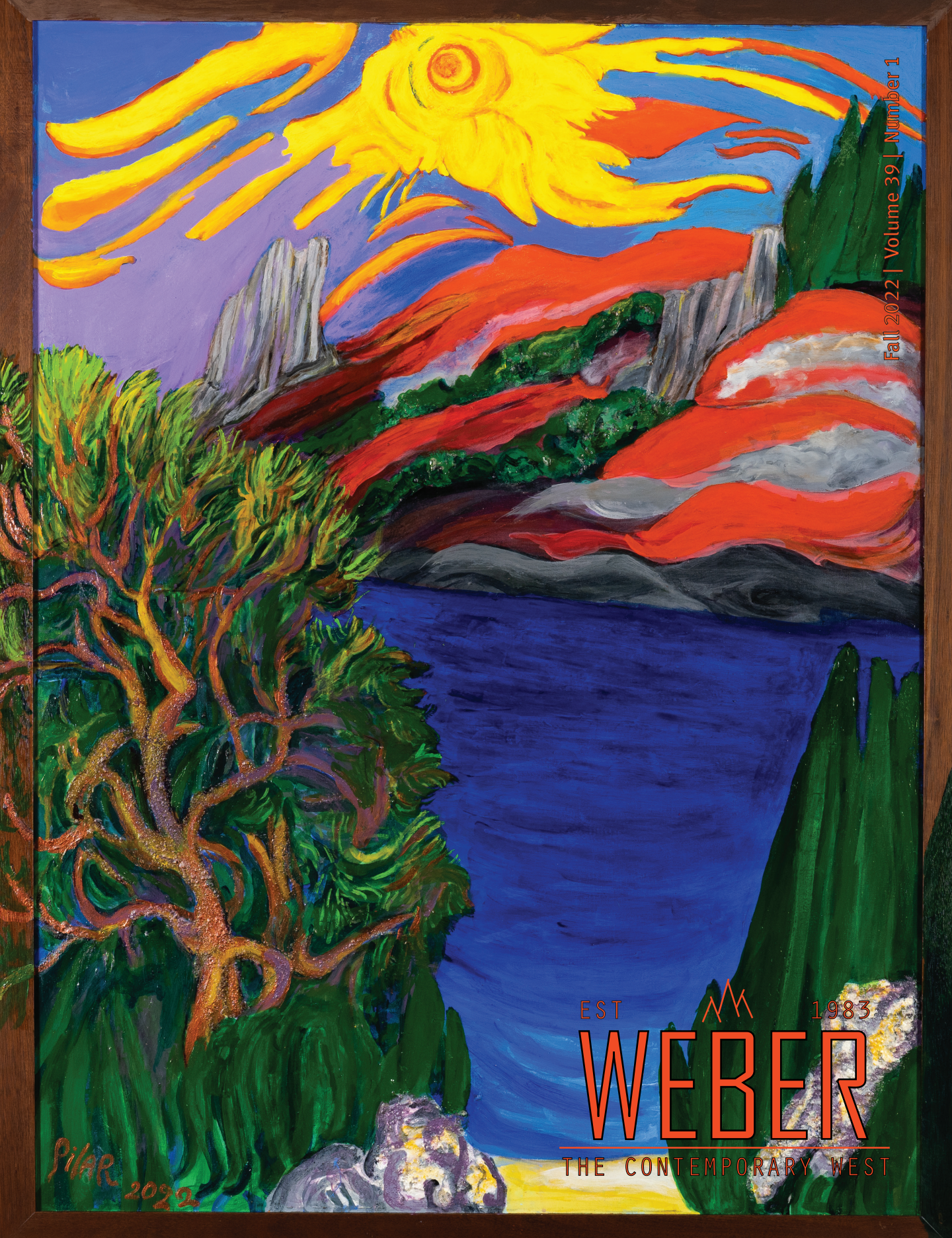


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EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

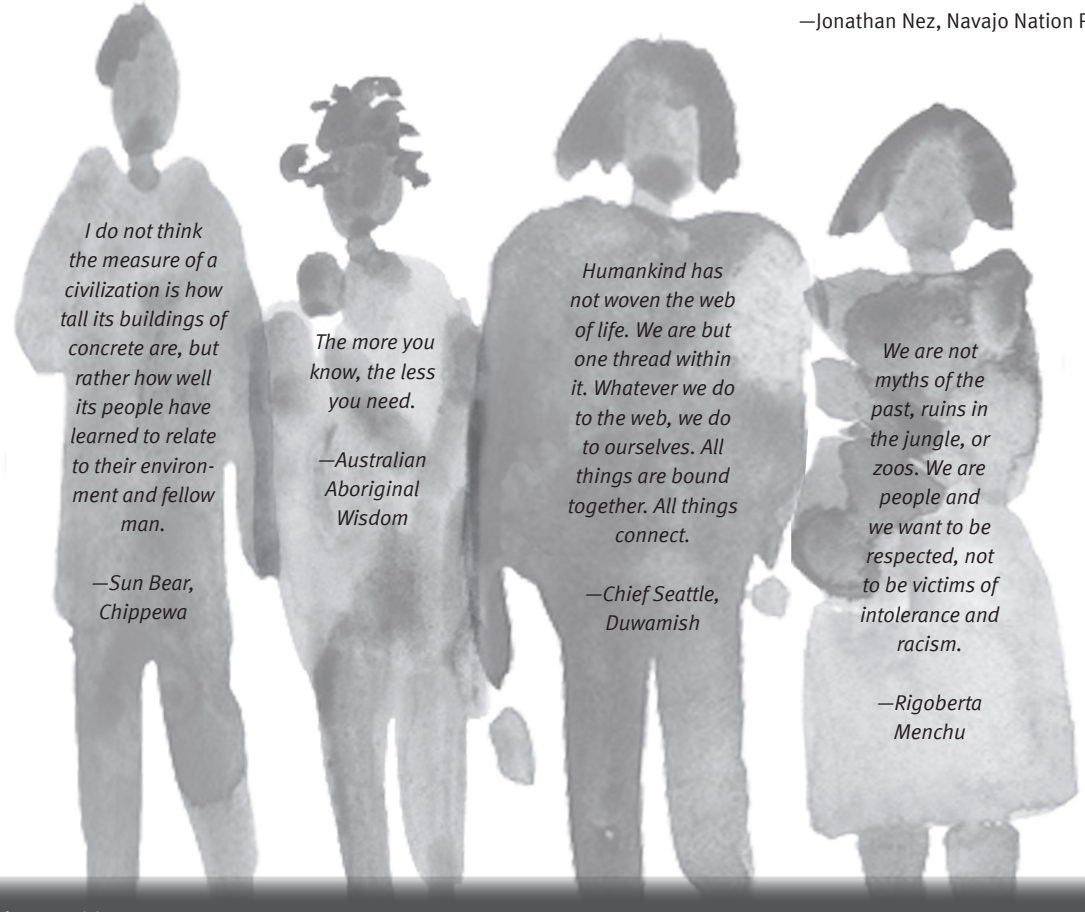
EST 1983
WEBER
THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Deriving from the German **weben**—to weave—**weber** translates into the literal and figurative "weaver" of textiles and texts. Weber are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into everchanging patterns. **Weber**, the journal, understands itself as a regional and global tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.

—Indigenous Peoples' Day—

The Navajo Nation has long been opposed to celebrating Columbus Day because it celebrates colonialism, oppression, and injustice inflicted on Indigenous peoples. He is credited by many with 'discovering' the Americas, but this characterization ignores the fact that the land was already inhabited by numerous peoples with advanced cultures, technologies, and systems of government. For generations, Indigenous communities throughout the Americas have fought to survive colonization, assimilation, disease, and genocide. Transforming Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day will encourage young Indigenous peoples to have pride in the place and people they come from and to be a part of a movement to reteach the history of the country.

—Jonathan Nez, Navajo Nation President



Presidential Recognition
On October 8th, 2021, President Joe Biden became the first commander in chief to formally recognize Indigenous Peoples' Day by issuing a proclamation celebrating the upcoming holiday. The proclamation says: "On Indigenous Peoples' Day, our Nation celebrates the invaluable contributions and resilience of Indigenous peoples, recognizes their inherent sovereignty, and commits to honoring the Federal Government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations."
The proclamation ends on a powerful note: "On Indigenous Peoples' Day, we honor America's first inhabitants and the Tribal Nations that continue to thrive today."

Front Cover: Pilar Pobil, *The Pine of Formentor*, 52" x 41," acrylic and multimedia on canvas, painted frame. Photo by Jesse Justice.



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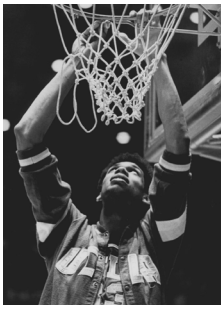
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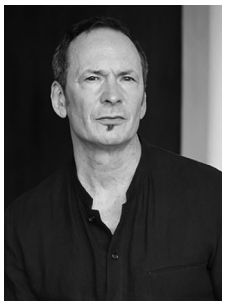
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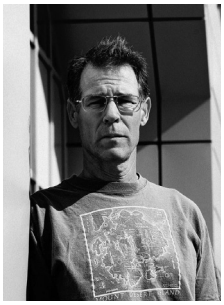
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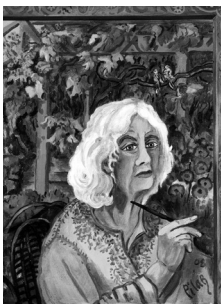
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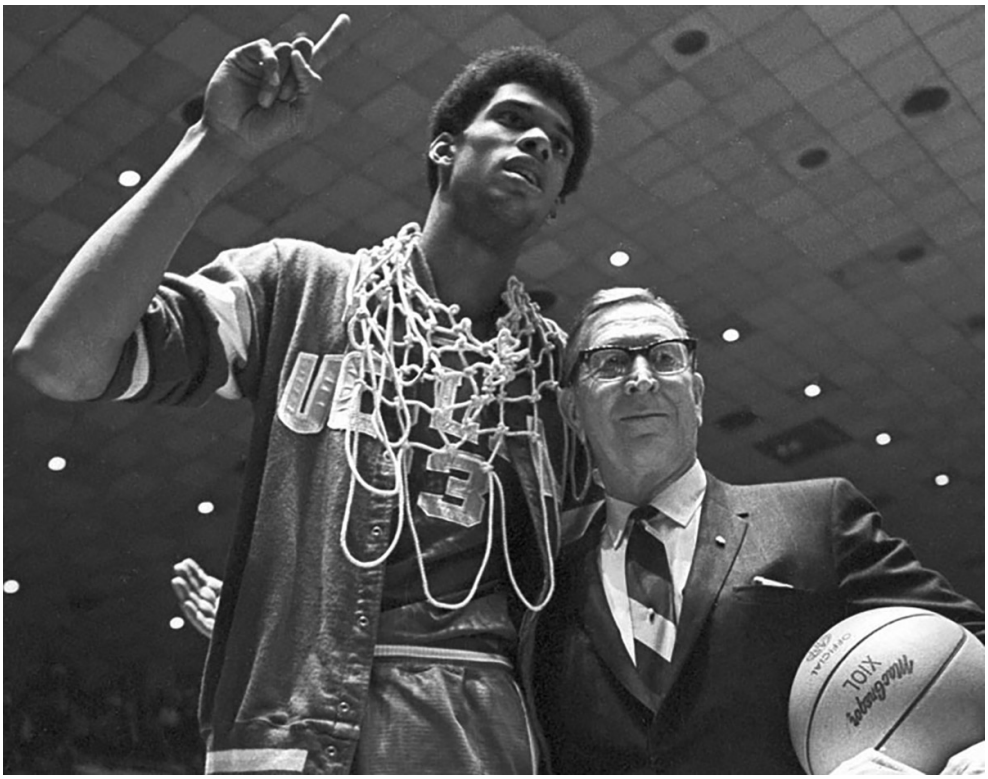
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OF HOPE, HOOPS, AND HARLEM

DAVID JAMES



Kareem Abdul-Jabbar with Coach John Wooden

A Conversation with
KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

When Kareem Abdul-Jabbar left the basketball court in 1989, no player had ever scored more points, won more MVP titles, or played more seasons with the NBA. ESPN named him the greatest center of all time in 2007, the greatest player in college basketball history in 2008, and the second-best player in NBA history (behind Michael Jordan) in 2016. In addition to making history on the basketball court, Abdul-Jabbar has found success as an actor, basketball coach, political activist, education advocate, and best-selling author.

His first book, his autobiography Giant Steps, *was written in 1983 with co-author Peter Knobler. The book's title is a nod to jazz great John Coltrane, in reference to his signature album,* Giant Steps. *Since then Abdul-Jabbar has gone on to publish 15 books and become a* New York Times *best-selling author. His non-fiction books include biography, social commentary, and history promoting African-American cultural achievements.*

Abdul-Jabbar made the following remarks during the 2021 Ogden School Foundation's Fall Author Event, where he was the featured speaker of the evening. After his remarks, he engaged in a conversation with KUTV 2 News sports anchor David James.

Good evening, everyone. I'm glad I was invited to be here tonight to speak to you on behalf of the Ogden School Foundation. Whenever I'm asked to speak about my life, I remember one of my favorite scenes in ***West Side Story***. Doc, the owner of a small soda shop where the Jets street gang hangs out, offers the boys some unsolicited advice. He makes the classic mistake of saying what most "oldsters" like me say to young people, "when I was your age," to which one of the Jets sneers, "you was never my age." He's right, of course. Every generation grows up in unique circumstances with different pressures, different experiences, and different expectations. What I went through when I was a teenager is not directly comparable with what today's teenagers are going through. They have lived through a worldwide pandemic; climate change is an imminent threat; and insurrectionists invaded the Capitol Building in an attempt to overturn a national election. Other generations haven't experienced anything like that. Even though those events are unique to this generation, there are certain core values that we share across all generations. These values have been codified in the U.S. Constitution, and it's up to every new generation to defend those values against attack. Unfortunately, the most dangerous attacks come from within our country, from those who are misinformed or just hostile to the ideals of democracy. The most important ideal this country stands for is that every person, regardless of race, gender, ethnic origin, religion, or gender identity, deserves an equal opportunity to thrive.

We may disagree about how to make this a reality for everyone, but we can't disagree that this is an existential goal of our country. Some people are content in agreeing that this is our goal, but they are unwilling to do anything to help make this a reality. Others will avoid responsibility by claiming we've already achieved this goal. It's like hearing a knocking in your engine when you're driving and choosing to ignore it. You hope that the knocking will go away, but you don't know if it will, right? Well, that knocking you're hearing is the voice of all people who share the core value that everyone should have the same opportunities in life. Unfortunately, many aren't getting those opportunities due to flaws in our systems.

Last year, those voices were heard loud and clear during what the ***New York Times*** estimated was the largest protest movement in the history of the United States.

Between 15 and 26 million people took to the streets to support Black Lives Matter. As a result, policing policies were changed, personnel changes were made, budgets were reallocated, offensive statues were removed, and the country as a whole was much better informed about the life and death challenges facing people of color.

Unfortunately, the country still faces its share of wannabe Thanoses who would like to snap their fingers and make part of our population disappear—particularly those who look different, worship differently, and love differently. The way they are accomplishing this terrible feat of inhumanity is not through Infinity Stones, but through legislation. At least 19 states have enacted 33 laws to make voting harder, especially for the poor and people of color. Redistricting in Texas and other states has deliberately disenfranchised many Black voters. This relentless campaign to disempower and silence isn't just racially motivated. According to the Human Rights Campaign, 2021 has been the worst year in recent history for the LGBTQ community. An unprecedented number of states have enacted record-shattering anti-LGBTQ legislation. Schoolchildren are having their curriculum rewritten to make sure they are less informed. Women are facing the harshest anti-choice legislation in 60 years as "finger-snappers" attempt to return women to a traditional "father knows best" time from the era of a woman "knowing her place."

"When I was your age. . . ." That's right, I'm using those famous words. The difference is, I'm not advising you to be like me. I'm talking about how I, too, had to grapple with the major challenges of becoming a meaningful member of society. When I was 20 years old and attending UCLA, I was invited by Jim Brown, a well-known activist, Hollywood actor, and NFL athlete, to join a group of Black athletes in what became known as the Cleveland Summit. We were tasked with deciding on whether to support or condemn boxing heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali in his decision to not participate in the draft as a conscientious objector. I was the youngest member of the group. Some had been in the military and did not look sympathetically at draft dodgers. I felt overwhelmed by the responsibility. Who was I, a kid just out of my teenage years, to decide the fate of anything, let alone the fate of one of the most famous Black men in the world? Wasn't that best left up to older, wiser people? But, there I was along with older, wiser people listening to Ali talk about his faith, his unwillingness to kill, and his willingness to give up his title, lose millions of dollars, and face years of imprisonment. Even when the government guaranteed he wouldn't have to go to Vietnam, that he would only do exhibition boxing, he refused. He wouldn't allow himself to be used as a poster boy to recruit others to do what he wouldn't do. By the time we were done grilling Ali, we all agreed that he was not just sincere, but uncommonly courageous. It was then that I knew that being an American didn't mean that I got to grab all the benefits of the country while watching others get nothing. It meant taking an active role in guiding it and helping steer it in the direction that the founders, even with their faults, intended us to go.

It has been said that eternal vigilance is the price of democracy. If a garden is not constantly tended to, it will become overgrown with weeds that choke off the vegetables. Without our active vigilance, our country's ideals of a paradise of equality will devolve into nothing more than a tax haven for the rich and powerful. We will become the kind of country that we fought in a revolution to change. This is not a rallying call to take to the streets with banners and slogans. It is a rallying call to encourage you to become the best person you can be. That includes following your dreams of having a rewarding career, a loving family, close friends, outdoor barbecues, Jazz season tickets (laughter), and whatever else you desire. But it also means actively defending the values that

made your success possible, so that everyone has the same opportunity to be successful.

Someday, when you turn to your children and say, "when I was your age," and you know you will, they'll still roll their eyes, but they'll be rolling them in a world that is better than the one you inherited. When those eyes stop rolling, they'll be looking at you with pride and admiration, because you helped make their world a better, fairer, more equal place than it has been before.

CONVERSATION

When Janis Vause called and invited me here tonight, Kareem, I couldn't say "yes" quickly enough. I grew up in San Diego, and UCLA turned me into a huge college basketball fan. I wasn't quite old enough to remember you playing, but John Wooden's name was magic. He came on Talkin' Sports *a couple times in the late '90s, when he was in Utah. There are so many topics that I know people want to hear from you about, but the one that brings us here tonight is, when did you start loving to read? How can you help to get someone interested in reading? Why were you interested?*

I think it had to do with the fact that my dad had to babysit me a lot, and I asked too many questions. A lot of you have kids like that, right? They ask too many questions. So, he would always hand me a book and say, "look it up." And it just became part and parcel of what I did, because he wasn't going to give me a whole lot of answers.

Who were some of the authors you really enjoyed and who impacted you?

Well, I really enjoyed mystery writers and stories about the Cold War. Authors like John Le Carré, Martin Cruz Smith, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler were a few I enjoyed. I went on a lot of road trips with the NBA, so I read a lot of stuff related to crime fiction and fiction about the Cold War during that time.

John Wooden could have been a teacher. He was a teacher on the basketball court. In Coach Wooden and Me, *you talk about John's experiences while bonding with students and players, and how it led him toward basketball. How did he impact your interest in reading and writing?*

Well, John Wooden was an English teacher. He really saw himself as an English teacher. He wanted all of us to get our degrees and to learn how to be good citizens, good parents, and good husbands. That was really what his primary focus was. He used basketball as a means to get to us with those things.

So, you began writing yourself. At what point did you consider yourself a "writer"? Maybe you have to be published to be an "author," but when did you consider yourself a "writer"?

I considered myself a writer after I wrote my first history book, ***Black Profiles in Courage***. The book had nothing to do with basketball and everything to do with what I wanted to say to Black Americans, kids especially. The book told them that this is their country and they belong here. They should find out what this country is all about and learn the things they need to learn to participate in it.

So, you've experimented a little bit with journalism. You've had a lot of experience listening to questions after games from people like me. As a youth, you dipped your toe in those waters as well. What did you learn about journalism? What appealed to you?

Well, I was between my junior and senior year in high school, and I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Martin Luther King. I was involved in a poverty program in Harlem

that was trying to teach kids how to make Harlem a better place. There were a number of different workshops on topics like journalism, music, dancing, and social work—all the things that people need to know to help the people in their community. I asked Dr. King his opinion on the program, and I got an answer. To get that close to someone who means that much to our country was amazing. It's something I will always be proud of.

Did you know at the time how important that moment was? Or were you just living your life, and 20 years later you looked back and realized you were right in the middle of history?

I knew what was going on as far as the importance of Dr. King and his message were concerned, because that was a very important thing in Harlem. There were always people arguing back and forth. Some people were militant and some were more conciliatory. It was hard to figure it all out. You had people like Malcolm X, who had a more militant vision of how Black Americans could achieve their freedom. Malcolm's message was the same as Dr. King's, you know. They just talked about different methods.

You spoke earlier about the Cleveland Summit. You were in a room with Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and Jim Brown, about to tell Muhammad Ali what you *thought. Where do you find your voice for a moment like that?*

Well, Wilt wasn't there. Wilt was a Knicks fan (laughter). I was just as proud as I could be. They wanted somebody young there who would represent the youth of America, the Black youth, and they picked me. I had known Bill Russell since I was 14 years old. I met Bill when I was in high school. I met a lot of the NBA players when I was in high school.

How much did interacting with those guys at a young age shape your life and the kinds of things you tell us tonight?

I was between my junior and senior year in high school, and I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Martin Luther King. I was involved in a poverty program in Harlem that was trying to teach kids how to make Harlem a better place. There were a number of different workshops on topics like journalism, music, dancing, and social work – all the things that people need to know to help the people in their community. I asked Dr. King his opinion on the program, and I got an answer. To get that close to someone who means that much to our country was amazing. It's something I will always be proud of.

