

Camas

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Article 1

Summer 2008

Camas, Summer 2008

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et al.: Camas, Summer 2008

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

Summer 2008

Craig Childs
sand

photo essay by
Bryce Andrews

Nathaniel Miller
ten years of stony sleep

poetry by **Aleria Jensen** **Scott Jones** **Jessica Babcock**

Sweat

drips from my breasts and elbows,
and they are rivers. We
are rivers formed
of alpine trickles. We are the snowmelt,
on fire and flaming, our hands cracking
sticks together, cracking the face
of the darkness with escaping prayers, sparks
rushing to lead them.

I have trouble keeping
my eyes open. Either way I see
the same—nothing and everything,
present and accounted for.
I have become a creature of the ranks of the blind.
Prayer sticks in hand,
we turn from the bright and nimble breeze
into the center of the earth and we chisel,
piles of auburn splinters growing around
our bare feet and slipping down
between the boughs of spruce
that cushion our vigil.

We have each taken a bite of the pemmican
and we have found ourselves
satisfied.
The human voice of the great crane. The voice
of the chickadee speaking
of a perfect day. *Rise up
and raise your head, my sisters and brothers,
rise up and be your own joy, and that
of your companions.*

Jessica Babcock



Contributors

Camas, Vol. 16, No. 2 [2008], Art 1

Bryce Andrews is a freelance writer and graduate student in the University of Montana's environmental studies program. Raised by a photographer, he enjoys reducing the world to black and white.

Jessica Babcock was sidelined this winter by a nasty cross-country ski accident and the ensuing knee surgery. But there has been a silver lining to this sedentary, medicated lifestyle: plenty of time to write psychedelic, narcotic-induced poems. However, Jess promises that her poems in this issue of *Camas* are not of the drug-induced kind.

Monika Bilka usually explores the Southern Oregon Cascades and high desert, but moved to Montana in 2006 to pursue her Master's degree. When she's not researching and writing history, she is probably dancing, hiking, or cross-country skiing.

Brant Cebulla hails from Pismo Beach, California. At just 21 years old, he's not going to humor anyone with a full-fledged bio. Give him a few years and it'll be fledged.

Danielle Chalfant grew up a Park Service kid, and is currently an environmental studies undergraduate at the University of Montana. She has lived in Yellowstone for the last ten years, but has always been in or around National Parks.

After graduating with a philosophy degree from the University of Montana, **Clark Chatlain** moved to Bozeman and then Portland, Oregon, for two years. He was happy to return to Missoula in 2004. He will be teaching in the film program at the University of Montana beginning in the fall of 2008. He has previously published poetry in *Crab Creek Review*, *Small Spiral Notebook* and *Boxcar Poetry*, among other publications.

A well-seasoned naturalist, writer and commentator, **Craig Childs** is the author of several books, including *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, *The Desert Cries*, *House of Rain* and most recently, *The Animal Dialogues*. He is a frequent commentator for NPR's Morning Edition, and his work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Natural History*, *Orion* and *Outside*. He lives off the grid with his wife and two sons in Colorado.

C. A. Dahl's poem is dedicated to rancher Sid Goodloe, who shared his land with nature writers, teaching us the difference between loving the land with words and living the land each day. Dahl has poems in eight anthologies and was a nonfiction award finalist in the Texas PEN Literary Competition.

Bethann Garramon is a photographer, illustrator, artist, aspiring farmer, and Montana Rocky Mountain Front native. Her focus is black-and-white traditional wet darkroom techniques, and natural history illustration. She currently is back on the Front, working as a Conservation Educator for the Boone and Crockett Club's Anderson Conservation Education Program.

Aleria Jensen lives at the edge of Auke Bay near Juneau, Alaska, at the bottom of a steep hill with a new set of stairs. Her poetry and essays have been previously published in the *Potomac Review*, the *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Orion*.

Scott Alexander Jones is an aspiring expatriate, a Texan, and a current MFA student in poetry at the University of Montana. His spacetime coordinates range from Seattle during the WTO riots to the ruins of an abandoned farmhouse in the Sierra Nevada foothills.

Matthew Kaler holds an MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry, from the University of Montana in Missoula, the city of his birth. He has lived on the Island of Malta in the Mediterranean, and Oahu, but contends that the Seeley-Swan Valley is one of the most gorgeous places on the planet. His favorite story is *The Third Man* by Graham Greene.

Mike Quist Kautz grew up at the end of a dirt road in western Maine. Between college and graduate school he worked as a potato truck driver, a longshoreman, a newspaper photographer, a logger, and a middle manager. He enjoys fancy desserts and riding motorcycles.

Chavawn Kelley has received fellowships from the Wyoming Arts Council, the Ucross Foundation and Can Serrat International Arts Center (Spain). Her work has been published in *Creative Nonfiction*, *Quarterly West* and *Hayden's Ferry Review*, among others, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and cited in Best American Essays. She lives in Laramie, Wyoming.

Mike Lommler is an itinerant photographer, writer and biologist. Much of his work is focused on the American Southwest, which is not where he is from but is where he feels at home.

Nathaniel Miller is a former art critic and ranch hand who enjoys pig-meat, old Russian folk music and books about Ned Kelly. He is not from the same place as you. Take his advice or you'll curse the day you started rolling down that lost highway.

Melissa Mylchreest grew up in Connecticut, lived amidst the hardwood forests and along the Atlantic coast, then moved to the Northern Rockies. She is a writer, artist, and chef, with a BA in poetry and an MS in environmental writing.

Tyler C. Pedersen is a native Montanan. As an Americorps volunteer in Oregon, Tyler is actively involved with watershed restoration projects, community outreach, stewardship education with local schools and the monitoring and protection of native amphibians and reptiles. In December 2007, Tyler self-published *Nostalgia, Naturally*, a book of poetry and photographs.

Growing up outside Chicago, **Katherine E. Standefer** oriented herself toward dark-bellied thunderclouds, tangled thickets, and the vast plains west. She now lives happily in a slightly dilapidated cabin in Hoback, Wyoming, working as a ski instructor, wilderness counselor, and writer-in-residence at Jackson Hole Middle School. She has won the Reville Prize for Fiction and The Colorado College Award in Literature grant.

Jeanine Stevens' poems have been published in *The South Dakota Review*, *Wavelength*, *Timber Creek Review* and *Rattlesnake Review*. Her other work will soon appear in *Poet Lore*, *Westwind*, and *Quercus Review*. She won first place in poetry from the Stockton Arts Commission, and from the Mendocino Coast Writer's Conference (College of the Redwoods).

Cathrine L. Walters grew up in southern Wisconsin. After a few years of working as a wildlife and range tech in Wisconsin and Idaho, she landed in Missoula working for Wildlands CPR as their program associate. She eventually took some time off to pursue her other passion of art through photography and graduated from the Rocky Mountain School of Photography in 2007.

Contents

From The Editors

One Year In A Janitor's Closet 4
by Brooke Havice

Nonfiction

Ten Years of Stony Sleep..... 6
by Nathaniel Miller

Sand 14
by Craig Childs

Everything I Know About Red
Canyon Red 20
by Chavawn Kelley

Abandoned 26
Range-Finding, Western-Style..... 28
by Mike Quist Kautz

Fiction

Rushing to Meet Dawn 22
by Brant Cebulla

StealthwalkersInside back cover
by Katherine E. Standefer

Photo Essay

Bones 30
by Bryce Andrews

Poetry

Sweat Inside front cover
The Springs at Night 17
by Jessica Babcock

The Blue Nun 9
by Jeanine Stevens

Replacing the Stairs 10
by Aleria Jensen

To Sacrifice an Ideal 11
Naming A Dark Rain Whiskey 33
by Matthew Kaler

The Sky Over Montana Will Hear Your
Singular Complaint 13
by Clark Chatlain

Sid's Rainstorm 18
by C.A. Dahl

Indian Summer's End 24
Northwest Passage 35
by Scott Jones

Dear Helen 32
by Melissa Mylchreest



Derek Kanwischer

Cover Photo by Derek Kanwischer: Valley Road Fire 2005: White Cloud Mountains of SE Central Idaho

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First Person

One Year In A Janitor's Closet

Change. If you turn to any media, the 2008 presidential race will slap you in the face with an extreme overuse of the word. Missoula is Montana's democratic hotspot and debates between editors spring up in the *Camas* office often: Obama 1, Clinton 1, dogs can't vote.

Prepping this issue of the magazine, with each change, addition and adjustment contributing to a tidal wave of tension in the *Camas* office, can start to feel like the dynamic of a family, or more accurately opposite-sex siblings. Let's just say that the *Camas* "office" is a glorified janitor's closet with a window. Two editors, an intern and golden retriever step over one another on a semi-daily basis. Complete with mini-fridge, three printers, wonky century-old pipes and the most eclectic book collection of all time, the *Camas* office is a home away from home where this girl has learned to hold her own. After all, even the dog comes loaded with testosterone.

This last fall marked the 15th Anniversary of *Camas*. Anyone who picks two issues at random from the last decade and a half will notice how it has changed: Evolved, improved, focused, matured. This list can be interpreted however you wish.

As one of the blips on the *Camas* timeline (called editor), I find myself in an emotional quandary, as it is time for this journal to once again change hands. As managing editors we have one year to leave our mark and improve upon the last; mine is nearly over.

The production of *Camas* is a textbook definition of a collaborative effort. There are many volunteers dedicated to sending a professional-quality journal out into the world two times per year, in addition to life's obligations as graduate students. These efforts build relationships and skill sets. From both we take what we can, move forward and leave the rest to experience.

The *nature of the west* has changed and continues to change. I've made my contribution as a Montana implant and am constantly reminded to respect nature, tradition and the people who have invested their lives in this beautiful place. I write this as the seasons change. I am teased with warm air and sunshine, only to remember that it is spring in Montana, not my Southern home. Here, we get snow and crocus. In Clemson (South Carolina for those of you not familiar with the color orange) the azaleas will be vibrant in the balmy air (or steamy to the mountain refuge) when I pay my spring visit.

Being in Missoula, a place I never visited before I moved, and so far from home, has made me homesick for the weirdest things. Clemson sports come to mind first, unhealthy food takes a quick second, followed by the sun and the beach, separately fulfilling entities. I'd take one, just one.

The University of Montana is a "sports school" and Missoula thrives on the fall and winter frenzy of football and basketball. Quite like my Southern football-crazed school, Saturdays in the fall create traffic jams and increased per capita alcoholism/botulism from tailgating, just on a much smaller scale. Not to be critical, but the stadium capacity of Clemson's Death Valley is 80,000+ compared to 25,000 for the Griz. But that's fine, because it's the *nature of the west* that brought me to the University of Montana. I prefer catching games from a



1000-foot vantage point atop Mount Jumbo.

March Madness started with a flash of orange that went out about as fast as a faulty Roman candle. I was psyched that my team made it on the tournament bracket at all. Yes, I picked them for a couple of rounds as any bleeding-orange CU Tiger would. Watching an ACC school in a western bar was hysterical. The worse the game got, the more obvious my borrowed Southern accent. The bartender felt sorry for me, served us a round of shots and sent me on my way. He foolishly picked Clemson in his bracket too.

