadore Three Woodcocks

Heather Cahoon

Names told everything.
Three Woodcocks called loud
four generations ago, just before
the reservation boundary was drawn

heavy and black across the hills
west of Hot Springs up to Elmo,
through Flathead Lake to the mountains
with snow. Then south along ridges,

deep draws that trapped echoes
and lives in their depths,
it drew circles around meanings
that disappeared.

Names used to signify, to validate lives
and occurrences. They told stories,
pictures spoken in air. Maybe your name
came from a friend, or you gave it
to yourself. Maybe three woodcocks
lit on the thin branch of a lodgepole
above the river where you were sleeping
and entered your dreams.

Names changed. Meanings
forgotten beside streams, in tall grass,
left behind in a world that moved
too quickly.

Still, names continue to tell
about lives splashed with colors
and grief, about changes that happened.
History hides inside every name.
Ellen Kress

Like those fires hidden deep in the hills near Nirada, they buried their hearts under the red earth of their skin and said silent prayers for tomorrow. Most were taken by the wind and were lost.

Behind the white house on the hill bodies without souls cling to the roots of sage brush and junipers. Holding so tightly to something still living doesn’t lessen their desire to breathe the real air.

The dead are refusing to die.

Too many breaths away from the next lit window, parents afraid to be Indian stay in their houses and weep until morning. Their children are lost to the night. Running in packs like coyotes, they search for something more promising than the lives they have been offered.

The living are refusing to die.

Embers
Heather Cahoon
Before I arrive, I imagine a scene like this. It is a little before seven a.m. Father and son stand, still house-warm, in the father’s front yard. The father is 80 and the son 50. A brown, weathered dog sits expectant at their backs. The driveway is packed hard and frozen, full of wheel-wide dips. A worn path leads from the drive to the farmhouse. The house stovepipe smokes; the house windows are dark. All color is muted or dusty. It smells like snow.

Inside, the mother sits by the wood stove, watching the men out the window. Her back curves in a C, her neck kinked to watch. The cleared kitchen table stands next to her, chairs tucked. The coffee pot is half full on the hotplate. Another brown ring burns into the metal surface. Her oil paintings hang on the walls of the sitting room: a Hereford and calf, her childhood home painted from a photograph, three horses romping. In the same room is a table with an inlay chess board and no pieces. The wood floor is covered by a few throw rugs. On the floor sits a computer from her daughter, collecting dust. On the desk: papers with black ink scratches, opened mail flush to the edge, check registers stacked, a calculator. A green couch faces the back window and its view of the Beartooth Mountains.

The son’s truck idles. The sky is losing its early gray. The cows are hungry and bellow in the dry grass fields. There will be more calves today, four or five at least. Calves always drop before the weather changes. They decide the son should get started and the father will wait for me. The son offers his truck to his father—it has soft seats and a working radio. The son tells him to get along and not to bother. He’ll be fine.

He is happy to wait. His kerchief makes a neat triangle at the top of the zipper of his canvas jacket. He wears a flannel cap with the slim earflaps folded up and tied in place with a neat string bow.
He opens the truck door for me. I find a box of Pfizer calf vaccine on the seat and set it on top of a pair of work gloves before I sit down.

He stares down the gravel road, absently petting the dog. His hand has liver spots and in his face there is continually the hint of a smile.

This is the scene when I arrive at 7:10 a.m. He watches from the drive as I speed past, reverse, and pull in. He gives me a strong handshake. “Hello Genevieve, I’m Ralph Cosgriff.” I immediately like Ralph. It might be his eyes, laughing and expectant. It might be the sense of life that I get from him. Or maybe it’s the sense that he is a threshold to a time past.

This is a smaller ranch than some of the others I have visited. Two families live here, Ralph and his wife, his son and his wife. They are outside the bounds of Melville and that community by about ten miles.

He is a gentleman: before we start the feeding, I must be introduced to his wife, Barbara. He quicksteps around me to open the door, lets me walk through, and closes it behind us. Barbara’s shadow is already in the hallway. I notice her voice first, the bubble of a water fountain, then her hand, only palm and thumb—no fingers. She looks breakable, thin as a sapling. Once we shake hands, Ralph ushers me out the door and down the path again before we have a chance to start in on a conversation.

“Well, we’ll see you at lunch, Barbara,” he calls. “I hope you dressed warmly, Genevieve. There’s some heat in the truck but it takes awhile to warm up.”

“I’ll be fine. Lots of layers.” I glance back at the house and see Barbara’s face at the window. I smile and wave but can’t see if she returns the gesture.

He opens the truck door for me. I find a box of Pfizer calf vaccine on the seat and set it on top of a pair of work gloves before I sit down. Ralph gets in, pats the gloves, and checks the rearview mirror. He starts the truck with a rumble and we are off down the road, through a gate, and across a field. There are some used vaccine vials on the floor, a few scraps of paper, a pen. Glued to the top middle of the dash is a square of brown carpet, the edges a little frayed. The radio dials are metal and look like the cigarette lighter. Wires run from under the dash to a small black box resting loose on the bench with two switches on its face. When he stops to open the barbed wire gates he does not use the emergency brake, leaving the truck to bob in neutral. As he drives, he points over to the next field at a truck moving swiftly, not slowing for the bumps.

“That’s John,” he says. “My son.” He watches the truck for a few moments longer than I do.

A stackyard looking like a playpen in the middle of a field holds much of their hay. This is hay that keeps Ralph and his son running all year, irrigating it in the summer, harvesting and storing it in summer and fall, feeding it in winter, seeding and planting and irrigating in the spring. He tells me, “People say I’m not in the cattle business, I’m in the hay business. I’m either puttin’ it up or feedin’ it out.” Ralph drives across the field toward the stackyard, slowing for ruts and gunning it over the hump of a stream bank. He backs up to the enclosure, jumping out before I can offer to help. He reminds me of Jack: nimble and quick. His torso leans forward when he walks, still straight but at an angle just slightly ahead of his body, charging toward his task. The hay rounds are stacked in two stories. Again in the cab, he maneuvers the truck straight back till we bump against the bottom hay bale and are ready to load the top one. I look out the back window to the truck’s flat bed and the two hydraulic arms used to lift bale to bed. The wired box moves the arms up and down, out and in, hugging each bale and plunking it onto the back of the truck. Or at least, that was supposed to happen. The arms lift it up, up, up and then jerk to a halt.

“Well, Genevieve, what’s wrong with this thing?” he says as he starts to twist each wire, pressing his index finger into the connections.

As he prods, I ask what has changed on the ranch over the years. The first thing he mentions is machinery. “As an example, when we were haying with horses, if you cut ten acres of hay in a day, with a team of horses, you would have hitched up in the dark and you unhitched in the dark and you might have used two teams. And now, some of these swathers will cut that much in an hour. Big things.” I watched the frozen arms as he played with cords and switches.

It certainly was a change from the pitchfork days.
Winter Morning

I had heard from other ranchers that the round bale made a huge difference in feeding efficiency. I tried to imagine what it would be like, this back and forth, every morning, alone, not even a radio. Loading hay, rolling it out field after field. At least with the pitchfork, you got a little exercise and perhaps some companionship. But machines and irrigation mean that it is possible to raise more cattle and more land with less people. This means ranchers must have more machines and fewer hands. There are alternatives, but they take resources and an ability to look into the future, the luxury of having a few thoughtful moments.

"I guess you could say we have increased our capacity to get things done," Ralph continues. "And with that it's increased the size of the units I imagine. A tractor costs $100,000 and a baler $30,000. You aren't going to be making any money if you only have 50 acres of hay. We buy all of our equipment used, though."

"You have to be quite a mechanic." I watch him fumble with the switches and wires trying to fix the problem.

"Yep. Keeps me busy in the winter months. And John is good at that stuff." Pressing a wire hard into the switch box finally works. "Ah, there we are." The hay bale starts moving again, finally dropping onto the bed. The whole truck shakes. I scratch something in my notebook about the feel of the rocking. The clutch squeaks and we are off.