Well, it was interesting for me to see how the guys managed their careers and the money they made. I got the chance to know Wilt a little bit—he lived an incredible lifestyle. He helped me see what I wanted to do with my life and how I wanted to live.

What did you take from your relationship with Muhammad Ali? You got to interact with him a few times.

Muhammad Ali was just a fun guy. He really wanted to see racism end against Black Americans, that's why he joined the Black Muslims. He wanted to be part of an organization that was going to be ready to deal with the struggle. He evolved throughout his life, he never gave it up. I have a lot of respect for him for that reason.

Money is always involved in politics. Corporations are always worried about their public image. I knew a little bit about Muhammad Ali, but while reading about the Cleveland Summit in your book, I was stunned by the conflicts of interest in that room. There were people who had a financial interest in promoting Muhammad Ali who were in the room. So, looking back on the event, it might seem like a simple decision, we're all going to back Muhammad Ali.

Yeah, there were. Jim Brown had invested in the company that backed Muhammad Ali and promoted his fights. So, if Muhammad Ali didn't fight, Jim Brown was going to lose money. It was complicated. But the guys made their decision, and Muhammad Ali made his decision as to what he was going to do, and what he was going to represent.

I saw the movie The Pentagon Papers *a couple of years ago. Did you ever talk to Muhammad Ali after information was leaked that what the U.S. government was saying publicly was different than what they were writing privately? We eventually found out what the government thought of the war all along. But he bet everything – his reputation, his salary, every dollar he earned, facing prison, to ultimately be proven right. Did you ever talk to him about that?*

No, I never talked with him about that. The thing of it was, he understood that he was right from the very beginning. He was not going to be taken advantage of, he had seen too much of that. So, he encouraged Black Americans to understand what was going on and to do a better job of confronting all of the difficulties that we faced.

You've written both fiction and non-fiction. Do you prefer non-fiction because it helps you escape the real world and real world problems? Or do you prefer fiction because it's a chance to explore real world problems, but in a fictional setting by removing specific names, places, and times?

As a historian, I like writing all the facts down. That's what people judge you on. You can make up all the stories you want to and people either like it or they don't, they find it realistic or they don't. But when you're writing about facts, it's a lot easier. You just have to have your facts straight and know how to spell.

What are the topics that you feel you've explored thoroughly? What topic would you like to explore a little more?

I would love to explore how things have evolved in our country in regard to our disparity of wealth. Native Americans were chased off of productive lands and Black Americans were imprisoned, enslaved. It's been very hard for people of color to make it into the middle class. And that bothers me.

I think it bothers a lot of people here. I think it's one reason to get involved with education foundations. When you invest in education, you give people a chance to change their circumstances. Ogden School District just did a survey on the number of students who utilize the free and reduced lunch program. About 70% of Ogden School District kids live below the poverty line. What do you see as some of the corrosive effects of poverty that drag people down day after day?

I think the most corrosive effect that poverty has is that it removes hope from people. They don't think that they can make it. They don't think that their kids have what it takes, or have opportunities. Just having Wi-Fi access gives you an advantage.

You have a foundation, the Skyhook Foundation, and you've gotten involved in STEM issues. A lot of school districts and a lot of foundations are going to move toward STEM in the future. What about it caught

your attention? Why have you decided to invest your time and your name in this?

Well, STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Those are the subjects that will lead to great jobs in the 21st century. The kids might not understand the periodic table right now, but they do know that if they pay attention in chemistry class or in physics they can get a great job and take care of themselves. America offers that to whoever wants to qualify themselves.

What are you doing while partnering with the school districts in L.A.?

We send fourth- and fifth- grade kids from various schools to our camp and they do STEM experiments out in nature. They observe the night sky; they do water-quality experiments and air-quality experiments. They look for trails and the possibility of mining on different landscapes. They learn about what it all takes to thrive in the modern world and about where the jobs are. And I'm very happy about the effect that we've had. We'd like to follow some of our students to the point where they become engineers, scientists, or technicians, and bring them back to show other kids that they started out at our camp.

In your recent book Black Cop's Kid *(2021), you write about an incident you experienced when you were a young man. You were caught in a riot as you were coming off of a subway. There was a demonstration going on when you heard shots, and you ran because you knew you were a big target. You know what it's like to be policed as an African American man. But at the same time, you know what it's like to have a close, personal relationship with a police officer. Your dad was a cop. So, given your background, what do you think of the current state of law enforcement?*

Well, we have to find a way to get to the point where the law serves all of us in the same way (applause). The only way that we can do that is to be sure that we have the means to get rid of bad police officers, because they are the ones who create the problem. So many incidents happen because of a taillight out, a sticker on a window, or windows were tinted, and people get killed. That shouldn't happen. So, we have to figure out a way to train our police officers to use patience and wisdom, in addition to the need to fight crime.

There have been a lot of social justice issues within the NBA recently. I don't know what kind of relationship you have with some of the current players, but are there any you know who are doing work at the grassroots? Many here tonight are invested in youth and in students by donating their time and resources. Are there any players who you think are really on to something?

We send fourth- and fifth- grade kids from various schools to our camp and they do STEM experiments out in nature. They observe the night sky; they do water-quality experiments and air-quality experiments. They look for trails and the possibility of mining on different landscapes. They learn about what it all takes to thrive in the modern world and about where the jobs are. And I'm very happy about the effect that we've had. We'd like to follow some of our students to the point where they become engineers, scientists, or technicians, and bring them back to show other kids that they started out at our camp.

Well, in conjunction with the NBA, I'm involved in giving away some money each year to the NBA players who I think are the most involved in social justice, who are trying to do their best to help their communities. The winner gets $100,000. Four other players get $25,000. We want the guys to think about what they can do in the communities that they serve.

I know many here think you need to take a look at Damian Lillard. He went to Weber State University, just a couple miles down the road. He had classes, he was a good player, and he had pro dreams. But he also invested a lot of time in the kids at the Boys and Girls Club, because he had been at a Boys and Girls Club and people invested time in him. There are a lot of people in this room who would pat him on the back.

Somebody on Damian's team won the prize, Carmelo Anthony. He has done a whole lot too, that's the difficult thing. There were a couple of teams with a number of guys who were very involved.

Another player who people in this room have a lot of love for is Big Mark Eaton. He's a former UCLA player and he played for the Utah Jazz. He stayed in the community long after he played and was involved in so many charitable efforts. He had a great career as a public speaker and was really a good guy. What are some of your memories of Mark?

Mark was one of those guys that all of you would admire if you knew what it took for him to make it into the NBA. When he went to UCLA, he tried out for basketball, but really hadn't had a lot of experience. They let him play on a team, and students would come just to heckle him. They'd say that he was awkward and clumsy and shouldn't be on the court. But Mark put the work in through two or three summers, and at the end of that time he was a formidable person on a defensive end of the court. He made a difference for the Jazz, and I was really proud of him. Go Bruins! I was happy that he found a community here, where people appreciated someone who had his type of character and determination.

In addition to being an author, you've been in the movies. You've been in Airplane*; you've got major comedic chops. But you also like to tell stories that people don't know much about. You did a movie about a basketball team in New York during the '20s and '30s, the Harlem Rens. Some might have known them as the New York Rens. Can you talk about their story?*

I think the only place you can see it is on YouTube. I wanted to let people know how much basketball has evolved. A lot of you have bought Chuck Taylor All-Star shoes. Most people don't know who Chuck Taylor was. He was a basketball star during the '30s. Some promoters in Chicago decided that they would try to find out what the best basketball team was. They invited the Globetrotters and the Rens. All of the all-white teams would compete against them. The Rens beat the Globetrotters in the semifinals and then beat the Oshkosh All Stars in the finals. They were the first professional champions of basketball in America, and nobody knows about them.

One of the guys that played for the Globetrotters was named "Sweetwater" Clifton. He got the opportunity to play in the NBA; he was one of the people that broke the color line in 1950. "Sweetwater" Clifton's contract was bought by the Knicks. He was fabulous, but the coach didn't know how to use him, and the players didn't know how to play with him. He was too different. So, it took a while before various styles of hoops blended, but they eventually did. The Celtics and two other teams were the first teams to integrate. And now when you look at the NBA, it's over 70% African American.

Now we have had this wonderful game that everybody participates in. I'm very happy to see basketball compete with soccer for

popularity in the world. I never thought I'd see that happen.

Why has nobody else been able to master the Skyhook? Even achieving 75% of what you did would be a tremendous weapon, but no one's done it.

I don't know, maybe nobody's taught them. I learned the Skyhook, how to shoot the hook shot, in the '50s. It's very easy to learn. George Maikan had a drill that he did called the Mikan Drill. My grade-school teacher got one of the kids in the neighborhood to show me how to do it. You shoot with your right hand, catch the ball, shoot it with your left hand off the glass, right in front of the hoop. It enables you to learn how to use the glass, to use both of your hands, and it works on your footwork. It's a really good drill. I worked on that until I was in seventh grade, when I started dunking a basketball. I was 13 years old. So, I guess that was a sign (laughter).

Wilt Chamberlain famously struggled to shoot free throws. Shaq famously struggled to shoot free throws. I remember that was the last of your NBA titles. The Lakers came home, you were down two-three and had to beat the Pistons twice to win. One of those games, you had to step to the line and make two free throws, right?

1988 (laughter).

You remember like it was yesterday. I didn't know this until I read the book, but you didn't get to leave John Wooden's practice until you hit back-to-back free throws.

You had to make free throws to get out of practice. You didn't want to be in there at eight o'clock shooting free throws. But the funny thing about Wilt and Shaq—I must share this with you—they are the only two players in NBA history to miss more than 5,000 free throws (laughter).

You're good at this (laughter).

I've done it a couple of times.

Joe McQueen, a dynamic, humble saxophonist, made Ogden his home for 74 years. He played with Count Basie, Charlie Parker, and other jazz legends who came through Ogden's Porter and Waiters Club, as well as other northern Utah segregated nightclubs. Do you have any jazz stories for the jazz fans in the crowd?

Well, my dad was a jazz musician. He got into it while he was in high school, but then had to go and serve in WWII. After the war, he got into bebop with the bebop scene in Manhattan. Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis—my dad knew all those guys. My dad played

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You talk in the book about jazz and basketball, and the overlap you see between the two. What does jazz have in common with basketball?

Well, jazz is about soloing. Jazz soloing, being a person that stands up and gives a solo interpretation of a tune, is like being the shooter in a basketball game. You want to have brilliant soloists, and you want to have brilliant shooters. You want Steph Curry and you want Charlie Parker.

You've talked a little bit about your family and their impact on you. Something that my grandfather said to me was, "some of what I'm doing for you, you'll never be able to repay me for, you have to pay it forward."

The Ogden Education Foundation is a great example of paying it forward. The difference a foundation makes for a kid who doesn't have a coat, for a kid who doesn't have shoes, for a kid who doesn't have food, for a kid who doesn't have a backpack, or for a kid who's never had access to STEM education, it's profound. You've asked us all to reach out and be the best version of ourselves in order to make a difference. Thanks for all of the memories over the years.

My dad was a jazz musician. He got into it while he was in high school, but then had to go and serve in WWII. After the war, he got into bebop with the bebop scene in Manhattan. Dizzy Gillespie, Dexter Gordon, Thelonious Monk, Miles Davis – my dad knew all those guys. My dad played in a band with Sonny Rollins. My dad went to Juilliard and graduated in 1952, but he couldn't get a job in a classical orchestra because of his skin color. And he couldn't get a chair in Count Basie's band. So, he had to give up his high musical aspirations – but he kept playing his whole life.

You're welcome. I've had a wonderful time.

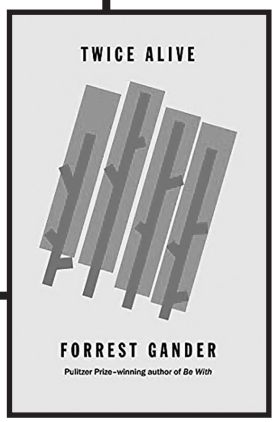


David James joined KUTV 2News in 1992 as a sports anchor and reporter. He currently anchors the sports news weekends on 2News and hosts *Talkin' Sports*, a sports highlight and interview show. In addition to television, David hosts the morning drive sports radio talk show *The Zone* on 97.5 FM/1280 AM. He was named the 1996 Utah Sportscaster of the year by the National Sportscaster and Sportswriter Association.

I FOR INVOLVED— AN ECOPOETIC CONVERSATION



A Conversation with
FORREST GANDER



ABRAHAM SMITH

Forrest Gander is every kind of writer: poet, translator, essayist, novelist. He is professor emeritus at Brown University, a Chancellor for the Academy of American Poets, and an elected member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is a United States Rockefeller Fellow and has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim, Whiting, and Howard Foundations, among many others. He is a Pulitzer Prize winner and one of the world's foremost translators. And he is one of the most generous poets I have had the lucky fortune to know: always ready to lend a hand to up-and-comers, always advocating for broader, brighter spotlights on the sometimes underseen avant-garde, and always finding new inroads into the myriad delights alive in collaboration. Gander's latest poetry collection, Twice Alive, *takes us ever deeper into love, loss, the fecund, the failing, lichens, and mushrooms. If William Blake was right when he called the inlets to the soul the five senses, then Gander's latest poems, so richly threaded and textured through the poet's acute sensory antennae, are surely some of the finest soul musics going.*

Gander gave a public reading as part of his residency in Weber State University's Creative Writing Program in Fall 2021. The interview below follows that format, beginning with Gander's elaborations on some of his poems and a conversation that, eventually, opened up to into a Q & A with the audience. Thank you, Forrest!

We are living in this time of real ecological exigency. It's a time during which, if we're not paying attention, our children will experience much less of the world because there will *be* much less of the world. The ecological situation is connected to political situations. The people who will suffer most are the poor, people in hot climates, and people of color. Some scientists are saying it's already too late for our seas, that the coral will die, and that the fish will continue to diminish. It's a time when we can't NOT pay attention as responsible human beings. Short-term gain is always more attractive than long-term thinking. Our perspective tends to be focused almost exclusively on human-beings, even though we are in relation with so many other species of plants and animals. In fact, they are a part of us, in our own bodies. There are, attached to our DNA, DNA from parasites that long ago became incorporated into our system. Other creatures, microbes and parasites, live all over and inside of us; some help us to digest food. We aren't a singularity. We need to develop the kind of thinking that connects us to others, both human and non-human, and that may redeem us.

Scientists have been saying for a long time that we're in trouble, that species are disappearing, that the Earth is heating up. The science is there, but science isn't always all that effective at persuading people. That's why writers can come into the picture, and artists, and others, who take scientific information and integrate it with psychological and emotional perspectives that can be more persuasive on a larger scale. Some of that kind of integration has come to be called eco-poetics or ecological poetics. I'll read an example of a poem that might be considered an ecological poem. A lot of the poems I'll read today are influenced by a poetry called Sangam that flourished in Southern India about 2,000 years ago. The writers of Sangam poetry—especially the kind called akam—thought that it was impossible to write about human emotion without writing about the landscape in which emotion takes place, because the landscape is connected to our emotions. Here's a poem based on Sangam poems called "Forest." And that's with one "r," not like my name (Laughter).

I was hiking around with a biologist named Maya Khosla, whose specialty is the study of post-burn fire zones. As you know, rising temperatures have made trees weaker and more vulnerable to beetles. That's a significant problem. But it's complicated by the fact that the forest agency in California is very much in bed with the timber companies. So, when a wildfire comes through California, the Park Service often turns the burned land over to the timber industry which comes in and clear-cuts everything, dead and living. Then they plant a monocot forest (just one species) to replace the varied forest which burned. But the forest, if it were left alone, returns to life very quickly. Maya Khosla's job involves going into burned areas to look for signs of life coming back. She reports those signs to try to keep the forest from being handed over to the timber industry. One of the first species to come back to a burned forest in California is the black-backed woodpecker, a really beautiful bird. Also, I might mention, I was writing this poem in the wreckage of my own life, after my wife died, and along with the biologist I was walking with someone who has become my partner now, who is really full of life. I was trying to navigate between the burned-out forest, my burned-out emotions, and this confrontation with personal and ecological hopefulness.

You use a lot of innovative structures and line break choices in your poems. How did you come to inhabit these structures, these lines?

Again, I am trying to think of the poem in relation to where the poem takes place. Using the blank page as another kind of landscape, the poem finds its form. The poem's arrange-

ment on the page can communicate, visually and rhythmically, the energy of its concerns. In "Wasteland: for Santa Rosa," the jump-cutting lines enact the movement of fire. In some of my other poems in *Twice Alive*, I use different kinds of caesurae, or pauses, spaces that break up the ways we might expect speech to sound. In English, we often default to a sort of iambic pentameter. The rhythms of our natural conversation often take place in iambic pentameter. With my use of caesuras—spaces, pauses—I'm trying to create a little hesitation so that we feel almost an erotic longing (for syntactial completion) between phrases. Those little pauses are full of tension that makes us pay closer attention to the words. I think of poetry as being very connected to the body, and the rhythms of a poem as being connected to perception and feeling.

In our education system, we learn pretty early on that there's the science-mind and there's the artist-mind. But you're trained as a geologist, steeped in literature, and you have had a very long life in poetry. What has been the greatest benefit that your science-mind has brought to your poetry, and the other way around?

Geology was a great educator for me. It educated my vision, how I looked at the world. Because in geology, you're constantly going back and forth from looking at large scale, looking at, say, that mountain (gestures to nearby mountain) and looking at large-scale fold patterns to understand what created the mountain. Where it folds, where it's been uplifted, where it's been run through with magmatic intrusions. But then, to really know what's happened, you need to look microscopically. Under the microscope, you see the residue of shear patterns, you see crystalline structures. And so it's by moving back and forth between the big view and the microscopic view that you learn about what you are seeing. I learned, through geology, a particular way of looking at the world. It's definitely influenced my poetry, which also tends to move back and forth between the large-scale and the small-scale. That's one of the ways science has been useful to me.

But the way poetry has been useful to me is in terms of emotion and intuition. It's true that in every human culture that has been studied, there has been some form of poetry. Anthropologists say there are three things almost every human culture has had—some sort of rules about incest, a formality with regard to burying their dead, and poetry. From the beginning, poetry has been connected to shamanism, to healing, and vision. Through language, we are able to offer our world to others. It's only very recently that human beings have been so dependent on rational language, as if logic were the only way to experience the world. I think that our recent dependence upon rational and transactional language has had unfortunate consequences for our emotional selves, our emotional and psychological intelligence. Poetry accesses our non-rational, non-transactional capacities

Anthropologists say there are three things almost every human culture has had – some sort of rules about incest, a formality with regard to burying their dead, and poetry. From the beginning, poetry has been connected to shamanism, to healing, and vision. Through language, we are able to offer our world to others. It's only very recently that human beings have been so dependent on rational language, as if logic were the only way to experience the world.

for knowledge. Now, in a time when media has bewitched us all, we are in love with the visual experience and with extravaganza. The full complexity of our daily language is shrinking down into Twitter feeds and Facebook emojis, which are fine, those are also forms of language. But our language muscles are atrophying. I think poetry can help articulate our language of feeling. Because when we don't have language for experience, we often respond with violence, historically. So, I am interested in how poetry might access and expand the nuance for feeling.

What do you see as the potential roles that poetry can play? Does it lean more toward motivating us to act, or does it perhaps lean more toward a healing place?

Poetry is a big place, lots of stuff can happen in poetry. I would never say that poetry should do this, or it should teach a lesson, or it should be about self-healing. But those are some of the things that it does do. One of the fascinating things for me right now, in this moment where we are all drawn toward spectacle, is that poetry has become more important culturally. There was a recent survey that revealed that people are reading more poetry now than ever before in the United States, and the vast majority of those new readers are young people and people of color. So, clearly, we are not being completely fulfilled by what social media and entertainment offer us, and we are looking elsewhere for something to harrow our souls. We're looking for a richer mud to anchor ourselves in.

How do you make poetry more accessible to a large audience? I have friends that don't feel like they understand poetry.

All of us know what that's like, and there's lots of bad poetry that's really hard to understand—or too easy to understand. Oftentimes, people have been trained badly in elementary school to think that poetry is a rare kind of enigmatic text that you have to search for semantic meaning. But it's like when you look at the moon and you've got your arm around your lover, and you say, "Wow, look at the moon." It's not like you're saying, hey, what exactly does that mean to you, babe? It's an experience. It's an intellectual, psychological, and emotional experience. Just like art, for instance looking at a painting, you need to let it happen to you. The poet John Keats talks about giving up the need to scramble after meaning. He suggests that we let a poem wash over us and that we just allow ourselves to feel it.

That notion that the meaning of language is only semantic is a recent phenomenon. Language has meaning even before we wrestle with the semantics of words. Which is why in every language, women talk to babies with an uplifting tilt to their voice. Why in almost every language, a rhythmic pattern like this "bang, bang, bang" (bangs table) means "no." Why in almost every language, including Chinese and Japanese, the deeper vowel sounds, the "oh" and "oo," are connected to deeper emotions than the tweeter vowel sounds. Those sounds are registering in our bodies before we ever make out what the words, semantically, mean.

I teach science and I struggle with bringing an emotional engagement to the curriculum. Do you have any advice; are there authors whose work brings emotion and science at the same time?

It's the question that all of us who are teachers are asking ourselves constantly. Trying to figure out how to both engage people so they are excited about the subject and so they feel emotionally invested, but also to make sure that they feel responsible with regard to research and fact. There are lots of writers who manage informational and research language and the language of passion. Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, for example, is emotionally powerful, but also full of information. Barry Lopez and

Terry Tempest Williams are likewise writers who are able to use facts and connect those facts to feeling. Unless we connect facts to feeling, facts stay alienated from us.

