Decay, Comma reduction linocut from the Underfoot series by Sherrie York
Dear fellow members of the Glenbrook, Crestone, Blue River, and Rocky Mountain Land Library communities,

At the Blue River Writers Gathering, we have gathered around the campfire in the forested darkness. The first thing we do is to call out the names of the writers, scientists, and visionaries past and present who’ve inspired our own efforts as nature writers. I love this ritual, love that everyone is nearly anonymous in the darkness. Some of the people around the fire are old friends, some I have just now met. But now, each of us appears as only a glimmer of firelight from the eyes, and a voice rising into the night.

Because we are nature writers, writing from the long reach of natural and human community across time and place, we also invoke the names of other-than-human creatures. Cougar, lobaria, spotted owl, varied thrush, Coho, cedar. Whether around the campfire, or in our poems and essays, we interweave the names of humans and other inspiring creatures.

Writing Nature is another of our campfires, another story-telling place. Whatever we do in celebration and defense of the Earth—in our teaching, writing, protesting, advocating—we return again and again to the campfire, to the calling out of names, to the poems, essays and stories that are the voices of the land, the gleam of firelight in every creature’s eyes.

It has been a pleasure to serve as an editor for this year’s edition of Writing Nature. I know you will be delighted, inspired, challenged, provoked, tickled, and fortified by these poems, essays, artwork, and book reviews. Next year the baton of editorship passes to long time Glen Brook members Rowland Russell and Fred Taylor. They’ll be keeping us all posted on community news and future submissions for Writing Nature.

Thanks to Ann Martin and Jeff Lee of the Rocky Mountain Land Library for once again electronically composing this beautiful journal. And also thanks to them, Writing Nature has a new web home. You can find PDFs of this issue and last year’s issue, post comments, make suggestions, or call out other names: http://landlibrary.wordpress.com/writing-nature-journal/

Blossoms, and best wishes to you all,

Charles Goodrich
The rain began the day I was laid off for the season. If the day had been clear and sunny, I would have busied myself with our unfinished woodshed, climbed up on the roof to tack nailers in place, say, or set mill slabs against the back to keep snow from sifting in. As if snow were a possibility. We’d been without a trace of precipitation for seven months, so long that it seemed, genuinely, like we’d never see storm clouds again. On trail crew, we’d stopped carrying jackets. At home, we’d stopped covering our tools. On that day, rain streamed down, silver and continuous as mercury, puddling around a tangle of extension cords in the dirt, while I sat indoors drinking coffee and watching it fall.

The truth is I hadn’t just been laid off; I had asked to be laid off. The weight of that unfinished woodshed hung over me like the dense wildfire smoke that, by October, had barely begun to dissipate. For fifteen years my partner, Laurie, and I had been building and building all over the North Cascades of Washington state: at work on trail and more recently at home on our own cabin. By the time the woodshed came along, we’d about had it. We’d managed to take little weekend stabs at the project; we’d poured footings and peeled poles. Then, inevitably, my back would go out. I’d lay on ice. I’d try to stretch. Then I’d go to work, where the satisfaction of unglorious labor was eroding. So I drained the gas from the chainsaws in the trails shop, and for the first time ever, I asked to be laid off early, ostensibly to work on the shed. Now there it sat, roofless, while it rained. And rained.

I stepped out the door barefoot and tried to coax the cat, Daisy, out past the jamb. Forget it. All that noise! All that water! Sometimes, during a summer thunderstorm, we might get an hour of raucous spattering, enough to draw streaks across dust-coated leaves of maple and thimbleberry. This time the deluge was for real. Greenness everywhere was rinsed shiny clean, fresh, and, in a way, foreign. I stood on the porch, and I felt like when I was a suburban kid in Southern California on the “It’s A Small World” ride at Disneyland floating into a rain forest where tinsel hangs from the ceiling and recorded rainfall competes with monkey howls and tropical birds squawking. I half-expected to hear a macaw, but I only heard rain, and after a while, through

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Recommended by...

Don Witten

—Bill McKibben, author of The End of Nature

*"Equal parts sweet and serious... will make many folks think about their lives in new ways.*

Siesta Lane: One Cabin, No Running Water, and a Year Living Green by Amy Minato

This writing is poignant and beautiful. I read the first 100 pages in one sitting, and now I’m savoring down, savoring all of this, like a fine cup of tea in front of a December morning fire. When I finish, I will turn back to page one and start again. This book is 33 1/3% Henry David Thoreau, 33 1/3% Annie Dillard, 33 1/3% Anne Lamott, and 100% Amy Minato. There you have it—a 200% book! This is pure poetry, insight, humor, and love of life and language. Savor this short chapter entitled “January”:

“I look out and see the oak, pine, meadow, and hills. I sit on the deck and want to stay forever gazing at the grass swaying and the mountains turning deeper blue. Listen carefully because that’s the whole story. The grass, those hills, that stare, with time filing her fingernails beside me.”

Every chapter is a gift. This book has made me reflect on my own life, how I interact with the earth, with my fellow travelers, with myself.
the trees, I thought I could hear the river. No, I told myself. It couldn’t be.

Though not officially designated as such, the Stehekin River is, more or less, wild. It is undammed and largely unmanipulated for the twenty miles between the glacier-fed headwaters and the place, a mile from the boat landing, where it spills into Lake Chelan. Because of that, and because of the steepness, closeness, and snowiness of the mountains that feed it, the water level fluctuates wildly. In spring, snowmelt from the mountains can bring regular flows of 5,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) or more. (These numbers, themselves, were relatively new to us. A USGS gauge on the river reported the volume of water running—via satellite—at three hour intervals to a website. Since Internet service arrived in the valley, the numbers had become a regular part of daily conversation. What’s the river down to? Two fifty?) By August the river drops well below 500 CFS, and there it stays, usually, for most of the winter. Except when it floods. During that last big one, eight years before, the river had risen to 20,000 CFS, a ridiculous unheard-of number. A hundred-year flood, the experts had called it.

Laurie came home from work for lunch. Her clothes were soaked, and she needed to change. But she put that off.

“Come on,” she said. “Let’s go look at the river.”

I was wearing shorts. I felt lethargic, spiny from too much caffeine, guilty for not working on the woodshed.

“Why?” I asked.

“You're a seasonal laborer on backcountry trail crews, I’d been free to give in to it. We cheered when trail bridges washed out; if it meant more work for us, so be it. Nature wins! we’d say. And we believed it. The river not only had more might than us, I figured back then, but more right, too. Once, when I worked in Canyonlands in Utah, a visitor had knocked at my door in the middle of the night to tell me about a rattlesnake she’d seen in the backcountry. Someone should do something about it, she said. The park belongs to the rattlesnakes, I said, and I shut the door. For many years I believed something similar about floods. The valley belongs to the river. The difference, of course, was that now that we’d settled down and bought land and built a home, we belonged to the valley too.

On our way back home, a familiar pickup slowed next to us.

“I think it’s gonna get wild,” the driver said.

After he drove off, we walked in silence. If we were a little late catching the hint, we did have an excuse. Experts had explained November floods to us this way: snow comes too early and then melts too fast when the freezing level rises and rain sets in. There’s a fancy name for that, too: a rain-on-snow event. This time there was precious little snow in the mountains, and the rain had only begun the night before. I’d even checked the website: only 6,000 CFS. The fact that the pickup driver—who had lived his whole life in Stehekin and didn’t need expert analysis or Internet numbers to recognize a flood—said it was going to get wild was, well, sobering.
Back at the house, I filled water bottles, thermoses, the bathtub even, preparing for our well pump to stop in the inevitable power outage. The river continued to rise. At dusk we ventured out one last time. I still wore shorts, and the fact that it was summer-clothes warm did not seem like a good omen. The water had already reached the bottom log of a vacation home across the road that sits on a three-foot high foundation. By now, it seemed less like a river than the ocean. Swells formed and curled over amongst the trees. A charging persistent roar grew louder and more sea-like by the minute. With all the displaced fish—would-be spawning salmon even smelled like the ocean.

Stehekin salmon are not what you might think. They’re not mighty ocean-farers, but smaller wiry landlocked sockeyes called kokanee, who make a comparatively short trip from the lake upstream to lay eggs. Through most of September and October, Laurie and I, as a rule, try not to stir up too much mud in the shallows of the river, try to give them a little personal space. But late October is, frankly, pretty late in their game. These hangers-on—eggs laid, business done, skin flapping, color fading—had apparently hung on just for this one last wild ride. They didn’t stand a chance.

So the flood smelled like the ocean. And, Laurie noted, like a lumber mill. And she was right. All those logs—roots and limbs, freshly torn, needles dangling, careening past or jamming up, straining in the current, then breaking loose, cannon-shot—could have built a thousand homes.

Back at home, the power went out, so we sat in the dark, the room flickering orange from woodstove fire, and we listened to a handheld radio. Some people still had power, and they were watching the numbers on the Internet. Up to 12,000, they reported. Still rising.

“It’ll get to 20,000” Laurie said. “I’ll bet it’s as big as ‘96!”
“No way,” I said. “Sixteen five max.”

This is not so bad, I thought. Everyone is over-reacting.

In the morning we made drip coffee, one cup at a very slow time, on a single-burner backpacker stove, before stepping out to check on the neighbors, a couple in their sixties, part-time residents, who had likely never seen such an event—had any of us, really?—and who may not have thought to move to higher ground.

“They can’t be at home,” I argued. “They wouldn’t have stayed.”

Laurie ignored me and charged ahead through the sopping brush.

From a distance, we saw a wisp of smoke.

“Ahoy mates,” the neighbors called.

The couple stood on their top step in barefeet, checking out the mud-streak level on the side of the cabin; the river had been a quarter inch from barging in. They had been isolated, a half mile from anyone, without even a radio. Nevertheless, they were in good spirits. They posed for photos, and wandered out into the muck. I was impressed. These folks were used to risk. The barefoot man spent years flying hot air balloons and hang gliders. His wife frequently traveled alone in South America. No one was going to get too wound up. The attitude, at first, was astonishingly nonchalant: Oh, that.