"Before the machines, being a hired hand was good work. This would be before health insurance and that kind of thing was customary."

When saving up enough to buy a ranch was an option, I think to myself. When the land wasn't so expensive that there was hope of starting on your own after a few years on as a hired hand. That's what Ralph did.

"I figure on needing 100 head per hired hand. Most people can't afford that with all the equipment and things. Most men would rather work in the mines than out here on the ranch. It pays well. It's not seasonal. My other son is a carpenter; he makes $20 an hour. He works 8 hours and every day he leaves and has his own time. Ranching, it's an ongoing 24 hour responsibility. If something comes up you've got to be there." He pauses and readjusts his hat. "It's just gotta be a bigger operation with less man labor."

Ralph tells me that this land used to be the ghetto of the county. "Genevieve, I tell you, if anybody had told me when I was in high school that I'd wind my life up living at Glasston, I would have hit 'um. I've been known to fight. This was the bottom of Sweet Grass County. Glasston—all the people had gone broke that had started in here and it was a place to stay away from. I remember when they sold out and moved off, and they were through and they had to find a new way to make a living. The ranching business was over for them. Of course that was after the crash of '29." He laughs. "So it isn't any lifelong desire—I'd always figured I'd wind up in the Judith Basin. Can't afford that now. Couldn't afford more land here now."

In the midst of some of the best fishing country, in the crook of two mountain ranges, it has been a long time since his last vacation. "I have less time to do things than when I moved here, when the kids
A few thick coffee and cream coats of Herefords spot in with the Angus, their bodies looking solid as doorstops.

Several have some kind of white markings. Ralph says that they used to breed bull Angus to Hereford cows for a hybrid, so there's some of that mixed in. Two calves face the truck, and as it approaches, they spring back just in time, playing chicken. Then the cows start thickening around us. Ralph slows, but never stops, bumping one in warning.

The cows are hungry and they start in before the hay is off the truck. Long tongues collect the scattered hay on the truck bed. Some rub their full weight up against the hay like my cat against her scratching post. The bale has to be unrolled from the correct side, spikes in the exact center. He rolls what looks like a giant cinnamon bun out from behind the truck.

"Ever heard of the Flying D Ranch?" This is Ralph's way of starting a story. I reply that no, I hadn't. "That's Ted Turner's ranch. It used to be the King's then the Irvine's. Then Ted Turner bought it. I used to work there, on the Flying D."

"So you traveled around a bit before you had your own ranch?"

"Oh yes. Worked at three different places before I bought this one in 1958. Went to school in
We pace across field after field. Often we follow established tracks, especially over water or up a hill. Sometimes we follow the whisper of a set of tires.

Bozeman, thought about buying a ranch in Georgia. Worked for Lockheed Martin in North Carolina.” He shakes his head. His bias-yoked shirt is thin from days of wear. White threads show through where it brushes his neck. When he isn’t hopping in and out of the cab, Ralph is happy to talk. He spins tales and lists facts. I, the stranger, don’t have to ask many questions to keep the stories coming. He remembers the time when there was a local school, Otter Creek School. He remembers the school picnics and his mother’s egg salad sandwiches and canned tomato pickle relish. He remembers weeding with his mother and sneaking string beans straight off the vine. He remembers haying before the tractor, before the round and square bale, all the way back to the stack. He tells me about the times when cash money was scarce, “It didn’t take much to live, because most of them had big gardens and canned food and there wasn’t a great deal of money to raise their own meat. And ah, about every second Saturday one school or the other would put on a dance. They’d charge a little gate fee, about a dollar or something, and that paid for the music and they took turns bringing lunch, you know sandwiches and cookies and coffee. The whole community would get together and dance till, oh, two in the morning."

These memories of poverty and hard work have softened with the sepia tone of reminiscence. Yet, reminiscence isn’t the only thing there. We have, in our modern lives, traded convenience for community. In Ralph’s youth, the work was physically harder and didn’t have as high a yield. Ralph and Barbara had to grow a garden and put up food for the winter. Ralph had to stack hay by hand. They had almost no cash—especially in the depression. But somehow, there was more time off for visiting, dances at the local school for a dollar, time with family and with this beautiful place. I later read one of Bill Donald’s father, Billy Donald’s, diaries that he kept every day. It recorded trips to town, fairs, rodeos mixed in with the fencing and building projects he did.

Sitting in the truck, playing with a bit of hay, I wonder if Ralph would go back to the old ways if he could. I am not sure if they ever had the chance to say stop to all the changes in ranching practices. Outside this fenced acreage there are larger forces at work. Ralph and John are just keeping up. They keep up with more irrigation, faster balers, rigged switches, four wheelers, hours and minutes, growth hormones, pesticide sprays.

“So what does John do for fun?”

“Oh, well, John’s married with kids grown. He mostly just goes to visit old high school friends I guess. He and Rocky—that’s his wife—used to sneak up to the mountains once a year. They don’t do that much anymore, though. We’re just going going going."

We pace across field after field. Often we follow established tracks, especially over water or up a hill. Sometimes we follow the whisper of a set of tires. It is repetitive. It is slow. Working the truck up to the hay, unloading, reposition­ing, fending off the hungry cows, the tongues, the unseen calves. The shift from outside cold to an over-warm cab makes my body ache. Ralph talks about the gardens of his grandmother, mother, and wife. He boasts that they used to get 75 percent of their food from the garden. “Not enough labor for a garden anymore.” He is speaking of kids and his own youth, perhaps of Barbara. “Plus, you can get a can of corn for a buck. Costs more to buy your seeds and starts.” Ralph talks a lot about labor and not having enough. Shortage of time seems to be the theme of his modern life.

A group of calves run fast as dogs down a slope. A Hereford mother licks under the tail of her calf as it sucks for milk. Ralph gets out and snips some baling twine before it’s unrolled. I reach my hand out to open my door and help. He isn’t practiced at delegating tasks and I stand behind him as he cuts the twine, gathering it in a bouquet in his left hand for one long pull. I spot missed strands and feebly pull them out at half his speed.

“You know, a lot of people use this netting stuff now on these round bales. It’s more efficient to get
on but what a mess to get off.”

I nod and smile as if I understand. He knows hay with an intimacy that I never could. The headaches of messy casings are something that I have trouble imagining after the hell of a time it took me to pull twine from around the thing. And the keeping track of the twine: earlier, I watched Ralph pull a length of it from halfway down a cow’s throat. She had started eating it along with the hay.

On our final trip, the bale gets stuck mid-roll. He gets out with a pitchfork and I with his work gloves, and we unroll it ourselves. I push while he stabs just outside the middle of the roll, turning fork into axle. The bale gains enough momentum to roll on its own and he pulls the fork out. I push a few more steps before I realize he stopped. He leans an elbow to his pitchfork and watches it make a green trail, watches it until all that’s left is a thin core. “Good enough,” he says. He stands for a moment, looking out over the yellow field and the trickle of creek running through. Clouds sink onto the points of the Beartooth. A flake of snow lands on the bow at the front of his hat. A speck that is John’s truck turns up the lane toward home, coffee, and food.

When Ralph says, “Genevieve, I hope you will join us for lunch,” as we drive up the road, I am glad to be done, ready to join Barbara by the stove. We follow after John to the house, checking on a sick calf on the way. Ralph lets out a low clucking as he leans his head out of the window to see if the calf is better. I watch the curl of its body until we are out of the gate. I think, cute as a button, and wish it well. Snow falls fast now, and swirls on the road. ♦
Josh Slotnick

Shed and Redemption #1

For Steve Elliott, who coined the phrase

Two weeks of relentless rain and now four days of wind and sun, and finally, the soil dry enough to till
The weather said more rain coming, tomorrow
The window is now.

When you hit the soil moisture right, you look the hero.
It comes up dark and fine-grained,
long beds of brownie hugging the contour of the earth. Like bed covers, shaping in relief,
the body of your sleeping wife.

We farm this field in patches, shadow boxing the bind weed, dodging the houses,
pouring ourselves into the earth at all hours.
In this, we demand our due.
Like homesteaders, pilgrims,
conquistadors
we do the tough work of transforming a jangly mess of crazy weeds into
a field
plumb, straight, level and productive
as we are supposed, before God and man,
to do.