I'll be graduating as this journal lands on your coffee tables, my personal season of change. Even as fall and Southern football is just around the corner, I don't plan on going anywhere for a while. Missoula

and the *nature of the west* suit me, in their own special way. How can I move away from the snow with which my dog is infatuated, a place where "I never drive my car," and the healthiest lifestyle I've ever sustained?

This force called graduate school is like the thunderstorms of the approaching summer: fun to watch, stressful to be in the middle of, and worth the exhaustion caused by the chaos. Whether you want it to or not, graduate school will change you, hopefully for the best. I changed my entire life to come to this place with a curiosity to see what would be the result two years down the road. A chance to make a change in myself and take a chance in what that change could be.

Going back to school gave me an opportunity to push myself to work, volunteer, learn out of the classroom, risk my preconceived notions of myself and the environmental movement, get to know more people and places, and take a chance on those people and places. The result has been a changed life, a changed person. For the better, though my opinion is slightly biased. Though I won't be replacing my tigers with grizzly bears anytime soon, I have been identified as a local due to my propensity to frequent a certain Missoula microbrewery.

I have to personally (and on behalf of my co-editor) thank everyone who has dedicated their time and effort to *Camas* while they have been changing their lives through graduate school. Without our editors and editorial board, this publication would not be possible. Thank you!

This is my farewell and note of gratitude to the graduate school experience, to managing a graduate student journal that finds its way to more than forty states. It was fun and I pass on the experience to someone else. They will make change and continue the development of the journal I've now become a part of. That change will be respected, as the duty of another to make *Camas* the best it can be.

Brooke Havice
April 2008

THE NATURE OF THE WEST Camas

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Submit!

Camas is seeking submissions for our
Winter 2008 issue

We welcome your submissions of non-
fiction, poetry, fiction, photography,
and book reviews

Deadline: October 15

E-mail: camas@mso.umt.edu



Sara Cook

Ten Years of Stony Sleep

Nathaniel Miller

Billboards for the Montana Valley Book Store advertise “over 100,000 books” and “expresso.” I’m driving west of Missoula on I-90, looking for Alberton and the chlorine spill that tore it apart in 1996. I’ve read enough to know it’s a delicate matter, and the book store seems like it might, of all local establishments, be receptive to my questioning.

Inside the store there is no one. It’s a converted house, with many hundreds of thousands of books over the estimated mark, and dark little passage-ways that you’re required to light as you go. The smell is dank, like rotting pulp, and everything appears to lean. A sign says there’s more in the basement but I won’t go down there.

I hear footsteps and the creaking of a door but that’s all. The only voice is that of an evangelical radio preacher, turned up to top volume and wired throughout the place so he seems to be speaking from every dark corner. He keeps repeating himself, saying over and over emphatically that, “if you let unresolved anger accumulate, it gives Satan a stronghold in your home.”

Chlorine, the poison gas, 130,000 pounds; potassium cresylate, a corrosive, 17,000 gallons; sodium chlorate, an oxidizer, 85 dry gallons. April 11, 1996: 19 cars from the Montana Rail Link meet a fractured section of track and derail near Alberton, Montana. About 1,000 people are evacuated from town; 350 are treated for chlorine inhalation; nine, including the two members of the rail crew, are

hospitalized; one hobo, aboard the train, dies. I-90, only 150 yards north of the wreck, is closed as gas drifts across the road and multiple car accidents ensue. Those treated are told that, unless afflicted by some preexisting pulmonary ailment, they should recover with due speed.

In 1999, three years after the accident, people are still unwell. A citizens’ symptom list compiled by the Alberton Community Coalition for Environmental Health (ACCEH) lists recurring side-effects as follows: “acid reflux, asthma, blurred vision, brain encephalopathy, cancer(s), chemical antibodies, chloracne, chronic fatigue, decreased, motor skills [sic], depression, diarrhea, dizziness, dry eye syndrome, dry skin, eye disease’s, fibromyalgia, gastro-intestinal pain, headaches, heart palpitations, joint pain, light sensitivity, loss of balance, loss of concentration, loss of touch sensation, lupus, mental disturbances, migraines, mood swings, multiple chemical sensitivity, muscle pain, nausea, peeling skin, reactive airway disease, short term memory loss, sinitis, skin rashes, speech difficulties, sun sensitivity, teeth corrosion, tissue, swelling, tremors, vertigo, withdrawal, word usage problems.”

Some may be related to the spill, some may not, but medical studies (published in 2005 after a similar derailment in Graniteville, South Carolina) say that chlorine inhalation can lead to a chronic asthma-like illness dubbed RADS, or Reactive Airway Dysfunction Syndrome. Chlorine burns the lungs and long after, as the tissue heals, scarring takes its place.

Drug treatment is the same as it is for asthma, but RADS victims don't respond well to the medication.

The ACCEH warns citizens not to sign a blanket release of future claims against the Montana Rail Link, and not to participate in the free medical exam, offered like a dog biscuit. Children continue to fall ill, "exo-thermic mixing" is not taken into account (e.g. mixing a strong acid with water creates energy/heat), and residents complain of sickness when they eat food from their gardens.

Then the talk dies off. It's 2006 now and the scar tissue is heavy in the lungs of Alberton, Montana.

I walk next door to the bar, the Sportsman's Tavern – a snowmachine is mounted to the outside wall, high up near the roof. There's an impressive collection of mirrored beer signs and, on the bar, a giant plastic rat with its head in a trap, its face contorted. It's about noon, and the bartender is on the phone. She asks me if I want anything; I say I have a question but I'll wait. She says it's her daughter and it might be a while – they've been talking about some guy who's been seen around town with some girl, loaded – and she puts the phone on her hip. I ask about the location of the spill, as delicately as I can muster. She looks irritated and shakes her head.

"Over the tracks, maybe," she says.

Everything is over the tracks in Alberton. Half the businesses along the thin main drag are railroad-themed. Everything is right here, hunched up against the tracks. Nothing strays far.

I go to leave when the sole patron, an older man with his money splayed out before him like he plans on drinking for a while, addresses me.

"Any reason you want to know?"

I explain that I'm interested, that's all, and thinking of writing something. He gives me another look and provides exact directions.

I bartended years ago at a place called the Rocky Mountain Flamingo. It was in Collbran, Colorado, on the Western Slope – another one-horse town, capitalizing on hunters and natural beauty, with a host of drunks and trailers and prefab homes lining the street. But Collbran was a definitive backwater, deposited at the far dead-end of a long canyon and valley. Where ex-cons and vets came to hide from the world. Where the women wore denture sets that didn't fit and swore that the bar was the only place they were safe from further alien abduction. The bar had been shut down a few years back due to the prevalence of crystal meth transactions in the bathroom. At this place, the only bar for miles around, most of the customers were alcoholics with revoked driver's licenses, so they

walked from the trailer park.

I eighty-sixed two bar patrons that summer. Few bartenders get the opportunity to permanently eject more than one customer, if that.

One older woman was known for pissing in her barstool. I cut her off on a fine afternoon and she threw a glass at me, so I told her never to return.

Another gentleman was known for back-handing his wife at the bar, causing her nose to hemorrhage. This man, Len, was fighting with his wife one night. They were drunk and screamed obscenities with such vehemence that the other customers left. I would not serve him, so Len turned on me and determined that I was of Mexican descent. He had never heard of Connecticut. His strategy was to slip basic Spanish words into his conversation so that I might be tricked into responding in my native tongue. Eventually I told him to leave, at which point he said, "I'm going to kill you. I'm going to kill you tonight. You're not welcome here."

"Never come back," I said.

Len and his wife stepped into their car and he began to beat her. I removed the gun from the safe and called the county sheriff, based in DeBeque, 45 minutes away. It took him about an hour to arrive, by which time Len had gone and his wife was pacing up and down the street. The sheriff confronted her and she replied, "He never touched me."

I told my boss about the incident and the very next day he let Len back in the bar.

Following the Alberton patron's directions, I reach the end of the dirt road where the spill is supposed to have occurred. There is nothing. The road stops at two private properties – one a fence with a sign reading, "No doing anything." The other is a rough assemblage of trailers, broken-down vehicles, various items lying about. As I'm turning my truck around, two dogs come running at me, barking and frothing, scratching at the windows. They chase me about 500 yards back up the road. I think, "I better not run over either of these dogs," and remember the gun under my seat.

I park where I can walk down to the tracks and the river, less than a mile from the scene of disaster. Nothing to be seen, but land provides evidence of its wounds. You know of the scars just by looking around, whether through projection or authentic sensory input. There is a hint of it on the air – a slight tang – however imagined, and a low-lying anger in the trees and water. A wronging remembered. It's the same as with a piece of ground that's been ploughed up and under, though a chemical spill seems like it might leave a particularly nasty mark.

And how do you define hurt? An unwelcomeness, perhaps. There is no signage here, no memorial for the transient who died, no pamphlets about cleaning up the soil or petitioning for federal compensation. A banner back in town read, "Welcome Hunters," but I haven't seen any. This place should be swarming with hunters and fishermen on a beautiful Saturday in autumn, but the only cars going by are on the highway, across the Clark Fork. Passing, passing, passing Alberton.

The backdrop here is sheer hillside, burnt dead, rock exposed. It's slate-grey, forbidding, a fortress wall. It seems appropriate that this mountain is here. The mind wants to put together the spill and this cliff's wracked appearance, as though it took the brunt of an invisible explosion. But a spill is quieter, sneakier. It drifts into the air, seeps into the water.

Two bald eagles cross paths neatly overhead, looking for something. Can they eat what they need to, or will it make them ill like the vegetables in people's gardens?

Passing houses on this back road, I wonder if they were evacuated in 1996. Someone is building a new house near the spill site. Is he digging a well?

The ACCEH must have had one hell of a time rounding up support for its efforts.

Neighbors who complain of sickness today are probably met with eye-rolling.

It's small-town Rocky Mountain West. I know these places. And I've watched: This is where so many people prefer to move on, to stomach their pains, to let their resentment build against the U.S. government. "Abandon hope all ye who enter..."

I walk right down to the tracks and stare at them. Bringer of good or bringer of evil? I bet the

perspective has altered over the last century. And I can't resist holding my breath. Afraid to take a big whiff of this poisoned air, ten years later. If I linger here long enough, I will convince myself I can smell it. Like an over-treated pool. Like a bottle of bleach you can't step away from.

The river looks all right – it's moving – but I don't let my dog drink from it. Around here, it's interrupted periodically by startling, large rock formations. They creep right into the river, or out of it, it's hard to tell. They look animate. Spines, scales. Here a mountainous vein of rock narrows the water's course to 10 or 15

feet, where the rest of it spans 50 or 60. It seems to come straight from the scored, slashed hill behind it – an arm of the castle wall.

On my way back to town, I cross the Natural Pier Bridge, one of Alberton's main attractions. It was once a component of the Yellowstone Trail, traversing Montana from Look Out Pass to North Dakota. The bridge was completed after much county/federal financial wrangling for \$100,000 in 1918.

Its middle pier is buried in one of these rocky spines – this one a towering dorsal fin, forcing the river to make way around it on either side. I cannot help but feel that the

bridge's demise is imminent. One day the beast will grow weary of its position, pinned to the river bottom, and it will tear loose from the concrete pylon with one great shudder.