It seems like the cartoon of the poet is this: up in the garret, pinching the fleas, trying to stay warm by burning lint. The solitude of it all. But you've made a rich poetic life inside collaboration. Was collaboration natural to you from the beginning? What have been the great fruits and challenges of your many collaborations?

I think that image of the genius poet in his—the image was usually male—garret is a very romanticized, patriarchal image. It doesn't take into account the way art really takes place. Cormac McCarthy says books are made from books. It's what you read that feeds you. It's the art that you've seen that inspires you to make your own art. Again, there's no such thing as, "I think therefore I am." Our language is something that we didn't invent. We were born into a language that preceded us. Every word we use has been used by others before us. We are inextricably involved with the language of others. In my own practice, I've found that letting go of trying to control everything and opening up to someone else's cooperative influence allows me to get places I would never have arrived on my own. And translating works the same way. In translating, you have to get out of your head. You have to get so far out of your head that it becomes a spiritual activity. Translators penetrate so deeply into someone else's head that they hear the music in the other writer's mind. I think translation is another form of collaboration, an intensive listening. Simone Weil said that prayer wasn't about asking for things, it was about listening.

Have you participated in intentional advocacy, and has some of your poetry been occasional—written for a particular activist-oriented event?

I think of poetry as an ethical activity. No one chooses poetry to become rich and famous or to influence huge numbers of people, even though poets have come to do that. Pablo Neruda read to football stadiums that were just packed full of people. I think of poetry as a way of living and that it is, in some sense, a form of advocacy because you're advocating for openness. All of us fall into patterns of perceptions and into patterns of speech, into what become ruts for how we live our lives and how we relate to people. What poetry and art can do is to bump us out of those ruts. Poetry can lead to a widening of human experience, which is the *modus operandi* of any sort of ethical outlook. I think art and poetry give us tools for thinking and feeling and so they are inherently activist.

A lot of the problems that we face right now are structural that need to be treated at scale, not just on a level of individual choice. How do we address those big structural changes?

Like Malcolm X says, "by any means necessary." For some people it will be writing letters to the editor, for some it will be writing

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poems, for some it will be performances on campus or mass protests. For all of us it will be voting. There are lots of ways to influence others, even on a small scale. I'm hopeful about the possibility that this is happening right now. All of us have some interest in thinking about these issues and in connecting our felt thoughts to others.

I was wondering, ecologically speaking, what's been keeping you up at night lately? And who has been a touchstone of hope for you lately – perhaps a few musicians, poets, or novelists that you turn to in those dark and quiet hours, or in those more jubilant and hopeful hours?

Biden's presidency has been encouraging me—for his focus on greenhouse gases, for the real ambitiousness of his programs. I think the world is beginning to shift toward an acknowledgement of our roles in climate change and its consequences. And there are a lot of writers all over the world addressing these same concerns. I mentioned Richard Powers. But there is also Brenda Hillman, Evelyn Riley, Camille Dungy, and Jorie Graham. Internationally, Julia Fiedorczuk in Poland, Coral Bracho in Mexico, Inger Christensen in Denmark, and Mats Söderlund in Sweden. If I were to recommend just one book, it would be Inger Christensen's ***Alphabet***.

Do you have any advice or thoughts on translation in poetry?

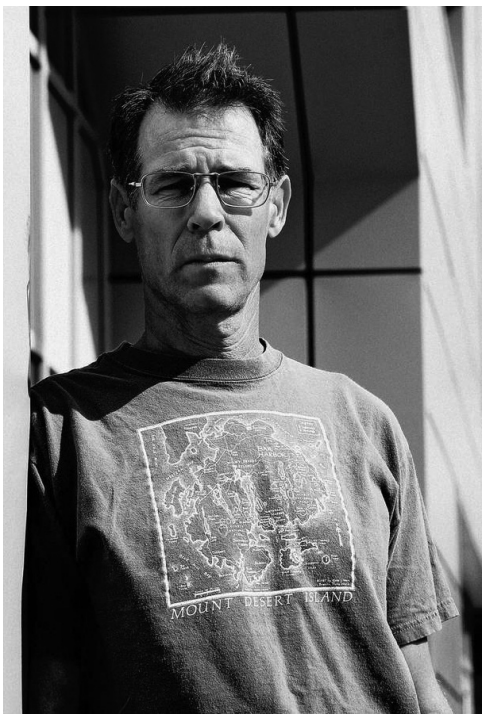
Yeah, lots (Laughter). Living in the United States from where we export so much of our culture and language to the rest of the world, where so many other languages are disappearing, translation becomes not just a literary activity but an ethical activity. Translations swerve our attentions toward others. A translation that renders some of the differences of another language—different syntaxes, rhythms, image repertoires, etc.—serve as germs that infect, in the best way, our language, refreshing it. If any of you have a second language, even a little of one, I encourage you to try translating. If you find an untranslated contemporary poet, your translation is going to be the best translation in the world simply because there are no other translations. And usually you contact the writer that you want to translate, and that links you to another world. You end up traveling to meet your writers, and they introduce you to their friends who are artists and writers, and worlds open up for you. It's a really fruitful activity and a very important one.



Abraham Smith is associate professor of English and co-director of creative writing at Weber State University. Away from his desk, he improvises poems inside songs with the band The Snarlin' Yarns.

BIOSPHERE NEEDS *ARE* HUMAN NEEDS

MARK A. STEVENSON



A Conversation with KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

Kim Stanley Robinson is an American author of over 20 novels and numerous short stories. A widely acclaimed writer of science fiction, his work has been recognized with the Hugo Award for Best Novel, Locus Award for Best Science Fiction Novel, the Nebula Award for Best Novel and the World Fantasy Award. In his bestselling novels the Mars *trilogy and other works, he explores a range of themes that illuminate potential futures for the human species on earth, the solar system, and our galaxy. His consistent engagement with the roles of both science and nature in shaping human development have also led to a focus on the social, political, and economic challenges of sustainability and climate change, particularly in* New York 2140 *and* The Ministry for the Future. *His most recent publication, and his first of non-fiction,* The High Sierra: A Love Story, *explores his lifelong relationship with the Sierra Nevada range of his native California. Robinson completed his B.A. in literature and his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, San Diego, and has taught at University of California, Davis.*

You were a keynote speaker at the 2022 Intermountain Sustainability Summit held in March at Weber State University, and during a subsequent dialogue with fellow keynote speaker Rob Davies, you were both asked to comment about the dichotomy of hope and despair one so often encounters in addressing young people's fears in facing the climate emergency. You both agreed that while we all experience moments of both hope and despair, the appropriate response is one of "resolve," of taking the mindset of "cathedral builders" who will not live to see the finished work but who take the next, small steps in front of us, plugging ourselves into whatever existing efforts in our communities or our workplaces that will bring our own meaning to the struggle. Along these lines, what motivated you to write The Ministry for the Future *at this moment in your life as a writer?*

One powerful motivation was learning about the upper limits of humans' ability to survive high heat and humidity in combination. A so-called "wet-bulb 35" temperature and humidity in combination would be enough to kill people who didn't have air conditioning, and this news, which I ran into around 2017, scared me. It seemed to me that our slow response to climate change, despite the urgent need to decarbonize our civilization, was going to lead to catastrophe. I had been writing utopian science fiction for many years, and I wanted to continue in that tradition, but the challenge became to shift the definition of utopia to this: we don't cause a mass extinction event; we don't cook ourselves. That's a new low bar for utopia, for sure, but at this point, it seemed to me to be the story most worth telling. And truthfully, it's not a story that is much out there right now. So I decided to try it.

I was struck by the book's dedication to Fredric Jameson. I first encountered his seminal article "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," as a graduate student in anthropology, and it was enormously influential for me in developing a critical understanding of the complex interrelations among culture, narrative forms and the political economy of an evolving global capitalism. In writing the book, how did this perspective shape your narrative framing in creating a complex, plausible near future scenario in which myriad climate change solutions come together in a contingent and unpredictable way?

Thanks for this. Jameson has indeed had a profound influence on my thinking and my life, and especially on my novels. Although he is a leading cultural critic and theorist, he is also very interested in, maybe you could say in love with, literature, and he teaches it with intensity and flair. For me, that's meant also a stream of suggestions from him for novels I should read (*The Heart of Midlothian*, *The War at the End of the World*, *The Doll*, *U.S.A.*, etc.) that have broadened my sense of what the novel can do. To tell a global story while still keeping a narrative spine

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made up of a few central characters—this is not an unusual challenge for the novel as a form, but it is a hard one. But ***Ministry*** comes at the end of four decades of writing novels, including some really long ones, so I felt I was prepared for this in multiple ways.

How did this complexity of scale shape your decisions regarding the heterogeneity of perspectives presented in the narrative?

I decided to present the story in a kind of slurry of different forms, to mimic the randomness of history itself, which might make it seem more plausible. The crucial form for me turned out to be the "eye-witness account," which I decided is a genre in its own right, with rules that are not quite the same as the usual rules of novels' dramatized scenes. But this form could be folded into the novel form, which is very capacious, and have a great effect of compression, range, and variety. These chapters were often my favorites.

It is a commonplace that the "wicked problem" of climate change, spanning disparate temporal and spatial scales, presents an intractable narrative challenge in fiction, but also in terms of climate communication, by which I mean the instrumentalization of narrative to motivate individual and collective action. Given the realities of the "post-truth" moment in which we find ourselves, the prevalence of conspiracy thinking and the psychological power of misinformation, what hopes do you hold out for the power of fiction and storytelling to help people come to grips with something as vast, frightening, and amorphous as climate change?

To tell a global story while still keeping a narrative spine made up of a few central characters – this is not an unusual challenge for the novel as a form, but it is a hard one. But Ministry *comes at the end of four decades of writing novels, including some really long ones, so I felt I was prepared for this in multiple ways.*

I think that the proliferation of misinformation and false narratives is precisely in response to the fact that everyone actually knows what is happening, and for some it is just too much, so they stick their head into the closest hole in the sand, or dig a new hole, and promptly stick their head in and try to feel better. The alternative is to face up to climate change, which can lead to dread, depression, and despair. But it is at least honest, and hopefully one can then begin to do the work of saving what we can, starting from the moment we are in. "Capitalism realism" and the various conspiracy theories need to be replaced by hope without hope, as Marcel Proust put it. Or Antonio Gramsci's pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. Whatever mental stance allows you to carry on without feeling too bad about our dangerous moment.

What impacts would you hope for The Ministry for the Future*?*

I hoped it would give people a kind of low-bar best-case scenario they could believe in, which would help them cope with the onslaught of bad news and doomism that is sure to come. I hoped it would feel realistic enough to provide a bit of an action plan, and also mental resilience in the face of the news we'll get this decade.

The reaction to the book since it came out has far exceeded my expectations. It's been both gratifying and worrying. I've seen that people really urgently want a story like this one—that the various oddities and flaws of this book are irrelevant compared to the felt need for it, as if people were kind of drowning in a sea of bad news, and were willing to seize any piece of driftwood that might

keep them afloat. I've been both impressed and worried by this response. The best part has been seeing that many people feel a sense of recognition in it—they feel they are already working in some kind of ministry for the future, and wanted their story to be told in fiction. I'm very happy I did it, and there needs to be more books like it; it needs to be a genre. Or, it needs to be one of the main things that science fiction is doing now.

There are numerous references in the book to Raymond Williams's concept of "structure of feeling" as a way of capturing the intersection of culture, affect, and societal change. How did this frame your narrative representations of the affective states generated or impacted, individually and collectively, by the climate emergency?

Williams has two key concepts; one, that we live in a culturally-created "structure of feeling" that makes sense of our inchoate animal emotions—language is part of that, but also the laws that govern how we live together. Then, secondly, every moment of history is composed of residual and emergent features, and these are often in conflict. And it isn't the case that residual is necessarily bad, or necessarily good— same for emergent— it's not that kind of cut. It's a way of analyzing history. Then as we move through time together, the structure of feeling changes—and sometimes pretty fast. Think of the differences in feeling between 1978 and 1982, if you were living then—it was abrupt. Now, we are post-pandemic, maybe; in any case, past the shock of the pandemic, into a new time. The 2020s are now massively accelerated by the pandemic and won't be like what the decade would have been like without it. It's a break in history, and a new structure of feeling will emerge, with new feelings about climate change too, as an emergency we have to deal with, despite the inadequacies of capitalism, etc.

I've seen that people really urgently want a story like this one – that the various oddities and flaws of this book are irrelevant compared to the felt need for it, as if people were kind of drowning in a sea of bad news, and were willing to seize any piece of driftwood that might keep them afloat. I've been both impressed and worried by this response. The best part has been seeing that many people feel a sense of recognition in it – they feel they are already working in some kind of ministry for the future, and wanted their story to be told in fiction.

Your work has been framed as "hard science fiction," driven by a reality principle that respects the laws of physics and plausibly extrapolates from current social and institutional realities. The Ministry for the Future *builds a scenario for the creation of a new "Keynesian balance" entailing a massive change in the neoliberal priorities that currently govern the global political economy, but one that draws on disparate institutions, models, and ideas that already exist. What's unique is the way that all of these are pulled together in one overarching narrative, demonstrating the plausibility of concerted action in staving off worse case scenarios, but only if we "run the table," as you say, and marshal these disparate techniques simultaneously and soon, in the equivalent of a wartime mobilization. Many of these changes entail top-down, institutional interventions. How do you see the impetus for this happening at the level of mass mobilization, particularly in ways which deliver on hopes for social and environmental justice?*

Good question. I'm hoping a majority of citizens press hard on their representatives to legislate the needed laws to cope with the emergency. The analogy here might be World War Two, when citizens voted for leaders to impose draconian controls on voters, to cope with the emergency. The more people understand the scale of the danger, the more they should press their representatives, and vote in proper representatives. It's a political battle, which means a discursive battle of competing narratives, as well as deployment of capital, of course.

Parenthetically, I want to say that "hard science fiction" is a bad title for a sub-genre, to the point of almost being a joke. The name makes a claim that is almost always broken, if it means to say these stories have some kind of fidelity to the real laws of physics—lots of so-called hard science fiction has faster than light travel, etc. etc. Best to just leave it at the name "science fiction" and dispense with sub-genres.

Do you see any contemporary potential cultural tipping points, or changing structures of feeling, that could make these changes possible within our current global political economy and nation-state system?

Good question! I'm looking, for sure. I wonder if sheer physical reality will create a cultural tipping point—in other words, drought, wildfires, hurricanes, flooding—and the death of food crops—disappearance of pollinating insects—etc. Could these events be tipping culture? I think maybe so.

The sheer volume and speed of climate-driven events and societal impacts far in excess of what has been predicted by climate models does seem to have generated a new structure of feeling, in terms of widespread acceptance of, if not resignation in the face of, the reality of climate change. If meaningful, systemic change needs to take place primarily through the ballot box, I wonder if you discern other tipping points, related for example to other culture shifts, intersecting crises, critiques of our current political economy, etc., that could accelerate the possibility for climate action? I'm thinking here particularly of the United States, which is portrayed in the book as an overall laggard or center of resistance to meaningful change.

I'm not sure about this, because it does seem like there are other crises, especially war and perhaps famine, that might actually slow progress on the climate front—it's hard to say. Adam Tooze recently attempted to map the polycrisis, and the result looked like a snarl of wool—it illustrated well how hard it is to think all these issues at once, or to understand how events in one realm might alter the rest. In other words, history.

I think the more people understand that clean energy and a healthy biosphere are the safest solutions for them, their families, and their communities, the more progress will be made.

At numerous points in the narrative, it's suggested that new forms of spirituality begin to play a role in a developing awareness of planetary interconnectedness, a kind of "Gaia citizenship." What role do you see for spirituality as a potential impetus for cultural, political, or economic change in the near future along the lines you describe in the book?

We need it. The religious area in the brain is huge and deep (the temporal lobe). It evolved early and it's deep in all our feelings. The world is sacred—well, of course—life is sacred—yes, obviously. So, how do we organize and act on that deep feeling? Indigenous religions are great on this. Gaia is one way to name it, or One Planet, or we are all brothers and sisters, including all the life forms together. Co-creation, etc. This kind of attitude is a form a devotion, people just have to get used to seeing it that way, and letting that feeling well up in them.

In the book, the idea of Gaia citizenship finds its fullest expression in the depiction of a worldwide implementation of a version of E.O. Wilson's Half-Earth project. How do you envision a widespread form of biophilia for its own sake being coupled with the embrace of degrowth scenarios involving shrinking resource use? How does this entail a redefinition of the role of human stewardship in ways that reconcile human needs with ecosystem or biodiversity needs?

Degrowth would be stewardship, or care, or devotion, because it would take some of civilization's heavy burden off the biosphere that sustains it. So there is no problem coupling these two aspects of the situation, and the story is spreading: 50% of the DNA in your body is not human DNA, so you are a biome yourself, and the rest of the biosphere is your extended body, and it needs to be healthy if you are to be healthy. This is both a practical and a religious insight at one and the same time. Biosphere needs *are* human needs.

In a piece you published in the Financial Times *in 2021, you stated that while the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of science as a tool, "[a]iming science is the work of the humanities and arts, politics and law" in terms of how we set our priorities as a civilization.[1] Similarly, in laying out the case for a form of carbon quantitative easing in the same piece, you argue that "finance, too, is a technology, being civilisation's software," which must somehow be mobilized for the common good. Could you elaborate on your thoughts as to how these different realms of knowledge creation, each with their own incommensurate systems of meaning and implicit or explicit moral frameworks, can interact in fruitful ways which create the cultural consensus and political majorities needed to enable effective climate action?*

E.O. Wilson said these systems are not incommensurate, but are actually consilient with each other. I think he was right. We need to point that out, and act on it.

In the book you present a closely drawn portrait of Swiss society, and Zurich in particular, in which the importance of place plays a central role. Swiss society seems to embody an ideal admixture of a broadly egalitarian ethos, technocratic competence, and a strongly grounded sense of local identity. At the same time you portray a blending of local tradition and transnational cultures, as the Swiss haltingly embrace the step-wise integration of displaced populations. Does this portrayal represent for you a kind of cosmopolitan ideal in which the potential flashpoints of a world in the grip of the climate emergency—flows of people, assimilation, the importance of culture and language in shaping identity—are uneasily, provisionally resolved? How would you describe its meaning for you within the larger narrative?

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My wife and I lived in Switzerland when we were young, so that was my main motive—I wanted to write about that. And happily, the Swiss have much to offer in the way of political accommodations, adjustments to reality, etc. They are not perfect by any means, but no one is. Since the UN has a lot of offices there, it made sense to put my *Ministry* there, so I went with it.

Returning to the role of literature as a medium for exploring humanity's present and future in relation to our home world, in a previous interview you refer to frameworks of psychology and religion as "story systems" that don't provide the kind of "granular and specific case studies" that literature can.[2] I'm thinking of your recent book on California's Sierra Nevada which, although a work of non-fiction, is very grounded in the subjective meanings, human and natural histories of a particular place. Given the epic sweep of The Ministry for the Future*, how would you envision stories in which more "granular and specific" climate stories are told, anchored in a particular group, place, ecosystem, or set of interspecies relations?*

Climate fiction is all about local impacts of global forces, so the stories that can be generated in this area are infinite. There's a great project, the Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative, at Arizona State University doing these climate fictions, calling for them and publishing them, and the quality of the stories is very high, also their intense feelings of loss and hope. It's not just a new genre—it's the story of our time.

Notes

1. Robinson, Kim Stanley. "Kim Stanley Robinson: a climate plan for a world in flames." *Financial Times*, 19 Aug. 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/ff94df96-b702-4e01-addd-f4253d0eecf6.

2. Snibe, Scott. "Kim Stanley Robinson on Solving the Climate Crisis, Buddhism, and the Power of Science Fiction." *A Skeptic's Path to Enlightenment*, 15 Mar. 2022, https://www.skepticspath.org/podcast/kim-stanley-robinson-on-buddhism-sci-fi-and-climate-change/.



Mark A. Stevenson is an assistant professor of anthropology at Weber State University. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Ireland and Germany, including studies of the process of German unification in public broadcasting and film institutions and of the intersection of labor market policies, education reform, and professionalization in the non-profit arts sector. His field research in Utah focuses on activism and environmental policymaking in relation to air quality and climate change. He holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from Temple University.

BORN FROM THE SEA

ELECTRA GAMÓN FIELDING & KATHRYN LINDQUIST



***I Was Born from the Sea with a Paintbrush in my Hand*, 45" x 35," acrylic on canvas, mixed media frame, 2014**

A Conversation with PILAR POBIL

I Was Born from the Sea with a Paintbrush in my Hand *is a self-portrait depicting me in my youth. I love the Mediterranean Sea. My friends and I swam in it all the time, even in winter when we would go way out from shore in a boat and jump into the icy cold water, if only for a few seconds. It also connects me to the lands of my ancestors: the Vascongada Mountains in northern Spain, near France, where my father's family originated 900 years ago; Alicante on the Spanish Mediterranean, where my father grew up and I used to visit his siblings; Italia, the homeland of my father's mother; and, of course, the island of Mallorca, my mother's family's ancestral home and my own dear home.*

Stepping into Pilar's garden is like entering a fairy tale. From its many nooks and intimate spaces pop vibrant scarlets, yellows, greens, and Mediterranean blues shaped by roses, geraniums, mosaic tables, and cozy seats. Even though her house sits in the heart of Salt Lake City's busy Avenues district, her favorite fountain sings over the city noises and enhances the verdant greenery, the stone walkways, and pillows of orange and fuchsia impatiens. It is a dreamy experience sitting under the pergola – hanging with grapes and baskets of violet petunias – built by Pilar's son, Luis, surrounded by Pilar's sculptures and paintings of lush mermaids and confident women that hang on fences and walls. Listening to Pilar transports you to a different world as she tells stories about her childhood in Spain and making her art.