Back at the house, neighbors began to trickle in, the intrepid out to survey the damage by foot, or trying to get home after having bailed out. We served coffee and apple quarters and peanut butter, anything that did not require cooking or opening the refrigerator, since the power was off and seemed likely to stay that way. The damage was hard to assess because water still ran deep down the middle of the road, as far as anyone could see, and in many places braided out through the woods. The silt in many places had the consistency of quicksand. Many homes had taken in water. And one house, the postmaster’s, had been completely lost. Last anyone saw, it sat teetering over the froth, splintering slowly away. Neighbors came and went. Dishes piled up. The sun broke through the clouds. Steam rose. And, like an undercurrent, the blaming began.

We should have dredged the channel years ago, some people said. We should have hardened the banks. If only the river hadn’t been dredged in the seventies, others said. If only people hadn’t built where they did. I tried

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Amy Minato

Roost

Blankets open like lotus blossoms over the darkening lawn. Smoked fish cheese and lemonade pass among the congregation at this autumn ritual when the sky is a sacred text inscribed by swifts. On pointy wings they fly from homes of spit and twigs zip across continents clear the air of bugs and arrive to this crumbling school where clutching our books and binoculars we turn nestling faces up to sky.

The birds ripple and overlap harassed by hawks. One swift at a time drops into the brick tunnel like an exile or a sacrifice until in crescendo

the swirling lines of thousands of swifts funnel into the shape of a stockinged leg stepping on the school or a black net of birds pulled into the chimney like a magician’s trick.

When the sky becomes too quiet and empty we pack up leaving our bodies crowded in the dank roost bellies against cold stone sharp tails bracing us wing to wing chortling hunkered down to sleep with our tribe.

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to steer clear. I wondered: is it possible that no matter what we did, or didn’t do, we would face this? I didn’t dare say so. People needed to feel that someone had done something wrong and that there was something someone should do to make it right.

Meanwhile, everywhere, children and dogs were collecting salmon. The kids placed them gingerly back in the muddy flow. The dogs carried them to their monstrous haystack mound in the summertime ball field. The kokanee, it turns out, aren't native to Lake Chelan—they were introduced by the state in the 1910's—but scientists concede that they are now “natural,” an official designation, since they've been going back and forth from the big lake to the small creeks on four year cycles for nearly a hundred years. The population is stable, they say, and even a flood can't hurt it much. If the eggs, this time, don't make it, there will be another wave of pilgrims next year, on a different cycle.

“Do you want to come back to work?” Garfoot asked again the next day. “Take a helicopter ride to survey the damage upvalley?”

“Yes,” I said. For clean up, no. For a helicopter ride, yes. I had no shame.

They’d fly Garfoot and me twenty three miles to the end of the road, they said, and we’d walk back, taking pictures and notes, making suggestions for repairs. Even though I’d heard the final number—26,000 CFS!—as rotors began to spin, I was still thinking: this is a boondoggle, a free ride. The reports of the damage, I was sure, had been greatly exaggerated. We rose into the turbulent air over our thin slice of the universe, so striking at this time of year, a Crayola box of colors: dogwoods pink, cottonwoods yellow, and maples red, and the river, like a childís silver marker slash, haphazard, uninhibited, flashing amidst the broken-off trees. So many trees lying every which way. Like a dumped box of matches. Like pick-up sticks strewn across the Sahara, huge dunes of beachy clean sand.

Soon we were over the uninhabited part of the valley, the part where no one had yet been, and the pilot pointed out a section of road that might be difficult to negotiate on foot. Huh? Where was the road? We couldn't tell, even though I'd driven that road a thousand times, and Garfoot had driven it ten-thousand times. In fifteen minutes in the air, I remembered what I'd been trying to forget for a week: that I needed this the way I need open-caskets at funerals. Until I see things first hand, I just don't get it. The ship bounced and skipped on the winds of an incoming storm. I fought nausea, and still, I was glad as hell to be there.

Even from the air I knew that by the next summer, when I'd have to hoof it around the missing road chunks and repair the damaged trails, it would no longer seem awesome, this flood. It would no longer be, simply, what happens. It would be, simply, a pain in the ass. But like the earliest, easiest moments of love, that first view was effused with pure unadulterated wonder. No longer: Oh, that. Now breath sucked sharp: Oh!

At last, the pilot brought us down to earth on a river bar. Garfoot and I walked the former road for the rest of the day, balancing on trees lying across trees, crawling under them and clambering over them. And we called out to each other. Would you look at this? We were back in the realm of particulars, notebook and camera, getting our bearings, settling in, walking, walking, walking. We skirted landslides and descended toward a long stretch of former-road beside the river, constructed by the CCC in the 1930ís, now washed to bedrock, blasted granite worn table-top smooth, sloping toward the churn.

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sweeping, washing coffee mugs with water saved in the bathtub and heated on the woodstove, loads of them, wishing that I could work on the woodshed, but knowing better than to go hammering away while neighbors tried to piece their lives back together. I could have prepared for a wild Halloween party we had planned, but anymore I wasn't all that enamored with wildness.

“No,” I answered. It was just the truth.

Instead, I stayed at home continued on page 7

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One small fir stood alone on a rock outcropping with a skirt of twisted roots and caught brush like the draped fabric beneath a Christmas tree. How it had survived, I could not imagine. The drizzle picked up, and I shot more pictures until finally we reached the spot that the pilot had pointed out from the air. A sheer cliff vanished in the froth. No way to cross.

We climbed up the cutbank and onto the rocky slope. We slipped on moss, and held onto roots—vegetable belay!—to pull ourselves further, up and up, and suddenly it became an adventure—no pictures to take up here, no figures to pencil-scrawl in the Rite-in-the-Rain notebook. We found an old backpack pump from a fire decades before, and knew, as we always knew, that we weren’t the first to be here, just one more migrating wave. We sat on the high point and gazed across at the unchanged mountainsides. We could no longer hear the river roar or smell the fish, only the leaf decay musk of late fall, a familiar soothing smell, like a salve, like an ending. Together we sipped the last of our tea as rain soaked heavy into wool.

Back at home, the woodshed roof went on in a day. Squeegees were hung out to dry in a welcome stretch of slanty sun days. And a final decision was made: the party would go on. We strung colored lights around the house and the new empty woodshed outside. Then the neighbors trickled in: no fewer than five Vikings, a spotted cow with a rubber glove utter, a scantily clad hussy with a black nose and a bushy tail: the Whorey Marmot. Darkness fell and the music grew loud, and the temperature dropped to single digits. A gorilla sipped beer through a curly straw up one nostril and eventually, predictably—he couldn’t help it!—popped the cow’s utter. Dancing and bonfires raged until two in the morning, then three. The Whorey Marmot had to recostume. Too many propositions.

On the morning-after, partygoers gathered for a greasy breakfast, then ventured out in pairs or small groups to see the floody sights. Laurie and I walked with our friends amongst the log jams and the sand traps, twisting fencing everywhere, and then to the summer homes near the former river banks. In one cabin, a mounted deer head, cocked ajar, surveyed

Drowned Boy by Jerry Gabriel

What I most admire about these linked stories set in rural southeast Ohio is the seamless way that landscape and longing and community combine in prose that’s spare, raw, and often “astonishingly” funny. (The dialogue, especially between the two main characters, Nate and Donnie, brothers as different as day and night, is snappy and original.) In the title story, a grief-struck teenager considers geological history: “The idea that a river might change direction had captivated Samantha at a time when almost nothing sparked any real interest in her.” In “Marauders,” a whole slew of old-timers latch onto the local elementary school basketball team: “We traveled like gypsies to these little towns—places called Mudsock and Comersville.” In the closing story “Reagan’s Army in Retreat” Nate returns looking for Donnie only to stumble upon a house fire in progress after which all that remains is a talking robot trivia game on eight track tapes stuck in the snow, a game that had once belonged to the boys. If there’s a more poignant image of loss—of innocence, sure, but also of home and the tenuous ties that hold us to it—I can’t conjure it.
a scene of jumbled furniture, broken glassware, and fir limbs, looking as startled as the whole bewildered valley.

On the way home, we walked the former road eroded three feet deep just below our house.

“Don’t you think eventually they’ll eventually move the road to high ground behind your house?” a neighbor asked.

I shrugged. Oh, that. “Sure,” I said.

“What then?”

“And then we’re screwed.”

She nodded.

What else is there to say? After fifteen years on trail crew, not one major bridge I built is still standing. Erosion happens. Sometimes it happens fast. The cornerpost of our woodshed sits precariously on the edge of the bench, where we chose to put it—cleverly, we thought—so that snow would shed more effectively down the bank. Now it was clear: the woodshed would go first and later, just maybe, the cornerstone of the house. Down, down, down. We’re going down! Or, if not that, next fire season, the whole valley might burn up. No way to know.

News reports make much of the community spirit that arises in the wake of disaster. People donate clothes and food or slow-brewed cups of coffee. They show their best side, then go home. But there’s a deeper, more subtle way that natural disasters draw people together, day after day, living in the mutual terror and awe. Nature does win after all. There’s nothing we can do, but head out, shoulders shrugging, shovel in hand. That, and wait. For several months, everyone waited, one eye on the thermometer, one on the snow up high, to see what might happen next.

Not much.

Spring remained cold. Snow melted lazily. The Internet river gauge rarely nosed over 2,000. Summer brought smoky skies. On trail crew Garfoot and I chipped away at the flood damage, rebuilding cribbing we’d rebuilt before. At home, on the weekends, Laurie and I entertained houseguests and lazed on river beaches, books in hand.

Come September, a new batch of salmon began wriggling upriver, frisky as ever, eager to navigate the flood-shifted shallows in search of a little gravel in which to settle in and lay a few eggs until, by October, they blanketed the river, slowly disintegrating, natural as the seasons changing, the leaves falling, browning up, layering into a thick fertile mat.

Marybeth Holleman
In the Garden, Early May

I mean to sit and write
but outside my window
the birch tree that drapes over the driveway
unfurls bright green
and troilus and geraniums
push pale heads up from soil
still wet from snowmelt
and spruce, so dark and brooding
all winter long, light tiny fires
at every tousled tip
and I can’t stand to simply watch
these small miracles

who is to say how a day is best spent? at the end of a life, what is left behind?

my life is spent like this, deciding whether to record or experience knowing that one without the other has no meaning, and yet wondering whether meaning is overrated believing Thomas Berry right when he said

The purpose of life is existence, and self-delight in existence.