About 30 yards downstream there are more rocks and, balanced atop the high ridge of one, a dead tree, bleached white and smooth from years of basking, hung up on that ridge and abandoned when the river was much higher. Its skinnier end leers out over the river – a long arm with hand and index finger outstretched – and seems to be pointing. It's aiming North, at Alberton.



I buy her at a roadside café
et al.: Camas, Summer 2008

in Bakersfield—folded hands
carve upward, arms dropping
white clouds—a waterfall dripping
golden leaves down her garment.

Warm, and smelling of cedar,
she is blue as veins in a dusty pink

Rose of Sharon. She is blue
because Russia is cold,

and that's where she comes from
holding a dime size charm—

a porcelain saint in a brown robe.

I don't know her faith, maybe
an icon or a holiday ornament.

I fasten her rusty hook to my saddle,
ride out and show her Nevada,

where blue is wide, white

is high, hills run yellow,

and a brown crust covers the earth.

The Blue Nun

Jeanine Stevens



October, and the menfolk crouch
in black mud under spruce trunks
and stalks of yellowing goatsbeard
heavy with fall.

They are comfortable here
where the hill empties,
boots a second skin
for the fourth day in a row.

Sometimes they ring the doorbell
to ask for a glass of water, a hat
a piece of scratch paper.

Meanwhile, through the window
I hear talk of thru-bolts and tread,
sawhorse brackets and spacers,
zip-ties, washers, two by tens.

I hear thirteen and five-eighths
and then fourteen and a quarter.

I hear the ease of tools
passed between them:

where's the tape measure

who has the level

gimme the hammer a sec.

All along I have been fitting intimacy
to the shape I know.

For a change I listen to their language,
hands and bodies attentive,
words a construct of tending.

Replacing the Stairs

Aleria Jensen

Let's not disturb the equilibrium

this'll give greater integrity

we need it snug and level.

Then the hum of the saw
and a board is carried over
oh god that's beautiful man!

Here, a tenderness toward
clean lines, lengths of timber
treated to carry our footsteps.
These men, they know precision
they know what fits
dead-on.

They will tell you exactly
what will add to your life
and what will take from it.



Eric Wall

To Sacrifice An Ideal

*is pretty much what God asked of Abraham, 'cause, what is a son if not that?, the transient offers from his factotum throne in the driver's seat of the Vanagon, axle-less, abandoned to the field in which he resides, wind pulsating through rivet-wheat he calls *the gold neighborhood*, above which phalanxes of geese pass over, darkly, how he recalls he was once a doctor down south but lost all his money to a malpractice-suit, Jack Daniels, and an ex-wife he refers to as, *The New Jersey of Heart*. How as a child in Harlem, up by the Fort Belknap Reservation, he endured ritual thrashings from a group of Gros Ventre boys while walking to school, more because of his runt-frame and glasses than his skin, more because his father worked for the Rendering plant, collecting dead livestock from ranchers along the Milk River on a flatbed pickup, and the indigo stain on the wood of that bed, and the night he told his father of the beatings, how the old man handed over his father's Colt pistol, and said, *I don't want to hear of it happening again*, and how those boys never relished so much as a sharp glance toward him after that next morning.*

- Matthew Kaler





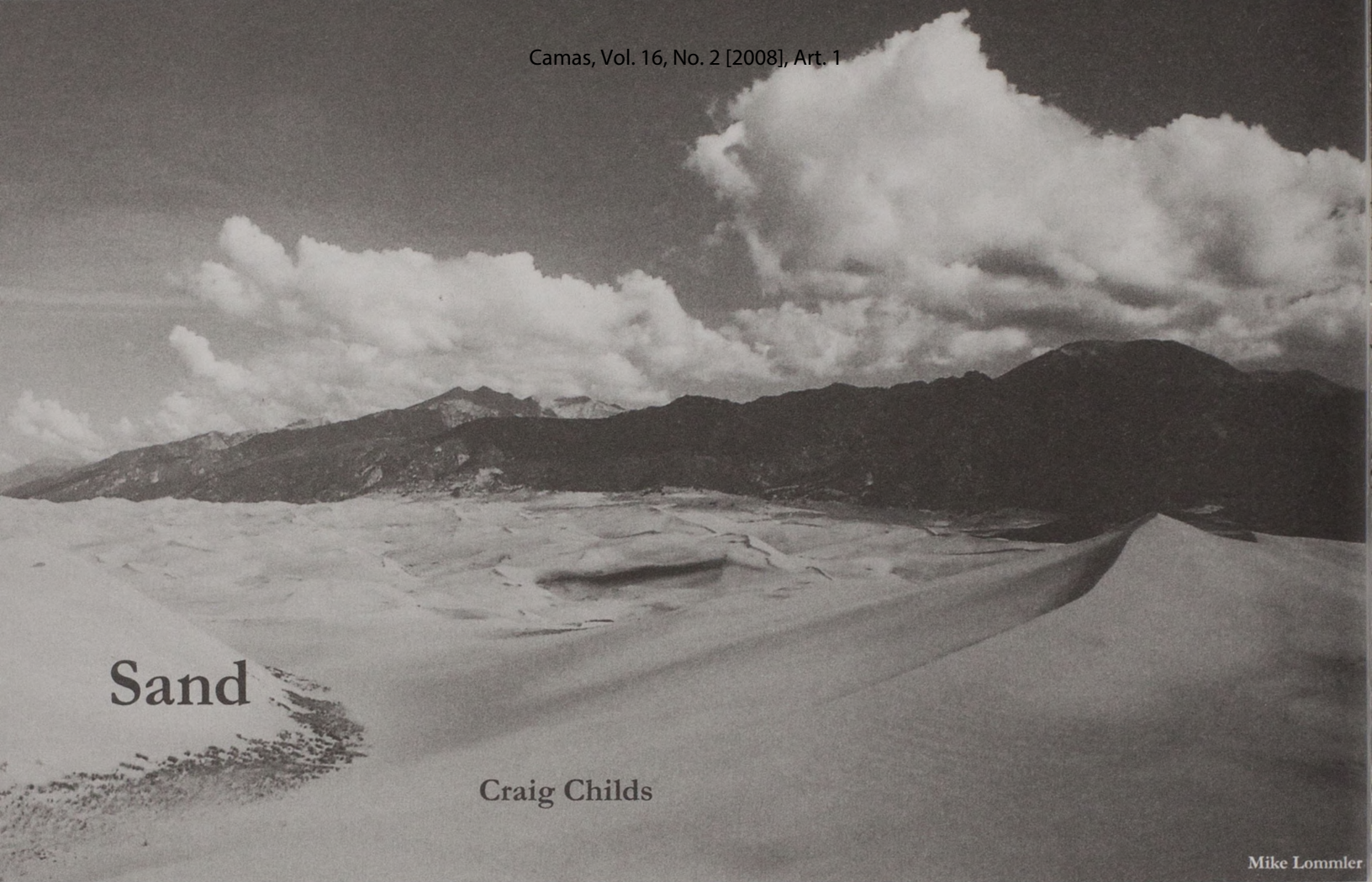
The Sky Over Montana Will Hear Your Singular Complaint

Clark Chatlain

Maybe your lover was some boy in Las Vegas and now you're dying alone.
A white gown wrapped around you. A white nursing home room
with letters and numbers taped to the door.
At night you're alone with a sterile ceiling of persecution
and willful ignorance
and the memory of moving among horses.
Their dark shapes bound you to that place the way
the sky isolated you, standing among bitter winds
under a pale morning sun.
But there was only one great catastrophe of your life:
the constant stench of the separator on the front porch.

The river is slow.

You watch now from a sterile room across
long farmlands lying in the warm sun of August.
Spring is far behind you.
There is cold linoleum under your slippered feet.
And you wonder at the beauty of that boy, at a sweet
temporary love that took your life.
At the secrets you bore,
telling them only to dark horses
under a single excruciating sky.



Sand

Craig Childs

Mike Lommler

The river lies in heaps, all of it turned to sand. No apparent life can be seen but for ripples and ribbons forming and dissolving in the wind. Sand glides several hundred feet up the steep north face of a dune, and about 400 feet up it threads around two small, dark circles. Hat brims, they both lie on the ground side by side like an improbable mishap, two unfortunate travelers drowned by the shifting earth. But there is life below, sunglasses glinting.

Buried up to my chin and lips, my eyes are open, gazing across a horizon of nothing but gentle crests. It looks carnal, naked figures spooned into each other, all shoulders and hips. Am I dreaming? I have been drifting in and out of sleep most of the day. Dream becomes waking, becomes dream again.

I blink. Still, I don't know.

I snuffle sand from around my mouth and say, "Hey, are you there?"

"I'm here," my partner answers as if he's been waiting for my voice.

"Are you awake?" I ask.

"I think so."

"Am I awake?"

"I think so."

"It's all sand. I'm dreaming about sand."

"God," he says.

We are quiet again and still I am not sure if I am awake or dreaming.

The white misery of the sun peaks around noon in the Gran Desierto of Sonora. A person should not be out at such an hour. Water escapes the skin fast enough to kill in one day, the body's moisture sublimating, turning from flesh to wind without becoming sweat. We cannot afford such loss.

To preserve our water, we practice the art of self-burial, digging coffins for our bodies and reclining into them on north slopes where the sun is not so direct. Hats protect the greasy knobs of our heads.

I blink again, looking across a silvery landscape, surface temperature of 130°. This is not the blistering expanse of the Sahara, nor are these the massive dunes of the Namib. It is one

of the lesser sand seas in the world, 5,000 square miles (the larger ranging toward 100,000). This is enough, though. Does one really need more than sand to every horizon, sand in every orifice? After a certain number of grains and square miles it all seems the same. Mathematical orders of motion and bound-particles tell the same ephemeral tale no matter where in the universe they are.

Shadows nick the tops of dunes, the first sign that time is, indeed, still moving forward. Over the length of a couple hours, or what seems like a couple hours, shadows open like sails as the sun arcs west. Heat slowly lifts out of the dunes and we both erupt at the same moment like beetles coming alive. For a moment we stand, two men naked and tall as pillars. I can feel my fingers, the hairs on my legs, my beard pouring down my chest. My companion lets out a roar of satisfaction, his neolithic voice howling into the wind.

With that, we glide down the long slope of the dune. Fine as flour, it washes around us like a wake. Belly first, hands clasped ahead as if diving

been besmirched. The cause of “singing dunes” is hypothesized to be vibrating sand waves, or the tuning-fork nature of compressed particles, or the amplitude of troughs and crests magnified as if through a bullhorn.

My theory is simple: Like huge iron bells, the dunes are ringing. There is no science to it. Bells simply ring. All they had to do was ask.

Swimming down the dune-face, we hear groans and thumps echoing beneath us, the kind of sound a mountain of snow makes before an avalanche: guttural commentary. The sounds fade as we glide to a stop at the bottom. Our backpacks are waiting for us mostly buried where we left them earlier in the day. Again, we stand, stretching our hands upward, letting our lungs expand, creatures of the earth. Our every bodily crevice weeps with sand.

Clothes on, we hitch gear onto our hips, then up to our shoulders. Our packs are fat with gallons of water, the only water to be found, which we carry westward, going nowhere but deeper. Our long shadows ripple behind us.