Pilar Pobil (1926) is a Utah artist born and raised in Spain. Originally from Madrid, where her father was deployed by the Spanish Navy, Pilar grew up on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, her mother's ancestral home. The de la Torre family was one of the island's seven aristocratic families that has inhabited Mallorca from the time of Jaume I in the 1200s. Pilar experienced Spain's brief Second Republic and the subsequent Spanish Civil War as a young child. She lost her father, Admiral Luis Pasqual del Pobil, to assassination when the Spanish Civil War began in 1936. Initially evicted from their home and then fleeing the islands for safety, her mother, sisters, and Pilar eventually returned to Mallorca, where she lived through her teens and young adulthood during the worst decades of the Franco dictatorship, when hunger, fear, and poverty prevailed. She gives a shrewd description of Francisco Franco in her book, My Kitchen Table*: "The war resulted in the long domination of my country by a conceited, cruel, and ridiculous little man with a mustache, who pulled Spain forty years behind the rest of Europe." Overall, more than 500,000 Spaniards perished in the war or from the generalized violence stemming from the conflict. Some researchers and historians believe the number to be much higher.*

In 1954, Pilar met Utahn Walter Smith in Mallorca; following courtship and marriage, they moved to Salt Lake City. Walter and Pilar bought the Avenues house where Pilar still lives and raised three children: Luis (who died from COVID-19 in early 2020), Mónica, and Maggie. In Utah, Pilar started her life as a professional artist and became an ardent promoter of the arts. It is difficult to communicate briefly the great impact she has had on Utah's art scene, but she has been recognized by museums, arts organizations, business leaders, governors, and mayors. In 2016, she was knighted by the King of Spain for promoting and contributing to Spanish culture. She has been named one of Utah's 15 Most Influential Artists, one of Utah's 100 Most Honored Artists, and a major Catalyst for Change in the state. Perhaps her greatest legacy is Art in the Garden, an annual event since 1995 that she hosts to promote local artists' work while patrons mingle among artists with food and beverage in her fairyland.

This interview is from a conversation over two evenings among Pilar, Kathryn Lindquist, and Electra Gamón Fielding at Pilar's home. Pilar was previously interviewed for Weber *in the Winter 2009 issue (vol. 29, no. 2, and available online) by the late Dr. Alicia Giralt, professor of Spanish at Weber State University and a passionate admirer of Pilar. We encourage you to read that interview and enjoy fabulous color reproductions of Pilar's earlier works. You will find similar themes in both interviews but also observe changes in thought and artistic expression of a most remarkable woman.*

(Electra) You witnessed the arrival of the Franco dictatorship to Spain when you were only nine, in 1936. Were you able to follow his death and the transition to democracy?

Franco died when I was in Utah. I really didn't know what was going to happen in Spain. There was a little time after his death before a declaration of democracy. To show you how quickly things changed, the summer after he died I was going to Spain with my daughter Maggie, who was about 12 years old. I said, "We have to buy a bathing suit for you." She said, "Why do we have to buy a bathing suit? I have two or three." I said, "You're going to wear a bathing suit in Spain, and you will not be able to go to a public beach." Because when I was growing up, there was a Catholic society, *Acción Católica*, that followed the rules of the Catholic Church, and my mother would make us buy our bathing suits from them. The bathing suits were made of canvas (laughter). They were long until nearly your knees, with sleeves and a high neck. I thought, well, if I go swimming in something like this, I will drown (laughter). I was a rebel from a very young age. My friends and I didn't go to the public beaches, because there were so many rules, and they put a wall in the middle of the beach to separate the women from the men. The wall was made from dried palm leaves; the men would part their side and look through the leaves to see the women in their canvas bathing suits. But, the funny thing is that Maggie and I went to Spain, and to the beach. The women were wearing the same kind of bathing suits as in Salt Lake (laughter). Some women were completely nude. There was an explosion of freedom.

(Kathryn) Where did you get regular bathing suits to go swimming with your friends?

Oh, you *could* get them because in Mallorca there have always been tourists and there were shops that sell to tourists, and I'm sure some Mallorquin women would buy a normal swimming suit. But for a well-known, Catholic family that everyone can point at . . .

(Kathryn) So this made you a black sheep.

There were so many things that we had to hide, like going to a party and dancing. My mother used to tell me, "If you let a man put his arm around your waist, you're going to go to hell, and I'm going to hell too because I'm too weak to stop you." But I already had decided that if I was going to hell anyway, I might as well have fun (laughter). If my father had been alive, he would not have let her be so strict.

(Electra) What are some of the details regarding your father's death that you discovered recently?

In 1936 we were living in Mahon, in Menorca, because my father was an admiral, and the naval base was there. I remember how beautiful it was the summer I was nine. I was able to play by myself with my friends, all the officers' children, and everyone was treating us well; everyone was giving us goodies, and we would play on the rocks. It was a wonderful summer. Then the Civil War started, and everything changed. My father went to prison. We had a veranda on the front of the house that would look out onto the garden and the sea. The last time I saw him I was outside, and he was sitting on the veranda on a chair with a book, but he was not reading. There was a man with a machine gun right in front of him, directed at my father, and he was just sitting there. I wanted to go to him, but he would not let me. Then we were thrown out of the house, and my father

My mother used to tell me, "If you let a man put his arm around your waist, you're going to go to hell, and I'm going to hell too because I'm too weak to stop you." But I already had decided that if I was going to hell anyway, I might as well have fun.

was taken prisoner with all of his officers. We were in danger, because they were shooting families and killing people, and my mother didn't have much money. She pawned her jewelry. So, while we were hiding, my mother was thinking of going to the Peninsula, to see my uncle and his sister Luisa, to see if we could stay with them. But we couldn't telephone, you couldn't get letters out or anything like that; everything was tough. We finally decided to go anyway. My sister Fernanda was washing my hair, and I wanted to know where my father was; they had told me that he was in the hospital. My younger sister and I would go for a walk with Catalina, the cook, just to take us from our hiding place, which was the attic in a house, and we would pass by the hospital. So, Fernanda told me that we were going to go to Alicante to see if my uncle and his sister were there, and I said, "What do you mean? Do you mean that we are going to Alicante and leave my father in the hospital? I am not going anywhere without him." I had an outburst. And then my sister told me that my father had died of an illness in the hospital. That was the first time I heard that, and, of course, I was destroyed.

(Electra) How many people lived in the attic?

My whole family, the cook, and two maids. Then the maids made friends with other people. We were eight or nine in that space, and we would sleep wherever we could. If you found some comfortable thing, like a couch, that's where you slept. You ate what you could get. There was very little food. Anyways, we went to Alicante, and my uncle Emilio and his sister were there; they were preparing to leave, so a few days later we all left with other family members. My uncle had some money. He was very wealthy and managed not to have all of it taken. So, we escaped to Portugal. In Portugal we spent two or three months. I still thought my father had died in the hospital. Then, when we were trying to go back to Mallorca and Alicante, we stayed in Badajoz a week or two. One day my cousin Isabel, who was married to Nicolás Franco, was talking to somebody there, and I was around with the children. Her friend was saying that her husband had been killed and that her two daughters were orphaned. My cousin pointed at me and said, "So was her father; he was killed in the Civil War." I heard it, and was shocked. Then my sisters and my mother told me that he had been held prisoner in the castle, and one day when he and his men were having coffee in the sitting room, somebody entered with a machine gun and killed them all.

Well, that still wasn't the way it happened. Nobody ever was going to tell me. But I was always very curious. Years later, when I was living in Utah, I found the truth. Every time I went to Mallorca, I went to the archives and tried to find papers about the Civil War and what had happened there. They had put my father and the officers in cells in Castillo de la Mola. El Castillo de la Mola is a very old castle. It has tiny rooms underground where they put prisoners in the olden times, with no bathrooms, nothing, horrible, no food. When they decided to get rid of them, they told them to come to the castle patio, and they shot them there. But my father and two or three others . . . My father was very sick; he couldn't go upstairs. When they saw that he was not there, he and the other sick men, they went looking for them and they killed them. They tortured them and amused themselves doing so. It must have been a horrible death. I would have never known. It is not that my family wanted to lie to me, but they knew that I adored him. So, I understand their silence.

(Electra) Did you find all this information in the archives?

I do have the documents. It's not documents just for my father. You have to read a lot to find the information.

(Electra) Does it say anywhere who killed them?

Oh, no, no. They were killing people in the street. They would come even where we were hiding. We hid in different places at different times, before we left Menorca. These people would come to the door, and they would take anything that they could take, any food that we had. They had guns, and if you did not let them in, they would shoot you. One of the places where we hid had been the home of a young student who had left. On the second floor there was a group of ***milicianos***, that's what they called them. They would go up and down the stairs all the time. They killed people in the streets with their guns. My mother couldn't sleep with all this going on. I remember that I felt so bad for my mother, so if I woke up at night, I would go to be with her to keep her company. That's why I remember all of this that would happen at night. It was a horrible situation.

(Electra) During the first months of the Civil War there was a lot of unrest and confusion.

Yes, you didn't know who your friend was. But that also happened during the years of the dictatorship. I want to tell the truth; I want to change what I put in my book ***From My Kitchen Table*** about my father's death because it says only what I had been told.

(Kathryn) Did the archives have the names of the other men massacred there too?

Yes. I know where my father's tomb is. It is in the cemetery of Mahon, and it is a common grave; he and all his officers were buried there. Now there's a plaque with their names. (Many common graves, containing hundreds of thousands of bodies, have been unearthed in Spain since Franco's death in 1975.)

(Electra) How many in total?

Forty-one or forty-two. After the war, the government sent a letter to my mother. They asked her if she wanted to get back his remains. My mother said, "How are you going to find his remains in a common grave?" I thought she was totally right. How can you know whose remains you're getting? So she said no; they were all friends. [Pause] And now, I don't think there are enough people to remember what happened during the Civil War. People have to remember, and I think this is one of the good things about the archives.

(Kathryn) When Donald Trump was elected in 2016, you were so upset that you had a stroke. Did you blame your stroke on Trump's election because he brought back thoughts of Franco? I'm curious to know if there was a parallel.

Franco was actually much smarter. Franco knew much more what he was doing. His actions were totally premeditated. I don't think Trump has the intelligence for that. He is not a very smart person. He's a very selfish person and only looks after himself.

(Electra) What changes have you seen in the political landscape in the last few decades here in the States, as opposed to when you arrived in the U.S?

When I arrived here, I was not as involved in politics, but I should have been. I thought America was a wonderful country because it had two parties that were totally different, Republicans and Democrats. But they were capable of doing their own things and still do the best for the country. I was also worried that, even with democracy, Black people didn't have the same rights. I saw the racism, and I started to see how Jewish people or Indigenous people were discriminated against.

(Electra) Let's talk about art. How did you become involved in Utah's art community?

I thought Salt Lake City was a wonderful city when I arrived in 1956. But it didn't have any art in the streets. There were starting to be museums and galleries, but most people thought they were something for wealthy people, not for people with an average

income. I started very early to have a nice garden. And I have done different things to help people raise money for all of the arts. Many years ago, the Salt Lake Garden Guild asked me if I would allow people to come to my garden to help them raise money. I said "yes." When the visitors came, I noticed that as they came in through the front gate, they were looking into the house and pointing at paintings. I thought, well, you know, these people would like to see paintings too. So the next spring, I talked to my artist friends. I said, "Why don't we have a show in the garden where visitors can come and see the art." And they said, "What a great idea. Art in the Garden." So that's how Art in the Garden started. I think that Salt Lake has changed. There are many more people now who appreciate the arts. I think that I've had a part in it.

(Electra) Do you think this is going to be your legacy?

This house and what I have done here inspired a foundation. First the garden got attention; people liked to come to the garden to see it and for the art. Then I thought, why not use it for other nonprofit events that help people. So, it expanded in this other direction—to host events that draw attention to issues like adult illiteracy, gerrymandering, and missing Indigenous women.

(Electra) You said that when you came to Utah, there was not a lot of art. Yet, you became a professional artist here. What obstacles did you have in Spain to become a professional artist? And how did moving to Utah help you to become one?

My main opposition to becoming an artist in Spain was my mother. My mother thought women were not supposed to do anything, just stay at home or go to a convent. She did not appreciate my artwork I had been creating since I was a child. When my father was alive, every time he came back from a naval trip, he would ask me what I had done when he was away. He would look at my works carefully and comment on them. It was really wonderful. This started when I was four or five years old until he died.

Maggie [Pilar's daughter in Spain] recently showed me a painting that I had done many years before I came here. I had originally given the painting to a very good friend of mine, Berta Sureda. Maggie later married Berta's nephew, and he gave the painting back to Maggie. I had forgotten that painting. Berta and her sister Maria were great friends of mine. Their father, Francisco Sureda, contributed a lot to my education. He was a professor at the university, and my mother trusted him. He often took us to see wonderful things in Mallorca—the cathedrals, the palaces, the Almudaina, the villages and countryside—and told us about the past. He gave us better history lessons than the convent school. I did many paintings and gave them to friends. Others I kept in my bedroom. After I came to Utah, the first time I went to Spain I was going to bring them to Salt Lake, but my mother had cleaned up my bedroom and thrown them away. I think something must have happened to her as a teenager, because when she was young, she was different, more adventurous. My grandmother, her mother, was not at all like her. She was a wonderful woman. She was a great influence on me because I lived very close to her house. I always loved her, and I went to be with her. She taught me how to knit and how to make handkerchiefs. All the time she told me stories. Oh, my gosh, she was very creative. She had 19 children, but only twelve survived into adulthood. This is why Mallorca's population is so large (laughter).

(Kathryn) So many artists left Spain during Franco's rule. Pablo Casals wouldn't go back to play the cello in Spain because of Franco. Did you feel like any arts flourished in Spain during the late '40s and early '50s?

I would say, yeah, I started seeing art shows in some galleries. La Plaça de Cort, where

City Hall is, is a beautiful square; it had the only art shop in Mallorca. My father used to take me to that shop and buy me crayons and paper and art supplies.

(Electra) Once you came to Utah, what did you find here that enabled you to become a professional artist?

During my first years in Utah, I was not thinking about becoming a professional artist. I had too many things to do. I had small children, and we had bought this old house that we were trying to fix. The house had been neglected for years, so Walter and I did a lot of repairs, mostly with our own hands. I had a smaller living room, and we opened it into a porch with the white arches to the south and west. I painted the stairs and all the wood that had been abused, but not the natural wood. In my spare time, I would do smaller things, some to keep and some to give away as presents. If I thought an empty bottle was pretty, I painted it; I have some in the windows. I also repaired old furniture I found and some pieces I painted. I bought old lamps and fixed them in style. And, of course, I turned a neglected space into a beautiful garden, putting large bricks and stones in the paths and steps in new places, and I loved doing it. So, I was doing a lot of work. Walter was doing other kinds of work; he was a very mindful person. He worked for Governor [Calvin] Rampton as director of industrial promotion in the 1960s. Also, he helped promote the arts in Utah in the '70s and '80s, even serving as chair of the Utah Arts Council. He was part of the arts renaissance of Utah in many ways. Walter was not a painter, he was a musician. The first thing that we bought when we didn't have any money was the grand piano.

(Electra) But he encouraged your art, obviously.

Oh, yes. When my son was 15, he wanted to take a photography class at the Art Barn. I drove him there and picked him up later. Walter said, "Why don't you take a class yourself?" I didn't want an art class because I had always been independent, drawing and painting as I liked, but I took a pottery class. We students had to wait too long for a wheel, so I started to make small figures with the clay. It reminded me of when I was with my Mallorquin grandmother in her country house, *Son Vida*. [*Son Vida*, now a luxury resort, was an old castle with huge gardens and many fountains.] The workers would clean the fountains and leave piles of mud to dry before putting it in the truck. We children would make small Christmas figures for the nativity from the mud. Those that survived the drying the wife of the woods keeper would fire for us.

That was my original idea for my sculptures. A few years after I started making sculptures, in 1979, my friend Frank Sanguinetti—then director of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts—decided to have a show in the museum for Christmas, so I made a complete nativity, with about 28 figures. I donated the set to the museum's permanent collection.

It reminded me of when I was with my Mallorquin grandmother in her country house, Son Vida. [Son Vida*, now a luxury resort, was an old castle with huge gardens and many fountains.*] *The workers would clean the fountains and leave piles of mud to dry before putting it in the truck. We children would make small Christmas figures for the nativity from the mud. Those that survived the drying, the wife of the woods keeper would fire for us.*

(Electra) Are there any artists or movements that have influenced your art? Where do you find inspiration?

I think when you like art, you look at art. Consciously, I have never said, "I'm going to do these in the style of, say, a Monet." But I'm sure that what we see, not only in the more contemporary artists, but also in the old, stays in our mind. Every time I went to the Peninsula, to Mallorca, I also went to Madrid. I had some dear old cousins that lived in Madrid. I would go visit them, and then I would go to the Museo del Prado. I got to stay a month with them, and I went to the Museo del Prado every day; I would go in the morning and be there until they closed for *mediodía* at one o'clock. I cannot tell you who inspired me, but I think we all get ideas from other people. Then you also have nature. I was lucky that I got to live in such a beautiful place. Because every time I went on a trip to Spain, I would go to different places. I would paint the Alhambra in Granada. If I went someplace, I would paint what was really a showpiece there. I traveled a lot in Spain—Córdoba, and Sevilla, all these places because I had relatives that I could go and visit. Spain is a very inspiring country. I have always liked to read, so if I saw an artist that I really liked, I would look for each book in the library and read about him or her. And there was a time when women just started to appear in art. I became very interested in that, because for so long there were only men. I always have been very interested in the possibility of women.

(Electra) Pilar, how has your art evolved? Is it still evolving?

I don't even think about it. I just follow what comes. But I don't know if it has evolved. The thing I have not done more recently is sculptures. Really, the last one I did was three or four years ago. It's because it is very hard work. You cannot have interruptions, because when the clay is damp, then you have to do it. You can't stop. But I'm planning to do one or two again.

(Kathryn) What were the last pieces you did?

The last piece that I did was *The Rabbi*, and I'm going to give it to the Jewish Community Center. I like Carla Cantor very much. She has been wonderful to me, and she was the community programs coordinator at the Center for years. I have had shows there. I'm going to give it to the Center in her honor.

(Electra) I know you're working on a new project, a painting. At age 95 you paint almost every day. Do you want to say something about the painting you're working on?

This painting is big because I like to do something that I have not done before. I had this idea: The Archduke of Austria came to Mallorca and fell in love with the island. He started building this kind of tower on the coast. He would buy land and build beautiful towers. They are small, but they are really pretty. And so I painted a tower thinking about him. When I started the painting, I asked myself, what is it that I have not done that is something that I really like in Spain? I also thought of Barcelona and Antoni Gaudí. I thought of the towers, and I have to tell you that this was not really the original project. The Eccles Community Art Center invited me to submit a work to an exhibit that they're going to have on abstract paintings. So I thought I would do an abstract painting; I started with this tower of black and white tiles. I thought I was going to do some crazy things around the tower.

(Kathryn) So that was the beginning of your abstract painting, turned into something else?

(laughs) Yes, and then I thought, oh, no, it doesn't go that way.

(Kathryn) The art tells you where it wants to go.

This painting is big because I like to do something that I have not done before. I had this idea: The Archduke of Austria came to Mallorca and fell in love with the island. He started building this kind of tower on the coast. He would buy land and build beautiful towers. They are small, but they are really pretty. And so I painted a tower thinking about him. When I started the painting, I asked myself, what is it that I have not done that is something that I really like in Spain?

Yes, this is what I always say. I think of a painting, and I start, and then the painting takes over and tells me where to go (laughs).

(Electra) Do you have a name for this painting yet or are you still thinking about it?

Memorias de Barcelona, or something like that. There's some of Gaudí's buildings in Mallorca, but not as many as in Barcelona. I like Gaudí.

(Electra) What advice would you give young artists who are hoping to have a professional career in art?

What I would say is, if you have an idea, don't be afraid, just start. Then, it will tell you where to go. That is something that has happened to me all the time. You have an idea, you start, and then the painting takes over. It's fun, try it! The main thing is, don't be afraid. Sometimes a mistake can be a good thing.

(Electra) What do you hope for the future of the arts in Utah?

I am very hopeful about art, because I think Utah has become very appreciative of the arts. I think I have made a small contribution to that, and I am glad.

(Kathryn) You've made a big difference because you have celebrated artists. Not only have you introduced people to the arts, but you have also promoted individual artists, who have gone on and who have gained confidence because you are confident in them. And you have also shown them how to do some things. You were saying, "don't be afraid, and charge what a piece is worth."

Yes, I know. I met the artist Susan Klinker in Bountiful many years ago. She was working hard, trying to save money to go to Canada and finish her schooling. I was going to have Art in the Garden soon; I told her, "You participate in Art in the Garden and all the money that you make, you can save to go to Canada." So, she made the mosaic table that I have in my garden, the only one that I have not made myself. She made that one and then brought three or four more to sell. I asked her, "How much are you going to sell these for?" I don't check with all of the artists, but I check with some, and she told me the price. I said, "This price? No way. You're not going to sell these tables for this price in my house. They are worth a lot more!" So, I put them up about two thirds more than the initial price, and I said, "You're not selling these for less than that. You want to go higher, you can, but not lower." She sold all of them the first day of the show (laughter).

(Kathryn) And she was a very happy woman!

(Electra) And that is why it's nice to have mentors like you, because how does an artist know how much they should ask for a piece?

Yes, I have done that with many artists. I told them, "No, you're not selling this painting for $300; you have to go higher." Not only because they sell their artwork for less than what it's worth, but also because they lower the value of their artistry and their time.

(Electra): What can be done to support the arts in Utah?