I apologize to the god of words but the god of dirt calls to me calls to me now.

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Somehow it felt a lot colder than this looks -
Sunny warm golds and russets, but sitting and sketching
for almost 2 hours, still, in lengthening shadows left us cold.
Add mallard to sketch, walking on the ice? Dabbling
in water? Work out value masses!
Wetland (northernmost) sw of TINGLEY POND

December 31, 2009

sunny, 40°

Painting out with Carol, for the first of 4 seasons. We plan to return here in March, June and September!

Colors are the noted hues of winter. Sky is pale, cool cerulean. The thin ice and water are even cooler — glacial?

Coyote willows on edge of bosque glow red-orange, violet behind them. Ochres, raw and burnt sienna, yellow-oranges dominate. The warm path in front of me has cool cast shadows. Dried grasses, reeds, asters, cattails, some sapling cottonwoods... dry vegetation rustles as a breeze picks up.

 Sounds: Route 66 traffic, the occasional BioPark Train, a towhee scratching in brush behind me, mallards quacking, wintering American Wigeons too. Two horseback riders pass right to left on distant edge. When the dabblers spring into flight, one horse spooked, bolted. A dogwalker passes, talking on her bluetooth — technology that’s still creepy to me. Two boys with fishing poles pass by — tell me they’re fishing for smallmouth bass when I ask.

By 2:30 the temperature has dropped and a breeze doesn’t help... Brrr! Time to go.

We walked the trail to the pair of wetlands, having reconnoisanced here two weeks ago.

We chose a view to the W/NW from the SE edge of 2nd wetland:

I selected a vantage point across a drainage channel because I could see the frozen margin better. But I didn’t like carrying my stuff over the concrete diversion wall. Balancing over water crossings — gaff!
Marybeth Holleman

On the River with Birds

It’s a family tradition: every spring, after snowmelt and before the salmon runs, we take our big blue canoe and paddle down the Kenai River, from Skilak Lake to Bing’s Landing. Two intertwined things bring us here at this particular time of year: birds and solitude. Migrating birds, especially trumpeter swans, stop here to rest and feed on their journey north. And because of the swans, motorboats are banned from this part of the river until mid-June, when swans leave and salmon arrive. No combat fishing, no whine of engines—all quiet except for the clarion ko-ho hoos of swans echoing off the hills.

Fed by glaciers, the Kenai River is a fairy-tale hue—a vivid aquamarine, with a clarity not seen in most glacial waters, heavy with silt from rock-scouring ice. The thirteen-mile paddle can be done in less than a day, but we like to spend a night on the river with the birds. This year it’s just my husband and I. My son, who just graduated high school, is off on an adventure with friends.

Other than my son’s absence, everything else cooperates. The days are sunny with a slight breeze, but still cold enough to frost at night. No one else is at our favorite campsite on a peninsula between the river and a lagoon, and someone has even left wood for a campfire.

And the birds: all are accounted for. A bald eagle perches in the cottonwood snag across the lagoon, while another sits on the nest nearby; clouds of dunlins chitter and swoop along the shoreline; widgeons and scoters gather across the river in reedy shallows. Just after we beach the canoe and begin to unload, a pair of trumpeter swans arrives at the head of the lagoon.

The swans stay all night and through the morning, like the closest of traveling companions, and then take flight just as we load up our gear. It’s hard to leave; I could spend another day listening to birdsong, lying in sunlight on the sandy shore, watching jeweled water swirl by.

A pair of common loons have also remained near, disappearing to dive for salmon smolt, then popping back up, preening feathers, scissoring beaks down white-ringed necks, and gliding by on the water, watching us watch them. Their sustained calls have serenaded us, night and day, resounding off the opposite shore, like ripples on wind. Now in the canoe, pushing off from shore, I see one loon surfaces in front of the bow.

“Oh,” I say, “wouldn’t it be amazing to see a loon swimming under water?”

And then I immediately regret giving voice to such want, when the river has already given so much. We pull closer, and the loon sits staring at us with those piercing red eyes. Just when I could reach out my paddle and touch the shining back, the loon arcs under. Then I see it, sleek black and white, soaring through blue-green, undulating beside the canoe, jetting under it, circling us twice, exceeding all desire.
Jerry Martien

to a northern
spotted owl

from the meadow
a dark shape
soundless
rises into the
douglas fir
beside my tent
the branch
bending
with her weight

last night
around the fire
naturalists
& nature-writers
doing owl calls

I try the basic
five-hoot greeting

she turns her head
a fraction
of how far it
could turn
regards me
opens her
wings
slides one tree
over to an
empty campsite

white-dappled
woods-dark
feathers upturned
at the tips for
silence

her temperature
the owl-man said
depends on
where she is
in the canopy

she wears the forest

warm and dry
in the tree-top
cool and wet
down here
where she hunts

she swoops
onto the meadow
strikes
rises with
empty talons
returns to the
forest edge

besides mice &
voles & canopy
she requires a
new cavity
in an old tree
every year
baby owls
like humans
leave a
big mess

what she gets
is industry
talking higher
rates of rotation
lower percents
of retention
with buffer zones
& off-season
campgrounds

exile in our
own land

when winter
comes colder
& summers
broiling hot

we’ll all wish
we had a
forest to wear

Breitenbush, Oregon

Recommended by...
Carolyn Servid

The Blue Plateau: An Australian Pastoral by Mark Tredinnick

This book is an exquisitely crafted tapestry of an extraordinary landscape and a few dozen characters who are shaped by it. The Australian edition’s subtitle, A Landscape Memoir, is more telling. Mark Tredinnick has evocatively captured a place, its geological history, and its profound role in human lives deeply rooted in it. Australia’s Blue Plateau was Tredinnick’s home at a significant time in his life. The place itself commands his respect and love, and both of those deepen as he comes to know the plateau, its steep valleys and its sometimes-trickling-sometimes-raging rivers through the eyes and lives and stories of the book’s cast of characters: generations of long-time settlers who wear the landscape like their own clothes; others learning and making their way; still others lost to the country’s wildness. Most striking is Tredinnick’s lyrical prose—not only his painterly descriptions and his telling of stories, but his reflections on the language of landscape, how it can shape our hearts, our very being.
The first “Cows Kill Salmon” bumper sticker I saw was on the dented tailgate of a puny pickup in Bend. I was in town loading the giant bed of our 4x4 Dodge tough with valves, hoses, belts, swather parts, sacks of chicken feed, vaccines for the upcoming days of processing hundreds of mother cows. I was filling our truck with muscle and brawn and can-do, with coolers full and paper bags stuffed with groceries to last a month. Then the two-hour return trip back to the ranch. “Get a clue!” I muttered. “How stupid is that? What does that guy know about getting food on the table? Nothing, that’s what.”

The pickup belonged to Bill Marlett, the founder of the Oregon Natural Desert Association and the author and originator of the “Cows Kill Salmon” slogan and campaign. I wouldn’t know that or meet him for years. But I did know one thing. Whoever he was, with a bumper sticker like that, he was the enemy. What he stood for challenged a way of life I had embraced completely.

Oppositional thinking makes everything less complicated. I am this not that, believe this not that. They are not this and so I am not one of them. Without good fences it’s not possible to have good neighbors. What, all just sit around compromising all the time? Doesn’t friction create the sparks to fire new inventions? Provide the flint of new ideas? I my way’d or the highway’d out of town, back to the desert, back to the large-scale, ranching way of the chosen few.

In case you didn’t know, ranching is the ultimate. It’s the dream. It matters. It is the way of right life. Everything else is silly in comparison. Ranchers are artists, inventors, bankers, businessmen, hydrologists, farmers. They know what hard work is. They stay up all the long night swathing hay or calving first calf heifers, then spend all the slobbering day horseback or all the sub-zero day tossing hay to rime-covered cows. Ranchers learn to dance with the seasons, to honor traditions, to speak the language of the drover. Ranching has its own humor. Take income: “Psychic, mostly.” That’s what our neighbor used to say. Or on the day calves are sold and shipped, the annual pay-day: “If you keep weighing them, they don’t get any heavier,” the wry comment from the cattle buyer, his pen poised. The anthem is: Country is good, city is evil. The refrain: Where a man’s a man and sacks are made of burlap. No small gestures. No small checks. No small measures. Broad brush, big tractors, big ideas, big pivots deep-knee bending across the fields sending geysers of water into the air. Big risk. “Gonna be a bear, be a grizzly.” And what could be more picturesque? The cowboy’s white shirt filling with the summer’s evening breeze as he lopes home, cows lowing to their calves emerald meadows as the shadows grow long, stout and shiny buckskin and sorrel quarter horses held in the corral for tomorrow’s long drive to higher pasture, saddles hanging in the cathedral-sized red barn, ropes-, halters- and bridles-in-waiting—tidy on their nails. What could feel more powerful than owning land, lots of it, or more self-sufficient than a shotgun still warm from shooting pheasant and chukar on your own spread, pulling small rainbow trout from your own creeks, making your own antelope sausage, collecting eggs from your own chickens, apples from your own orchard? Or the satisfaction of introducing the land to its greater capacity and purpose, plowing up the soil, planting crops, delivering water to places that had been dry for centuries? What greater sense of accomplishment than managing the migration of thousands of cattle with miles of wire, enhancing their productivity with artificial insemination or specially enhanced feed and growth supplements. Rancher as conductor, nature the compliant orchestra.

Then I moved into town. I went from living on hundreds of thousands of unpopulated acres to living cheek-by-jowl on a crowded street. My children were wide-eyed and wary. Me too, as I surveyed the frontier of single-parenting, of going to an office every day, of single-handedly supporting three children. My son rigged an orange juice can on a string so he could talk house-to-house to the girl next door. We lived that close. My oldest daughter walked downtown to meet friends and go to a movie in three minutes. That close. I remember coaching myself not to cattle-call my children to dinner. The neighbors could hear. This was a far cry from the then-manager of the GI Ranch, Art Foss, telling me: “Miss Ellie, you’re the nicest neighbor I have.” My reply: “I am the only neighbor you have and I am ten miles from your front door. But I’ll take it as a compliment.” The ebb and flow of life in town was punctuated by the day for trash collection, lawn or snow removal services, not by brandings, gathering

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cattle, baling hay. The only weather-related concerns pertained to ski or golf conditions, not a crop-crushing hail storm or so much snow you couldn’t get to the cattle to feed them or a misty, persistent spring rain that would make the grass jump.