**We intend no such end for ourselves. Instead, we do
what the dunes tell us to do. We get out of the sun.
We swim in evening sand. We walk into the dark.**

into water, we part the dune. It ripples and purls as if it were water. Though such characteristics have been studied for nearly a century, no mathematical equation has yet been devised to handle the fluid mechanics of sand.

This particular sand owes its fineness to the delta of the Colorado River 60 miles distant. This is what remains of the American Southwest, the sediments of nearly 250,000 square miles of eroded earth dumped into a shallow, warm sea, and washed up along gentle beaches. Like the delta of any great river, this one is made of the finest possible sediment, mineral silts and tumbled specks of quartz. The lightest of these sediments are blown inland, millions of years piled upon each other into dune complexes shaped into domes, stars, and crescents.

Like most dunes, these make sounds: moans, whispers, and whines. Researchers have been arguing for decades about why sand dunes all over the world do this, and their disagreements have become so heated that scientific careers have

There is no celebrated reason for us to be here. No companies have sponsored gear or support; no expedition, no research project or National Geographic adventure. We are simply two men who for years have been curious what it would be like in the largest sand sea in North America.

Two men came a few weeks before us. I call them men because they were seasoned mountain climbers attempting an expedition across the dunes from one side to the next. They became separated (easy out here) and only one lived. The other was found along a trail of discarded remains. He first dropped his pack, no doubt relieved of the maddening weight of his water. With his supplies left behind — jettisoned perhaps in an attempt to move fast, to get out of the dunes — he steadily lost his mind. He gave up his boots and socks, then his shirt, then his pants, and finally his hat. At the end of this trail was a blistered and swollen body. He gave up everything layer by layer, until finally his life escaped in the wind.

We intend no such end for ourselves. Instead, we do what the dunes tell us to do. We get out of the sun. We swim in evening sand. We walk into the dark.

There are simple things you should know to survive here. Do not carry a stove, a pot, or even a bowl. Every piece of gear must serve at least two purposes. Dress like a scavenger. Never set down your pen, your knife, or anything small enough for the sand to swallow. I recommend coming without pockets. I had to take a knife to mine, slashing my cargo pants and my shirt pocket to let the sand out.

In the midnight black of stars, the wind has finally stopped, the space filled with a celestial silence. Even the ringing in the dunes has ceased. I swear I can hear my companion breathing a hundred yards away as he sleeps. We both lie with our backs to the ground. His camp is a high crest, a bed smoothed with his hands. My camp is in the bottom of a trough, a pearl in the bed of an oyster. I stare into a circle of stars.

When sunrise comes, we are already walking. A cool wind is on and I feel like the scupper on a ship, sand pouring through the slashes in my pockets, flowing in and out of me. Have I slept? Did I dream? The sun is a white glob on the horizon, its circle masked with mirages as light bends across the night-cooled earth. Depressions in the sand begin filling with heat. They look like pools of mercury. Distant dunes split in two, allowing their top-halves to rise into the sky like dirigibles. Of the many landscapes I have imagined, this is not one. It is nothing I knew could exist, its physics turned inside-out, time interwoven, space merging and springing apart.

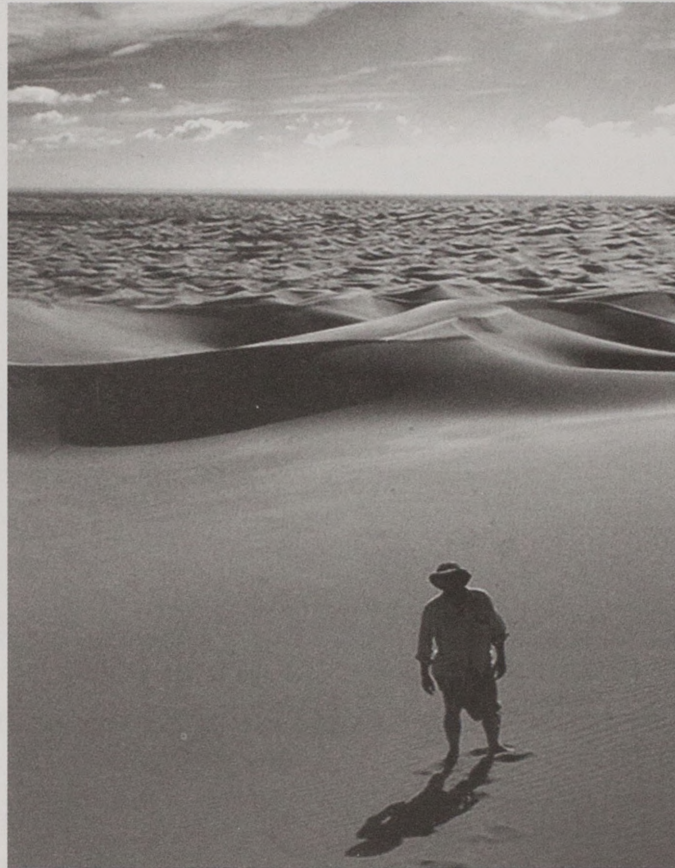
By noon, or what seems like noon, the dunes are unquestionably real. We stagger to our knees,

the insides of our mouths dusted with sand. Nothing more could we possibly desire in our lives. No umbilicus, no car left at a trailhead, no way out but our feet. We have come only deeper into the earth. We begin pawing down to get out of the sun. Another day in gorgeous hell.

With my trough dug out, I pause, forehead against tepid sand, forearms holding me up. I

want to rest a moment before lying in my sarcophagus, before the countless and sleepless dreams banish all sense of time.

I stretch my fingers through the sand, my eyes close enough to distinguish each grain's color. Red, blue, gray, white, and glass-clear. I pick out a black speck and imagine Vishnu Schist from the floor of the Grand Canyon. There is a peach that reminds me of Navajo Sandstone. Blue is Bright Angle Shale. Green is the olivine of the Rocky Mountains. I kiss the grains, my lips picking them up dry. As



we touch, I extend up the Colorado River, which no longer flows this far south.

It is said that if the alveoli of a person's lungs were stretched out they would cover half a football field. If every vein and capillary were laid end to end they would extend 60,000 miles. In this same way, I spread myself out in the sand, reaching up every gully and cut in the watershed that birthed this supernatural landscape: Gila River, Little Colorado, San Juan, Green. I see mountains and crystal waters at the head. I smell the sour rot of ferns in an aspen grove.

Already I am dreaming. I groan and roll to my back. Like pulling a blanket across me, I sweep sand over my body and sink irretrievably into the earth.

Photo courtesy of Craig Childs

The river ran
cold, the springs warm, seeping
up from the hot gravel
we sat on and down with the falls
over chartreuse moss and bracken.
It was all very lush, old snow
gilding the edges of the pool.
We drank a bottle of wine and a flask
of homemade kahlua, decided
that we were very cultured,
what with our baguette and muenster,
our variety pack of fancy olives,
small dark pits still nestled inside.

The warmth of the water held us
afloat. Every intake of breath and our breasts
broke the surface of the water. Smooth
sandstone colored islands in the clear
black gauze of the water. Our skin was the color
of moonlight, and the moon was its own
color. The moon its own, and our skin
glowing in it.

The springs at night

Jessica Babcock

I once read a poem about a woman
who had fallen from a cliff.

We were that woman, then, and
we were stunning.

*They found her face up, spread-eagled
on the sand, as if she'd been ravished
by a god, or tried to fly.*

We felt both the ravishing
and the flight.

That frantic slow motion
awareness before you hit the ground.

Sid's Rainstorm
C.A. Dahl

We writers sit on his porch when the sky opens. Dog Bob, moved by lightning, drags his buckshot-filled body to lie under the table across our damp and muddy-socked toes. Sid turns in his chair, "You can't cuss the rain, if you need it." He raises a jubilant fist to the sky, shakes it like a rain rattle, roaring. "Come on. Come on you storm."

His silver-haired profile sharpens against the wet screen sliding off the roof slats, cutting the landscape into slices like black rain lines in a Japanese woodcut.

"So writers, write about this storm," he shouts through cupped hands, out-hammering the thunder with his pounding voice. We pull our chins into jacket collars as the air on the porch grows cold as well water, so thick with moisture that a deep breath could feel like drowning. We write:

When it comes, it runs through ice cubes. The grass clumps tremble with the beating, while puddles jump and splash as if seeded with leaping tadpoles.

We write through the moisture, force the curling pages down, watch the pine trees bend to the rain-dam breaking on their sap-filled boughs. Our inks grab the fibers of the paper, refusing to gray out, but hold the color like the dark pines of a Chinese painting.



“Damn you sucking junipers,” he stamps his feet as if he could stop the roots’ silent slurping. “Drink 200 gallons a day. My rain,” he shouts. We write:

The mud on the road goes slick as silk, sliding on itself down the hill. Scrubbed mud, rubbed mud, blending shards and arrowheads in water ridges, erasing tire tracks of pickup trucks and horses’ feet.

“That’s the last kick of the horse,” he says and stands. “Hell of a ride.” The sky, depleted and subdued, drips its last spots on our pads, smearing whatever we wrote. We blot the raindrops mixed with ink off on our jeans to join the dirt we carry in our hiking pockets, cuffs, and hair.

Sid, mood changed like the weather, steps off his porch of hand-hewn Ponderosa pine, hitting the steps he built to reach the land sooner than a door can open, sniffs the air for bear, elk, beaten mint, the smell of satisfied soil under new sun.

Someone asks, “How much rain fell, Sid? Six inches?” Lost in his personal landscape, Sid never turns. “I don’t measure the rain. I measure the grass.”



Everything I Know About Red Canyon Red

Chavawn Kelley

David Love said his mother made the children cross the street rather than pass her on the sidewalks of town. That was the first I heard of Red Canyon Red. He mentioned it as the wind blew and we stood at the edge of the scenic overlook, the canyon's namesake walls of sandstone alive as sails, billowing past Table Mountain to the Absarok Range. David's hair was gray. He said her hair was red, the woman who opened her door to men.

My friend Harvey said he was in uniform, back from the war, when he sat next to her one night at the Lander Bar. The way she opened her legs on the stool when he looked down was how he knew. And Red Canyon Red was not young by then. Her son was also home on leave and Harvey noticed what a hero he'd become. The way she sat, Harvey said, was how he knew that night, more than fifty years ago.

The nursing home directory listed her as a resident. Was she among the numb waiting in chairs along the wall? Or did she lie alone in an unstained bed? Her name in white letters pressed onto a field of black said nothing of Red Canyon Red. What did the aide walk in to her room to find? That she'd slipped from her body the way she used to ease from her slip for hire? The newspaper notice of her death was small.

We only lived in her house a month, not in Red Canyon but on Seventh Street, in town. With fresh paint throughout and a new storm door. Across the street, the neighbor said a workman reached his arm into a vent in the bedroom floor to discover that what was blocking the duct was thirty thousand dollars in crumpled bills. The son—a state attorney general by then—gave up no reward.

In a wet year, the larkspur grows high as a foal, and its blue is Red Canyon's response to sky. The flowers of the arrow-leaf balsamroot are yellow, the sun in multitude. Penstemon and Indian paintbrush, in flower among the sage, press from soil as red as a woman's monthly days or a battlefield. Red Canyon says there's a nature not preserved in The Nature Conservancy's new Red Canyon Ranch.