Spend money (laughter). Realize that art is valuable. Realize that just because a person is talented doesn't mean that it doesn't take a lot of work to do a painting. There are some paintings that, more or less, the artist can tell how they're going to end. Like roses in your garden. But if you make a little more sophisticated painting, you start it and don't know what it is going to look like. I often think that, oh, this is not going to take me more than a few days, and then I keep working on it much longer than I thought. And it becomes different from what I had thought at the beginning. As I said before, the painting takes over and tells you what to do.

(Electra) So, we can spend some money and attend events like Art in the Garden. Anything else?

Be a sponsor of the arts, and appreciate the arts. Realize what a change it makes in your house when you have some good art hanging on the walls. I think a house without art is not really complete. You have to have something beautiful to look at in winter. Always, but especially in the wintertime, when you cannot look into the garden.

(Electra) Thank you so much, Pilar. It has been lovely talking to you.



Electra Gamón Fielding (Ph.D., University of Utah) is an associate professor of Spanish at Weber State University. Her work focuses on the presence of Orientalized elements in Spain's cultural production and the representations of Jewish and Muslim women in the early modern picaresque novel. Fielding has been acquainted with Pobil's legacy for several years, but during the summer and fall of 2021 when she worked closely with Pilar, she became a fervent admirer of both the woman and her art.



Kathryn Lindquist (Ph.D., American Studies, University of Utah) taught humanities courses for many years at the University of Utah. From 2005 to 2013, she served as a trustee at WSU, thus coming to admire the university's devotion to excellence in education. Pilar is a dear friend of Kathryn. Kathryn serves on the Pilar Pobil Legacy Foundation Board.



Art in Pilar's Garden, 28" x 26," acrylic on canvas, painted frame, 2011

The Artwork of Pilar Pobil

When you grow up seeing art everywhere, on the outsides and insides of public buildings and in homes, it will get into your subconscious and pop out unexpectedly. In Spain, we are challenged by what we see and the light and color in landscapes. If you don't find an outlet for your feelings, you are going to suffer because your life is incomplete. It is like being hungry with nothing to eat.

As a child I made art constantly. I sculpted figures with mud; I painted my bedroom furniture; I drew and painted on paper with supplies my beloved father brought me. His assassination in the Spanish Civil War, when I was 9, devastated me. However, even after a war or a catastrophe, a memory remains of the good, along with the desire to restore it, and so I continued to produce art to bring joy. My mother didn't approve of my being an artist, so I rebelled. Art and reading, especially history, relationships, and fun in Spain defined my world.

Then I met Walter Smith from Salt Lake City. We married and moved to Utah, and my world expanded into this new beautiful place and these welcoming people and different light. My world embraced three children who brought play and delight. My art became utilitarian: I designed and embroidered clothing for us; I painted second-hand furniture with images from my past and my present for our home; I built a fairyland garden; I filled our space with jeweled colors and brilliant stories.

Not until my forties, with my children in school, did I reach my dream of really working on my art. I made up for the wait and began by making sculptures. Wanting to work when traveling induced me to use watercolors. That led to painting in oils and expanding canvases into frames. Now I use acrylics because I have too much to accomplish and oil doesn't dry fast enough. Art is the dominant, lasting, obsessive, unavoidable force of my life.

Now I am 95 years old and my art resides in museums and homes worldwide. My book, *My Kitchen Table,* was a finalist for the State Book of the Year Award in non-fiction, 2007. I have hosted many events in my garden to celebrate diverse communities; I love having children come to paint and discover new aspects of their own talents.

I hope people enjoy humor in some of my work and find ideas to provoke thought about human values and behavior. I hope they think deeply about how we can make our world safer and healthier and more joyful for everyone. Art brings out the best in our souls.

Art is a long road that never ends; there is always more to learn, more to discover, more to interpret, more to attain. May art fill your life.

Pilar Pobil, 2022

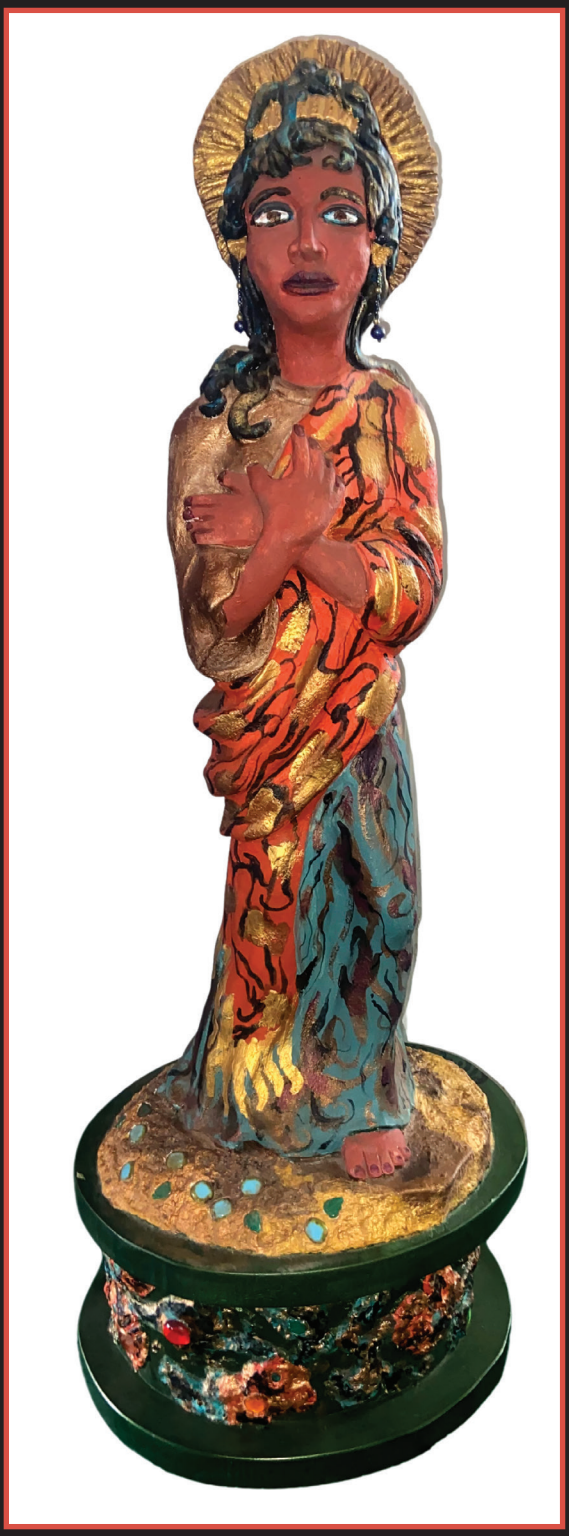




Evening Prayer (Dominguez-Escalante Expedition), 23" x 20" x 16," stoneware, 1976



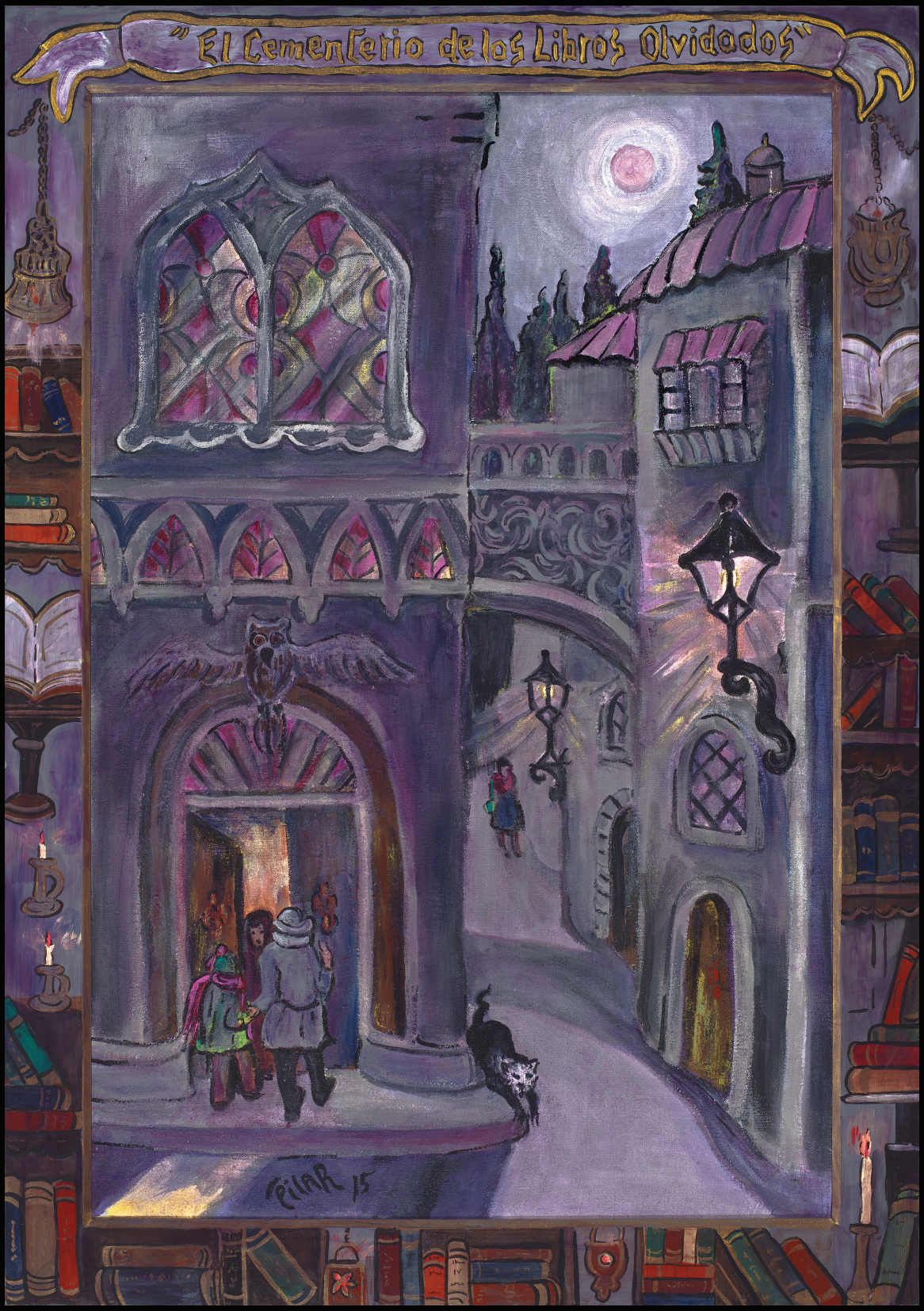
The Rabbi, 14.5" x 14" x 12," painted stoneware, 2016



The African Madonna, 30" x 11" x 11," painted stoneware, 2001



I Was Born from the Sea with a Paintbrush in My Hand, 45" x 35," acrylic on canvas, mixed media frame, 2014



The Cemetery of the Forgotten Books, 41" x 38, " acrylic on canvas, painted frame, 2015



Boots, 12” x 10,” acrylic and multimedia on leather, 2016





Embroidered Handbag, traditional Mallorquin embroidery, 11” x 12,” thread and beads on fabric, 2010



Armchair, 41” x 21” x 19,” acrylic on wood, 2003



I have painted all the walls in my house in very bold colors like red and purple and emerald green. I like striking things, and these colors show off my paintings. I don't want something like an ugly fuse box visible, so I paint it into a birdhouse. I decorate the fireplace tiles, the stairways, closet doors. The doors, unless they're really good wood that I don't want to change, are perfect canvases for a still life or a mermaid or any design I make up.

Door with Still Life, 77" x 32," acrylic on wood, 1998



The Dames of the Round Table, 36" x 48," acrylic and mixed media on canvas, painted frame, 2018



Oval Table, Medieval Spanish Street Musicians,
21" x 27" x 24," acrylic on wood, 2007



Barcelona, 54" x 29," acrylic on canvas, painted frame, 2021



Mi pasado y mi presente (My Past and My Present), 48" x 46," oil on canvas, painted frame, 2006



Ibiza en mi memoria (Ibiza in My Memory), 36" x 46," oil on canvas, painted frame, 2005



El crepusculo de la Madre Tierra (The Lament of Mother Earth), 57" x 35," acrylic and mixed media on canvas, painted frame, 2013

I like to do large paintings of people because they command the viewer to look at them, to see a moment in life — of irony or sadness or joy, or the plain static intensity of a certain look. Art pulls you into a subject you had not thought about before, or can create a mood that makes you laugh or cry or that shows the injustice of the world or the beauty of nature. Art elevates the mind and contributes to the goodness and the enjoyment of people. Art persists when other things are gone.

Pilar Pobil

Full Moon

A Poem to Mallorca



Alone, looking at the sky,
I bathe in the moonlight
that shines over my hair,
as white as the foam
of that blue sea so far away. . .

Alone, without sharing my life
or the beauty of the clear night
that surrounds me in its freshness,
with the murmurs of the cool water
sliding under the shadows of the big trees,

very near the tall mountains
that were unknown to me in my young life
and now protect my dreams and solitude
and give me support and company
when no one else shares my old life. . .

But that brilliant blue sea of my memories,
that island I lost so long ago,
exist in the center of my soul,
their memory as strong as ever,
and I see them again, shining on the water
in the mysterious light of the full moon.

Flavian Mark Lupinetti

From a Ranch of Ghosts



so odd so late in life to learn a new lexicon
for the living things and the land I know

I twist my tongue over *yeísmo* to master *cholla*,

try (as I might) to roll up erre to speak of my yard's *arroyo*,
an ephemeral stream, my pronouncing it
draws no drop of water
neither spring runoff nor summer monsoon wet
the rounded stones along its banks, raising suspicion
they were smoothed by rains long since chased off

acequia a ditch that delivered water without charging or pooling
smooth as capillaries sluicing blood through lungs
a marvel of engineering by people without levels or surveyors' tools

sendero a straight path, almost always manufactured by humans

the word *canyon* by itself offers meager description
it requires modification by
box or blind,
slide or slot,
gooseneck or stairstep,
or occasionally Grand

part of Georgia O'Keeffe's genius lay in not what she rendered
but what she left out—
all but a single cliff within a *cordillera*
all but a lone cottonwood tree shadowing a *barranca*

caldera both the bucket of feed I give my horse and the vast dish
left in the earth after a volcanic explosion and collapse

ballena a series of humps resembling a pod of whales

picacho means peak, a lesson lost on those who named Picacho Peak

the etymology of hoodoo remains elusive
hard not to see the resemblance to voodoo as
explanation for this tortioned tower of granite
out of a Dr. Seuss illustration

this summer I learned the word *brule*
a forest burned to the ground

lacking O'Keeffe's genius, I yearn to exclude nothing
if I cannot capture their beauty, I can at least memorize their names
I must learn them all to love them all
if I do not know what I have to lose
I may fail to resist those who would take them away

The Bulldozer That Took the Top off a Mountain

The fickle and the superficial marvel at the mountain's surface.
The truer lover sees the beauty that resides inside.

A glimpse will please the capricious for a moment, but
the faithful proves enduring through his motives mercenary.

The Caterpillar X twelve-fifty is winsome in its own way,
and also helps to execute fiduciary duty.

"Mountain Top Removal," an ungainly, prejudicial phrase.
Call it "Modern Mining Method," a more salutary name.

Virginal topography is overrated. Let us boldly
state that intact, this hill holds no value to the holders of the shares.

So drop in the dynamite, and bring all the toys in.
Dump waste in the creeks, and dilute all the poison.

As we depart, through haze of rock dust,
rejoice that coal now sells for eighty bucks a ton.

Declarative Sentences

You've demonstrated for fifty years.
What lessons have you learned?

When it comes time to topple a statue,
make certain the length of your rope squared
exceeds the sum of the squares
of the statue's height
and your distance from the base,
and when you do this calculation,
offer silent thanks to Mrs. Daugherty,
who taught you the Pythagorean theorem.

Respect demo etiquette. During a march,
it is ill-advised to check your email,
it is forbidden to look at your FitBit,
it is unseemly to take a selfie.

If the police attack, or the National Guard,
or the Bureau of Prisons, or the Park Service,
it may appear they select their targets at random.
They do not.

Double-check your spelling.
"No Justice No Peas"
could provoke a needless hoarding of legumes.

Any music you hear while marching
will consist of songs entirely unfamiliar to you.
This will strike a note of melancholy
because you remember when you knew all the songs.

A brisk wind at your back
means you needn't worry about tear gas.
Rubber bullets, however,
never rebound at the shooters.

Your sneakers served you well
in days of old, but in this century?
You ain't outrunning nobody.
Stick with heavy boots.

You've demonstrated for fifty years.
What lesson do you want to pass on?

Don't ever be deterred by anyone who
calls destruction of racist public art
an act of revisionist history.
Revision is essential to creation. Besides,
all history is revisionist history.



Flavian Mark Lupinetti, a writer and cardiac surgeon, received his MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. His fiction and poetry have appeared in *About Place*, *Barrelhouse*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Beltway Poetry Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Cutthroat*, *The Examined Life*, *Neon*, *PROEM*, and *ZYZZYVA*.

Andrew Leggett

Magenta Shores


Andy Hutchinson

In this pale twilight,
we pass the beach houses
where retirees go to rest
on banksia-lined streets
of white architectural uniformity.

We brood as querulous misfits
in false community,
dreaming of an urban village
where the residents, drunk with poetry,
jam raucously on vintage instruments.

I push against a hedge to let
an old man in a golf cart
overtake us in the dusk
on the verge of the putting green
where managers and keepers
laid poisoned baits for rabbits.

On the edge of the resort,
we amble along the track
over the dunes to Tuggerah Beach.
We walk the line between foam and sand,
where kelp washes up as waves break,
then dump their load of silica
on the steep shelf.

In the afterglow
that follows sunset over the lake,
night stumbles and falls
until the moon rises,
then disappears behind a cloud.

Let's rest for a moment, you say.
I lower myself onto the sand
while you photograph the moon's demise.
I feel it in my joints. I seek
your assistance to rise.

Losing Touch

We have left you to move out
along the coast that divides
this land of citizens
from the leviathan depths,
where the whale's cry bounces
and echoes down trenches,
mourning its lost calf,
and the tiger shark lusts
for the board rider
on her trajectory across the face
between crest and trough,
bloody dreams disrupted
when both shark and surfer
pull out before the breakers
crash in over the rocks.

As we proceed
down the Pacific Highway
in our solitary vehicle
packed with suitcases
and the casket for my old guitar,
the removalists travel separately.
There are no floral tributes
or cortege to follow us,
through scars of fire and flood,
across the boundaries set
by the urban weekend magazine.

You may not recognise us
when we rendezvous again
at a bohemian music festival
or wine tasting at some limestone
vineyard, where you might
see through us as phantoms
thrown up by the *kairos*
of sea spray that surrounds us,
ethereally thin as we've become,
having lost the knotted tongues
with which we once conversed
on the pratfalls and the merits
of contemporary cinema.

My Familiar Frogmouth

The smell of puppies drew the tawny frogmouth
swooping from the colony on Galloway's Hill.
Blinded by the lights, the bird flew across the deck

and through the French doors into the lounge
to crash against blinds, then dive the television set,
right itself and crash against the wall. Feathers fell.

I killed the lights, willed the bird to turn. It hung a moment,
then spun and flew, back towards the hill. My first encounter
with the night bird heralded confusion, a time to ride boundaries

between worlds, to cross regions in which distinctions
between dark and light disappeared. The sepia tones
of Siennese artists illuminated landscapes over which I flew,

umbre robes with arcane symbols falling from my shoulders
as dreams streamed out behind, then funnelled and fell
into the tornado. The fury restored my sense of chiaroscuro,

as would a collision of Urizen, riding his flaming disk,
with Vermeer's *Astronomer*, retiring late from night vision,
hoping to snatch a little sleep, his back stamped black.

Normative forces brought me crashing, much as solar flares
afflicted wax that fastened Icarus' feathers. After impact,
when I walked the Wynnum foreshore, the angry crone

appeared beneath the figs on the path by the playground
opposite the fish-and-chippery, she whom I tore when
I turned to chase the chimera of things the way they were.

Soon I found, that though I might, by strength of will,
jam my foot against the slamming door and force my way
back, the angel of that place had made a pact with Azrael,

who held his flaming sword to bar me from the house
where my heart sought to rest. It was then, on a walk
by the clump of trees at Norman Park, I met that bird again,

perched on a branch. I looked, and he looked back at me,
locked in atavistic recognition. The frogmouth and I were
now one spirit, as with all things, but more so, kindred.

There are no nights, even when the blood moon rises,
fecund over my horizon, on which I, feathered and transformed,
fly out my bedroom window, but my awareness travels

with the bird. In the night, I know that he will come to show me,
if I tune to the path of his flight and read it, just as I did
when I switched out that light and willed him to turn home.

Soon the stone that weighed me to the earth sank to my heart.
I left to find my way alone, wrenching filaments that might
be seen in fading light, the fibres of a child's forgiveness.

It was then that I asked Blake: If when I break from the marriage
of Heaven and Hell, those two lodges remain one in the other,
the other in one, one and the same, in the same place, one I cannot

break and then re-enter, then where does the nightjar fly?
Blake said I should ask Milton, who knew best of loss,
when Katherine died, who'd kept his talent live by scribing

when the poet's eyes went blind. And Milton said: You must
take your bird familiar out to heal, not lay that talent waste.
I took advice. I could not change my mind, so changed my place.