It took moving “in” for me to truly and fundamentally appreciate the “out.” It took living a dramatically compressed life to finally knowing, at a cellular level, what an expansive, fragile, drop dead gorgeous beauty the High Desert is. I began to pay attention to how little attention I had paid, to how little attention was being paid. I had been a trespasser in the desert: presumptive, arrogant, willful. I read in Bend’s paper about the tireless and often maligned defenders of urban river trails, the Deschutes River, the Badlands on Bend’s outskirts, the Hart Mountain Antelope Refuge. As resort communities were built pell-mell, I could swear I heard the sound of a pebble rattling in the empty lava canyons of the drained subterranean aquifers. I saw the panting fish in the slack waters of the Middle Deschutes and reflected on the eroded banks of Camp Creek that ran through our desert ranch. Did cattle in fact kill streamside plants as Bill Marlett’s campaign maintained? Did the silt cattle created really suffocate the insects the fish feed on? Did the degraded streams become broader, more shallow, too warm for fish? Where had the rainbow trout that used to inhabit Camp Creek gone?

These questions insisted their way into my work day in the office seated at my computer, or fixing dinner for my children. As I made grocery lists, helped with homework, tended our urban menagerie of gerbils, a parakeet, dog, and cat, the headlines about the effects of hormones in meat jumped out at me. What was the small white pill we had injected subcutaneously in the calves ears? What was the toxic chemical we poured along the spine of the cow’s back? What was in the numerous vaccines and boluses we administered? In the chicken feed? I was ashamed I didn’t know. This was when I started to ask myself: “Had I been part of something perfectly beautiful after all?”

When I met Bill Marlett I found him to be, ironically, very like the stereotypical rancher, with a kind of owning-it-all stance and manner, a stare-down demeanor, strong, capable hands, his worn jeans and work shirt a matter of functionality, not fashion. A too-much-work-to-do, urgent energy that seemed to push him from inside. He moved to Bend from his native Wisconsin in 1984 to fight plans for hydroelectric installations on the Deschutes River. He won, winning the Deschutes a state scenic waterway designation, a cause he went on to champion on behalf of dozens of Oregon rivers. He founded Bend’s Environmental Center, later moving on to the Oregon Natural Desert Association, making it one of the most effective grass roots organizations in the West, if not the nation. Its aim? To end grazing on public lands. Altogether. Zero, zip, nada.

Does he or those championing similar causes have no choice but to aim for the extreme to win a partial solution? Is that the only way? Does it take revolution to regain some sort of tolerable middle ground? Greenpeace folks used to...
be regarded as a bunch of extremists. Al Gore won a Nobel Peace Prize for many of the same messages. Do we have to push against each other to know who we are and who the other is? Can we invent, improve, progress without being in opposition?

We are woefully clumsy creatures, even when well-intended, even when we think we are on the side of “right.” Oregon Public Broadcasting recently aired a series to invoke the beauty of the High Desert. One episode filled the TV screen with a herd of pronghorn running across a desert flat. The shot was taken from a helicopter, the noisy rotors churning just above the terrified animals. The shot went on and on with classical music enhancing the image of freedom and beauty and wildness. After awhile the antelope’s tongues were hanging out, the terrified herd turning, twisting, stumbling, some falling. This was a portrait of panic, not beauty extolled. In an effort to invoke custodial caring the good people of OPB did harm. Man’s predilection for instructing, doing “good,” according only to his terms, is shocking.

But there are hopeful signs. Ranchers are reclaiming native grasses using innovative grazing practices, are diverting cattle away from streams to transportable troughs powered by solar panels, are producing hormone-free, natural beef, and implementing costly best practices despite rising production costs across the board. Reclamation efforts on the 278,000 acres of the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge has fish returning to spawn in creeks, streams crazy with growth and flourishing native flora and fauna. And some of the many ranchers who have been using right, sustainable practices all along are finally being recognized.

At an annual formal dinner in Portland, Oregon, The High Desert Museum recognizes stewards of the High Desert. This particular year Doc and Connie Hatfield, well-known in the region for their decades of thoughtful and scientific range management practices and for the creation of a consortium of ranches raising organic beef, were to be honored. They seemed to sit in watchful silence, as though, in observing the urban noise and self-importance, the oppositional thinking, they wordlessly and wistfully acknowledged that the chances of enough people truly getting to know and care about the land were slim. They sat there taking in all the fanfare and hub-bub, as though their ears were pressed against a shell that cried and whispered of how catastrophic this lack of profound and genuine understanding would be.

“Honey, get the gate.” That’s what my former husband would say to me, and I would. Happily. He’d pull the pickup on through, I’d shut the gate behind and we’d drive through the vast corridors of our land, surveying on a golden evening mothers paired up happily, fresh brands on the flank of the calves. Traversing the meadow, I’d lean out the truck window breathing in the sage-scented air.

I now have an equal interest in pulling fences as opening and closing them. I now realize, unlike the many conscientious and best-practice ranchers, I sailed in a prairie schooner but never looked deep into the ocean. I don’t advocate jamming things into reverse. I don’t suggest eliminating cattle or cowboy, green collar or blue. I do suggest that the oppositional thinking we seem to require be shifted in concept. That we oppose bad practice, not each other, see land both as a means and an end, develop prescription lenses that work for both the entrepreneurial and the custodial vision.

“Cows kill salmon.” When I first saw that bumper sticker I pictured a big-bellied Hereford mother cow standing streamside, her front hoof planted on a writhing salmon while she distractedly chewed her cud, gazing off into nothingness in that vapid, bovine way. But really all it means is that we are intricately and beautifully and dangerously connected.

Sketch by Sarah Rabkin
SueEllen Campbell

Climate and Ice

Ice is one of the key players in global climate, one that is intricately interwoven with the movements and temperatures of air and ocean, with the evolution, growth, and decay of organic life, and with human histories and actions. We know that we still have much to learn about the behavior of ice and just how thoroughly that behavior can alter climate and weather conditions all around the world by amplifying changes caused by other factors.

How quickly will the ice recede, and what are the mechanisms that control the speed of its melting? Will melting ice slow or even stop the warm Gulf Stream and North Atlantic currents, and if so, how much colder will Europe become, how much hotter the tropics? How many plants and animals will be moved into extinction by climate-driven habitat changes and limits to their movements—ice edge walruses, seals, polar bears, high-mountain pikas and fritillary butterflies? (Some estimates by reputable ecologists are shockingly high, between fifteen and thirty-seven percent of terrestrial species.) What will human societies do about the carbon we are pumping into the atmosphere, where it will inevitably return ever more heat to the surface? How much more carbon will melting permafrost add? What kinds of feedbacks will create what kinds of runaway effects, or, we must all hope, moderating counter-effects? What will control our own behavior? Competition, self-defense, and fear? Or some new flowering of cooperation, creativity, and hope, another moment when—as in the crisis of the Younger Dryas—our adaptability and ingenuity help us invent new ways of living?

Faced with such questions, such uncertainty, how do we determine how to think, how to feel? Changes this large, this fundamental, offer formidable challenges to our imaginations, challenges artists of many kinds are beginning to embrace, sometimes on their own, sometimes in partnership with scientists. Sometimes their creations involve ice itself. The British Cape Farewell project, for instance, which takes ships full of scientists, educators, and artists into the Arctic, has produced, among many other things, photographs of ice sculptures that reflect and refract the light and images around them, then melt away. One photograph by director David Buckland shows the words “THE COLD LIBRARY OF ICE” projected in an eerie green light against the deep glowing blue of ice itself. For a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boulder, Colorado, curated by Lucy Lippard and titled “Weather Report: Art and Climate Change,” American artist Jane McMahan created a reliquary holding a cube of glacial ice (from the glacier whose water supplies the city of Boulder), kept frozen, though imperfectly, by solar panels and shading curtains; in a bit of pure artistic luck, as the ice slowly evaporated inside its container, some tiny, long-frozen bones gradually emerged. The possibility that those bones were a pika’s added to the

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Amy Minato

Mating Season

Spring equinox the first suitor arrives.
Bloodcurrant lets down pink locks
for rufous hummingbird’s needled kiss.
Fawn lilies open for churlly bees. Hermit thrush twirl
lassos of seductive song into the chill breeze, punctuated
by the piping sparrow’s impatient call.

Striped bass shimmy together in streams
orange-crowned warblers chuckle overhead
cinnamon teal strut the pond, sandhill cranes pose regal
beside cattail posts each eye out for a mate
osprey press into each other in free fall. The mole emerges
from her burrow invites the drowsy to rise as I

in my crumpled gown and squirrel hair remember
that you, my love, return to me today as I blink
into the grinning sun. Come soon.
conceptual and emotional resonance of McMahan’s piece, for these small tundra animals are on their way to vanishing in a warmer world.

Such work is at its most compelling when it is filled with a passion for action, when it balances on a fine line between art and activism, when it brings together as art can sometimes do our emotions, imaginations, ethics, and determination. Journalist, poet, and essayist Marybeth Holleman writes about her fear for polar bears and compares our human efforts to grapple with climate change to the bears’ searching for ice on which to rest and to hunt: “It’s as if we, too, are swimming, swimming, toward a shore we cannot see but still believe is there, somewhere.” And photographer James Balog has mounted an ambitious glacier project—the Extreme Ice Survey—involving several years of time-lapse photographs, still photos repeated at intervals, on Iceland and Greenland, in North and South America, and in the Alps, producing magazine photos, televised video footage, radio interviews, spectacular large-scale photographic prints in a traveling museum display, streaming videos and photos mounted at busy Denver International Airport, and an elaborate website.