In the eastern part of this state they emptied their souls into the land,
their righteous efforts prophesizing a just return.
They were told and told themselves,
“Rain follows the plow.”

If we catch the dry windows, pull re-may in the wind in the dark before a 26 degree night
When our suburban neighbors would never work
The kitchen still trashed from dinner
Kid’s lunches not yet made
Our lawn not mowed
And there we are, in the dark, pulling gauzy fabric in the icy wind, temperature dropping like a bomb.

Are we not due?
Not just the money, but the success of it, shouldn’t it work?
Are we not due
The redemption of our labor?

From beneath my ear protection I hear the tractor’s roar steady and even
Behind me the soil spins up fine and black, ahead, a sliver of white lays in the field indistinguishable, but definitely, out of place.

At .7 miles an hour you have time to stare.
I wait till I am almost on it, then
put the clutch in, pull down the rpms, disengage the PTO, take the tractor out of gear,
pull my ear protection off and jump
onto the soft soil.

It’s a shed.
A buck’s antler, shed here in this field, when there was still snow.

A good omen?

Fifteen seasons into this, ready now to begin to begin,
I think I know
It’s just a bad fence.
An Interview with Anna Lappé

Peter Metcalf

Aisle after brightly lit aisle fills the modern supermarket with artfully displayed food commodities from the global pantry: grains from Montana, vegetables from California, bananas from Ecuador, apples from New Zealand, beef from Argentina. Fresh produce is available even in the depths of winter. Grocery shopping offers a historically unparalleled abundance of choice. Or so the major agribusiness corporations that control the food system want us to believe, argues food activist and author Anna Lappé.

In her latest book, *Grub*, which she co-authored with chef Bryant Terry, Lappé explores the six illusions she sees represented by the increasingly global commodities food system: the illusions of choice, safety, efficiency, cleanliness, and progress. She argues that instead of delivering us a vast array of responsibly grown, safe and healthy foods, the current system transforms people from food eaters to consumers of food products. The production and consumption of these food products harm our health, our environment and our communities. The industrial system of agriculture fills our air and water with toxic chemicals, fails to pay workers fair compensation and fills our bodies with highly processed, low nutrition foods that lead to a host of dietary illnesses, all while generating high profits for an increasingly limited number of corporations.

But Lappé’s activism and the book’s content move beyond a biting exposé on the problems within the dominant food system, most of which have been subject to an increasing level of consumer awareness in recent years. Instead Lappé and Terry offer an alternative to the current food products paradigm: “grub.” They selected this slang term for basic, common food because they wanted to avoid the class connotations associated with organics and to emphasize that healthy, local food should be every person’s food. *Grub* is Lappé’s and Terry’s word for “food that is local, that is sustainable and that has been grown with fairness from seed to table,” Lappé said.

Eating grub is about restoring true choice to the food system. Choosing grub means choosing healthy, fresh foods grown with environmentally sound practices, creating profitable markets for local growers, and markets that pay workers fair wages, and most importantly, returning control of agricultural policy decisions to the people. And this system is not just a dream, Lappé assures her readers—it is developing across the country and around the world. The book *Grub* also contains dozens of tantalizing, fancy recipes to help readers deliver this newfangled grub to their table.

The production and consumption of these food products harm our health, our environment and our communities.

Together with her mother, the well known social activist and author Francis Moore-Lappé, Anna Lappé runs the Small Planet Institute and Small Planet Fund, which work to democratize the food system and improve access to healthy, sustainable, and fairly grown food for low-income people throughout the world. I sat down with Anna along the Clark Fork River in Missoula, Montana, on a golden autumn afternoon to talk about grub and democracy.

**Peter Metcalf:** Affordability or access for lower income people tends to be one of the complaints about food alternatives like organics, or what you call “grub.” How do you make grub widely available and not just some kitschy lifestyle alternative?

**Anna Lappé:** Hopefully what happens is, as people start hearing about why eating grub and choosing grub is so important, the benefits to our health of eating local and organic, the benefits to our environment, the benefits to our local economy, whether it is because we are supporting local farmers or paying farm workers or other workers a fair wage, once you start getting people to realize that, “Wow, grub

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is really the best thing to be choosing for our bodies and for our planet,” then hopefully the next step is for people to start asking the question of “why?” Why are our shelves not filled with choices for grub?

When you walk into any grocery store in this country or any supermarket in the country, they are filled with highly processed, high fat, high sugar, high salt products that have been designed to deliver the most profit to the corporations and to their shareholders. They have not been designed to bring us the best health. Once you get people to then ask the question “why,” hopefully it creates a broader dialogue about the choices made in this country about what food is sold in our supermarkets, what type of farming is subsidized by our taxpayer dollars, and who has power to make those decisions to shape policy and how we can have a food system that more reflects our values than the profit motives of those companies.

**PM:** What is your feeling about a company like Wal-Mart moving into the organics market?

**AL:** I have to admit I am really apprehensive about the impact Wal-Mart moving into the organics industry is going to have on organic standards. Organic standards are not standards that have been written into concrete, that are immutable, that will never change. They are constantly under threat to decrease their rigidity to allow more food items and to allow more processes to be accepted as “organic.” Since their introduction, the food industry has lobbied the National Organic Standards Board to allow more synthetic chemicals to be considered allowable under the law and still be called organic. They’ve attempted to make it allowable to have animals eat non-organic feed and still be called organic. And those are just two examples. Both of those times there was a big reaction from citizen activists and the National Organic Standards Board ultimately didn’t change the standard. The concern amongst a lot of public health advocates and sustainable agriculture advocates is that, with Wal-Mart’s economic clout, you’ll see further attempts to weaken the standards and those attempts might be more successful. The first move Wal-Mart made was to introduce organic milk into their stores. They chose a company called Aurora Dairy. Aurora has been targeted by sustainable farming advocates who have exposed the ways in which Aurora Dairy practices on their organic operation are almost as environmentally unsound and industrial as their conventional operation. They have mega-large-scale operations that look basically like they are industrial operations. The fact that Wal-Mart is choosing to source from them is further cause for concern. I think this all raises the question, will Wal-Mart moving into organics help democratize the food system?

**PM:** Sure, more people might have access to organics or grub. More acreage will certainly go into organic production.

**AL:** I think the way we democratize the food system is going to be by building local and regional food economies and fighting for policies that will give low income communities better access to the foods that are best for them. It’s not thinking that one of the largest corporations in the world is going to have the poorest and most vulnerable community’s interests at heart. And so to me, Wal-Mart is certainly not the answer to how to democratize the food system, but it should get people to raise the issue that, yeah, there certainly is a problem of accessibility and that should be something we are all concerned about.

**PM:** How do people fight for more accessibility in the food system?

**AL:** It is a hard fight but, being here in Missoula, we are sitting within eye distance of the second farmers’ market to open here. They just started allowing EBT, which is the electronic version of food stamps. That has been an effort happening at farmers’ markets all across the country. You are giving poor people who are surviving on food stamps access to fresh food that is healthiest for them, for all of us. You are also providing new markets for local farmers who are bringing their food to these farmers’ markets. That is ultimately a problem that can only be solved through community effort and through democratic engagement and policy change. You can’t expect, given the way our market works, to solve that
problem because we are treating food like anything else in the market. The market for food in most cases is just like the market for television or a pair of jeans or whatever. It is run by corporations that have the same corporate structure where they have to meet the demands of their shareholders and it is not just once a year—it is every quarter that they have to show profit. And how do food corporations make profit? They make profit by making products as cheaply as possible and selling them for as much as they can. You can't expect that kind of corporation to solve the problem. The market for food right now is not working. It is not working for our health, it is not working for the environment, it is not working for poor people in this country. So there is a role with food, the most essential thing for life, to really rethink what is our relationship to food and the market.