And everything I know of Red Canyon Red is nothing at all.



Cathrine Walters



Rushing To Meet Dawn

Brant Cebulla

“Coffee’s all around I think,” Michael said, looking at his girlfriend Martha for reassurance. Their friend Edmund sat alone across the table.

“I’d like the Moons Over My Hammy plate too, with hash browns,” said Edmund. “Make sure they’re brown, not yellow. I want my potatoes looking like potatoes, not eggs.”

“Browns? You’re worried about the browns?” Michael asked. “What I say about ordering things with eggs at Denny’s?”

“Something about poor chickens, refresh me.”

“That’s right; they’re brutalized so you can eat a sandwich.”

“Alright boys,” the waitress said, familiar with these three 4:00 AM regulars. “Anything else?”

“Just waters,” Martha said.

Michael, Martha and Edmund had all graduated from Salinas High School at the end of the spring. They would all start college in two weeks after spending the summer cooped up in the Salad Bowl of America. Edmund would be off to the University of Southern California, while Michael and Martha were headed to UC Santa Cruz, just a little ways north along the coast.

The fit there seemed perfect for Michael: a leftist university brimming with intelligent, cutting edge, tree-hugging neoteric-beatniks that called for the kind of environmental change he felt so akin to. After eighteen years of his young life, concern for the environment seemed to be the most meaningful thing he could take interest in, so he bound himself to the movement.

Problem was, Michael didn’t care much for the outdoors, and he knew that wouldn’t fly if he wanted to consider himself an environmentalist. So he often felt compelled to verbally validate himself, drawing upon “fond childhood memories” of camping in the Sierras as the foundation for his false sense of love for nature. To further legitimize his image, Michael had been the secretary of his high school’s recycling club and vaunted that he was a zealot of Edward Abbey, despite having only skimmed the first few chapters of *Desert Solitaire*.



“Meh, I’ve had better,” Edmund said as he dropped his sandwich back on the plate, picking up his fork to carouse his side dish. “At least they cooked the browns brown.”

“Shouldn’t of ordered an egg sandwich,” Michael said.

“Yeah ‘cause they don’t cook ‘um right here,” Edmund said. “Should have told the waitress that I don’t care for gooey eggs.”

“Me? I’d never order something called ‘Moons Over Miami’ and expect it to be good,” Martha said, shoving her smirk into her coffee.

“Moons Over My Hammy,” Edmund corrected. The waitress placed the bill on the table.

“Hey, I’ve been thinking,” Michael said, putting his hand on Martha’s thigh, his way of letting everyone know that he was changing the subject. “Summer’s almost over, and our nights are always the same. Let’s do something.” Martha looked at him inquisitively while Edmund rubbed his eyes with the tips of his fingers.

Michael snapped his hands like it just came to him, but it had been on his mind since they got a table. “Let’s catch the sunrise! Right on the beach. How often do we visit the ocean? And at sunrise? This’ll be magnificent.” Michael looked at Martha. “What do you say?”

“Sounds wonderful.”

Martha had never really made her own decision about college. So enamored by her boyfriend of two years, she could not imagine parting ways with Michael, who, at her young age, seemed perfect for marriage. Exactly what she loved about him, she couldn’t quite pin down, but the fact that he was right there massaging her thigh and tickling her skin with his soft breath at

Denny’s added up to two good reasons to go to UC Santa Cruz.

“Alright, I’ll go. But I’m going to need some more coffee,” Edmund said as they loaded into Michael’s Toyota 4Runner: a smooth, clean cut, white SUV with a top rack for surfboards, canoes and skis. Edmund sat in the back. “I think this idea sounds a lot better now than when we’ll be on the beach, ready to pass out.”

“No way man. I used to watch the sunrise all the time as a kid,” Michael said as he started the car. “It’s too breathtaking watching that sun surge out of the ocean to sleep. I’m already good on coffee.” He looked at Martha.

“I’m good too.”

Michael didn’t bother looking behind him when he backed out. “We’re kind of strapped for time—”

“What do you mean?” Edmund tapped his watch.

"It's four-thirty; sunrise isn't till like, just before six."

"Exactly, I figure it'll take us about an hour to get there and settled in." Michael finally turned around to look at Edmund now that the car was actually moving forward. "I want it to be pitch-black when we sit down, ready to take in the incandescent sunrise the moment the sun dazzles before the ocean."

"Listen Thoreau, Reservation Road will get us to the beach in twenty minutes max. Let's stop at a gas station and get coffee."

"No, no, we're headed to Santa Cruz," Michael said.

"Marina? You thought we were going to Marina? Santa Cruz will be a trip; it'll be nicer there too; I like their beaches." Martha slid her open hand through the seams of Michael's fingers that gripped the stick shift.

"It's going to be beautiful," Martha said. She lunged over and gave Michael a kiss on the cheek.

"Well, I'm going to need some coffee," Edmund said.

"I'm not stopping." Michael gave his 4Runner a little more gas. "We're rushing to meet dawn. You can just sleep in the car for all I care."

Michael and Edmund had been best friends since the beginning of high school. When Michael started dating Martha two years ago, the group became an inseparable triad. Michael and Martha never realized how dependent their relationship grew on Edmund's presence, but they already felt him fading away as each day drew closer and closer to the start of college.

The clock read 5:28 when their SUV pulled onto the side of the street that overlooked Pleasure Point Beach, nestled in Santa Cruz. The street ran about thirteen feet higher than the damp beach and between the two stood a slanted wall of sand, rocks and weeds. The three got out of the car and stood in a row near the edge of the small cliff. At this pitch black and cold hour, they couldn't even see the water; lost somewhere behind the fog and darkness, though nothing clouded Michael's imagination, or mouth.

"The Pacific Ocean stretches ceaselessly. When that sun pops out, it's going to look like the ocean and light are enamored."

"Is that even a word?" Edmund asked. Martha giggled, just long enough to realize she might have offended Michael. So she began caressing his back, egging him on as they listened to the waves do their thing.

"Hear that? Those thundering waves, where the ocean roars and stakes its claim on the land."

"I bet the water feels that way too," Edmund said.

Michael continued to ignore him. "I'm glad there's no street lights; that would ruin it. This is going to be perfect." He grabbed Martha's hand. "Let's hop down on the beach and get a good spot."

"I think I'll just stick up here," Edmund said. "I'll

have fifteen more feet of vantage than you guys." He'd had enough of Michael's banter. Edmund sat down on the edge of the bluff where he could dangle his feet.

Michael browsed the overhang, having a hard time making out anything, looking for a suitable drop where he could help Martha just enough to feel like a good boyfriend. He finally found a collection of convenient sized stones, bigger than rocks, smaller than boulders.

When he went down, he took each step slowly while bracing Martha's left arm till they got onto the beach. They walked to the water and sat themselves down with their legs stretched out about ten feet away from the tide.

The two glanced out at the

horizon, anxious for the sun.

"I think it'll be good to go to school here," Michael said.

"I do too," Martha said. She cracked her neck at an awkward angle and perched her head onto his shoulder. "I'm glad this all worked out."

"Me too. It's perfect really. Santa Cruz is so beautiful. Just wait till we see this sunrise. And it's not just the ocean you know. It's everything about Santa Cruz. All those forests back there." Michael pointed behind him toward the coastal mountains. "Amazing! I know Salinas isn't far from here, but I really feel like we can get immersed in nature and all of its beauty right here."

"Yeah." Martha dug her toes into the ground, churning up spoonfuls of sand and looked out at the ocean, which was becoming more and more visible as the waves faintly came in and out of view, a little more apparent each time. This didn't strike either of them at the moment. "I think it'll be good here for the two of us."

Michael put his hand on Martha's jaw, brushing her lips with his thumb. "Babe." Martha shifted her head a little more in line with Michael's face. "I love you."

"Love you too." And they would have kissed right there, but from the corner of Martha's eye the horizon looked too funny not to turn and get a better glimpse. "Where's the sun?"

A somber azure lit the sky, and Michael and Martha could now clearly see the horizon void of the expected rose, orange and bisque. It didn't make much sense to the two upfront until Edmund shouted from atop the cliff, "You know guys, I just realized. The sun rises behind us."

Michael and Martha didn't dare look at each other's sunrise-flushed faces. Instead, they sat staring at the ocean, a dark blue dusky body of water. The sea's white ripples wavered all over in the distance, but in a rare moment during daylight, they didn't shine or reflect in their constant flux. Radiance was buried behind the mountains at this hour.

But it was so vast and endless, the sunless horizon.

They would all start college in two weeks after spending the summer cooped up in the Salad Bowl of America.

Indian Summer's End

In the gathering wind I stop to listen
to the rumor of rattlesnakes rustling thru the serviceberry.
Lately I've been spotting half-smoked cigarettes everywhere.
Here, for example, near the top of Mt. Sentinel
where I pass a mother who shouts to her son:
*If you fall & crack your skull on a stone
what wolves are left will lick up all your blood.*
I pass a man with dyed-black hair, sideburns left gray.
He says: *They say it's gonna get ugly. Lotsa wind. Lotta snow.*
Lately I've been spotting spent condoms everywhere.
Here in the ninebark, in the chokecherry, the snowberry,
dogwood overlooking a cloudshadowed town.
It's a brazen celebration of death
the way the young hike up & the old down.
I'm afraid it's as obvious as the skeleton dance
of a deathbed poet listing places he'll never go:
Bulgaria, Lhasa, Rio, painted bodies of the Borneo forest.
His skeleton says the *seize in carpe diem* means *pluck* as in *fruit* ---
that it applies as much to *love* as it does to *the day*.
When the first flakes of snow begin to fall
I'll take shelter in that trailhead kiosk below



Tyler Pedersen

with a new display on *Shrubs in Winter*.

What color & shape are the buds & stems?

Are there spines or thorns on the stem?

Are the buds arranged opposite each other on the stem?

This trail goes on far above that rock I thought was the peak.
Conchcall of a freight train, windsong, now my cellphone ---
It's Aaron, he calculates if we read a book a week
& our hair falls out gray we'll take in only four bookshelves
in the Boulder library.

As my pen runs out of ink
& my cellphone dies he tells me of an ancient library
devoted solely to the study of bees.
Somewhere by those faraway smokestacks ---
somewhere between the roots of a leafless oak
you can rub charcoal over faded newsprint
'til something Richard Hugo said about eating stones
cuts thru.

I heard how when word of his death
reached one smokey bar
a man unplugged the jukebox & stood on it
& the bikers told the bartender to let the man speak.

Scott Jones

Abandoned

Mike Quist Kautz

Abandoned cars can be found in every neighbourhood in this western town. Dull with fire ash in the summer, surrounded by unshoveled snow in the winter, forlorn and flat-tired, these vehicles come to rest in the University district, in the slant streets to the south, and beside the coal trains in the railyard. Eventually someone calls the police, and the police dispatch a towtruck. Those vehicles beyond any redemption go straight to the scrap yard. The rest go to auction like canner cows.

On a recent Saturday morning the Missoula Police Department held its first-ever auction of abandoned vehicles. The Sheriff's Department used to dispose of the cars, but they abandoned the job because of budget cuts. City Traffic Sergeant Shawn Paul, who is whiter and taller than the Jamaican dance-hall singer of the same name, is now responsible for the program. To handle the extra work he had to pull an officer off the street.