Balog’s team, which includes scientists, field managers, mountain climbers, engineers, photographers, and videographers, documents the rapid melting of glacial ice, collecting information and footage valuable to science. They are producing a set of dramatic, action-filled images that enact their belief (and the project’s motto) that seeing is believing. At the same time, these images illuminate the astonishing beauty of ice landscapes. Melt ponds spread sapphire blue across the black-and-white striations of old ice; white waterfalls plunge into moulins, deep holes that transfer melted water to the base of glaciers and speed their downhill flow. Ice cliffs and canyons mimic rock, sharp crags and rounded curves, layers of sediment marking ages long past. Crystalline ice fragments rest on black volcanic beaches or beneath violent ocean waves, there just for days, or hours. Sometimes the sky’s blues match the glacier’s blues, the white of the clouds the glacier’s white; sometimes the blues are like nothing else on earth. Icebergs splash ostentatiously from glaciers, churn and flip, float calmly in the sea. Tiny human figures stand at glacier edges, trail across vast white fields, rappel down white walls, pointing their cameras at what they see so that we can see it too. Together, we watch and wonder at the world’s iciest landscapes, their beauty and power, the fascination they hold for us, and maybe we hear the warnings they offer us.

— from SueEllen Campbell’s recently completed *The Face of the Earth*, about natural landscapes and how we’ve understood them through science and culture.
Though the theme of our September 2009 gathering at Glen Brook was “Grounds for Optimism,” as sometimes happens in a group of independent thinkers, our Sunday morning discussion meandered off-theme to a wide-ranging discussion of our own writing processes. A number of us spoke to our challenges, our “fallow” times, our quirky tricks of our trade. A breakthrough for a number of us was the realization that our times of not writing can sometimes be an integral part of our writing.

For me, this often takes the form of what I call “hidden drafts” that may lead to a gradually revealed piece of finished work. I joke that 95% of my editing happen before I start to write, but that estimate may not really be that far off the mark. The words I firmly set to posterity have often been imagined, mulled over and reworked 5 or 6 times before my hands ever hit the keyboard.

Since a good bit of my writing is spurred by my explorations of a distant place, my first draft is often one of anticipation; imagining an adventure, poring over maps, reading guide books, plant keys, packing my gear (including my trusty black-bound sketch journal). My thoughts about the trip to come as I board the airplane, tool down the highway, or repack at the trailhead inform the experience, and in turn will help shape the narrative. Call this draft zero or minus one.

I feel strongly that experience itself is the fundamental first draft. Moving through place with my senses wide open, attending to each landscape, organism and person I meet as if they had a fascinating story to tell me. The phenomenologist/writer David Abram’s says that the human body is the most sensitive recording device ever invented. Go do something exciting, relaxing, rejuvenating, enlivening to you. Reflect on anything done passionately and try to remember the totality of the experience—all we need in a great story is right there, writ in skin and senses. To remember is to link the various parts of a body’s knowing into a whole cloth reflection.

My aforementioned journal is oft the repository for another edition of that

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**Anita Sullivan**

**Beginning**

But the second thing is that the light here is like the eye of a hurricane

confident and innocent

in the way of a robust infant banging pans gently on the floor to learn their qualities, not yet become

a boy striding along hitting bushes with sticks.

And so it is that light begins here, or goes out from here, so that sitting on a bench among reeds, I can give full attention to other things, to

the redwing blackbirds, old souls, wheezing and jangling like watchbands loosely hung on a bunch of wrists.

Mountains disturb the horizon on all three sides either painted onto a background forever, or advancing steadily in this direction.

In that sense I am a simple soul, if the owl calls my name I will know it, not as some secret noise I have never heard, no, not like that at all.

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Anita Sullivan

Stone

They lie on their backs in the half-lit late September afternoons
the old gravestones on this hill above the humming city,
and wait for their favorite song, that roams like a low breeze
while yellow jackets work the mossy slabs.
They lie on their backs in the deep grass, or their backs have become
their fronts, or the ground has wheeled away from them.

And a jolly old soul is she... is the only line they all remember, and can sing, very very sotto voce
among the weeds, these bones, these stones, this group, these grave ones.

Dried pine needles group like Chladini patterns on the moss
of the many fallen.

People walking their dogs sometimes feel a brown throb under the treacle sun,
absently shrug it off. Raccoons at night sliding between the wild and the tame
know the difference by the way the ground goes off-and-on silly under their paws.

The recent stones are fully upright.
The others are half buried by snowberry, sweet pea, false solomon’s seal, fern,
their faces scraped, their fissures shallow, and strange scripts
are showing up between some of the lines:

“Let justice roll down like
#@~~&)>?+=`~*. . .
Waters in a mighty stream.”

Somewhere among them
might be inscribed the song that Dame Love once sang to the Soul
in which she revealed her seven names.

The stones lie still and dream of the fires that once were made of them, stone fires,
and how the old men crouched over the flames, to let smoke drift up
through their anuses to their mouths, and out again.

The men scratched patterns into the rock; on the front surfaces
figures danced, gaped—
gorged... perhaps they sang
And a jolly old soul is she...
experience. I have an inveterate inner narrator; phrases and images continually jump into my consciousness as I walk, dictated from one part of my sensory/cognitive apparatus to another. As there are times when memory may not be enough to record the experience, it is important to bring along tools that I’m extremely comfortable with, which feel almost ritualized and sacred when I pick them up. I’ve used the same style of blank-paged journal for 20 years; each new white page beckons me as an uncarved block full of limitless potential. Into that journal, as I move through an experience, go phrases, fleeting lines of poetry, ideas for an essay, sketches for a painting. Journal entries, both of words and images, serve as mnemonics to provoke thoughtful explorations later on and as such encompass draft 2 (or perhaps 1b).

The next two drafts weave in and out of each other: the stories I tell of what I’ve done, what I felt while I was doing it, what I think the significance of it all may be. This is the story I tell to others close to me (or sometimes to the perfectly placed-stranger). I tell and retell them to myself as well as I take my daily walks. For me, talking/walking help to weave the facts, the themes, and the reflections that constitute a good part of what will eventually reach the page.

As for the act of writing itself, my email could almost be considered a separate draft. Spontaneous electronic expositions to good friends and ingenious comrades constitute a robust electronic record of an experience: if a story is worth telling, it is worth saving. Many of my essays have grown from the roots of such messages. While I strive for ‘mindful’ experience, I hope that the writing itself will be pretty mindless. Not that I don’t edit as I compose, but because I have often thought or said aloud a good bit of my piece before I launch into the actual writing, I can usually tell as the words are coming out when something doesn’t ring true.

But what about those times when I’m struggling to capture the words on paper or screen? When I have writer’s block I invariably seek some new, vivid experience or a well formed distraction (sometimes an evocative movie or great music will do). Even if what I do seemingly has no bearing on what I’m trying to write, being in my body—out of my mind—allows me to access something, often exactly what I need to shake the writing loose from that vast wilderness of imagination stored within. Worst case, I have done something fully enlivening, and perhaps found new stories to tell some other day. When stuck, I lean on what got me to start—new experiences, meaningful conversations, walking meditations, well-timed distractions—to get my muse pumped up again. Learn what turns your muse on and be willing to indulge as needed. When working, mine happens to prefer strong coffee in the morning and red wine in the evening.

There’s an entire industry devoted to writing and selling books about how to liberate the “writer within.” Some swear by these. To be honest, I’m not overly fond of ‘how to’ books. Though directed exercises work very well for some people, my rebellious resistance comes up quite strongly (I really don’t cotton to guided imagery either). I do, however, turn to biographies and auto-biographies of writers (and painters, photographers, filmmakers) whose works I admire for useful ideas about writing and for much needed inspiration. And, no matter how stodgy it seems, I am absolutely GA-GA over the big ol’ New Century Dictionary that I inherited from my mom. Sometimes taking an etymological journey through a single word can spark an entire essay.

From this drafty perspective, I can’t clearly demarcate what is not-writing from the words streaming onto the page. There is a vast continuum (multi-directional), from imagination, through experience, reflection and into and out of the writing itself. So fear not, intrepid fellow scribes. When it seems like you are most stuck, on some level you may be doing some of your best writing. ✌️
Susan Zwinger

Two Birds

I. Varied Thrush

Ixoreus naevius

What’re you doing
deked out in sexy clothes
in March? In snow.
Spring has been cancelled.

Burnt orange chest banded
with black onyx chevron, blue-gray
wing covers, checkered racing primaries,
checkered brain. Bill, a long spear
tapered in search

and kill precision. Voice—
finger-singing on wine glass rim—
long note brimming with harmonics,
you singe my ears with vibration.

A loud-mouthed robin shoves
you off the Pacific Rim.

Here in a garden of immigrants
you toss Beauty

Bark beneath the rhododendron.

II. The American Dipper,
Stairstep Falls, Olympic Peninsula

A water ouzel twenty feet close
hunts by walking upstream under
whitewater.
I measure her efforts: twenty minutes
hard labor
turning over rocks,
then she splashes
onto a basalt boulder mid-river,
bathes and preens meticulously,
fluffs out gray down all over,
bejeweled throughout her pinions,
she mimics a small round river stone
for survival and yawns,
flies seven feet nearer,
stands on shore one tall
yellow leg, eyelids
closing without her consent,
she sleeps in my presence.

Behind, in a bush not fourteen feet
away, the Swainson’s thrush feeds
nestlings,
but it is the water ouzel that dazzles
my soul. How much I could achieve
with half her tenacity.
I miss the point. The point being
silence in the presence
of small feathered gods.
**Recommended by...**

**Jeff Lee, Denver, Colorado**

**Crickets and Katydids, Concerts and Solos by Vincent C. Dethier**

Entomologist Vincent Dethier encourages us to listen to our surroundings in this natural history of the common crickets, locust, and grasshoppers of the northeast. From Mount Washington to the salt marshes of Cape Cod, Dethier’s ear is bent toward meadow grasshopper, marsh locust, sphagnum and snowy tree cricket. No simple task, as Dethier reports: “The singing insects are wary, alert, clever in the art of concealment, and as deceptive as the most skillful ventriloquists.” This uniquely focused book won the 1993 Burroughs Medal for best nature writing, and features especially fine insect drawings by Abigail Rorer.

**Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians by Hilary Stewart**

From the wood comes post and beam houses, ceremonial masks, ocean-going canoes, and totem poles declaring history, rights and lineages. From the inner bark: baskets, cordage, netting and clothing—soft, warm, and water repellent. (Shred cedar bark even finer and you have the stuff of diapers). The giant cedar of the northwest coast rainforest has truly been the tree of life for people who sense its gifts—the Kwakiutl, Haida, Bella Coola, and others. Hilary Stewart has produced a beautiful blend of word and image, meticulous in detail, including over 500 of the author’s own drawings.
SCOTT SADIL

SALMON WATCH

From the trail you could see the redds. Pale as burnished ice, patches of disturbed gravel gleamed as if contact lenses lost to the bottom of a fish bowl. Low water ran clear as tears. Distorted by hope, the pool seemed small as a midnight promise, the redds themselves no larger than the glow of galaxies in a moonless sky. Scale was all over the board. Would they be fish or were these dreams? You wanted to run your hand over things, dissolve perspective to the certainties of flesh.

The first fish changed everything. That wasn’t gravel, nor pebbles, nor sand, but rocks as big as clenched fists. She moved onto a redd, exposed her brilliant side, and the great tail lifted stones from the bottom as if moving dust with breath through a straw. Now we knew what we were looking at, looking for. A wild animal raised clouds to the sky, and from this day forward we would all share in stories heard often as lies.

The boys could see as much as well. By now they had already named each fish, an intimacy of character and story. They weren’t quite rooting but almost. For two hours now we had watched the younger, smaller female attempt to dig into the bedrock at the edge of the gravel redds, and then suffer the threatening glare of the two other females, one guarding her eggs in the nest, the other preparing to

Barbara Thomas

Morning after the Nor’easter

Subdued blizzard wind
split trees on the road.

My cats come out of hiding
curious once more lick their paws

Loreena McKennitt’s smoky voice
shades the room gray.

Dreams I barely touch
weave in and out of Celtic myth.

I sit in the company of flowers
clematis on trellis wisteria on vine
whose petals have survived the night

Chinook. King. How might we delineate this regal female? Fish this large in what should only be recognizable as a trout stream subvert all sense of proportion. If she made noise it would be thunder. The moment passes when you think this must actually be a mistake, a wild salmon lost on its journey home, utterly disoriented by passage along reach of the neighborhood Superfund. You recall effects of chemical distillates. Yet for once the truth proves bald as a heel: the female king on her redd splits in two, joined as if by shadow suspended obliquely downstream.

The second fish was smaller. By far. Half the size of the bright silver female, she approached the freestone bed cautiously, her stomach visibly distended, swaying in the current. She rolled and tried to dig in the bedrock alongside the fist-sized cobble, moving nothing. She pressed in on the other fish. The big female glanced her way, a look that could move mountains.

Of course I’m making it all up. Or maybe not. The smaller fish needed a redd, a nest in which to lay her eggs, and in the clear narrow pool there were but the clenched stones outlined beneath the one bright female, plus another small patch over which a long dark fish hovered, disintegrating. Males seesawed through the pool, inconsequential peacocks nipping painlessly one another’s fins. The story was all in the little fish—if twelve pounds of organic chemistry hard-wired to this one final moment of deposition can be rightly called little. Yet there she was, as far as she was going, and there was no room in the inn. This was going to get worse before it got better.

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Finally, after slow rain,  
all-night whispering  
outside my bedroom window,  
the grass rasping out its secrets  
for a cup of water in the cool dark.  

In the foothills, on moon-worn beds  
of granite, lichen uncrinkles & swells.  
Cracked stream bottoms begin to  
knit themselves back whole.  

Cemented for a year in mud, a toad  
awakened by the thudding of rain  
stirs a stiff leg.  
In a nearby cottonwood,  
an owl hunched in its greatcoat  
of feathers stops blinking, waits.  

The energy in the pool had infected our own.  
“God, did you see that!” Max whispered, slapping both hands on his thighs. “Big Mama was trying to kill her.”  

“Maybe not kill her,” I suggested, adopting my teacher’s stance. “That’s probably just how she protects her own redd.”  

“Where’s Little Mama going to go?” Patrick wondered aloud for all of us.  

In the books and movies, photographs and nature videos, spawning salmon are often portrayed as a single entity, a writhing soup of identical parts, a teeming group consciousness. We think of ants, honeybees, the myth of buffalo and passenger pigeons, the forest primeval. Difficult is the notion that one animal or individual creature is any different, or more important, than another. In our minds we can intellectualize each part of the picture as life, while in our hearts we divulge her own treasure. We were high in the watershed and it was unclear whether the small female could climb any farther, if in fact there was spawning gravel beyond. Or if there was, who or what she would find there. She seemed determined to remain at this particular site. Or the switch had flipped and it wasn’t about choice at all.

The boys—my own two and Max, the neighbor kid—whispered encouragement to Little Mama. The name Big Mama will come as no surprise. At thirty, thirty-five pounds, she had the presence of a miracle in a magic show. The only alternative to date has been religion. The spawned out female had a name I can’t repeat. Boys will be boys.

Little Mama heard no prayers. She moved in behind Big Mama, positioning herself over the very edge of the stony redd. Her body posture, her physical attitude, if you will, communicated now. Her belly waved like a balloon in the wind. She sank toward the bottom as if a waterlogged branch.

Then Big Mama was on her like a dog. She grabbed the smaller fish by the root of the tail, and unlike the males who nipped and nuzzled each other, Big Mama bit down hard and torqued so that Little Mama rose out of the water, flopping lengthwise as if snared. Big Mama didn’t let go. Two, three times she heaved the smaller fish through the surface and swatted the water with her like a teenager splashing poolside sunbathers. But this was no game. It was business like a meal of raw flesh. Or the worst kind of back-alley fare.

By now the boys were hollering. They squealed as if tickled, a mix of delight, fear, and anger. Pretty much what you hear on the big-time wrestling station, but a much deeper chord. This was education at the gut level. There was more going on than any one of them could have explained.

Both fish disappeared, slipping in a tangled fight through boulders at the tail of the pool. Our view was blocked by the broad trunks of old-growth fir. Autumn sunlight bounced over the riffled water, the glare impenetrable as a shattered windshield. The boys were on their feet. I told them to calm down.
experience it as but Life.

Even those of us who have witnessed in person the great spawning scenes of reddened salmon, the tumultuous exposition of life borne of death, would be hard-pressed to identify and empathize with any single fish. The nature of nature is the whole, not any one piece. Yet as we face the current opportunity to choose the fate of our anadromous fish, we may be guided by the unfathomable wisdom emblazoned upon the individual survivors. We know it's already too late for some of them. The species becomes a race, a tribe, a single family, a footnote in history. Yet only in the individual fish do we begin to see the story on a level we can comprehend, the moment by moment struggle to survive, no different than yours and mine. This is either tragic or sublime, depending on where the argument starts. The only thing certain is that one or one million salmon will never have to question the value or meaning of an action or a life.

It was impossible to know when and how the fish returned. One minute we were gazing at the spawned out female and the entourage of sparring males, rafting through the pool as if squalls through a summer sky, and the next minute Big and Little Mama were back, positioned over the big female's freshly dug redd as if they had never warred and departed. Again the smaller fish rolled on her side and tried unsuccessfully to dig in the bedrock and boulders. Her movements seemed more anxious, more agitated than even before. Males moved about the two females as if metal filings around magnets. The scene had become as primitive as physics.

And as pure. Suddenly I thought about my own life, a losing proposition at best. Not my life itself, just thinking about it. Can I just say my experience in matters at what I'll call the primal level have been anything but clear and simple? More like a rat in a psychiatric experiment. Marriage, fatherhood, the so-called career. These fish, I thought, have it easy, stopping myself just short of self-pity, further evidence of the degradation we call the human condition. A state of mind is the weakest link, I thought. Thank God we're still animals at heart.

The family appeared at the edge of the pool, drifting along the bank oblivious to what was happening in the water. Mother in a long skirt and shawl, dad in sandals and a knitted hat that covered all of his head but the ponytail like a shower cap. The child was a toddler of indeterminate sex. A ways off but not real different than the tone of that photo on the cover of Trout Fishing in America. I don't want to call them hippies but I could.

They wandered downstream in the direction of the two Mamas. The young child dug sand from the bank and scattered it into the pool. My boys and Max snapped their heads at me. Raising upturned hands, they pleaded with their eyes for me to do something. They're going to scare the fish! Max silently mouthed.

We waited in our hiding spot above the pool, quiet as shadows in the deep shade of firs and big leaf maples and red alders just beginning to show the yellow of fall. I looked at the boys and raised a finger to my lips. The whole point seemed suddenly to let it ride, let nature take its course and all that implied. To intervene would have been like trying to untangle Big and Little Mama.

I don't believe the family ever saw the fish. Their behavior was too detached, unconscious, remote. Just another stroll along the river through the woods. Big Mama, however, keyed into their presence immediately, growing more and more skittish as she hovered nervously over her newly dug redd, responding in a way that had nothing to do with the continued maneuverings, on Little Mama's part, to insinuate herself onto the precious gravel.

Now you know for sure I'm making this all up. The fact of the matter is, we are but puppets controlled by strings as mysterious as life itself. I know no more about what these fish were doing than why the moon and a month and a woman all cycle to rhythms that are the same. We need but ask ourselves this: Were Big and Little Mama in a fight, a dance, or an interaction as irreducible as a man raising an umbrella to rain?

Or, finally, this: Do you believe for a moment that the family wandering blindly along the stream bank was separate from the fish spawning in the pool, that one was one thing and the other

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another?

When I got out of my head, Big Mama was gone. The redd lay as empty as a mirror. The family stood streamside at the pool, the toddler trying to climb down out of his or her father’s arms. The mother smiled as her partner struggled to control the child. They began to retrace their steps along the water’s edge.

The boys glanced at me, shaking their heads. When we looked back at the pool, Little Mama had already positioned herself onto the redd, as precisely as a smile. Three males swarmed to greet her. For long moments they swirled as if gulls around a loaf of bread, changing places, shifting positions, tethered to some irrational response or desire. Little Mama lay as if oblivious to these antics, motionless but her belly that seemed to caress the cleansed stones of the pale, oval redd.