**PM:** Are you suggesting a whole new kind of economic paradigm within the food market?

**AL:** Here in this country we used to have antitrust laws. There was a whole understanding of why we had antitrust laws because we realized, when we looked at the way capitalism evolved, there is a tendency for power to beget more power and have that distort markets and distort competition. Now in this country, and I describe it in *Grub*, you have incredible concentration of power in the food industry that a lot of economists would argue is creating a market that no longer has true competitiveness in it.

In *Hope's Edge* (Lappe's book co-authored with her mother), we talk about realizing that all the institutions that we have, whether it is government or corporations or the way the market works in relation to the corporations, are all very human made. It wasn't descended from the heavens and handed to us. It was created by human beings and therefore it is evolving. It's not like what we have today is exactly how things worked a hundred or two hundred years ago. We are seeing the evolution of capitalism. We are seeing ways in which people are taking the market and not having it be something that we are all subservient to, but having it be invested in community values or these values of fairness or sustainability. We are not saying “throw out capitalism and try something else,” we are saying let us actually make this meet our values and our ideals of how capitalism should work.

**PM:** For the average citizen, what is the best way to make this paradigm shift to a “grub economy?”

**AL:** The fact that we even have to be sitting here having this conversation at all is really a symptom of a failure of our democracy in that none of us as individuals would say, “Hey, let’s create a food system that makes the animals sick, makes us super sick, gives our kids diabetes, gives us heart diseases, makes us really fat, makes us get cancer. Let's try to make a food system that does that.” The fact that that has been an expression of our democracy which, theoretically, is an expression of the collective voice of all of us, is a sign that there is something awry in our democratic system. So being involved with our democratic decision-making is something we should be doing.

On a daily basis, of course, we can each think in a more conscious way about the food choices we make. We all have to eat every day anyway. We might as well be making choices that are good for us. One of the things we stress in *Grub* is that not everybody is going to be able to eat local twelve months of the year, but even moving in that direction is a huge step. Making a commitment of a certain percentage of your diet and trying to make it local as much as possible is moving in the right direction. Then beyond that we can think about all the other kinds of ways we can be involved, whether that is being involved with the food in our kids’ schools, or getting involved with the local community garden, or getting involved with what is happening locally and figuring out how your work or your energy can play into those efforts.
the likes of him
with his ancient wheat and generation land
of the fathers. He who decided to be different because
he could. He’s got the garb
of any hayseed and the machinery
to match. But he’ll keep you on
your toes to catch him in the act of being
unexpected.
My first meeting he quoted Hippocrates,
told me of such mysteries
the likes of which I never heard—
Camelina, green manure, Kamut.
Well, I never. And his neighbors say
he’s crazy. Spent too much time in California
communing with them hippies.
But that was twenty years ago and now he’s king
over King Tut’s wheat and can consider
his life and feel good. The land loves
him and owes him
its life. He is proud of the best things—
eating lentils straight out
of the seeder, fourteen varieties of squash
just because. And next year
he’s ordering watermelons.
From inside my house, which serves as a blind, I am using binoculars to watch the greater sandhill cranes fifty feet away. This family group, a female, male, and adolescent, are digging through a flooded field of clover for insects and grubs. The greater sandhill crane is about four feet high, not as tall as an emu (six feet) or an ostrich (eight feet) but impressive enough to make you pause. Birds shouldn’t be this big. Birds are tiny, modest, brown blurs flitting from branch to branch. Birds don’t reach up to your chest with wings stretching out in a vampyrian cloak and a dagger-sharp bill that could gut a coyote. The two adults in my field have slate-gray plumage brightened by a white chin, cheek, and upper throat. The juvenile’s head is tawny brown with a mottled body of brown and gray. Suddenly the female gets excited, perhaps by a bull snake in the grass, and the patch of naked red skin on her forehead turns brighter red, engorged with blood. I can actually see this through my binoculars. She raises her wings, and the red patch is hidden. She jumps slightly, an awkward hop into the air. I wonder if she is about to dance. The juvenile bird

This is the second chapter in Sharman Apt Russell’s next book, tentatively titled My Life as a Pantheist, to be published by Counterpoint Press in 2008. It explores the history and worldview of pantheism — the belief that the universe is an interconnected whole that human beings can rightly consider sacred. This chapter is a work-in-progress that has been shortened to fit the needs of this journal.
moves back, as if scared or warned.
Cranes have a long adolescence, not breeding until four years or later. They mate for life. Although few in the wild live for more than twenty-five years, a male Siberian crane in captivity was believed to be eighty-three when he died, the proverbial game old bird still fathering chicks into his late seventies. Theoretically, the female I am watching now could have been coming to this field, every year, for half my lifetime. Nothing much has changed from her point of view. The Gila River shifted course, some cottonwood trees grew taller, other trees fell down. This year, a big box appeared on the land, a woman inside watching.

To my disappointment, the female does not dance but folds in her wings and holds still. Cranes can look oddly human, with their long legs, erect stance, and series of well-considered actions: one foot carefully in front of the other, a lowering of the neck, a jab at the ground, a raising of the head, a stately movement forward. Ten birds in a field resemble a scene of peasant farmers, efficiently going about their task. Fifty birds look like a convention. There is an air of gossip and professional opportunity, a constant and subtle flow, exchanges over territory and status, significant preening, a single wing stretch, a double wing stretch, an alert stare. If alarmed, the entire convention will spread their wings, flap, and fly away—their gurgles, knocks, and rattles filling the air. Family members, in particular, keep a constant vocal contact, staying together in the confusion of take-off. Any allusion to humanity is now dispelled, for the sound of cranes is distinctly inhuman, weird and prehistoric.

I hear that sound daily now, in mid-November, as small groups like this fly here and there, looking for a better field or just a change of pace, something different. Ornithologists describe the call of the sandhill crane as a bugle-like garroooo-a-a-a or more simply gar-oo-oo, which is absurd. It doesn’t sound like that at all. It doesn’t sound like anything I would be able to describe. The word throaty comes to mind, but that seems obvious. Still, something tracheal, vibrational, jazzy is going on, like the Latin American instrument guiro used in bossa nova music and played by sliding a wooden stick across the grooves in a carved gourd. In his seminal book *Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold side-stepped the issue and wrote instead, “When we hear his call we hear no mere bird. We hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution,” referring to the fact that sandhill cranes have been around for nine million years, our oldest known living bird species.

The female changes her mind about something, lifts her wings again, and still does not dance. Instead she takes a running start into the wind. With wings fully extended, she springs upward, flapping strongly, the upstroke more rapid than the down as she gains altitude. The male and juvenile follow. This family and their flock will stay in the Gila Valley about four months, defining our winter. In late February, they will fly north again, stopping for nearly two months in southern Colorado before ending up, if lucky, at the same nesting site they chose last year. Home is an extended range of over 2000 miles. Home is a loop, a cycle of scenery, a rhythmic motion back and forth.

Aldo Leopold also wrote, “The physics of beauty is one department of natural science still in the Dark Ages. Not even the manipulators of bent space have tried to solve its equations. Everyone knows that the autumn landscape in the north woods is the land, plus a red maple, plus a ruffed grouse. In terms of conventional physics, the grouse represents only a millionth of either the mass or the energy of an acre. Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead.” Subtract the greater sandhill crane and the Gila Valley—with its coyotes, foxes, bears, mountain lions, bobcats, javelina, deer, cows, horses, dogs, cats, skunks, beavers, raccoons, porcupines, coatimundis, rabbits, hares, gophers, mice, packrats, wrens, sparrows, thrashers, woodpeckers, flycatchers, owls, hawks, eagles, and innumerable insects—would seem empty.

The early Greeks had a fondness for cranes, which they captured and domesticated. The Greek word for cranes, *geranos*, comes from the myth of Gerania, the leader of a tribe of pygmies doomed to wage war against these birds as punishment for neglecting
the gods. Apollo himself liked to turn into a crane. Mercury invented the Greek alphabet after watching cranes fly. As a flock, cranes have a flexible formation. The chevron pattern undulates and changes. The lead crane moves back. Another crane drifts ahead. A new letter appears in the sky. Individually, cranes can look like letters, too. The long legs of the bird usually trail straight behind, the long neck pointed forward, amazing flying sticks! (In cold weather, young birds sometimes tuck their legs against their bodies.) But on landing, the legs drop, a sudden weight directed down. The crane cups her wings and spreads her tail, falling like a parachute and flapping quickly at the last moment to break her descent. A reverse L, gamma in Greek. An inverted V or lambda.