Annie Nordby is that officer. Two days before the auction she sat at her desk with an 8-inch stack of vehicle titles and a 48-oz Diet Coke. "There are a lot," she said. "Two-hundred and thirty-one abandoned in July and another 235 in August."

At ten of nine on Saturday a small crowd milled around the two lots out on the industrial plain west of the city. It was cold and gray and the men sauntered around with their sweatshirt hoods on. Most had Leathermans and cell phones on their belts and grease under their fingernails. They had hands like crescent wrenches. If you break down someday on an empty Montana road you would be happy to see any of them. They poked around under the hoods and cupped their hands on the windows to look at mileages. Some cars were missing wheels, a few had no engines, others had engines where they didn't belong, like the backseat or in the trunk. A few conspicuous, frowning girlfriends stood with their arms folded across their chests.

Who abandons cars? Sgt. Paul suggests it's graduating college students. "They're out of here," he shrugs, "they don't care."

A brown '87 AMC Eagle 4WD station wagon with 114,283 miles and fake wood paneling seemed to confirm his theory. Its trunk contained a copy of "Conceptual Issues in Human Origins Research," a nearly-new XXL jockstrap presumably purchased for costume purposes, and a blank form for requesting a transcript.

However, most of the vehicles suggest less ascendant lives. A gray Dodge Caravan with a flat tire and three bald ones contained a cookbook ("Good Housekeeping's Best One-Dish Meals") and a First Interstate Bank receipt showing a balance of \$2.12 in checking.

A red '91 Nissan pick-up came with a bed full of bricks, a set of branding irons, several half-full bottles of motor oil, at least a dozen empty Copenhagen tins, a notice from a collection agency for \$129.46 eight months past due, and several pairs of work gloves worn through at the thumbs.

A black '87 Nissan Maxima with fancy chrome hubcaps came with a make-up case, go-go boots with 4" soles, a Bundt cake pan, a well-used car jack, and an extra tire.

There were two minivans filled to split town. The '87 Ford Aerostar was packed with moving boxes, one labeled "Hats and Scarfs," the others covered neatly with a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles blanket. In front a kid's sock sat on the passenger seat, a half-used box of Nesquik, and a Clifford the Big Red Dog book on the floor. The Chevy Lumina had white dog hair on the seats. There were lamps, bookshelves and a bed with Care Bear sheets in the back.

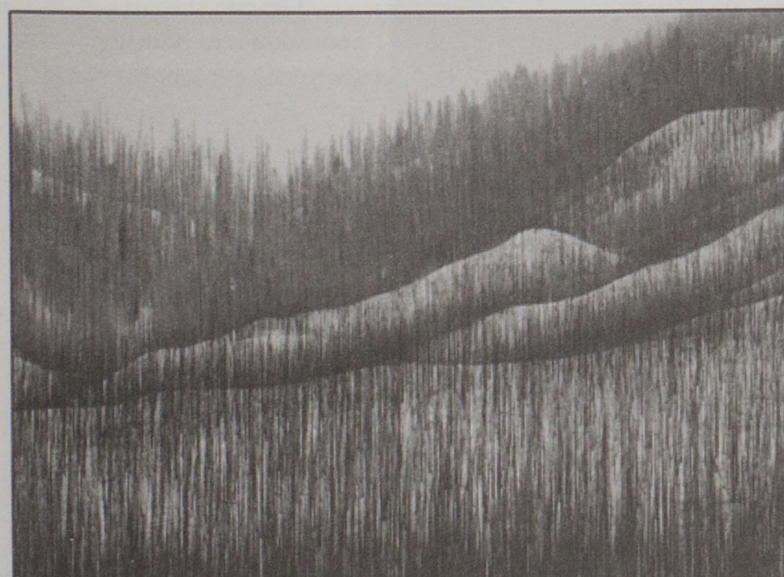
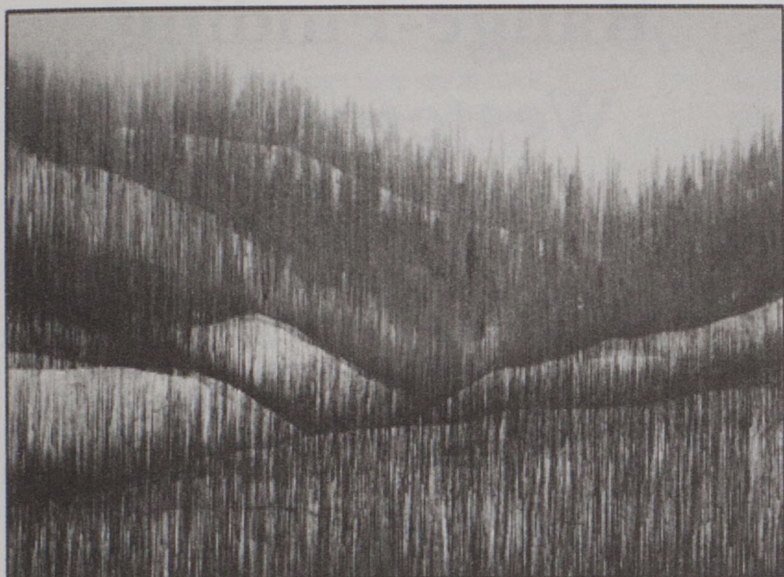
A '94 Hyundai Elantra with tinted windows came with a "Horny! Horny! Horny!" air freshener on the rearview mirror, an Ab Roller, a pair of blue polyester short-shorts, a receipt from the night of 7/1/07 at the Sleepy Inn Motel on West Broadway, and a hand-written list of apartments in the \$300/month range.

A Ford Escort with Illinois plates had a pay stub for someone named Dianne Bonvallet. She worked at a cigarette store in Boulder, Colorado, thirty-four hours each week, \$6/hour, \$372 every two weeks after taxes. On the floor lying under some unopened mail was what appeared to be a child's doll with blond hair. Closer inspection revealed it to be a bread loaf-sized bundle of severed blond dreadlocks.

Another pick-up had nothing in it but a letter to Joey Stockton from Bertha B. Booth of 17420 N. Wilkenson Road, Rathdrum, ID 83858.

There were some items common to many vehicles: full ashtrays, and empty packs of Camels, Marlboros, Newports, fast-food wrappers and pizza boxes, work gloves and waitressing aprons.

Almost every vehicle contained medicine chests of automotive additives, desperate \$2 treatments to delay \$2,000 overhauls. The bottles were piled in back seats and on passenger side floors: transmission fluid for stripped gears, radiator stop-leak for failing head gaskets, motor oil for worn-out rings, starting fluid for the old carbureted trucks, boxes of fuses for shorting electrical systems.



Mike Kautz

Did the buyers at the auction say, “This is like walking around Pompeii, all these interrupted lives! All these plans derailed by fatigued metal in a piston, worn bearings and dried up hoses?”

They did not. They said, “Jeep Wagoneer over there. 401 in that, it’d make a good woods truck. That’ll climb the bark of a tree if you put it in low.” Someone else talked on his cellphone with his backers back home: “No ma, I know, I said \$300 was my limit, and that’s what I’m gonna stick to.” A father and son looked for a parts truck for their ’78 Ford ranch truck.

Sergeant Paul presided over the auction, and seemed to be glad for the break from writing traffic tickets. Traffic enforcement is perhaps not the funniest division of law enforcement, and Sgt. Paul is a comedian at heart. He described an ’87 Honda Accord with a board through the shattered back window as, “loaded; with a free 2x4 and air conditioning.” Trying to sell the Nissan pickup and finding no bidders he said, “People, this truck comes with bricks in the back. And some cattle brands. That’s worth \$85 right there.” Looking over the AMC Eagle he noted its strong points: “Roof racks on this vehicle. People, these are adjustable roof racks. And an XXL jockstrap is included at no extra charge.”

Most vehicles found no taker even at the minimum \$85 bid. One red Ford F-150 with a lift kit and a big chrome toolbox went for the astronomical price of \$700. However, the city won’t come close to covering its expenses with the six scheduled auctions this year. The city expects to spend \$25,000 a year removing vehicles. Like most budgets, this one may have been optimistic on the expense side, as July and August’s 466 vehicles surpassed the department’s prediction of 336 for the entire year.

After the auction those who won cars worked on the engines or tried to pick the door locks while Sgt. Paul looked on. When people leave their cars for the last time they lock the doors and walk away with the keys.

The unsold vehicles were towed a half mile south to Pacific Steel and Recycling. There the tires come off and the cars are crushed into what steelmen call a “shred log.” These logs are shipped off to shredders in Salt Lake and Seattle. There 5000-horsepower hammermill shredders tear the vehicles into scraps the size of playing cards. Western steel mills don’t roll sheet steel, so the cars won’t be reincarnated as luxury sedans, toasters, or refrigerators. In Seattle and Salt Lake they pour rebar. The rebar goes into bridge deckings, parking garages, and exit ramps. There, steel that rolled all over the long roads of the West will finally sit still.

The first day of fall fell on a Sunday this year. In the jungles of the northern Amazon the sun beat directly down on the Equator, while up here on the 47th parallel the day and night were evenly divided. The longer nights compel hardwoods to stop producing chlorophyll, snow geese to head south, and Montanans to prepare firearms for hunting season. Up here, "autumnal equinox" is Latin for "shoot the shit out of some shit."

Those with a scientific mind head to a shooting range with day-glo target sheets, a ballistics chart, and a padded rifle rest. The rest head for Forest Service land with cans, beer bottles, or in this Information Age, a computer monitor. Any dirt road with more trees than houses has at least one backwoods shooting range.

Up a creek outside of Missoula, Montana, there is just this sort of place. Like many western streams the creek first watered herds of antelope and bison, then cattle and ranch families. Now it grows green grass around herds of 1/2 acre homesteads. Past the housing developments, the mountains close in, providing a baffle for sound and a backstop for stray bullets. A pull-out in front of a gated Forest Service logging road marks the range. In case you are not sure if you have the right spot, it's also marked by bullet-riddled carcasses. In the weeds by the gate a whitetail is melting smellily back into the ground, one hind leg investigated, but not consumed, by coyotes. The ground is confettied with red, yellow and green shotgun casings. In front of the new green steel gate is another older gate. It is steel Swiss cheese, perforated by so many large-caliber rifle bullets that the government had to replace it.

The range is also marked by the stump of a foot-thick ponderosa pine. Townsfolk pumped so much lead into the trunk of this tree that eventually

Range-Finding, Western-Style

Mike Quist Kautz

the bullets formed a fatal wedge of lead. The bullets burrowed into the wood like fat metallic pine beetles and toppled the tree.

The carcasses of computer monitors lie beyond the tree and the gate. They rest on their sides with their green silicon guts around them. Computer monitors are the Cape Buffalo of the backwoods shooting range, impervious to all but the largest calibers. Several rounds from a deer rifle only put small holes in the screen. The bullets do not emerge from the back. Number Six shot from a 12-gauge at ten paces only leaves shallow dents on the plastic housing. Before being saturated by bullets each monitor already contains several pounds of lead in its picture tube, and copper in its core.

Despite the countdown to hunting season's opening day, this September Sunday it was raining and traffic at the range was light. The first marksmen to arrive came

with a small gym bag of handguns. The two men were wearing sweatpants and backwards Yankees hats.