I put binoculars on her, certain I could witness a discharge of eggs. In her eyes was nothing, or everything, the perfect vision of a planet staring back at you. It is always a problem of point of view. I watched her empty expression, the length of her already darkening body, the gentle bend and flex of fins. Nothing happened I could see. Little Mama remained in the midst of a story without intelligible beginning or end. Beside her a single male shuddered as if struck, quivered like a tuning fork, shivered as its own cold blood ran through its veins.

Big Mama was nowhere to be found.

Barbara Drake

Wet Land

Wapato is blooming this month, Sagittaria latifolia, “a round root the size of Hens eggs,” favored as food by native inhabitants of Oregon, once abundant around here. Driving north I pass a pond full of Wapato now blooming, the small white flowers elevated on long stems like spots of sunlight on shiny leaves.

Later, going south, I see the farmer unloading drain pipe for the field at the curve. It means he is going to put an end to the silver pools that stand there in winter. I know he is tired of farming, wants to subdivide, build houses at the bend of the road into town. I feel a sigh of grief, thinking I will no longer see that pond in winter. The water will rush away pretending it has somewhere more important to go as if it were an unwelcome guest saving face.

Once in the Wapato marsh I saw a red mare standing in water up to her chest. Her neck arched as she pulled wet weeds with her mouth. I never go past there without hoping to see her again, to see the red horse up to her broad chest, mouthing weeds.

from Driving One Hundred, Barbara Drake, Windfall Press 2009
Tricksters and Line Curvers

The Brazilians have a word, Jetino, that means “the powerful magic that arises during dangerous times.” As writers who live in dangerous times it is our work to summon that magic, to modulate it into stories and patterns of language that will help us to imagine this new world that we are creating every moment.

As a model for how to do this, I look to the trickster, the divine fool, who operates with one foot in the sacred and one in the profane; who has appeared in many cultures in the guise of Br’er Rabbit, Coyote, Raven, Tanuki the Raccoon dog, and High John de Conquer. The trickster is able, as Zora Neale Hurston put it, “to make a way out of no way and hit a straight lick with a crooked stick.” As my friend David Grimes, who as a fisherman in Prince William Sound, helped to protect a few vital salmon fisheries from the biggest oil spill in North American history with a few salvaged booms and old fishing lines, as he says, “against all odds is the odds the trickster likes” and if that doesn’t describe our situation, I don’t know what does. As we look to cultivate new ways to examine, and respond to, our current problems, perhaps instead of trying to fight the problem head on, we might be better off doing as trickster does, “hitting the straight lick with a crooked stick.”

As writers, we see things that others do not, and an important part of our task is to create new visions out of that. The trickster is the spirit behind the kind of intuitive leaps of imagination that Newton, Robert Johnson, Picasso, Emily Dickinson, Dogen, and Rachel Carson made. But the trickster often couches these transformations in humor and song, which softens the shock of having broken the rules. It sweetens the medicine. The trickster may romp and clown and look ridiculous, but there is something deeper behind it. There is a lesson in this for us writers of the green persuasion who are legendary for being sanctimonious. Ed Abbey knew this for sure. So does David James Duncan.

In October 1943, at the height of uncertainty about WWII, when all of the world seemed to be breaking apart, Zora Neale Hurston, in an essay about High John de Conquer, an African American trickster, wrote, “Maybe, now, we used-to-be black African folks can be of some help to our brothers and sisters who have always been white. We have given the rest of the nation song and laughter. Maybe now, in this terrible struggle, we can give something else—the source and soul of our laughter and song.” She goes on to say of this trickster that he “is there to help them overcome things they feel that they could not beat otherwise, and to bring them the laugh of the day... they do not worry. They go on and laugh and sing. Things are bound to come out right tomorrow. That is the secret of Negro song and laughter.” Which is to say that the trickster not only brings new ideas, but also hope, pulling everyone up and out of their suffering until maybe they’re laughing and talking and feeling good, which gets the ideas going again. This is what we must do as writers, but perhaps it might be done best as a tricky, slantwise, thing. As that famed ecological philosopher Mae West said, “the most pleasing distance between two points is a curved line.” As artists, we follow in a long tradition of line curvers that have transformed the world through their art, back through Groucho Marx, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ikkyu, all the way back to the cave painters in Lascaux forty thousands years ago. Of course, this kind of magic and creative chaos is not something that we can just turn on, but we can create the space and intention in ourselves for wild magic to arise on its own, much like we intentionally set aside the geographic space for national parks and forests so that wilderness may flourish. In fact, I would say that we had better pay attention to the corridors of magic and imagination in our own hearts and minds if we want migration corridors for grizzlies to succeed.

The poet Adam Zagajewski writes, “try to praise the mutilated world.” Another way to say this is to rejoice in the face of the emergency that we find ourselves in. This is where the trickster makes humor out of adversity, and makes his “way out of no way,” an escape against all odds. If our cousins Br’er Rabbit and Raven can do it, so can we. If we want to do the same and tell the stories that will help, we must be willing to make those trickster leaps and dances that are being made all over the world, in Mumbai ghettos and Ashanti villages. Now that our back is against the wall, it is the time when the source of our art, of our song and our laughter really means something, when we are called to make our souls clap hands. As ol’ Br’er Rabbit said, “There was times when all the creatures used to gather to sagashuate just like there ain’t been no hard times, just like there aint been no fallin out, just like they remembered they were all kin.”
Meanings of Life

One morning I was riding my bike with our son Guthrie, eleven, along Taylor’s Ferry Road, near the intersection with Spring Garden, when he turned and said over his shoulder, “Won’t gas run out in our lifetime?”

“Yes,” I said, meaning his lifetime, if not mine. “Yes, I believe it will.”

“Well, dad,” he said, “wouldn’t it be great if we could just go back to horses?” He pumped along. A fast car passed close, and he shied into the gravel.

“You can tell a lot about people,” I said as he recovered, “by how they drive.”

Later, as we rolled along the bike path through Tryon Park, the sun spangling our eyes through the hawthorn thicket, he turned over his shoulder again.

“Dad! Maybe the sun is doing Morse Code to tell the meaning of life!” And a little later: “But every forest would say a different code. Maybe there are thousands of meanings of life!”

And I thought of the thousands of meanings available all around us, the way the senses are designed to deliver meanings in multiple languages, and the way riding with our son brought me home to the earth.

Bill Siverly
Agriculture

Asotin County was named after nim’pu village hasutin
On the Idaho side of the Snake, place for catching eels.
On Washington’s side the canyon slopes up to Columbia Plateau,
Rolling hills of rich loess now devoted to winter wheat.

The Fitzgeralds ran a few head of cattle out of their ranch
Up on Dry Creek, but mostly they farmed an acreage near Peola,
A defunct town just over the line in Garfield County.
The son called Fitz was fun to be with, always drinking and joking.

Once I asked his brother-in-law where Fitz got that limp.
Clarence explained how farmers used tractor-drawn machines
To inject liquid petroleum nitrates directly into the soil.
One day Fitz was horsing that stubborn machine into place,
When one of those injector knives stabbed him right through the foot.

“Oh! Fitz has limped like that ever since,” Clarence gravely intoned.
Later, at the cabin near Peola, I walked out into a fallow field
Overlooking the vast plateau rolling toward the Snake River Breaks
And picked up a pinch of dry, crusty grit that passed for soil.

Eventually agriculture fails. We take away more from earth
Than we give back, humus abandoned in favor of chemicals.
After we no longer grow with oil, the young will have less to demand,
Dwelling along the Snake, catching whatever they can.
The Necessity of Celebrating the Miraculous

“The world, I have come to believe, is a very queer place, but we have been part of this queerness for so long that we tend to take it for granted. We rush to and fro like Mad Hatters upon our peculiar errands, all the time imagining our surroundings to be dull and ourselves quite ordinary creatures. Actually there is nothing in the world to encourage this idea . . .”

—Loren Eiseley, The Immense Journey

It’s probably no coincidence that I brought Loren Eiseley’s The Immense Journey on a recent trip into Alaska’s Brooks Range wilderness. No accident, either, that life’s circumstances forced my sweetheart, Helene, to bow out of the trip at almost the last minute.

Helene’s withdrawal meant I would be alone in the Arctic wilds for 10 days. That’s not much when compared to Christ’s 40 days in the wilderness or to any number of contemporary solo journeys. But it was enough time, certainly, to do some soul searching, re-read Eiseley’s wonderfully provocative essays, and shed enough of my urban psyche to leave myself open to the wondrous wild.

Going solo into the wild raises the stakes. It magnifies and intensifies experiences, whether unnerving (a river crossing, a broken tent pole, a bear in camp) or sublime (the Valley of Precipices, howling wolves, sweeping tundra expanses that seem to go on forever). There’s nothing like a wilderness sojourn, especially when alone, to renew or enlarge one’s sense of wonder and regain an awareness of life’s miracles—and the larger miracle that is creation.

Or the universe or all-that-is or whatever you prefer to call it.

Is it not a miracle to watch Dall sheep lambs hop nimbly from boulder to boulder on steep slopes that would paralyze a human mountaineer? Or to watch a tiny, pale yellow spider, no bigger than a sesame seed, crawl across the back of the hand before dropping back into the tundra, where it and its kin somehow survive Arctic extremes? And isn’t it a marvelous thing to walk among huge leaping walls of marble, whose calcium carbonate was laid down as sediment, then buried and, over great expanses of time, squished, fractured, and otherwise contorted, then thrust upward into the sky—all by unimaginable earth forces—and finally sculpted by glacial ice? Or to stand in a valley sparkling wildly as ice crystals are lit up by the rising sun?

I know: not everyone can get into the wilderness yearly. Or would want to. But of course that’s not necessary. While the wilderness may more easily open us to the miracles of this world we inhabit, there’s plenty of wondrous stuff going on around us all the time, in all sorts of ways. Yeah, you may be saying, I know that. But how often do you feel it with your whole being?

As Eiseley and other wisdom keepers have reminded us across the years, life itself is a miracle—as are the parts of creation that our western culture tends to consider “dead” or lifeless. And to be part of the spectacle is a miracle. My life is a miracle. Yours too. And we need to honor that miracle regularly.