In a story from the sixth century B.C., the lyric poet Ibycus was attacked by bandits and fatally wounded. Dying, he saw a flock of cranes pass overhead and told his murderers that the birds would revenge him. Later, in the Corinth marketplace, one of the robbers saw the same flock and cried out, perhaps as a joke, “Behold, the avengers of Ibycus!” Overheard, the man was questioned and confessed. “The cranes of Ibycus” became a Greek proverb signifying the discovery of a crime through divine intervention.

The sixth century B.C. also saw the rise of the philosopher-scientist, the beginning of Western science, the first known pantheists. These men were concerned with the physical structure of the world, and they rejected mythology as an explanation. They didn’t believe in Apollo or Mercury or the cranes of Ibycus. We know them mostly from the writings of later historians, including Aristotle who described them as physici, interested in finding logical principles within nature, as opposed to theologi, satisfied with the rule of supernatural beings.

The multitalented Thales—philosopher, astronomer, statesman, engineer—came from Miletus, a city-state on the coast of what is now Turkey. He was said to have predicted the eclipse of 585 B.C., which gave him considerable cachet among the sea-faring Greeks, always interested in what the heavens were doing. Thales determined that the world consisted of one unifying substance, and that substance was water. Perhaps he meant that everything came from water or perhaps that everything, ultimately, was made of water—in the way that vapor and ice, gas and matter, were once liquid. Thales further reasoned that the earth floated on water, an idea which he used to explain earthquakes. Although he is quoted as saying, “The world is full of gods,” a likely interpretation is that he saw the world as infused with a life-force that was powerful and eternal and therefore divine.

A pupil of Thales, Anaximander believed that the basic stuff of the world, “the principle and element of existing things,” was not water, air, fire, or earth—or anything we can see with the naked eye. He called it apeiron, and he considered this basic stuff to be powerful, eternal, and divine. According to Anaximander, animal life on earth also began with a “separating out” from slime or moist matter heated by the sun. The first men and women grew from embryo to puberty inside fishlike creatures—or possibly were themselves similar to fish—from which they emerged, able now to survive on land. The philosopher’s account of human origin is the first on record to be rational, not mythological.

My husband’s favorite philosopher is Heraclitus, who came after Thales but was still active in the sixth century B.C. Heraclitus was more interested in the inner world than the outer. He is commonly known as a misanthrope, a riddler, and
a literary stylist. His pithy sayings include, “I went in search of myself,” “One cannot step twice into the same river,” and “The way up and down is one and the same.” The epigrams require some pondering, but if you have ever read any philosophy at all, you will only feel grateful to this man for the brevity of his language. In the work of Heraclitus, a basic doctrine is that all things change. Life is flux. Therefore, conflict is inevitable. “War is father of all and king of all.” At the same time, Heraclitus believed in an ultimate unity which reconciled opposites. “God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger.”

For Heraclitus, the task of a human being is to seek wisdom through listening to the logos, a word for the basic principles or law underlying the universe. Although Heraclitus’ sense of the divine is pantheistically vague, logos, fire, god, and Zeus are all expressions he uses to describe the ineffable, ever-changing, ever-divisive oneness of life. “Grasplings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.”

What we know of Heraclitus is based on a few remaining fragments and the perceptions of later philosophers who didn’t like him. Some version of this is true for all the early Greeks; our history is another kind of mythology. The sixth century B.C. involved a paradigm shift, a new way of thinking and seeing which would be interpreted by Plato and Aristotle nearly two hundred years later and by Plutarch and others hundreds of years after that.

Twenty years after the death of Heraclitus, Democritus was born. Democritus believed in tiny indivisible atoms or atomos, which careen about in empty space until they collide and bond and become those things which are familiar to us: dirt, ants, Uncle Lou. From my house in the Gila Valley, in the early winter sunsets of November and December, I watch the long-legged, long-necked sandhill cranes fly across the field like slow-motion arrows. They rattle eerily. They call to each other, garroooo-a-a-a gurgle-gurgle-khrrrr-khrrrr-khrrrr. The mated pairs especially do not want to lose each other in the darkening air as they navigate to where they will roost for the night, standing in shallow water, one leg raised.

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Democritus (460-370 B.C.) lived in the same time period, although they did not have much to say to each other. Democritus is labeled a pre-Socratic, as are Heraclitus, Thales, Anaximander, and many other philosophers. The term pre-Socratic sounds diminutive, as though these men were a kind of opening act before the Real Philosopher takes the stage. In fact, their intentions were simply different. They were interested in the nature of the world, Socrates in how men should live in the world. They were interested in science, Socrates in ethics.

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The sun sets to my right, west, the light behind the cottonwood trees pinking and yellowing, pearly-white, like the inside of certain shells. A few clouds gloom the east, blue-black rolls with a stern demeanor. In front of me, south, is the panorama of sky above Bear Mountain and Telephone Mountain and the more distant, rumpled Black Hills. The color blue deepens to cerulean, a hint of turquoise. A cloud flares orange. It is a landscape painting, a Constable moment, different every day and night, every moment of day and night. The light fades. The planet Venus remains, unblinking, unfailing, like a good friend.

I have come to live here, in the country, for this sky. The Greeks were intensely interested in the weather, the movement of sun and moon, the changing stars. I am also interested but not for any practical reason. I do not have a ship to navigate or an
My Life as a Pantheist

eclipse to predict. Mainly I need to look at the sky in order to feel there is a reason for getting up, making the bed, going to work. I think it is that important, to see something grand and beautiful every day, to feel some part of me relax and loosen into that space.

This sky, like all the skies I have ever seen, holds no grief or suffering, no emotions except the ones I create, the gentle pleasure of personification—those furrowed brows to the east—the childlike innocence of puffy white balls, the majesty of flat-bottomed ships. Similarly, the philosophy of Thales and Anaximander and Heraclitus holds no grief or human drama, no tears or laughter. We do not know if these men ever had brothers or sisters, married, had children, loved these children, lost someone they loved, anguished, doubted. It seems only that they thought about the world, sauntered along the beach, poked at a tide pool, and came up with some theories. The world is made of water. The world is made of air.

Of course, that is not how life is. That is not how we live. My own life was shaped by the death of my father, a Kansas farm boy who went off at seventeen to World War II, joined the Air Force, and became a test pilot. In a profession that takes bravery for granted, he was known for being brave. In 1956, he tested the X-2 rocket plane and set a speed record, climbing high into the stratosphere, high above the clouds, moving three times the speed of sound. In the descent, the plane went out of control, and he died in the crash. I was two years old. My sister was five. My father was thirty-two. Almost immediately, my mother had to leave the military base and make her way as a single parent. Many years later, when my own children were almost grown, she wondered out loud how we had survived all that, how she had walked about like a zombie, barely functional, hard on her, hard on her two daughters. She never remarried.

He had been a good son on the Kansas farm, stringing popcorn for the family Christmas tree.

I was too young to know my father. But my sister remembers a dream shortly after his death. He came into her room, sat on her bed, and told her everything would be okay. She felt comforted, a dream that would last all her life. I found comfort, too, in my father’s decency and heroism. He had been a good son on the Kansas farm, stringing popcorn for the family Christmas tree. Once he had saved a man’s life by smashing open the canopy of a burning plane, despite the danger of the plane exploding. (The man lived but lost both feet.) Even so, my mother protested, he was a normal fun-loving adult, the sort who drank martinis and wore a lampshade on his head at Air Force parties.

In my own childhood, growing up in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, single parent households were not common. I felt different, and I dramatized my father’s absence. When President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, I wept more than the other fourth-graders. Later I read about my father in my grandmother’s scrapbooks, articles and pictures about his death, and I internalized him, the Hero, the purer and more ideal Form. In essence, he came and sat on my bed. He told me he loved me, would always love me. Everything would be okay.