I made my bed where I could lift my feet just far enough
to cross the road, then moved to rooms where jacaranda
bloomed each spring below my balcony, those purple flowers

that, in the cemetery, fall on my parents' graves. Walking from there,
I met two birds. The frogmouths roosted on a wire, communed with me,
then flew away, northwest. I followed on a flight to Longreach,

for an interview, saw brolgas dance, was offered earth to serve,
but nothing came from bones in that arid land, that mirage
that left me, dry with nothing but potential space, to travel south,

where black cockatoos and honey-eaters fed on banksias.
Black-tailed wallabies found me on the Redgum Trail
in Wyrrabalong National Park, and brush-tailed possums shrieked,

their eyes in torch light glowing red. Swallows came to nest
and feed their young in the adobe house they made on a security
sensor by the door. In spring, they circled and dived,

skimmed and played on the surface of a pond between the house
and the fairway that footed dunes beyond. Pelicans swooped on fish
in the shallows of the Tuggerah lakes and men cast rods

by caravan parks at The Entrance and Long Jetty, where there was
little industry, but the ice trade flourished. Wild surf dumped charcoal
from the fires at Wollombi and Lake Macquarie to wash up

on Tuggerah Beach. On the run from Pelican Point, the setting sun
glowed as a red disk, before it disappeared behind the pall
blowing from fires northeast of Sydney. While the nation burned,

I lived as alien servant to the surf culture, on Darkinjung land,
outside communion with the familiar. In this time, no frogmouths
came, until the death of my sister-in-law of the Kamilaroi mob.

I returned, for a school reunion, to Toowoomba, where she died
off country, far north of those plains of her birth. Even there,
in that drought-stricken land, I found fellowship and a sense

of the familiar. The names came back to me, attached to faces
of thirty-two children in the photograph of my primary class
of 1969, then matched to those of high school friends,

aged forty years on. At the cemetery, my parents lay as still
as they ever were beneath their plaques under the jacaranda.
That night, perched on a garden trellis, my sister-in-law's spirit

came as a frogmouth, then she flew away from the wire.
My grieving nieces told me their mother had been an owl,
but the totemic boobuk, the nightjar and the tawny frogmouth

were often confused, and feared by all except those that sought,
in spirit, to fly out to heal or to harm. I'd just been back to Brisbane
for another job interview. While waiting for an outcome,

my old neighbours, from the next apartment, sent me
photographs of tawny frogmouths roosting in the old familiar
jacaranda that fell below the balcony I'd left—three of them,

a nesting couple and their fledgling, now residing there,
singing their plaintive oom-oom-oom-oom, calling and willing
my spirit's winged return to the purple flowers of home.



Andrew Leggett is an Australian author and editor of poetry, fiction, academic papers, and songs. His work has been published widely internationally. His two poetry collections, *Old Time Religion and Other Poems* (1998) and *Dark Husk of Beauty* (2006), were published by Interactive Press. His third collection, *Losing Touch*, is forthcoming from Ginninderra Press. In addition to medical degrees and postgraduate qualifications in psychiatry and psychotherapy, he holds a Ph.D. in creative writing from Griffith University. He is a former editor of *Australasian Journal of Psychotherapy* and the current prose editor of *Stylus Lit*.

John Porter

Autumn Flags



Yesterday's leaves
were bright prayer flags,
bravely clinging to the gales. . .
Today, the prayers are replaced
by scriptures of bare branches
etched on a clear blue sky
in many languages.

Tomorrow's seasons
will turn the trees to mulch,
newsprint, forecasts and possibility.
High clouds scroll past, leaving a trace
of distant mountains half remembered,
the sharp edge of the wind
scatters words at my feet.

Leaving the Mountains

As I drive home, I imagine an ice axe swung
and crampons finding purpose on thin images
Of past climbs that might just last forever.

The truth we tested lay on north faces:
No joy till the top, no hope of living
Except moving up to where the warmth awaits

Those hard uncertainties shared so steeply
Gathered divisions of our lives together
No luxury of fate fixed in stars.

Now we face the golden sun descending.
At our back, vast ranges stretch horizons
Like a smile connecting earth with heaven.

Perhaps beyond the furthest dark ranges
We will find what time has not allowed us:
Those signposts to all the unknown places.

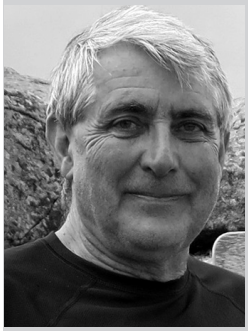
Yet still that touch of the mountain made,
The hard connections to a way above
Created a link, what we had to do to be.

These mountains will know all our memories
And we their realities of wind and ice
When we share the same silver dark sea

Science of the Sea

Charged by moonlight
An invisible loom weaves
Silver yarn into dark waters,
Creates and holds the not now
And yet forever of this planet
In a fragile weft of quantum waves.

Where the star shimmering sea
Meets the night's horizon
Tales are told of deep space events,
Bright numbers scattered across the oceans
Their functions so subtle they
Seem to us the magic of life.



John Porter lives in the Lake District, birthplace of the English Romantic movement, with his English wife. Both their daughters have settled in the western United States. John has climbed extensively for over 60 years, including new routes in the Himalaya and the Andes. He has been President of the Alpine Club and in 1980 founded the Kendal Mountain Film Festival. His book *One Day as a Tiger* won the grand prize at the Banff Mountain Book Festival in 2014 and has been published in seven languages. His current projects include a new book of poems titled *A Path of Shadows* (Little Peak Press, 2022), which he will present at the Banff Mountain Book Festival in November 2022, and a memoir.

Madison Jones

Field Maintenance


Martin Fennema

We drive posts into the ground,
the same each winter, after frost
kills the grass and the cows are sick
of eating hay. The deadfall posts

we cut from blighted cedars
to stop the spread from those
pioneering trees who move
like whispers from forest to field.

The shortleaf canopy throwing shade,
my father, austere against
the wind singing through bent
saplings at the edge of the woods

where we enter. Chainsaw, hammer,
crinkled sack of nails, wire spool
peeking through the cotton gloves.
We bury the stakes as deep as we

can stand to dig, the post hole
digger handles threaten to splinter
against the frozen clay, and yet
each year the cows grow stubborn

with hunger and press themselves
with such deliberate patience
against the barbed wire to discern
weak spots along the fence

until the bone-dense posts again
give way to the neighbor's
lush bermuda grass, and once more
we are called to consider

the ouroboros of horseshoe nail,
crushed like dirt against the posts
we set aside to cure all summer
in their place under a darkening sky.

Not Yet Dawn

I lie awake in the darkness, thinking
of the whale that washed ashore this week,

belly stuffed with calcified plastic,
grocery bags he thought were squid.

He died the awful way of mineral and acid,
the miserable, slow death from within.

My father couldn't hack it as a poet.
Instead, he became an arborist

and taught me the name of every tree
we cut down, spoke of them with poetry

in the threadbare sunlight that takes the place
of shade once the sycamore is gone.

The space between us as you turn in sleep,
beside me in the silhouette of dawn,

the waves of the lightening sky
drip through your mind like dew

as you walk some far off place,
folding the fragmented world into your dress.

We are counting water as it rushes past
in a river swollen from spring rains.

When we speak the names of the dead,
it is a way to listen to their absence.

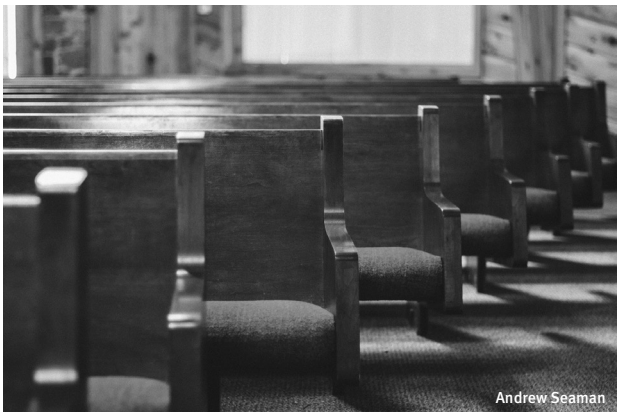
In the still and brightening morning,
a single bird's song cuts the silence.



Madison Jones is an assistant professor of writing & rhetoric and natural resources science at the University of Rhode Island. He received his Ph.D. in writing studies from the University of Florida in 2020. He is the author of *Losing the Dog* (Salmon Poetry, 2023) and *Reflections on the Dark Water* (Solomon & George, 2016). His poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, *The Greensboro Review*, and elsewhere. Recent awards include a poetry fellowship from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and a writing residency from the Fairhope Center for the Writing Arts.

Valerie A. Smith

Exodus, Or How We Left Our Church of Fifteen Years


Andrew Seaman

or how we stayed after so many families left
or you know folks used to call it a cult
or why does pastor call us out like that
or Ananias & Saphira: It was our fault
or *scandaliso*—the spirit of offense
or Jezebel, because the wife
or are we hearing from God
or as long as we're hearing from the Holy Spirit
or Sarah, God hasn't said anything to me yet
or wilderness, are we going to be here forever

or that church life every Sunday Wednesday
children's church usher greeter bookstore altar
corporate prayer worship Easter pastor's birthday
pastor's wife's birthday Christmas New Year's Eve

or *baptismos*—our whole lives almost
or Pentecost, sometimes the roof would blow off
or a man walked out of his wheelchair
or a man walked out on his wife
or there's still something in the Word
or Edith, maybe it's his wife
or Moses, maybe he's just getting old
or that ministry saved us
or we were saved in that ministry
or we'd do anything but die

Rain on a September Morning

It's early and it's been raining for hours.
The dog sniffs the door and whimpers.
No one wakes up. No one will walk him.

This poem has been raining in me
For days, weeks, maybe even months.
I love laughing, but I'm just as likely
To side-eye, *What's with all the rain*?

I'm all trauma and long memory, gaps
Between rain drops, the blue dot on radar
Watching green yellow orange red,
All the colors of rain come my way.

What kind of poet are you? a mentor asked.
Since then, I have been sitting upright
Waiting for the rain to tell me.

I'm the black rain experience, a late bloomer
Hiding beside a basket of clothes, rubbing
Nacho's backside with my foot.

Studying for the exams has taught me
More about rain than I wanted to know.
It's romantic how God made me
To notice the trees and rain.

Where would I be without stanzas to enter
And leave in the rain? Each line is a little couch
Where a few words sit next to each other
Wondering what will happen when their knees touch.

I spent the last two months without
A woman on my study schedule.
Everything I know about black poets I have
Taught myself between thunder and light.

This is how I come in from the rain:
I close my eyes and imagine
I'm manageable.

Curlie Raised the Blues

in a North Jersey brownstone with
a cellar door alarmed with tin cans.
Her blue china shined with impeccable taste.

She was waiting with fresh biscuits and gravy
when the Blues escaped the South
on busses and trains, her home

became a depot for siblings
to be raised with her only son.
She never laid a hand on him.

She taught him to read
put her brothers on big rigs
and married her sisters to affable men.

Me and all my second cousins
swam in her above-ground pool,
ate watermelon at the picnic table
kicking pincher bugs off our toes.

One day I lost hold of her dog
chased him around the city block
was sent for a switch from the yard
but she couldn't bear to use it.

She'd rather lick her thumb
and catch the Bible's thin pages
with a shotgun under her bed
and Harlequins in the attic.

Whitney & Robyn

What does the storm set free? Spirits stripped of flesh on their slow walk.
My body is an argument I did not start.
she glistened from cocoa butter smoothed in
There will be no edges, but curves
the once-girl they belong to, the dewy woman
and as soon as i die i hope everyone who loved me learns
whose name I love, whose hair I love,
Who she sees, the girl facing me
When love is a shimmering curtain
We get hurt so often we never
Despite the fusing kiss that wields the magic
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering
She wanted a little room for thinking:
The wrong ghost beckons me by name to come:
With the woman, as always, the sun
A woman with a burning flame
like love. How strange to answer the begging
our ancient rituals demand that we give
I think by now the river must be thick

Epitaph: Tracy K. Smith, "The Speed of Belief," *Life on Mars*, 2011. Line 1: My body is an argument I did not start, Morgan Parker, "And Cold Sunset," *Magical Negro*, 2019. Line 2: she glistened from cocoa butter smoothed in Rita Dove, "Weathering Out," *Collected Poems: 1974-2004*, 2016. Line 3: There will be no edges, but curves, Tracy K. Smith, "Sci-Fi," *Life on Mars*, 2011. Line 4: the once-girl they belong to, the dewy woman, Kamilah Aisha Moon, "Cataracts," *Starshine & Clay*, 2017. Line 5: and as soon as i die i hope everyone who loved me learns, Nikki Giovanni, "When I Die," *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*, 1996. Line 6: whose name I love, whose hair I love, Elizabeth Alexander, "Tina Green," *American Sublime*, 2005. Line 7: Who she sees, the girl facing me, Claudia Rankine, "Birthright," *Nothing in Nature Is Private*, 2012. Line 8: When love is a shimmering curtain, Maya Angelou, "On Diverse Deviations," *Maya Angelou: The Complete Poetry*, 2015. Line 9: We get hurt so often we never, Morgan Parker, "Black Women for Beginners Pt. 1," *Magical Negro*, 2019. Line 10: Despite the fusing kiss that wields the magic, Georgia Douglas Camp Johnson, "Isolation," *The Heart of a Woman, and Other Poems*, 1918. Line 11: While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering, Georgia Douglas Camp Johnson, "The Heart of a Woman," *The Heart of a Woman, and Other Poems*, 1918. Line 12: She wanted a little room for thinking: Rita Dove, "Daystar," *Collected Poems: 1974-2004*, 2016. Line 13: The wrong ghost beckons me by name to come, Kamilah Aisha Moon, "A Golden Shovel," *Starshine & Clay*, 2017. Line 14: With the woman, as always, the sun, Claudia Rankine, "Birthright," *Nothing in Nature Is Private*, 2012. Line 15: A woman with a burning flame, Georgia Douglas Camp Johnson, "Smothered Fires," *The Heart of a Woman, and Other Poems*, 1918. Line 16: like love. How strange to answer the begging, Kamilah Aisha Moon, "Prodigal Daughter," *Starshine & Clay*, 2017. Line 17: our ancient rituals demand that we give, Nikki Giovanni, "The Women Gather," *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*, 1996. Line 18: I think by now the river must be thick, Natasha Trethewey. "Elegy," *Thrall*, 2015.

Baby Archie

he'd be black by now if it weren't for the island's incessant illusion of sun
we'll call him anything except accepted of the exceptions made in the past
a veiled transparency drapes seven silks of darkness not worth mentioning
only passing glances leave his mother out of hired hands to cast her down
then what will she think of herself then her baby better off heir to the throne
castle untethered they roam the world looking for kingdoms to reign



Valerie A. Smith speaks on behalf of those who do not have a voice. She is currently studying poetry in the Ph.D. program at Georgia State University. She earned her master's degree at Kennesaw State University where she is currently a lecturer of English. Valerie values spending quality time with her family.

Richard Robbins

At Low Tide



All five of them made a point on the misshapen star a guided missile could find if it cared to.

Back home in their towns, a rough ceramic bowl sat next to a vase of new flowers. This was where one-by-one they would restore the light.

In the melody of this place, the creaking spruce trunk, brush or tap of crowns. Labored bear breath. Whistling plover. Midnight glide of elk through the scrub. Roar of a family on the ocean side of things inside the larger wave-roar, waiting for the last faint push of foam to reach them. This heartbeat at finger-end or in the ear. Rest when the wind stops to turn around. The musical rest.

She stooped on the tidal flat a half-mile out at low tide, digging clams she would not eat later.

A rocket across Gaza. Arc of weather ocean-to-bay. A helicopter gunship. A steel-colored heron.

He hosed away eelgrass and mud before shucking the oyster, swallowing the insides whole. Before that, he'd registered shape and texture, brine-scent and color. It was like the way some honor the deer they have killed. It was like corn meal on the ground for the spirit to pick up for its journey.

And what was there left to do but leave through the gates from before. Into the mouth of new comfort. Into roils of tenderness. Into the vacancies of light. Or the light of scar and bloody paving stones. The altar of the street. The fragrance of lamb and coffee. Adhan wrung-out and being written on the air.

The Great Litany

For Lent, we twenty or so will begin with call and response: Four short lines of praise for Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Forty long lines of petition.

To deliver us from our offenses and temptation. To spare others from their prison cells, earthquakes, murder. To keep our President faithful to the oath. To support workers in the field, open others' ears to good words. To forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers. To turn their hearts. Page by page.

We can barely stand for the whole prayer, some of us, the west window still dark this time of morning, the baseboards ticking slow to temperature. The ocean falls into itself two blocks away. We might stay upright if we could walk there.

Our children all left us in their time. I know that much about these strangers. One man has a tremor in his left hand. (Later, his wife will pass the plate for both of them.) Another man, tall and bald three pews ahead, wears thumb-sized tufts of gray hair he missed behind one ear. (Later, he announces the community dinner for immigrant relief. He is selling tickets.) You can only see so much from this angle.

Our children all left us in their time. I know that much about these strangers. Some had to change the locks. Some had to burn their own houses down. I know they still wonder about it. They were workers in a field. It was harvest.

The ocean falls into itself two blocks away. Years back, bits of Fukushima lingered there at first light, pushed up, pulled back in the foam. Early walkers couldn't read the kanji. One dog ran to sniff, then shot back when the last push of wave lifted the bits to its mouth. This is the Body of Christ, broken for you.

We might stay upright if we could walk there. The nave filling with the heaps of our requests: For all animals and fish in the sea. For our dead ones. For travelers. For women in childbirth. For those suffering in mind and body. The birds of the air. The clouds that will bring rain. For those blind of heart, from pride or envy. For the end of war. For the end of loneliness. We could walk there in any weather, reach our fingers down in the wash and bring the salt taste to our lips. The Cup of Salvation.

Leadbetter Point

Salal along the trail from Leadbetter Point
down to the Bay. Goat's beard lichen on every
kind of tree. The Sitka spruce. The elkhorn
moss. The broken empty egg of plover.
The washed-up, upturned crab. The vegetable
scat of coyote. The elk, ghosts of the forest,
moving bayside to oceanside and back
and no one knowing. The sun rising
from behind the coast range, rising across
the clam and oyster water. And ocean
wind subsumed by fir and cedar in the mile
between there and here. And shade settling onto the grove
of old growth. You are never really
alone. Not with your lost sister's face
still in the chop. Your grandfather's voice drifting
up the tidal flat from a cluster
of boats. Not with your wife and sons still moving
slowly in Midwest ice far over
those mountains like a dream. The mind
could sweep them away, or the mind
could fail, and still the inner weather would find
these monochrome grasses more beautiful
than color. This clump of ditch weed tamped down
by bears. The bald eagle screech sudden
and invisible. The heartbreak moment
to moment, run through by swords, because break
and mend is everything you didn't
know you missed. Or so the angel will tell you
once you recover again, or stand
upright again, once you move your mouth
around the holy host of first words.

Someone Else's Map

Who would put the first bird, a Stellar's jay, on their map. Or the first fern, swiveling now on its stalk not in wind but in a wave of heat rising from the spot where first sun fell across the frost.

Who would absolve the first offender, no matter her non-intent, no matter any later generosity.

Listen: When someone draws the map of his grief, he includes white spaces that are never only loss. A herd of elk passes through this part of the woods every night, never detected. They are crossing the white space now.

Listen: You have to roll your own grief inside the leather bundle and stow it on the mud porch. It will stay warm there, even though you may want it outdoors hanging in the light and cold air. You have to count everything inside the bundle and leave it right there on the wooden slats, next to the shoes. It made you afraid once, to walk away.

Who would leave his house and walk the thin highway a mile north to that village. Who would stop at every front gate blessing it, even if the house had been empty for years, the family all dead, its fortune played-out, even if it's only a set for some historical re-enactment.

Who would leave himself behind.

Even though that, all along, made the color for the map, the direction of its rivers, configured it, as in ancient times, with south at the top—that place of community and good weather. Who would cross the white behind the first things of this world only to discover weightlessness and the light of animals. Question after question a string of tracks in the dark across windfall and duff.



Richard Robbins studied with Richard Hugo and Madeline DeFrees at the University of Montana, where he completed his MFA. He has published six books of poems, most recently *Body Turn to Rain: New & Selected Poems*, which Lynx House Press released in 2017. He has received awards from The Loft, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Society of America. From 1986-2014, Robbins directed the Good Thunder Reading Series at Minnesota State University Mankato, where he recently retired from the Creative Writing Program. His website is https://www.richardrobbinspoems.com

Margaret Chula

She Who Watches


Margaret Chula

Begin by thinking like a snake. Seek out shafts
of sunlight on rock face, boulder, meadow grass.

Slither through snags of thorns, past sage
with its haze of healing and hallucinogen.

Rout through rubble, along the path of spirit quest.
Huddle beneath basalt, sanctuary of animal dreams.

Observe lizard tracks embedded on rock—
spirit visions of antelope, scorpion, salmon.

Trace your fingers along scars of petroglyphs,
volcanic rock, now settled, receptive to chisel

and the hands of seekers who lean into cliff face
to carve out the image of their dream spirit.

Be attentive to bird calls that lead to She Who Watches,
Tsagaglalal, who gazes at the mighty river, her eternal vigil.

Coil inside the spirals of her all-knowing eyes—
listen to your throat pulse to the river's ancient song.

Wildfires

After lightning strikes the Memaloose Hills
After a candle flame ignites the tablecloth
After the teenager tosses a firecracker
  into Eagle Creek Canyon
After the frenzied KBPS weatherman,
  the heroic firefighters
After the burning of Eleanor's home,
  the panic of her llamas
After the reflections of red
  in the sky and rivers
After smoke clouds the air,
  seeps into our kitchens,
  invades our dreams
After the turtle withdraws into its shell
  the rabbit down its hole
After the deer flees, its nostrils
  clogged with ashes
After sheltering for ten days indoors
  checking the air quality every hour

Even after the blessed rains, the cleansing
winds, we hesitate—like the cicada

seventeen years underground, emerging
from its carapace to mate and sing.

Finally released, we blink under blue skies,
inhale pure air, feel the sun warm our faces—

welcome the rumble of the recycling truck
returning us to the before.

Here I Stand

Memaloose Hills, Oregon

I've come to find solace
on this hillside, where the tapered tips
of pines meet the sky.

I've come for spring sunshine,
hiking boots loosely laced,
wide-brimmed hat shading my eyes.