So while it’s important that we be educated and warned about global warming, toxins everywhere (including our bodies), the dangers and potential cruelties of industrial farming (or industrial anything), we humans also need reminding now and then that to simply be alive and part of this grand experiment—or whatever you wish to call it—is indeed a mysterious and
astonishing thing.

We so desperately need the words and work of people like Loren Eiseley, Robert Marshall, Wendell Berry, Robert Bly, Terry Tempest Williams, Chet Raymo, Scott Russell Sanders, Gary Snyder, James Hillman, Kathleen Dean Moore, Paul Shepard, and Matthew Fox, to name a few of the people I return to time and again for inspiration and hope.

This matters because we behave differently in the presence of the miraculous. We act more respectfully, more reverently, more generously. And we’re more open to being joyful, playful, and, perhaps most importantly, hopeful, essential ways of being in these anxious, destructive, scary times, when it’s so easy to be overcome by despair, hopelessness, and paralysis.

I’m not suggesting a retreat from the problems that we and the larger world face—and to a large degree we humans have helped to create. We need to keep working for the greater good, a healthier, more just and peaceful world. But we need to stop now and then to praise and embrace life.

Above my desk is a quote attributed to Thich Nhat Hanh. In his own way, he says much the same thing that Loren Eiseley does. I return to it often, especially when things seem darkest.

“People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don’t even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.”

Amen and hallelujah.

Recommended by...

Bill Sherwonit, Anchorage, Alaska

Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness by Eric Reece

Probably the best book I’ve read this year (though published in 2006), this is top-notch literary—and advocacy—journalism that explores the awful destructiveness of “radical strip mining” for coal in the Appalachian region, where entire mountaintops are removed to get at the coal, with devastating consequences to the landscape and the inhabitants in the region, both human and otherwise. After reading this, I am amazed that any mountaintop removal is still allowed. And I wonder how President Barack Obama can embrace the idea of “clean coal” (does he still?). What an oxymoron.
Kim Stafford

Tats Mewi at Billy Meadow

Long before dawn outside my tent
robin begins to count episodes of good luck.
“This one, this one, this one, this.”

Long before dawn raven has
a salty question: “Crooked crawl?
Crooked crawl?”

While night yet holds the unwary,
chickadee has a plan: “Pick a seed-seed.
Pick a seed.”

Bill Siverly

Lookout Creek

Towerng Douglas fir and hemlock process sunlight
Over crooked yews festooned with strands of moss.
Dogwood and rhododendrons tell the understory
Down to Oregon grape and salal poking out of sun-fed mycelium.

Spotted owls occupy the rare broken tops of Douglas fir.
When forest turns cold and water-logged,
They wear the canopy like a cloak of snow,
Swooping through branches in pursuit of flying squirrels.

The whole canyon of Lookout Creek is always on the move
Decades slower than the human eye can see.
Pacific storms make motion visible, as wind and water
Knock down trees, break up logjams, scour gravel beds,
Shove boulders downstream like pounding hearts of bears.

Alders and sculpin are swept away, but cutthroat trout
Wait out chaos under cutbanks, emerging in the aftermath,
Survivors adjusting quickly to purged habitat,
Later rejoined by resurgent sculpin and alders.

Obscure lichens fall from branches as lobes of nitrogen,
Feeding every plant below and every towering tree.
Humans set up instruments and tiny red florescent flags,
To see what happens now, and after they are gone.

*tats mewi is Nez Perce for “good morning”
A SONG, WAITING

What took me into the dark, under the stars, while my city slept? Striding along Palatine Hill Road, then off through the hedge and into the cemetery, I remembered a time I was at the Root Feast at Warm Springs. The drumming had been going for some hours, and the dancers turning counter-clockwise in the Longhouse until we were all in the trance of old ways. Suddenly, the drumming stopped, and an old man stood before us, leaning on his cane.

“I went down to the corner,” he called out, “to see if there was a song—waiting to see if anyone could hear it. I have heard it! I would sing it for you.” And then the drumming began again, and he began to chant in Sahaptin the song that had awaited him, so he could give us the full voltage of that message. Then he came to the end of his words and the drums began again.

Later, the drumming stopped a second time, and another elder stood before us. “I got up in the dark,” he said, “wondering if there might be some words for us. I looked all through the paper—many words, but not the words. So I stared into the fire to see if there might be some words. There were words! I would say them for you.” And he began to speak in Sahaptin the words that had awaited his attention in the fire. Then he came to the end of his words and the drumming began again.

In the dark, as I trudged down slope between the graves, I wondered if there might be a song—if there might be some words, waiting to see if anyone would hear them. There were words. I have heard them. If you have a moment, I would say them for you. 🎵
Three old poets on a wooden foot bridge. Admiring its pole construction. Its
craftily fitted joints.
Pieces shaped and cut and assembled to span the creek rushing beneath. We
cross.
Standing. Fallen. Decomposing into duff. Spared the clear-cuts of the
surrounding mountains the millions of years go on. Refugia, Charles has
written. The places where things go on.
He bends down and picks up a leaf of prehistoric lettuce. Hands me a piece.
Lobaria, he says.
Ancient lichen. Pockets and ridges like the landscape of another world. Now
I see it in the canopy above us. Scattered on the forest floor. Green and gray.
Thriving and dying. A fungus and an algae hooked up with a bacterium it can
photosynthesize, fix nitrogen from the air, reproduce from spores or broken
pieces of itself. Its decay feeds the forest. It goes on. He hands a piece to Clem.
Who is more interested in the yew. A dense centuries-old branch his hand can
reach around. The English long-bow. Battle of Agincourt, he says. Then adds:
Henry V? Laughs at the French generals whining about the rules of war. This
bright new tool of empire.
Then devil’s club. Charles points to the spiny stalks thrust up around us
through the forest floor. With wrapped burlap for a hand-hold he says company
goons beat the Wobblies when they ran them out of Everett and other mill
towns. I touch one. Spines sharp as needles. Ingenious, I say. A moment of
silent respect for the IWW.
At a wide spot in the trail three old poets looking up at a spider’s web. Strung
between yews an artful airy construct, its author in the middle of it. Pollen
from the firs has dusted the spider and every strut and strand with gold. All
that beauty. Useless now that it’s visible. Poor guy, we all commiserate.
He’ll never get his dinner with that.

Lookout Creek, H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest
Drawing on Nature
Exhibit in Albuquerque this Summer

If you’re in New Mexico this summer, consider visiting Albuquerque’s New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science (http://www.nmnaturalhistory.org/). From 11 June to 12 September, 2010, the museum will exhibit illustrated natural history field journals created by more than 30 artist-naturalists, many of whom have longstanding affiliations with Writing Nature.

Original sketchbooks will be on view along with framed artwork. Visitors can handle a facsimile “journal” containing reproductions of additional field sketches, see photographs of the artists afield, and watch video interviews.

The group represented in this exhibit originally emerged from the first gathering of natural history writers in Crestone, Colorado, in 1995. About a dozen women convened the following summer in rural Vermont to sketch, write, enjoy each other’s company, and share work and resources. A 1996 gathering took place in Yellowstone National Park.

Every subsequent summer has seen another informal journal-keepers’ convocation. Gatherings have convened at Glacier, North Cascades, and Zion National Parks; on the California and Oregon coasts and Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front; in New York State’s Hudson River Valley, Washington’s San Juan Islands, and Colorado’s San Luis Valley.

The exhibitors include not only professional artists and illustrators, but also scientists, writers, teachers, photographers, designers, outdoor educators. All share certain qualities: curiosity; field experience in natural-history learning; an independent yet cooperative spirit; flexibility, humility, and resilience; a sense of play, and a regular practice—not just pragmatic or professional, but also devotional—that heightens attentiveness through visual and verbal recording of observations.

—submitted by Sarah Rabkin

Community news:

The 2010 Blue River Writers’ Gathering will be September 24-26 at the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest. Contact Charles Goodrich for more information or to register (charles.goodrich@oregonstate.edu).

The next Crestone Gathering: Carson Bennett has reserved the Baca campus facilities for the Crestone retreat next summer, from Friday, July 30 to Sunday, August 1. The deadline for RSVPs will be April 30, 2010. The early deadline was at the request of Susan Nishida at Colorado College, who has agreed to schedule the retreat as a priority over other group requests as long as we have enough people confirmed by the end of April to put it on the Baca Campus schedule. Contact Carson (carsonb54@yahoo.com) with any questions or to RSVP.

Glen Brook 2010: The gathering will be October 15-17, 2010 at Camp Glen Brook in Marlborough, NH. Also, the Monadnock Literary and Arts Festival that Fred and I co-coordinate with Camp Glen Brook will take place September 17-19, 2010. Contact Fred (rtaylor@antioch.edu) or Rowland (rrussell@antioch.edu) with questions or input about either of these gatherings.

Workshop on Teaching about Climate Change
John Calderazzo, SueEllen Campbell, and Cindy Thomashow will be running a workshop on understanding, responding to, and (especially) teaching climate change this summer, Aug. 1-4, at Maine’s Unity College, in conjunction with the Orion Society. With a starting goal of helping everyone get past the feeling that they must be expert to even raise the subject, we’ll cover important basics about how the climate system works, what changes are predicted, how they’ll affect humans and the rest of nature, how the arts and humanities can respond (or lead?), what sorts of actions might lessen impacts, prepare for the inevitable, and adapt to what comes. Along the way, we’ll explore effective and engaging teaching methods. We’ll do field work on Unity’s campus with scientists; we’ll do hands-on learning activities; and—not least!—we’ll write and make art. Please consider joining us and help us spread the word to interested friends and colleagues. Email SueEllen for more information (secamp@lamar.colostate.edu) or check the Unity College website for a more complete description: http://www.unity.edu/Visitors/SummerPrograms/Orion/Welcome.aspx.
BOOKS RECENTLY PUBLISHED


BOOKS FORTHCOMING


Bill Sherwonit, Fly Tales: Lessons in Fly Fishing Like the Real Guys, Barclay Creek Press, 2010.

Anita Sullivan, Garden of Beasts (poems), Airlie Press, Monmouth, OR, November 2010.