At the same time, of course, I should be ready for death. It would come quickly, at the most inconvenient moment, say when you had two small children. You would never really recover. You would grieve and grieve for what could not be. You would taste bitterness and bile all your life. This kind of loss could break you. It could harm your children. God was a sniper in the sky, impersonal, like one of those soldiers in Bosnia. Look, a red kerchief. Bang. Too bad for her, crossing the marketplace at the wrong time.

From that date, 1956, until now, fifty years later, nothing very bad has happened in my life. No one I love has died. No one I love has a degenerative disease or been in a terrible car accident. It really seems remarkable to me. Obviously, this run of luck can not continue. Eventually I will get breast cancer. My husband will have a stroke. A truck will turn left without signaling. If this seems morbid, it is also true. This is what happens to people. We all die.

The pantheism of the pre-Socratics had little to say about death. But two other schools of early Greek philosophy, Epicureanism and Stoicism, did.

Epicurus began teaching some eighty years after Socrates. Like most philosophers of this time, he was concerned with how men should live their lives. The goal for Epicurus was tranquility, “freedom from pain in the body and from disturbance in the soul.” In the commune he established in Athens, this meant a simple life, with a simple, plentiful diet and little indulgence. A man should not go hungry, but nor
should he overeat, since eventually that would reduce his tranquility. A model of moderation, it is a linguistic irony that his name evolved into the word *epicure*, a mild pejorative for someone who excessively enjoys food.

In many ways, Epicurus foreshadowed modern ideas. He adopted the theory of Democritus and taught that nothing existed except atoms and the void in which they collided and bonded and collided and dispersed. He expanded this view by suggesting that atoms occasionally swerve, making an unpredictable sideways jump. This unpredictable swerve helped atoms bump into each other and brought into nature a certain randomness—changing a mechanistic universe to something much more interesting, full of chance and opportunity.

In such a universe, which was infinite and full of infinite worlds, complex forms naturally arose. As one Epicurean explained, given enough time and space, atoms moved and met “in all manner of ways” and all possible combinations. Eventually these became “the beginnings of great things, of earth and sea and sky and the generation of living creatures.” To explain the well-ordered designs of nature, the followers of Epicurus took up the theory of an earlier pre-Socratic who had described a version of natural selection: good biological designs tended to survive and reproduce, and bad ones did not.

For the most part, Epicurus was a practical man who thought we should trust our senses. Otherwise, life would get too confusing and untranquil. But we also needed to exercise judgment. Our perception of the world could be distorted. The gods were a good example of this. Epicurus acknowledged that they might exist, since so many people had seen and talked about them for so long. But immortal creatures such as Apollo or Mercury were not likely to be what we imagined, for as they entered our senses—in thin streams of ethereal atoms—we processed them imperfectly into stories and dreams. In truth, the gods were blissful beings who had no interest in us. And no power over us.

By this time, philosophy was less for the elite and more for the common man (but not woman or slave). For Epicurus, philosophy should make you happy. First, physically, you needed to be well-fed, warm, and comfortable, and not much more than that. Psychologically, you needed to be free of fear, anxiety, and confusion. This was especially true of death. Tales of an unhappy after-life were propaganda and scare-mongering. Neither the mind nor soul survived death. The atoms simply dispersed. There was nothing left to suffer. Only sensation causes suffering and death is a cessation of that. Since we will never experience death, why should we fear it?

As Epicurus advises, “There is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living.”

In short, by definition, unendurable pain is not endured. We die or recover.

You may be thinking what I am thinking. This makes sense from the perspective of the dead. But to lose a wife or husband or child to death can be painful, and full of sensation, unpleasant and untranquil. In the remaining writings we have, Epicurus says nothing about this subject. He does, however, speak of physical suffering, which can be extended to the emotional: “Great pains quickly put an end to life; long-enduring pains are not severe.” In short, by definition, unendurable pain is not endured. We die or recover. Chronic pain can be endured, and with the help of philosophy, moments of happiness will begin to dominate.

A second system of philosophy, more clearly pantheistic, also appeared in the third century B.C. The Stoics shared some important beliefs with Epicurus and his followers. Both promoted virtue as central to a good life and downplayed conventional success such as fame and fortune. Both prized equanimity. Both thought the world was composed of one substance and rejected Plato’s idea of two (one material, and one immaterial, those pure and ideal Forms which include the human soul). Both were materialists who denied the existence of an after-life.

Their differences were more significant. For his material substance, Epicurus saw atoms swerving randomly. The Stoics believed in a matter interpenetrated with energy, or a fiery breath, the combination of which was the body and mind of God. Borrowing from Heraclitus, this God or Providence or Destiny was also called the *logos*, and because the *logos* was rational, beneficent, and perfect, so was the universe. Everything was working just as it was supposed to work. Everything was fated, even our pain and suffering, which was not really evil—there could be no evil in the body and mind of God—but just what is.
Most modern-day pantheists would feel an affinity with Epicurus and the Stoics, although we might argue with some of the details. We also try to avoid fear and confusion. We also seek tranquility and acceptance.

Pantheism Movement, a pantheist writes about the death of his twenty-one-year-old daughter. The ritual of grieving was important. The parents insisted on a green funeral, burying their child in a wooden casket where she would naturally decompose and return to the earth. The Unitarian minister, carefully referred to as a panentheist (believing that God is immanent in the world but also a presence outside the world), spoke of how this young woman would eventually become the dogwood flowers, the dew on the branches, and the caterpillar drinking the dew. Next the mourners walked through the woods near the grave site, startling up a doe and fawns, enjoying the sun and wind, what the father described as “the divinity of nature.” When these parents visit their child’s grave, they listen to the sound of owls and coyotes, to the hoarse rumble of a bullfrog, and “We know where Chez is. She is the spider web, the circling hawk, the butterfly, the sunset painted by west Texas grass fires.”

There are other ways for a pantheist to grieve. In a New York Times interview with novelist Carlos Fuentes, the author speaks of the death of his two adult children. “You go on. You go on. You bring the person you love inside you. That is how you cope. You make him or her live within you. The whole experience I had with my children is in me. It is nowhere else I can see...the
experience of having them within myself is what matters."

You bring the person inside you. I understand completely. No one did it better than I, given the opportunity so young to build my own mythology, the Hero Father, the man soaring into the clouds, and falling from them, too, never a disappointment, never a cross word between us.

I look at these grand skies in the Gila Valley, this brilliant blue turning deeper cerulean, trails of water vapor flaring pink, the dark roll of stratocumulus traveling north to drop snow in the Mogollon Mountains. I stand in this grace, space and light, and I do not think consciously of my father, Mel Apt, dressed as I have always known him in the 8x12 black and white publicity photos from Bell Aircraft: a balding man wearing a flight jacket, posed before a rocket plane, his smile genuine.

I do, however, feel a connection. I know he loved clouds. In home movies, my father panned over my mother and the two little girls she held by the hand to focus on a storm drifting over the Grand Canyon. He was drawn instinctively to that beauty. He wanted to watch, over and over, what the sky looked like in 1955.

It looks much the same as today. It has no human sorrow or drama, no history, no meaning except what we give it, our overlay of nuance and myth. We tell ourselves stories about the world, and I have no quarrel with that. Metaphor is how we think and play. Thinking and playing are who we are. My science is not a denial of that. My pantheism is not a denial of human emotion or of how these emotions entangle metaphorically with all those atoms colliding and dispersing and reuniting.

"There are gods in everything," Thales said. He did not abandon the story of his time but referred to it affectionately. Apollo is in the crane. And our beloved daughter, our much-missed child, is in the spider web, the hawk, and the butterfly. ♦

She watches the petals die, and the bloom falls off her cheeks in the fiery damp of August. When the hummingbirds came to her childhood window she had no idea it was a dream she would later clutch glittering in a dusty fist. In her spinning under the cottonwood she catches scraps of sun through the leaves and tosses them—dreaming—into waterfalls with slick neon forests of maidenhair and moss—the kind of falls that make the faithful, with their blindness and hope and their knowing something exists.
Beekeeping

Jill Beauchesne

1.