I'm here to breathe in zephyrs
that nudge the surface
of vernal ponds,

a breeze that carries
the trill of a meadowlark
hidden in tall grasses.

Now, two of them in a dance
of feather and song
on this April afternoon.

I lie in the grass, alone
amid blazing balsam root
and mating birds

remembering times
when I felt the hand
of my mother

brush away tears—
and gnats and weeds
that tangled my hair.

Meadow weaves itself into me
warp and weft—the heft
of my body, now lifting.

Lure

Metolius River, Oregon

Nymph, you tunnel through sediment
and sludge, molt toward wings that spike
toward the light. Up like a tiny fruit pit
you glide on water, suck up wind into flight,
give in to dawn that will lift you like a tumbleweed
hardly noticed in the desert's sage, the mole's scurry
the grip of a hawk's talons round the belly of a mouse.

I watch your wings, mayfly, delicate and unsure,
move the tracery of your body. Unaware of enemy
or air current that can raise and drop you like
dandelion fluff, you are lured to the ghost
of yourself, floating like a feather from
a taut line attached to a pole, held by
a hand, work-worn and sunburned,
fingers clenched around desire
as you spiral down
to mate with
yourself.



Margaret Chula has published fourteen collections of poetry, including *Firefly Lanterns: Twelve Years in Kyoto*. Her poems explore the interconnectedness between our everyday lives and the natural world. A featured speaker and workshop leader at haiku conferences around the world, she has also served as president of the Tanka Society of America, Poet Laureate for Friends of Chamber Music, and is currently on the Advisory Board for the Center for Japanese Studies. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Sophia Gauthier

Gender in Cattle Country


Georgina Chandler

I do not wish to be a man, though
I wish to be Johnny Cash

at times—
cattle-smell on the Interstate through stretches
of sage, at least,

what it must feel
to summon his voice in my own thin
ribs, as cello
strung on a granite floor, how
the sternum bows
and vibrates—

what's a Stetson hat without a voice from below?
From that wide city
where ladies with bow-legs teeter like wet grass?

I do not wish, as I drive,
to be a man, though
I wish to be a cowboy—for a horse,
or the whistle to call it.

The Supercell

I drive miles
to watch the coming of a supercell—
clouds blossom black, and pulse
like fungus in the fields.

I graft my boots to fissures
in barbed wire, let my body on a fence,
and wait.

Here, highway billboards promise
dial-up salvation: 1-800-he-will-rise. A girl can wonder sex,
and fear and damnation, why it is her stomach stirs
when women burn things down.

You ask me if I'm afraid to be alone here,
when the mesocyclone hits:
I'm not,

though every cloud I harvest is full
of vortices: tendrils of swirling air that never
touch the ground.

Not afraid to be alone, though
afraid of being more alone than you.

In truth,
I've never felt more wanted
than when lightning glows the tinny white of wine,
closeness measured
by what smell precedes it.

Afraid, I think, of what I am
that I like it here—that *wanted* is a precipice
where row drops into rain,

the moment a supercell could strike me,
that it chooses not to.

On being dead in Scipio, Utah

When you die, there'll be a town: a real town,
out between the cow skulls and the LDS homelands. I promise
you'll find your way here, eventually; everyone does—the interstate delivers us,
or the horseback trails.

You'll flock, with the other spirits, to a one-way street—asphalt split
and lined with sapling palms. At the end of the road you'll arrive
at a Chevron station, with a door on both sides:
one for truckers, the other for shimmering dead.

Just follow the ghosts of cowpokes, friendly, and traveling salesmen
that count the money they died with.

Inside, convenience-store Charon runs the register; he'll ring you up for a candy bar
or a ticket to the sweet beyond.
He still takes drachmas, or Visa, or a fistful of buffalo nickels.
He'll count them with too-long fingers, one by one.

Beneath the brim of his hat, you'll see
his eyes are made of cactus flowers, his cheeks of sand. They erode in layers
over bone, dusting up the counter—he breathes it all back in.

Come night, the ferryman packs his van of recently departed
and drives South, through a furnace of sandstone baked the color of snake-shed skin.
He smokes out the window; he never stops for gas.
Don't be afraid, of the desert blurring by. Go ahead—

tilt your neck out the window and look,
as you drive past pastures of zebras, emus, and buffalo, eating cheatgrass off the road
that divides you—

a stretch of highway where drivers burn through gas like cigarettes,
and no one remembers their names.



Sophia Gauthier was the runner-up for the 2021 National Federation of State Poetry Societies (NFSPS) William Stafford Award, and her work can be found in the 2021 *Encore* Anthology by NFSPS press. She earned a bachelor of arts from Lewis & Clark College and currently resides in Portland, Oregon, where she works with primates in medical research. Raised in Salt Lake City, she turns to the complex landscape and culture of Utah as her creative home.

Spencer Hamp

The Further Deaths of William Wyler



Or, separate men from boys, early even,
sautée dinner jackets with hometown firearms
in cocktails of active duty brine, to joust,
swap goose stories of creams of the crop
and academies left feeling chuffed.

Or, is she there next door still breathing,
raining down her voice on the parade,
knots of golden hair; strings of sesame
phonetically royal, doubly featured
getting decorated just because it's new.

Or, faulting a buttered alias worn out
on the call sheet, singling cowboy jaunts
across the buttressed county, big chariot,
flaunting bona fide pickles, and she
looks on from rural England surviving.

Or, looking over shoulder at a novel from
the canon, knowing nothing of Sparis
or Pain, wanting the sensual von Sternberg
version, Gary Cooper forgetting his shirt
back on, holding a gun like it's his son.

Iron Symptoms

Its shape wrought thoughtfully, that lantern there,
of inauthentic design—or perhaps it is some old thing—
is what does capable transportation nonetheless.
Eye-wide portalling, simply a vague past, a spell.

Ensorcels not a chapter of my present life, because
I never freshed colonial, never pillaged tropics in
my boots, never hunted lamplit London ever, at all,
nor do I really want to. A founder's sickness, a pioneer's.

The conquistadors made it farther than imaginable;
see winded cypress frogged in Spanish moss, stuck
by adoptive fathers neither borrowed nor for rent,
the very icons of their conquest rendered benign inside time.

This certain institution. Predator twirls grayed,
in flocks beautified, grown accustomed, and brutalizes
drifted antiquity. It's the smell of soil at Tenōchtitlan;
the sabotaging hallows of iron, and the ghost mothers.

Continue spinning, a steel celebration of aerodynamics
recalling missionary church bells. You hate wind chimes,
I remember, their invasive chaos. Like to monetize
eclipse-chasing, insistent on gentrifying the sky's bedding.

Cortés understood Moctezuma once he recognized
himself and was, at last, most afraid. Naturalizing his
acts of terror before lunching on apoplexy science,
building showrooms of tarnation in museum ratios.

Relics of a pissier johnson, galvanizing explorers' groves
to include establishing notions for dive bars and truffle sport.
And the two of us, standing on the stoop of histories encased,
crossing the partition, to straighten the frame of oil paintings.

After Weevils Killed the Sugar Beets

The land was long when measured out by walnut and the like,
and then by avocado and, of course, by men.
The land is long and divided into squares where Oklahomans
shook with Mexican movers in the orchards,
conferring them the American grain allotted to some other persons
their fought share. With it comes the build
of faith, self-serviced on a hillclimb. Possibly, folks made it up
Mount Shasta in the shadow of the war dam
ahead of schedule, but the harvest decades its growth. Maybe centuries.
At the very least, imagination reaps and drives a person
tame enough to organize the same cut slice of earth. How else would
we create, had not the boss called it blessings
to concentrate your fingers 'round an orange and pull for hours?

Lying in Salinas, shot from a thicket, the mule left its mark
on a family dreaming tycoon illustrations.
Inherent portraits depict the loss of members to the big C, and
to art school, that kind of suicide. Trailing fortune from
the Gila, there is a way of trapping nothing and spinning something
like gold from it, predicated on hurrying and hiding
murders. The wave must be got before the crest, told coastal fortunes.
Mastering, that's work. Scraps of pimped bibles are buried,
knowingly, when one can stomach their own dirt enough to spade.
Do California lobsters want to be eaten? A lesser imp
that's tanked for a year and kept as a spiny pet. A clock is ticking in them.
Fast is for novices. The land is long and won
by a series of explosions, a loudness crowded back by extended surprise,
gesticulating mad over regions where monied hideouts
don't belong. The land was long for rookies to attempt target practice,
shouldering new weapons aimed at the Yucca horizon.



Spencer Hamp is a multi-disciplinary artist originally from Seattle. His professional background is in social work, theater, and film. He began self-publishing last year. One project engages the digital consciousness, resulting in an expanding archive of poems at internetbellyache.com. Another project is an episodic zine called *DECIDUOUS: MEDITATIONS IN GRADUATING THE CREATIVE PROCESS*, produced on a consumer HP printer and mailed out for free from his current home in Brooklyn, NY. He has one dog and is married to someone he loves. His writing can be found on Instagram at @internetbellyache.

IN THAT CLASSROOM

RYAN SHOEMAKER


Aaron Lynn

In the fall of 2009, I got a job teaching math at Westside Alternative, an inner-city high school in Phoenix that didn't require any certification or formal experience, just a college degree. My parents were baffled. They couldn't understand why I didn't take a job with the engineering firm I'd interned for my last semester at Brigham Young University. But I wanted to do something altruistic, at least for a while, before I settled into life.

At the end of my first week at Westside, the school's founder and principal, a man named McCaren, called me to his office.

We sat across from each other, separated by a broad faux oak desk bare except for a copy of my resume and an orange Monster Energy drink that had marked the desktop with a half dozen wet circles.

McCaren leaned back. Something deep in the chair groaned as he shifted his weight. "Brigham Young University," he said. "BS in mechanical engineering, *magna cum laude*. An internship with HDR Engineering." He looked at me, starting at the thick soles of my brown Oxfords and moving up to the top of my head. "I want to put you on the school's homepage. A picture, a short bio." McCaren laid a large, freckled hand over my resume. "I want parents to see this. Someone like you could boost our enrollment."

I felt a rush of heat rise through my shirt collar and into my cheeks. "Me?" I said. "I've never even taught before. I don't see how I can boost enrollment."

But there was something I'd wanted to talk to McCaren about. It was a week into school and I wanted to do more. "What about an engineering club?" I asked. "I could be the advisor. Projects, field trips, competitions with other schools. Maybe that would help enrollment."

McCaren breathed a little chuckle that whistled through his nostrils. "I don't think most of these kids can even spell *engineering*. We have a hip-hop club and a dance club. That's what these kids like." He stared at me without saying anything, then looked down at my resume. "You were a Mormon missionary. Where?"

"Los Angeles," I said. "Mostly the San Fernando Valley."

McCaren leaned forward, resting the dry knobs of his elbows on the desk. "All those dusty, blue-collar towns," he said. "Same kind of kids here, right? Marginal-

ized, at-risk. You wanted to save them, didn't you? A mission. Isn't that the point?"

I wasn't quite sure what he was getting at. "I wanted to help them."

"You want to help these kids?" McCaren asked. "You want to save them? Get them through the door and into a seat. I hear you're doing great things in your classroom, but don't make it too hard. They'll bolt the minute it gets tough. We can't afford that. Sixty dollars per student per day. That's what the State pays us. No students, no *dinero*." McCaren lifted the Monster to his lips, not blinking, not taking his eyes from me, then set the can on my resume. "This is triage, just the basics to get these kids into the working class. That's how you save them."

I nodded but didn't agree.

Daniel Garcia. He was in my sixth period algebra class, hair razored to his skull, sagging beige Dickies, a pressed white T-shirt that caught him just above the knees, a hard copy of at least half the male students at Westside. He'd emerged from the same brokenness and poverty as most of these kids—the absent father, the undocumented mom, an older brother who'd dropped out of school—yet he showed up every day, did his homework, got A's. He'd scored in the ninetieth percentile on the state standardized math test.

After that first week of school, he'd started staying after class, and once the other students were gone he'd tell me something he'd read about.

"You know, Cannon," he might say so quickly that he'd have to gulp for air between each sentence, "that NASA just found this habitable planet four light-years from earth. And did you know that life on earth might have come from Mars. Like maybe an asteroid knocked off some piece of Mars that came to earth with microbes on it." As we spoke, he'd cock his head toward the front of the classroom, his eyes bouncing between me and the open door.

He talked about wanting to build satellites for NASA or design missile defense systems. And the way he talked—it was more than a pipe dream, more substantive than the way his friends jawed about their ridiculous plans of dropping a rap album or walking on to the Phoenix Suns. And then Daniel's friends would show up at my classroom door and something would change on his face, a sudden air of indifference, not a care in the world beyond the moment. And then he'd leave.

What would happen to Daniel after graduation? As the months passed, the question took on greater urgency. There he was in his senior year, no college acceptance letter, no scholarship, no money squirreled away for even a semester at Phoenix Community College, no plan beyond high school. What could get him out of the inner city, away from his friends, toward college? A job? But where? An internship? Doing what? I couldn't think of anything.

And then one night in January, as I sat in my apartment watching the evening news with its repeating loop of growing fatigue and national discontent for the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, I had a thought that came to me suddenly. What about the military for Daniel? I had my own doubts about the war, its legality, financial costs, human rights violations, but the idea of Daniel enlisting seemed to have a sound logic. The drawdown had already begun. The President had committed to a complete withdrawal of American ground forces in the new year. The war might be over before Daniel even finished boot camp. He'd probably be safer in the military than he'd ever be on Phoenix's Westside. And wasn't the military just what Daniel needed, what most of these kids needed, the routine, the discipline, the professional development, the boon of the G.I. Bill?

I wanted to bring all this up with Daniel, to step out of the easy back-and-forth of our brief afterschool conversations and speak with blunt candor about the world beyond Westside and his diminishing options if he kept his present course. But there was never time before his friends showed up, all giggles and grabassing, to lead him away.

Two weeks later I stayed after school to finish some lesson plans for the next day, long enough that it was dark when I walked to my car. I hadn't eaten since breakfast and my stomach growled with a raw, aching emptiness. I kept thinking about a taco truck not far from the school where I'd started eating once or twice a week. That's what I wanted to fill the emptiness in my stomach.

As I squinted at the menu printed on the side of the truck, a thin body draped in baggy blue jeans and an oversize Phoenix Suns hoodie stood at the stainless steel counter in front of me, picking over a handful of change, a spattering of nickels and dimes in a mound of pennies. The woman who always took my order, gray-streaked hair pulled into a tight ponytail and coppery, sun-spotted cheeks, leaned through a narrow window above the counter, a single taco on a square of wax paper in her left hand. She gave me a nod of recognition and an apologetic half-smile. The thin body said, "*Lo siento*," a voice I immediately recognized as Daniel's.

I felt a sudden, heavy sadness press into me as I watched Daniel sift through the change in his hand.

I stepped to the counter. "Four more for him," I said to the woman. "And I'll take two *carne asada* and two *lengua*. And two Cokes. The *medio litro* in the bottle."

Daniel swung around. "Hey, Mr. Cannon," he said in a far-off, dreamy voice. He raised his handful of change and giggled. "I'm short a little."

I pulled out my wallet. "It's on me."

We sat at a collapsible card table in front of the truck, on flimsy plastic lawn chairs, and ate. A smell vented from Daniel's hoodie, something of skunk and pine strong enough to cut through the grilled meat and diced onions and cilantro on my plate. I could see it in Daniel's eyes, the raw red there.

He held a taco pinched between his thumb and index finger, hunched forward, shoulders rounded. He finished it in three quick bites, and then took another taco from his plate. "Where'd you get a taste for *lengua*?" he asked.

Traffic rushed by on 27th Avenue. I looked down at my plate but suddenly had no appetite. My left foot, as if counting time, beat a quick, nervous rhythm against the gritty asphalt. I kept waiting for Daniel's friends to appear, from behind the Dollar Store across the busy street, from the dirt alleyway on the other side of the taco truck, to call him away into the night. "Los Angeles," I said. "I was a Mormon missionary there."

Daniel's fingertips gleamed with a translucent layer of pork grease. "You ever try brain tacos, Cannon? *Cabeza*." His cheeks bulged with meat and tortilla.

I wagged my finger. "That's where I draw the line. No brains, no *chiciornes*, no cow stomach."

"You're talking about my comfort foods," Daniel said. "*Chiciornes, menudo*. My mom used to make scrambled eggs and cow brains for breakfast."

A blue Civic with tinted windows pulled into the parking lot, idling in front of the taco truck, bass thumping, muffler wheezing, chrome rims spinning. I waited, expecting the windows to lower, expecting bloodshot eyes and dumb, grinning faces to emerge from the darkness, Daniel's friends calling to him. But the car pulled forward and then merged into the heavy traffic.

Daniel pointed at the moon. "You know there's probably water up there, in the shadows and underneath the ground. NASA thinks so. I just read about it."

I touched my bottle of Coke, felt its chill on my palm, heard the pop of tiny bubbles. "Where'd you read that?"

Daniel lifted a thin circle of radish and popped it in his mouth. "The library. I go Saturdays when my mom and brother work. Just me and the bums there."

I looked at the moon, and then back to Daniel. "So what happens after graduation? You hang out in the library every day? No college?"

"College?" Daniel rubbed his fingers together. "Got to have money."

"Last year, didn't the school counselor talk to you about college?" My voice ticked up a notch. "Applications? Scholarships? Financial aid?"

Daniel laughed, perhaps at my ignorance. "It's all about attendance, Cannon. That's how Westside works." Daniel rattled the change in the hoodie pocket. "Got to fill the seats to get that state money."

"It's a shitty school," I said, shocked at this admission. "Barely a school." I could hear something in my voice, something rushed and persistent and frustrated, and I knew Daniel could hear it, too. "But what about you, probably the smartest kid at Westside? Satellites, missile defense, the moon. How's that going to happen? Or do you just plan to read about interesting things?"

Daniel folded his arms across his chest and looked down at the table. "My brother wants me to go into business with him, mowing lawns. I thought I'd save for a couple years and then go to college."

"A couple years? A lot can change in a couple years," I said.

Across 27th Avenue a city bus pulled to the curb with a screech of metal and the hiss of air, disgorging its passengers, old men and women with plastic grocery bags twined around their wrists. "Two years," I said. "Three years, four years, five years."

Daniel looked up at me. I could see his anger. "What do I do, Cannon?" His hands had seized into fists. And then he pulled a handful of change from the pocket of his hoodie and let it spill onto the table. "This is it, all I got."

We stared at each other across the table. This was new territory, a place beyond the breezy back and forth of our afterschool conversations, more consequential and far-reaching.

"You join the military," I said. "You get out of Phoenix. You learn something. Satellites. Missile defense. Electronics. And then you go to college on Uncle Sam's dime."

Daniel nodded. "The military," he said, without surprise, as if he'd said the word a hundred times. "*Army Strong*. *Be All You Can Be*. They send me stuff, pens and key chains. They even call me. Staff Sargent Speers. They make you feel like the number one draft pick. My brother says it's slavery."

"The war's almost over," I said. "People are done with it. You enlist and spend your time stateside. Unless there's something better here?"

Daniel ran his hand over his shaved head, the short hairs bristling under his palm. The hood fell away.

The traffic rushed past. My question lingered in the silence between us.

The day after graduation Daniel enlisted in the Army. A week later he shipped out to Fort Benning, Georgia. I was proud of him. I thought I'd saved Daniel from McCaren's status quo narrative.

That summer and fall, we exchanged letters. He told me all about boot camp, the humidity, KP duty, PT at dawn, the hours of classes in marksmanship and orienteering, but recounted not with disdain but through the eyes of someone growing into a new life. He did well enough to be assigned to the Signal Corps for advanced training.

In February, Daniel's unit deployed to Iraq, but he wasn't worried. The grunts coming back, he wrote, were bored off their asses. He'd be under ten feet of concrete in the Green Zone teaching Iraqi intelligence officers about satellite systems. But he said he wouldn't mind seeing some action, just a little, just enough to earn his Army Combat Badge.

And then it was early April, the Friday before spring break. I was into my second year at Westside. I sat at my desk after school and graded midterms. It'd been a day of outbursts and distraction, students barely able to concentrate, their minds absorbed with the prospect of a week free

from school. A steady electronic beat and the heavy smell of fried food drifted through my closed door, the hip-hop club continuing the day's merriment in the cafeteria down the hall from my classroom.

I was tired, ready to toss the midterms in my bag and head home. The next morning, I planned to drive to my parents' house outside Seattle to spend the break. I still needed to pack. And then I heard a tapping at the door, so quiet I wondered if it was the music.

I walked to the door and opened it. Two men, not much older than some of my students, stood there under the hallway's harsh fluorescent lighting, brown skin and thin mustaches, their eyes shadowed under black, sun-bleached baseball hats fading into the color of a dark plum.

The man who'd knocked was short and thin, the physical opposite of his friend, who was taller and thick through the chest. Both wore long-sleeve, button-up shirts flecked with a dusting of dirt and grass. A whiff of gasoline and oil mingled with the frying food from the cafeteria.

"Mr. Cannon?" the shorter one asked.

"Yes." I didn't know them. I thought they might be part of the grounds crew McCaren had hired to mow the lawns and cut back the tall oleander that edged the front of the school.

"I'm Diego, Daniel's brother."

He spoke so softly, his head bent forward, his mouth pointed at the carpet, that I barely heard him above the music. I motioned them in and then closed the door.

It took a moment, but I remembered him from Westside's graduation ceremony in June, pulling at the collar of his blue-striped button-up shirt, shifting his weight from foot to foot as his mother, in a sleeveless yellow summer dress, a little unsteady in black high heels, fawned over Daniel, straightening the golden tassel on his cap and smoothing the front of his royal blue gown. "Daniel mentioned you," I said, walking back to my desk and easing into the chair. "He said you were at Westside a couple years back."