"I don't hunt. I can buy burger at Albertson's," the short muscled one said. "I keep a .38 Special under my couch and a Ruger .40 S&W in the freezer for personal protection."

His friend lit a cigarette and said, "I carry a Glock 19 concealed, especially in the bank, even though that's the one place the state doesn't want you packing."



The men preferred to remain anonymous, but they did offer a show of their shooting prowess. After setting up some milk jugs they stood back 20 feet.

“Say there is an assailant pursuing me,” the smoker said. “This is how it would roll.”

He took a gunslinger’s stance and squinted at the milk jugs. Suddenly he lifted his pistol from his hip, aimed, and said, “Shit. Safety’s on.”

“Those Glocks have three safeties,” the bodybuilder said, in defense of his friend.

The second try was a success, and the milk jug bounced along the ground and 15 brass cartridges flipped end-over-end onto the ground. After a few pistol duets the men packed up their things and left to catch the Seahawks game. They left the shredded milk jugs behind as a warning to potential assailants.

As their pickup pulled away a maroon minivan arrived with a father-son pair. Zaymore had just turned three, and this was his first time at the range. “It smells funny,” he said, catching wind of the whitetail.

His father Scott walked behind, puffing under the weight of a computer monitor.

“Are we going to kill it?” Zaymore asked.

“Yep,” Scott said. Another trip to the minivan produced a very nice Browning A-bolt rifle in 7mm Remington Magnum (“for the big stuff, elk, a trip to Alaska for moose someday”), a Smith and Wesson .44 magnum (“for bears and for my wife when she’s home alone”), and a .22 pistol (“for Zaymore”).

The computer monitor stood on its Boot Hill awaiting its fate while Scott outfitted Zaymore with sunglasses and earplugs. With his father kneeling next to him and his still-knuckleless baby hands on the pistol, Zaymore took aim. He had the right squint and Scott only corrected his footwork, “Left foot forward a little, there.” Zaymore closed his eyes as he pulled the trigger. He hit it anyway. When he saw the

spiderweb across the glass he let out a kid’s belly laugh. “Again!” he said. They went again 5 more times, until Scott had to explain, “there are no more bullets in there cowboy.”

When Scott shot the big gun, Zaymore’s mouth made a small “o.” The report echoed between the hillsides like a cannon. Then he fired the .44. After roaring and jerking through the six-shot cylinder Scott blinked and took out his earplugs.

“I guess this is sort of a big gun for my wife. She only weighs 100 pounds. I weigh 210 and I still get pushed around.”

He and Zaymore walked over to the remarkably intact monitor and poked it with their toes. Scott peered into its innards.

“Jeez there’s a lot of metal in here. It seems like kind of a waste to just throw all this out. That 7mm will take down any animal out there, and at 400 yards. I thought this would kind of explode more. One of the shots didn’t even go all the way through. Must be all this copper and metal in here. And look how thick the screen glass is.”

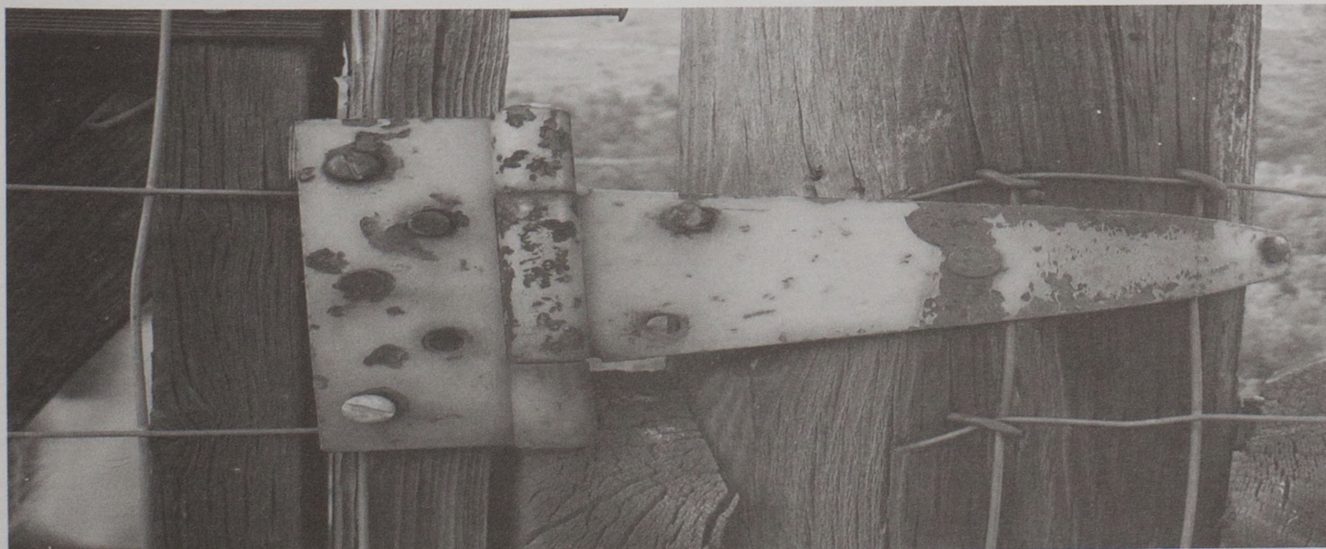
Zaymore also looked thoughtful.

“Are you going to bring it home and show Mom?” he asked.

“No,” Scott said. “We’ll leave it for someone else to shoot.”

They packed the guns back in the minivan and Scott put Zaymore into his car seat. As they pulled away the sun came out for a minute and the ground glittered with brass. .308, .45, .22 LR, .30-30, .223 Remington, 9mm Ruger, .340 Weatherby, 30 Carbine and 7mm Mauser, the cartridges crunched underfoot like shells on a beach. In the fall, only a hundred miles and a few mountains away from the old Anaconda mine, Montanans pour copper back into the ground.

Photos by Sara Cook



Bones

When my mother visited the ranch she tagged along to watch me work. I walked a fence line, splicing wire and pounding staples while she waited. When I returned she held out her hand to show me an elk vertebra as white as ivory. She said: "There are so many bones here. You don't see them until you sit still."

From a distance, the grassy benches and foothills of this high Montana valley look austere and empty. Up close there are as many bones as bunchgrasses. It is a strange trick of decomposition: Soft tissue turns black and melts into the earth, leaving no record except a striking green-up in the spring. Bones remain. They stay in place after the initial violence of stripping and disarticulation, accumulating over years.

Fallen-down homesteads—gray, slump-roofed and chinked with scraps of newspaper from World War One—are bones. So are dry ditches going nowhere and slowly filling in, liquor bottles by the highway, boarded windows on the outskirts of town and houses that can only be sold to strangers. We live with bones and keep making more.

Jake P---- rode for a grazing association in mountains southeast of here. At the end of the day he sat with the other hands by the fire, listening as they talked about cattle and women and watching sparks climb.

"I wish I were a better horseman," he said, then stood and went out from the firelight into the mountain dark and shot himself through the brain. The others knew the noise for what it was.

I heard the story from my boss. He heard it from Jake's best friend who called to explain why he couldn't keep an appointment to shoe our ranch horses.

Jake left relics: A Dodge pickup with a chrome cobra's head on the gearshift, work clothes, a saddle and horses among other things. Twenty-three-year-olds don't write wills, so these things went by default to his parents.

Three months after the suicide I drove south to the Pass before dawn to gather cattle with Tim and Marlene. I expected to find them drifting around their trailer like ghosts, staring at his things and the gun, wondering. Instead we sat in the cramped kitchen booth and Marlene poured cup after cup of instant coffee until the brightening world shivered and my guts churned.

I looked through their small, oval window and watched a steep slope catch daylight by degrees. Tim talked steadily about the grass, his hounds and cool weather. A framed program from Jake's funeral hung beside the refrigerator. He was straw-haired in the picture, wearing a vest with a cowboy hat held carefully at his side.

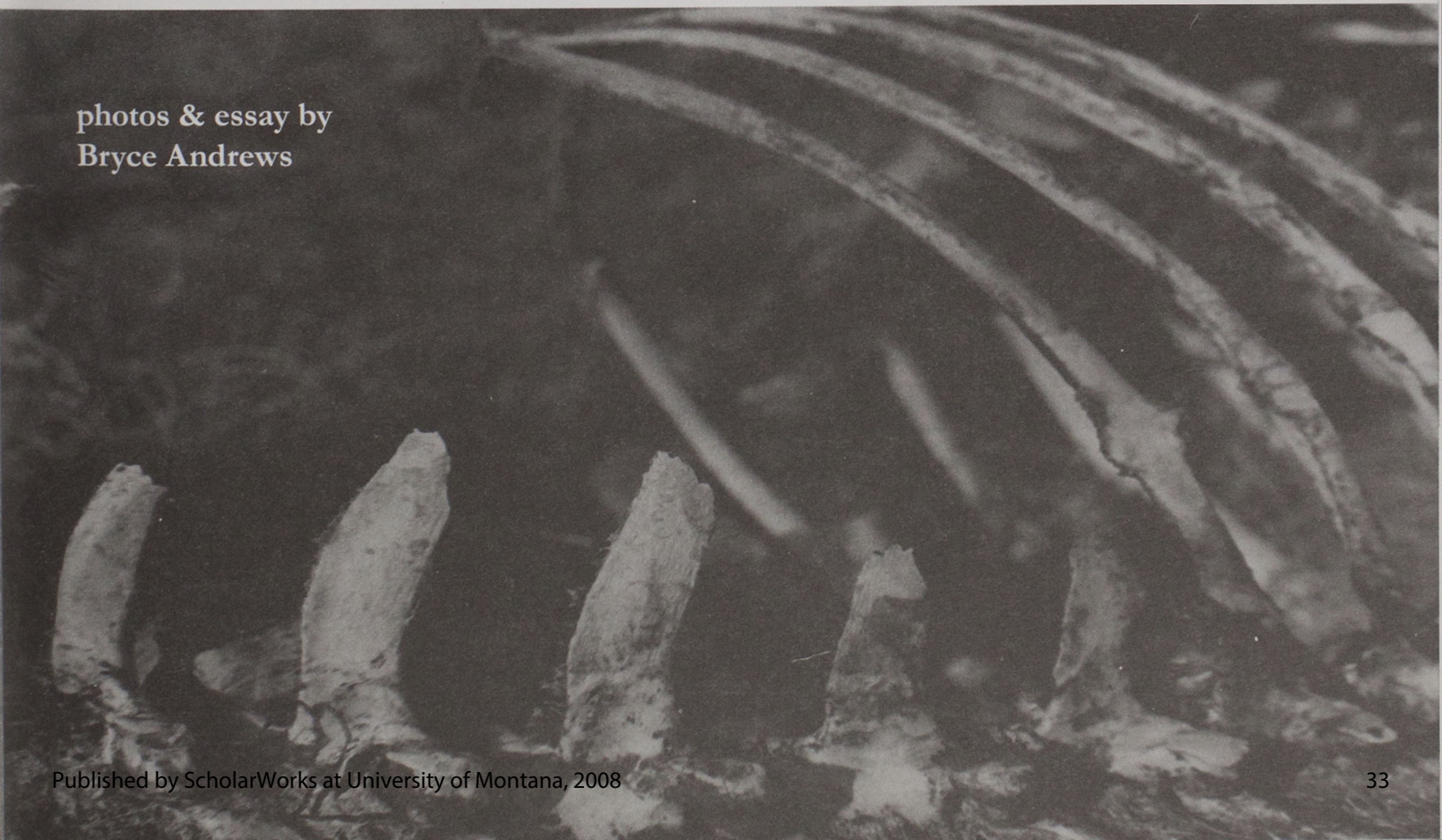


I don't know if Tim saw me looking. He stood, pulled on his boots and stepped outside. I could see him in the pasture beside the trailer. He peered uphill, threw his head back and yelled "Heeay! Heeay!"