We need a spinner. The harlequin parts of an hour, the Sundays, the kitchen—honey and water hardly mix. You suck in and pull, prying the queen guard. The sentries are so small. Flax or algae in your toenails and hair. The linden tree is aiding our factory. I want to see royal jelly—toast on the blue plates, next to the marjoram beak-pieces. I want persuasion, before-hours, with a radio in the background. You touch me, pieces of wax and stained flagellum, summer causing your increase. What can we eat with what we can make, increased ether, return-trips already paid for, bedclothes hitting us at certain lights. Surely we are in common.

2.

What comes with winter, over-wintering. If I sang along the hives, some difference would sound in their painted towers. Quick—I picture you, coldless and happily mercantile, a village in a delta with rain. Your silent neighbors moving out of silence. I see dust and shopping bags, neat rows of pork and mango strips drying in the sun. I see children. I know there are no computers, no trash collection. I know you on a bike ride, twitching side-waist and shifting seat, climbing any hill.

3.

I hear the whistling of birth. Of a three-day exodus. Drones and a spatula, fences. There are friends who hardly know us, fathers who have come to a standstill. Your tethered mouth—show me the direction to shared work, to covering up properly. I cast down the comb in straight lines, two scrapes into the bucket. ‘Watch the dead ones’—a whisper from the hedge, and we are off and running, thinking fast, of others, of couplings and even before. Love, when I let you down.
4.

In jars, crystalline. In cubes, disparate cells, caps. We sort through the genes. In gin bottles, dirty candlesticks. Night clubs and ocher women, amber men. Forming lines, decisions on the dresser. I scrape the insides of the glass, working out the dry spots. You tell me I work too hard. Simple—reheat on medium, the large stockpot. How domestic we become in these pocket-sized instructions. The digital screen of my face, my wonderment in the photograph. At the graft.

5.

Stuff the smoker with kindling. Call it the majesty. The evacuees, the bees, stranded and lifelike, hovering at the doorjambs and our fingertips. How high do they count the eggs? The gel we are eating, all non-metal, gloveless. Let’s hand it all in, put our hands in, pull at the filling, chew at the comb. This purpose, like any other, makes a homecoming. I could order our families in to watch.

6.

Love, tell me a secret. I feel you rushing. And what your honesty sounds like to me is a small window, an uncluttered room and a phone call. The promise of what is, not the underpinning of everything. And next spring will be as light-hued, and next spring will be run-off. Will be knapweed, small hairs and seeds. And this collection of color will hardly wreck us.
Jasmine perches in the prow of a cheap REI inflatable kayak known as a “duckie,” while I plop down in the stern to steer. Years of beers sink the floor of the raft well below the water’s surface, and through the thin plastic I can feel the river flowing beneath me. A fish-eye view would present the front of the raft gliding serenely on the surface, then sinking steadily toward the back, finally coming to a large bulbous lump at the rear. I am truly immersed in this river that I have decided to call home.

I have seen this river from many perspectives, but never have I felt so much like a water molecule as in this duckie, my direction and destiny determined by the whim of the river. Pulled into a rapid, my posterior bounces against the submerged rocks. My friend Tracy, meanwhile, rides the waves nearby in a hard-shell kayak, paddling upstream at will and surfing the rapids, pointing the nose of her craft upstream into the rapid and gliding effortlessly on the curling eddies.

“Dad, how come you don’t do that in your kayak?” Jasmine asks, much impressed. I grunt in response as I struggle with the plastic oars, trying to keep the duckie from banging into the canyon walls.

When things fell apart a few years earlier, I decided to make a clean break and start my life over from scratch. Simplicity was calling. I divested myself of nearly everything, I left behind my relationship with a wonderful woman; I emptied my life of friends, community, possessions. I wanted to reduce life to its bare essentials. I took Thoreau to task literally: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach and not when I came to die discover that I had not lived.”

So I plunked down my life savings and bought fifty acres of rocks and ponderosa near this river in Central Montana. I gradually began putting back things I found I needed. I needed shelter, so, making a compromise for comfort, set up a yurt rather than a teepee. For the first year I slept on the floor in a sleeping bag, then built a bed. I cooked on a camp stove, then set up a propane stove and a kitchen. I installed solar panels for electricity. I watched as the yurt began to quickly fill with bookcases, a table, desk, chairs. By winter I realized the chickadees, Clark’s nutcrackers, deer, and dog weren’t enough. It was time to bring my daughter for a visit.

Jasmine wants to bring her new *Charlotte's Web* video she got from McDonalds.

“You can bring it, but it won’t do you much good,” I tell her, wondering when McDonalds started selling videos.

“Why not?”

“I don’t have a TV.”
Below us the river carves a serpentine route through the dark volcanic rocks studded with ponderosa pine. The snow-covered Rocky Mountain Front forms the western skyline.

It’s too complicated to explain, so I say we are going up the hill, but we break through the crusty snow and she falls, getting cold and wet. By the time we reach to the top she is crying and miserable. However, we have just come up a great sledding hill, so even if she refuses, I’m determined to sled. My wrecks delight her, and she makes me do it again and again.

After lunch, Jasmine leads me up the rocks, insisting on climbing up and over them, telling me the rock outcrops are pirate ships.

“Come on, we have to climb up and find a rock to sit on so we can look at stuff,” she tells me.

“You can see everything from up here,” she proclaims when we reached the first outcrop.

“Look at all this stuff! There’s our house and Mike and Lu’s and the mountains and all this stuff!” she says, waving her arms.

Below us the river carves a serpentine route through the dark volcanic rocks studded with ponderosa pine. The snow-covered Rocky Mountain Front forms the western skyline.

I’ve lived here long enough to have fallen into a routine. My peregrinations carry me over the same territory, incising well worn paths into the hillside. Often where I stray from the path I find myself in unfamiliar and confusing terrain. So today I let Jasmine chart the course and we head up the road, Jasmine pulling her sled. I ask if she wants to ride and me to pull, but she refuses.

“I hate that,” she informs me.

“You’d rather pull the sled?”

“Yeah.”

So we walk and race, although she always has to win. When we reach the backside of the hill, I suggest a shortcut.

“You got a hair cut?” she asks.
Clarity Can Be Deceptive

Come on, let’s find a rock to sit on,” Jasmine says.

When we reach the next rock she says, “let’s go sit over here.” Then, “no, over here.”

I’ve encountered the same dilemma myself: there are just too many good sitting rocks. We finally find a place and pile up rocks. I hand her a rock.

“Oh, thanks, that’s the one I was looking for,” she says.

I give her another.

“Oh, that’s the one I was looking for too.”

We build cairns, or “buildings” as she calls them, until the sun began to set over the Front, turning the evening sky into an event.

That night, we dance to the blues on the radio while the rice simmers on the stove and sing songs to my lousy guitar playing. Jasmine selects “Alexander the Horse” for her bedtime story from the box of childhood books I’d hauled from my parents’ basement. She then falls asleep on my chest while I read Gary Snyder poems aloud to her. As the fire crackles in the wood stove, I lie in bed and listen to the geese honking across the waning moon.

On the last day of her visit, we walk down to the river. It’s still frozen, but the water runs over the top and under the ice. The river has dropped significantly from last week, and pallets of ice strewn about the high water mark lie melting in the sun. I pick up a handful of floe ice. It splinters apart in dozens of slivers. A pair of Canada geese stand like lawn ornaments on the opposite bank, watching our every move. Have they already mated? A canyon wren trills from the cliff, evoking a flood of memories and longing.

By summer Jasmine has returned and I have purchased the duckie. Floating down the river, we watch the cliff swallows dart and soar overhead as we pass their mud nests stuck like warts onto the cliff.