The sound died away, and for a moment Tim looked stooped and worn. His chest worked for breath and his eyes dropped to the ground.

He must have heard the horses because he straightened just before they spilled into view and loped downhill, coming so fast that their shapes ran together. They pulled up short and circled, tossing their heads and blowing. Tim chose a bay. Marlene stepped out of the trailer and picked a roan. They saddled quickly. We worked together, and they rode beautifully.

photos & essay by
Bryce Andrews



Dear
Helen

Melissa
Mylchreest

I opened the las Camas, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2008), Art. 11
eating it with a spoon while the snow coated the city
and the toast burned black. I remember
driving up that day you canned it; you ran
out into the white sunlight waving a dishrag, the screen door
banging so that all the hair on Frannie's tail stood on end.
We hugged quickly in the yard, sea air tangling our hair
together: I knew you'd come just when the water boiled! Come in!
In the kitchen, bright lids bounced in the bottom of a pot,
tossed copper light around the room. We watched it dance in the corner
past the stove, how it jiggled the cut daffodils stuck in a cup.
Later, we rocked on the porch talking and listening
for the lids to pop themselves tight, pouring tea, then gin,
to drink neat from jam jars. I held mine curled against my chest,
watched you watch the wind on the bay, and the sun
rested on your face as it does on something familiar;
the slope of shale running to the shore, the sweet beeches,
the flank of North Mountain gone red too. When we fell silent, the space
hummed with thick light; the sea burned as though made
of tinder, swallows rode the bright beams of air, their flight
the shape of laughter, and the endless street-side lupines
shivered in their fronds as though they imagined dancing.



Monika Bilka

How did I not know to stay rooted
to that small lump of earth, that not-quite mountain?
The inexhaustible palate of the sun, the slender pink-armed
rhubarb, the shoddy hinges and warm gin. I am throwing the burnt toast
to the birds, traffic-talk and damp flakes rushing in to
mingle and fade in the kitchen heat, and I wonder
how I ever will call this place home.

Naming a Dark Rain Whiskey

et al.: Camas, Summer 2008

Matthew Kaler

We met, then argued on the devotees of obsession. I admitted I was one. I admitted this title binding words I sought over and over in the heart. We discussed color symbolism. You remembered living out of hospital rooms. At the door, in that rain, I witnessed your cancer. I

held

a black umbrella over you. A beetle crossed tips of long dead grass in the yard, and the mind began to sheave all of God's obscure love into the distant green of a meadow.

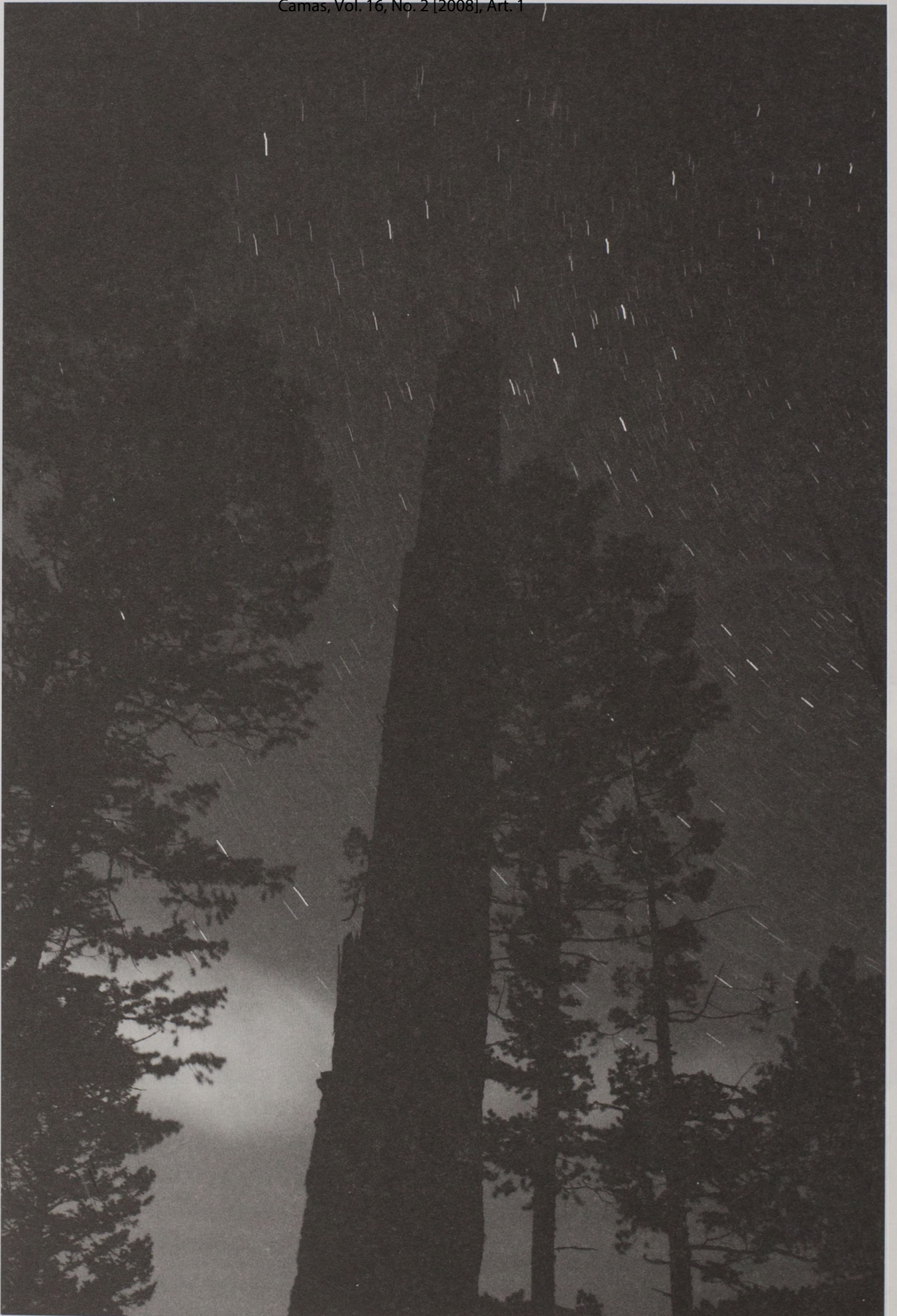
We walked to that field. The green fell out of sight, the bleak sentiment waned.

We made love after you named your parent's farm, the gleam of a shotgun your father used on mallards. As we dressed, you asked me to think on the words of infidelity, *this isn't me*, and on union, its blind Promethean hope.

You said there are loaded guns throughout so many childhoods, miles of disturbing fence-line. I told you my small brother's head snaps back, over and over, in every wind. In every wind the report his mind never heard. What was he hunting so far out there, alone, trailing those long years of barb wire?

Obsessively, we searched for images that meant the mind: an abandoned farmhouse in the last thaw of winter white rabbits, writhing in panic, furrowing the meadow's green a thousand-acre gulch fire, leaping highway

The last morning, you asked for a drink as we undressed. Amber tempered whiskey. You said tomorrow. You said the green that fell from sight.



Northwest Passage

Scott Jones

Today it finally rains in the Bitterroot
where from a plane I spotted smokestacks
deep in the forest,

where I hiked toward flames

& the sun spent the whole day setting.

Nodding off on such an icarist vessel

you might've read today how

the fabled northwest passage has opened at last
for business ---

It's now fully navigable.

Like Leary's ashes shot into space

The Octavius conquered those icy waters in 1762

a year whose treaties balanced its battles ---

her crew unthawed in the belly of an aimless whale
drifting in arctic circles,

her captain's bloodless hand

pinching an ink-filled quill.

Any day now he'll float to the surface

& the polar bears can stop trying to sink teeth
into 4 inches of bumpy walrus skin.

Such thawings have been known to reveal

frost ogres (from whence came maggots

known as men)

& a cow called Audhumla.

But there's only so much time between takeoff & landing.

Perhaps instead you read that Beckham denies rumors

he'll play a gay neighbor on Desperate Housewives.

That the largest ever jackpot lottery winner

plans to buy back his granddaughter's overdose ---

That he's put an ad in the paper

addressed to the devil.

That Pavarotti's rotting in a piano box.

That blood can trigger the tongue as it exits the brain

& his deathrattle addressed to a princess

rattled the larynx in a dead language.

That the mortician thought himself a magician

when the fat cadaver turned to him & said:

My kiss will dissolve the silence that makes you mine.

Stealthwalkers

Katherine E. Standefer

We once broke down just outside Rock Springs with a puff of smoke and a shudder. It was hot out. You sat in the sage chewing dry grass ends and I picked at a John Prine song on my father's smoke-stringed guitar. I am an old woman, you sang. You rubbed your hand over my wooden belly and I knew just what you meant.

Later, after the tow truck came, you dug up twelve crumpled bills and we filled our stomachs with Chinese food and MSG. The buffet was full of oil men and out of state boyscouts. The truckers wobbled in with their too-tight showy jeans and you whispered Just Socks until I had to spit out a mouthful of chicken, laughing. I kissed you hard and we giggled into each others' mouths.

There was a railroad running out on the edge of town and we walked there with mud heavy on our shoes. In the sky low clouds turned orange and broke for the Colorado border. Look, you said, this is called stealthwalking. This is the quietest way to go. You told me to stand on the middle ground, to walk the wood where it was flat, to not let go of your hand. Then you edged your toes up onto the rail and started stepping. The hills along the track were burnt and purple in shadow and we walked for a long time without saying anything at all, little pieces of mud starting to drop off your soles.

In Gypsum you told me you were leaving. It was the assignment you'd been asking for, you said, and I lay sweaty in bed pounding my fists against your chest. You want a story, I said, here's your story, and bit your arm hard. You just lay still, looking at the sky, and I think you were already gone. We were both covered in salt that night, stunned by the brightness of the moon through the window. You licked the light from my cheeks. You left a row of purple asters on the hood of my car the day you went.

Let me forget all the shitty TVs in Denver bars I flipped through looking for fuzzy images of men in the desert, men with their notepads tucked up under their shirts. Let me forget resting my forehead on cool porcelain toilets off the Interstate after radio reports of Helicopter Down. What I want to believe is you're just gone a few more days, just following the Pope across Europe like paparazzi. What I want to believe is you're just broken down in Rock Springs, and you'll be home soon.

This becomes my prayer: your right arm out wide, elegant palm holding sky like a tightrope walker. I want to know you're stealthwalking. I want to know you're hidden, folded away from battle, palms dry.



The University of
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