More and more shoot out of the nests like clowns tumbling out of a Volkswagen. If there is such a thing as reincarnation, let me come back as a swallow. A perfect parabola of flight. They hang in front of us for just an instant, then twist and the wind pitches them backward. They whisk by within arm’s reach as if showing off. Neither catching insects nor engaged in courtship, simply flying out of sheer ecstasy. One after another glides by; they chase and turn. Just past the rock, they tuck in their wings and let the wind whip them back to the starting point. This swallow run along the cliff is less than one hundred yards. They look like kayaks playing in the rapids.

A pair of swallows flirt; each one rising higher and circling the other as if on a vertical column of air. Higher and higher they fly until almost out of sight. They join in conjugal bliss and plummet earthward, locked in a deathly embrace. A few feet above the river they part and resume their sky antics.

A kingfisher scolds us as he stays just ahead of the boat. Jasmine delights in the downy merganser chicks furiously beating the water, trying to keep up with their mother. All summer I will watch them grow as their numbers diminish. Some merganser mothers fledge all ten; others will only have two or three left by summer’s end.

We round the corner just as a great blue heron takes flight, stroking the air with its enormous wings, like a prehistoric creature. Wordlessly, Jasmine follows its flight with her eyes.

I stop paddling, and we float silently by a bald
eagle’s nest crowning an immense ponderosa pine. Every year the eagles add to the nest; every year they raise two or three young. All summer and fall they spiral overhead. First one appears, then another and another and soon the sky is filled with eagles diving on each other and playing tag like ravens. The eagles always seem to affirm something. When I wonder what on earth I am doing with my life, I look up just as an eagle soars into view. Craning our necks, we see an adult eagle eyeing us nervously from its perch as we drift past.

Last summer someone shot one of the eagles. I found the carcass later. There wasn’t much left but feathers and a skeleton. I brought home a wing feather and the skull.

“\textbf{W}hen we get back to the truck can we go again?” Jasmine asks.

“We’ll take out at the house and go get the truck tomorrow,” I tell her.

“I mean when we get back to the truck,” she says.

“The river doesn’t take us back to the truck.”

“We’re not going back?”

“No, Jasmine, the river only flows one way,” I say, struggling to keep the duckie pointed downstream.

Jasmine turns around and looks at me incredulously.

“But that’s where we started,” she insists.

“Yes, but the river only flows one direction.” I try to think of how to explain this. “When we get back I’ll show you a map.” This seems the only way I can conceptualize the notion.

“The river doesn’t go back to the truck?” she asks.

“No, it only flows downhill. The truck is upstream. We start there and float downstream until we reach the house. Then we take out and tomorrow we’ll drive back up and pick up the truck.”

She turns back around, unsatisfied with my explanation. Clearly I’m trying to weasel out of going again.

Like so many elephants, grey and imposing, wrinkled and smooth, the dark rocks watch over the river. Kingfishers dart among their feet and swallows and nighthawks ply their updrafts and nest on their bellies. Large multi-hued dragonflies coast over the placid summer water. The river sculpts pools out of the rocks, an artist intimately chipping away at her subject.

A white bathtub ring against the grey cliffs indicates June’s highwater mark a foot above us. Jasmine refuses to believe me when I tell her that all the cottonwood logs, bare and white, stacked up twenty yards from the river’s edge, were deposited just a few weeks ago by this river.

At peak runoff, I had launched my kayak into the river, hurtling down rapids I didn’t know existed, flying over boulders I knew were there but couldn’t see. I was lost, all landmarks flooded; this was some other river than the placid stream I knew. The water so muddy, it seemed as much solid as liquid. Usually it’s so clear you see right to the bottom of a fifteen-foot-deep pool, like looking through tinted green glass.

I wish I could say that I’ve come to know this river over the years, but my knowledge is superficial, despite having floated and hiked it numerous times and in all seasons. The river defines the place, yet it remains unknowable. I like to think I know the best fishing holes, where the beaver live, where the birds nest, when the mergansers fledge, how to best negotiate the two rapids, but I find the river keeps changing. One year there is a sandy beach next to the swimming hole, the next year it’s gone. The route through the rapids changes with the water level, which fluctuates daily. Sometimes the whitefish spawn in late October, other years it’s a month earlier.

“Look—pelicans!” I exclaim to Jasmine when they fly overhead in military formation, as if I expect her to be thrilled with the same incongruity I feel upon seeing pelicans in Montana.

We hold an image in our minds of what a place should be like and who should inhabit it, as if our limited imaginations have pre-designed nature. I am elated when these birds shake my idea of how things are. Yet Jasmine accepts it all with a nod as if this is precisely how things are meant to be.
Deep pools seethe with fish. Low angled sunlight sets the tall grass on fire. A swallow dive bombs a kestrel. I tell myself that if I live next to this river long enough I might learn something.

It begins to rain. Lightly at first, then turning into a deluge. As the little boat fills with rainwater and spray from the rapids, it behaves like a bathtub, but not nearly as responsive and certainly less warm. The rapids are really little more than ripples, but from this perspective below the river’s surface they resemble catastrophic waterfalls. Jasmine screeches with glee each time we hit a rapid and laughs joyously at each wave that drenches me.

“I'm not wet at all!” she proclaims, bundled up in my oversized raincoat and perched atop a drybag above the soggy floor of the raft.

“That's good,” I mutter, holding my arms so the several gallons of river that have washed over me on the last rapid can drain out of my raincoat, which proves completely impervious to letting water out.

As the boat fills with water, my efforts at negotiating the twisting river in a waterlogged, half-submerged kayak with tiny plastic paddles prove useless. While we bounce off rock walls and spin helplessly about in eddies, Tracy, sealed in a plastic tube and coated with neoprene, glides gracefully from rapid to rapid, from bank to bank, choosing her own path.

I spot a shallow cave and we pull out. We eat lunch and dry out somewhat while watching the rain pucker the river.

When the rain dissipates, I empty the bathtub of several inches of standing water, and we continue downstream past towering cliffs streaked with Halloween orange and fluorescent green lichens.

“Dad, can I paddle?” Jasmine asks.

Nothing to lose, and in fact with two of us we manage to maneuver the boat into rapids and hit them head on so I can get drenched even more.

As evening grows, insects drop tantalizingly into eddies. Flycatchers and sandpipers cruise the edge of water and air. Deep pools seethe with fish. Low angled sunlight sets the tall grass on fire. A swallow dive bombs a kestrel. I tell myself that if I live next to this river long enough I might learn something.

We reach the takeout. As I lug the duckie up the bank, Jasmine asks, “Can we go again tomorrow?” ♦
I will be living out of the black
and white with dreams stained seaweed
green and melon-colored salmon.

*I can't believe they let me live here.* Soon
I will stroll in the twilight and the blessed being-needed-glow
of fishers and their scaled leaping lifeblood.

When they call me up

to the wild I will live stark
and striking with the walking embers. I'll write
something; I'll get cold
and hungry for many months and many
things will move me—some won’t.
I will raise a flannel boy, and he will be barefoot
and brazen to the cold. He will help me do things. Soon
I will lead a different life—eyes fixed firmly and salt—
salt gilding my ears.
April nights are long in the boatyard. Gill netters on racks with nets strewn out for mending, suspended over gravel. Water ruts the paths. Common rain melts the last ice harbored in shade.

The other deckhands linger far south. After the random noise of daily work only scattered wheelhouses glow. The clink of bottles and a guitar hooked to a pig-nose amp down by the Russian boats carries through still air, Smoke on the Water. I hung up the payphone after a strained call. Distance can’t disguise the harshness of a leaden apology.

On the Alaskan Peninsula

Jerry Mathes II
Nak Nek is six miles away
over frost heaves and sumps.
I walk most nights, but the fog’s
Coming in. Glenda, the cab driver
from La Jolla likes Whitman, wears
pooka shells and peace signs. Her blonde hair
smells like she sleeps on tundra.

The Natives say,
Fog-Woman brings the salmon,
she’s always out of reach after Raven’s
rudeness. He always chases her.

Mist moves fast
among the masts and boats
appear drifting through dry-dock.
Alaska Public Radio plays
as the taxi’s defroster fan rattles
on winter loosened bearings.

I could take off in most directions
and never be missed.
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