"Dropped out," Diego said. "Had to work." His voice had a nervous quiver. His eyes were red and watery under the bill of his hat. And then I remembered something that had bothered me, but which I'd forgotten until that moment: the way Diego had looked at me at graduation, the briefest of looks, how he'd scanned the faculty sitting on stage until our eyes locked. Something bitter and angry passed through his gaze.

I looked over at Diego's friend. He stood by the closed door, head turned away from me, as if he were listening for something. When I turned back to Diego, he was suddenly so close to my desk that I flinched. I could smell sweat and gasoline, dust and mowed grass.

"Have you thought about finishing school?" I said. "Westside has a free night program."

"Fuck this school," Diego said. "And fuck you." He pointed at me with a grease-smudged index finger, stabbing at the space between us. His lips curled back to show a row of clenched teeth. "You put it in his fucking head. Money for college. Honor. Discipline. I told him it was all

bullshit. I told him to read some history, not what they give you in school. I kept asking him why he'd want to fight for a country that hates him."

I felt the tap of blood in my ears and an electric tingle in my fingertips. I raised my hands from the desk. "I'm not sure what you're getting at here." I looked at the classroom door. The friend stood there, now staring at me.

Diego's upper lip trembled. "They came last night in their uniforms, with their medals and their shiny shoes." The words came from deep in his throat, almost a growl. "Then they told us how he volunteered for some stupid patrol. And that's all they'd say. And this." Diego pulled a folded paper from his back pocket and held it in his fist. "You know how much? $100,000 for my brother's life. You think it's enough? Even for the poor?"

All at once, I saw the carnage of the evening news from the past seven years rise up fresh in my mind, thick, crumpled armor, cratered asphalt, oily smoke dimming the desert sun. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." I heard the words, like a prayer, looping through my mind in a kind of distant reverb, and then I knew they were my words. I felt myself leaning forward in my chair, my elbows on the desk, my hands clasped together. I felt an unspeakable loss, felt a piercing guilt, but I suddenly understood why Diego had come to my classroom. The music pulsed through the door. I understood that no one would hear me. "I never forced him," I said. "I thought it would help pay for college. Please."

Diego brought his fists down on the desktop. A ceramic cup of sharpened pencils spilled onto the floor. "You didn't have anything to lose," Diego shouted. "You fucking *pinche pendejo*?" And then he broke into Spanish, the words raging out of him, too quickly for me to understand. But their meaning was clear.

Diego reached into his front pocket. Something in his hand caught the overhead lights. He flicked his wrist. Then I saw it, the black handle of a knife and a curved steel blade with a serrated edge. I stood up quickly, the chair shooting back and ricocheting off the metal chalk tray. In a moment like that you understand what a knife can do to your body.

That classroom. There you are, so young, smiling, a teacher, only for a brief moment of your long life, and there they are down there, your students, asses parked in graffitied chairs, elbows on dingy desks—hungry, worried, scared, tired, barely able to keep their eyes open.

And for years after your time at Westside—in fact, for the rest of your privileged life—these are the thoughts that will haunt you in those small hours of the night as you consider who built that classroom, nail by nail and stick by stick:

Eleventh grade, your winning long jump at a track meet that sent you to regions, a half-inch farther than Atticus Gacoki, a Kenyan immigrant from another school, and how the man holding the measuring tape looked at you and winked, a sly smile, like a secret, creasing his pale, whiskered face.

You'll remember your grandfather, a retired civil engineer for the City of Idaho Falls, a former leader in your church, a bishop, a counselor in the stake presidency, how one summer day you rode with him in his new Lexus SUV, heading across town to hit a bucket of balls at Sand Creek Golf Course, when two black men in a cream-colored Escalade pulled up next to you at a stop light, enraged that your grandfather had cut them off, and how the driver leaned out the window and called him a cracker motherfucker. And then, before taking a quick right and speeding away, the man spat a wad of yellow phlegm that splattered the top of the windshield. And your grandfather, a deep red sprouting through the collar of his blue Calloway golf shirt, saying in a voice you hardly recognized: "They're all over town now." And then he looked at you, as if he were about to share a secret. "Fifty years ago," he said, "we would have stuck a fork in those niggers and turned them over."

And you, a few years later, in your starched white shirt and black missionary tag, teaching a young, undocumented couple from El Salvador about God's plan of happiness, and you, practically euphoric with what your mission president preached that morning at a training meeting. "Elders and sisters," he said, gripping the sides of the pulpit, his eyes misty. "As God's faithful servants, you have more power and authority than any worldly king or queen." You looked at the man and woman, at their worn clothes, at their tan, round faces, at the slight decay on the edges of their front teeth. How you wanted to save them!

But on that Friday before spring break, in that classroom, a knife pointed at your guts, you can only process a single thought: how the world, once so safe, is now rife with danger.

Call it luck, call it coincidence, call it divine intervention, call it nothing, but as I stood by my desk and pleaded with Diego, the fire alarm above the door suddenly blared a deafening screech that filled the room. Diego winced and brought his hands to his ears. The classroom door flew open. McCaren was there with Dan Wilson, the P.E. teacher and football coach. White smoke swirled above the fluorescent lights in the hallway and drifted into the classroom.

McCaren rushed in, waving his arms. He pushed Diego's friend toward the door. "Out," he yelled. "Out, out. There's a fire in the kitchen."

I bolted from the room and down the hallway with McCaren at my side. I looked back and saw Diego standing in the classroom doorway. His face was blank, no hint of surprise at this interruption to whatever plan he'd had—as if this were just another injustice he couldn't fix.

Outside, I hurried to my car, pausing only for a moment to look at a pickup truck parked next to me, a blistered, brown Toyota whose bed sagged with the weight of a lawnmower, a weed eater, and a blue tarp bulging with mesquite branches.

And then I drove to my apartment, a gated complex in north Mesa with a lush, landscaped courtyard and a swimming pool surrounded by

palm trees. I wanted to feel safe. But I couldn't sit still, couldn't help tensing when I heard footsteps shuffle past my front door, couldn't help peering through the thin slats of the blinds if a snatch of conversation carried up from the courtyard. I couldn't sleep, a guilt churning in me, wanting out, yet I felt something even more immediate and urgent: a primitive desire for self-preservation in a world I suddenly couldn't control.

And as I drove north the next morning through vast, isolated regions, scanning the rearview mirror, scanning the parking lots of rest areas, that crippling sense of menace eased as the sun set and the arid land gave way to the forested mountains of western Washington, country roads, and finally to the narrow gravel lane where I grew up.

"We ordered Chinese food," my mom said as I stood in our living room. The windows were dark with night, and only the TV illuminated the room with an eerie white light.

"How's life in the trenches?" my dad asked. He was sunk deep into his plush La-Z-Boy, his face reflecting the electric white of the TV. A plate heaped with food rested on his round belly. He squinted at the TV. A man's giant head floated there above a black and white banner that said: *Can Iraq Defend Itself*?

"War," I said.

I eased onto the couch, suddenly so exhausted. I nodded off, but not fully. I could hear the mechanical *rat-tat-tat* of machine guns, the scrape of tank tracks, and the fuzzy drawl of American voices on radios, all of it a background to the man's rabid voice that pitched higher and higher.

I heard Daniel's name. My eyes snapped open. There, spread across the TV screen, I saw a picture of Daniel. He stood next to an American flag, in a beret and a black formal jacket with stamped brass buttons, the corners of his mouth curled into the faintest suggestion of a grin. A banner running across the bottom of the screen said: *U.S. Troop Killed in IED Attack Outside Baghdad*. I felt on the edge of something, ready to bury my face in my hands and weep.

I looked at my parents, waiting for them to acknowledge this lost life, a hand to the mouth, a mournful shake of the head, a word or phrase about the poor family. I wanted an entrance to unburden myself, to free this sadness and guilt. But my parents didn't even notice Daniel, didn't even look at the TV screen. They were in the middle of a petty argument, my dad complaining about the Egg Foo Young on his plate and the measly portions, and my mom telling him that if he cared so much, he should have chosen the restaurant.

I stood, unnoticed, and walked outside. A full moon floated on the horizon. The air had the warm touch of spring, but a chill drifted up from the damp lawn, like a cold breath on my face and bare arms.

Monday morning I called McCaren and told him I wouldn't return.

"What you're feeling," he said, his voice barely more than a whisper, as if he were at my side, his mouth close to my ear. "God, I can't even

imagine. One of your students. Some kid you tried to help." I heard the crackle of tiny bubbles and a rush of liquid. I could imagine the sweaty can, the pink tip of a tongue sliding over freckled lips. "But don't you want to pull some good out of this? For these kids. Don't you want to save them?" His breathing quickened. "We'll put his picture in the lobby. We'll make a little garden memorial with a plaque. These kids need a hero. Hell, why not name the school after him? Parents will love it. He's a patriot—"

I hung up.

That night at dinner, I told my parents I was done teaching. They looked at each other across the open pizza box in the center of the table. Something passed between them, as if this were the end to some private conversation about me that had started long ago. They seemed relieved. "Don't feel bad," my mom said, dabbing the corners of her mouth with a napkin. "I'm sure you did a lot of good. They were lucky to have you that long." My dad held a slice of pizza to his mouth. "A high school teacher with an engineering degree." He shook his head. "That equation just never made sense to me."

But what I never told my parents, or anyone, was how the next morning I drove to the Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Federal Way to put my name to paper to enlist as a private in the United States Army. I imagined a grand gesture to calm my guilt: stepping from that classroom, stepping from a privileged history, standing shoulder to shoulder with Daniel and Diego, with all of my students. And as I drove, I wanted to believe that's what I'd do, as quiet country roads turned into crowded highways and then into wide, congested city streets, even as I sat in front of the Recruiting Station and watched in its streaked windows the warped reflection of strip malls and drab, gated apartment complexes. A cold wind pushed a torn plastic grocery bag past the Station's glass double doors as a low, dark cloud began to shed a spray of fine droplets over the windshield. The car was warm, the seat comfortable, and the city beyond the rain-flecked windows only a soft, distant hum. I never went inside.



Ryan Shoemaker's debut story collection, *Beyond the Lights*, is available through No Record Press. T.C. Boyle called it a collection that "moves effortlessly from brilliant comedic pieces to stories of deep emotional resonance." Ryan's fiction has appeared in *Gulf Stream*, *Santa Monica Review*, *Booth*, and *Juked*, among others. He is an assistant professor of English at Southern Utah University. Find him at RyanShoemaker.net.

WINTER TRAINS

DOUG RAMSPECK



Troy is looking at his father's boots. They are perched outside the back door. They have mud on them. His father isn't inside them. Troy holds a plastic garbage bag in his hands.

He takes the garbage out to the bin then returns to the kitchen. He eats his cereal while his mother smokes at the kitchen sink, her back to him.

Troy says, "They're by the back door, Mom. Dad's boots."

She turns, squinting. "What are you going on about?"

"Dad's work boots. By the back door."

His mother studies him in a way that makes him look down at his orange juice.

He says, "With the steel toes. You know how much he likes them. He'll come back to get them."

His mother laughs a bitter snort. "He's stupid, but not that stupid."

At school it's hard to listen. The snow coming down outside the classroom window is a white veil. It dreams itself. Troy keeps imagining that everyone keeps turning to stare at him. He feels the intrusion of their eyes. They probably heard what happened on the TV news. He closes his eyes while his teacher says something about the Spanish-American War. Her words slip one into the next, blurring.

His mom isn't home from work yet when he gets back after school. He watches TV. He looks in the refrigerator but finds nothing he wants. He steps out on the back stoop. He doesn't have a coat. The cold assaults him.

His father's boots haven't moved.

Thursday a car is parked in the gravel driveway. Troy steps off the school bus. On the side of the car, it says "SHERIFF Miller County." Troy is nearly at the house when two men in uniform come out. They nod hi to him going past but say nothing.

Troy's mom, when he goes in, is on her hands and knees. She is picking up shards from a broken coffee cup on the kitchen floor.

"Watch where you step," she says.

Troy says, "Mom."

She waves him away from the broken cup.

Troy says again, "Mom."

She stops dabbing with the paper towels. "What?"

Troy says, "Is Dad OK?"

She pushes out her lips. It's an expression he doesn't understand. "No," she says.

"Mom," Troy says one more time.

She doesn't look up this time. She says, "He's not fine. OK? He'll never be fine again. Quit asking."

"What happened?"

She scowls at him and says, "That man he got in the fight with died today. OK?"

Troy starts to speak but stops. Words can't remember how to form.

His mom says, "That's what they came by to tell me. Your dad got in a fight for no reason at a hardware store, and now we have to turn him in if he comes back. Or we're in trouble too."

"Mom," Troy says.

He dreams that night that he is walking through the snow. He hears his dad out there somewhere. Hears him breathing, like sudden gusts of wind.

It upsets Troy so much he wakes. He gets up and goes into the hallway. It's quiet in the house. He walks into the kitchen. He opens the back door to the cold. He turns on the outside light.

There are the boots.

At school the next day, people ask Troy now about his father. If he did it. Troy doesn't know what to say. Sometimes he says no. Sometimes he simply looks away.

At lunch, Gordy—Troy's best friend—asks if he knows where his father is hiding. Troy shrugs.

After school, by their lockers, Gordy asks if his dad killed the man with his bare hands. He sounds impressed.

Troy says, "I don't know."

Kev—who is there with them—sips his Coke and says, "You can kill someone by punching their nose bone back into their brain."

"You're lying," Gordy says. "It's not even bone there."

"Then how can you have a broken nose?" Kev asks. "Think about it." When Troy gets home from school that day, he flops down on the couch and imagines it's a raft he's riding. He hears a train horn, so he stands and crosses to the window. The train floats past on a raised bed of tracks. Troy leans closer to the window and glances down. Then he goes up higher on his tiptoes. His heart is jackhammering.

His dad's boots are gone.

"Dad was here," Troy says breathlessly when his mom gets home from work.

She blinks as she comes in from the garage. It's not a good kind of blinking. She says, "What?"

"His boots. He came home and took his boots."

His mom shakes her head. "I threw them out," she says.

Troy doesn't quite follow. "What?"

"I got tired of looking at them. Tired of being reminded what he did."

"Mom," Troy says.

"Good riddance," his mom says. "The sooner you realize that, the better. Best case, he's in prison till you're my age. You want to keep thinking about him all that time?"

"You threw them out?" Troy asks.

"Don't ask it like that."

Troy finds them later. In the big green garbage bin at the side of the garage. One lies on top. The other has slipped down the side and is waiting at the bottom.

He carries the boots clutched to his chest. Into the kitchen then down the hall. He sits on his bed and holds one of the boots in his lap. Then he takes both boots and shoves them underneath the bed.

Later, his mom knocks. He doesn't answer. The door comes open.

His mom says, "Come help with dinner."

Troy doesn't move. He doesn't breathe. He doesn't speak. He is statuary.

"Troy," his mom says, "stop sulking."

On Saturday morning, Troy sleeps late. His mom is leaving for work as he steps into the kitchen. He's in bare feet. There is frost on the windows. He toasts a bagel and hears his mother's car go down the driveway. He spreads cream cheese on the bagel. He carries it into the living room and sits cross-legged on the couch. He watches TV. He licks cream cheese from his fingers.

Later, the back door comes open. He hears it. Troy gets up and crosses into the kitchen. A man is there. The man has his sweatshirt hood over his head. The man is his dad.

He hugs Troy so hard that Troy can't breathe. His dad smells sweaty, even though it's cold out.

He holds Troy at arm's length and says, "Where's your mom?"

"Work," Troy says.

His dad thinks it over. He leans against the counter.

"You have any money?" he asks.

"What?" Troy says.

"That Christmas money. You still got it?"

"Some," Troy says.

"Can I have it? I hate to ask, but it's desperation time."

They go down the hallway to Troy's room. Troy hid the cash inside his catcher's mitt. Twenty-two dollars.

"Thanks, kiddo," his dad says. "You're a lifesaver."

Troy follows his dad into his dad's bedroom. His dad opens the jewelry box on top of the dresser. He stuffs a few bright rings and bracelets and earrings and necklaces into his coat pocket. They go back to the kitchen. His dad reaches high into the pantry and pulls down a ceramic red pot with a lid. Money is inside it. This surprises Troy. His dad stuffs the bills in his pocket then says, "I've got to go now, Troy-boy. Sorry, but I do. I wanted to see you first. That's why I came back. You know I love you—right?"

Troy's eyes are blurry.

His dad hugs him hard again. "Tell your mom I'm sorry," he says.

Then he steps out the back door and looks both ways. Troy, meanwhile, is stuck in place. Cold air washes over him through the open door. He knows he should say something, should ask his dad something, but instead he just watches his dad walks quickly across the frozen grass. In the direction of the garage. The hood of his dark blue sweatshirt is back up again. He doesn't look back. He heads toward the railroad tracks.

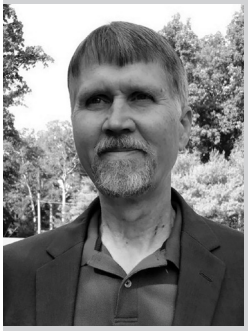
"Dad!" Troy finally calls out, remembering. But his dad doesn't hear. His dad is past the garage. His dad is climbing the fence and starting toward the tracks.

Troy races through the kitchen and down the hall. He finds the boots under his bed. He carries them clutched to his chest. He runs. He is wearing only his pajamas. His feet are bare. He runs across the yard, past the garage, and toward the fence.

"Dad!" he calls out. "Dad!"

He throws the boots onto the far side of the chain-link fence. He climbs it. He picks the boots back up then runs up the steep incline. He stands high on the railroad tracks and looks in every direction across the neighborhood. Smoke seeps out of a few chimneys. A dog is barking somewhere.

Troy doesn't see his dad anywhere. And now he worries. He worries that he doesn't know where his dad is going, but he won't have his boots when he gets there. Troy cries a little at the thought as he starts back toward the house. The boots keep slipping from his grip. He has to stop to pick them up. He holds them tighter. It's a longer walk back than it was there. He feels like he might just keep walking and walking forever, the boots hard and cold against him, while his father gets farther and farther away.



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CHOSEN

SRI CRAVEN



You are excited to be chosen! After no hope whatsoever, you make it! You have perfect marks in each of your subjects. And, he notices! You think sixth form is the very best!

***

It is the eighties. Middle-class New Delhi—*Dilli* for insiders, and you don't count yourself among them even if you are born here—is populated by tall light-skinned dewy girls with shiny hair, and there you are, short, dark, and two curly oily braids to boot! So typical of your family! "So *Soath* Indd-yunn!" the fair and lovely girls mock, their pretty pink mouths unable to rid their pretty vicious tongues of the native twist and bite. Not Soath, you dimwits, South, and not South either, you nincompoops, Tamil. Your invectives are lost on them. Pearls before swine, you shake your head while they laugh. These girls with imperfect English, but perfect legs. You hate your mother for not letting you shorten your uniform by those critical two inches. You beg her to stop massaging your scalp with sesame oil every single day. You hate your father for not helping you overcome your genetic deficiencies by at least having a car and a chauffeur to bring you to school. Your only hope in the face of these glaring shortcomings is English.

***

Dings, everyone calls them. "They are not like us," your mother announces firmly. "They are *exactly* like us," your aunt's high-pitch follows. Your mother's rambunctious younger sister turns to you in her trademark loud singsong, "*Vaat*! Yet another *ding* teacher this year, unh? *Vaat* is it this time—Brown, or Black, or Green, or Red?" And the whole clan cackles while you draw yourself up proudly, push back your glasses from the bridge of your snub nose, and say in *your* trademark imperiousness, "It's Michael, actually, like George Michael, the singer." No MTV for another decade, but you devour the pictures of music stars in the magazines that your rich classmates bring to school from their family trips to England. "But," you continue, "he's Mr. *Justin* Michael." Your aunt looks at you with something in her eyes that you cannot read. "They are British-ers," your father's low voice offers. "They are nothing but lower-class fools," your aunt's husband bellows. "They are stupid," your boy cousin sneers. "They are immoral," your girl cousin hisses. They are. . . they are. . . they are. . . . These pronouncements about the dings—Anglo-Indians—are everywhere. "British," you say turning to your father, for you know that he is proud of your English. Everyone stares at you. Your aunt trills, "Oh, *vaat*, Miss Ding herself or *vaat*?" She and her family guffaw. Your father beams at you.

Your aunt's family visits every weekend, fellow Southern expatriates in the hostile capital city. "We two, ours two," your uncle greets each time, ceaselessly repeating the government's family planning slogan, his sideways glance a declaration of your father's failure in having only one, and a girl at that! You are not permitted to call them 'aunt' and 'uncle' as you do in your head, only the appropriate words in your mother tongue. "Our words capture blood ties, not like English!" your mother insists. Your uncle transliterates, "Younger mother and younger father—our words have meanings! After all, we are your parents if anything should ever happen, *Shiva*, *Shiva*, to your parents!" The dread of that prospect locks your tongue, stalling your pontification about language and meaning. Your father who otherwise supports you in all things that have to do with English takes your mother's side in this matter. You know that this is to mollify your aunt and uncle who constantly chastise you for "blindly going after all things ding." "And, after all, for what! Imitating some lower-class idiot fool when *ow-err* language is thousands of years old!" Your uncle's sense of his Brahmin superiority never fails those moments even as his aptitude for British enunciation relentlessly does.

"*Vaat's* the special today?" the men ask the women about the food. The aromas of ghee and jaggery and milk and cardamom on a street filled with those of *garam masala* and *mooli parathas* remind you of your foreignness in your own country. The television blares another boring round of a one-day match between Australia and India, with your boy cousin

groaning, and your uncle saying, "Fools, don't know how to play and getting so much money! Something is off, I tell you. Bloody fools." An accountant, he suspects, long before the news breaks years later that the matches are fixed. Your father surfaces from behind his newspaper to offer grunts of assent, and occasional gems like "British-ers (Anglo Indians) are best players," or "Better half's" (wife's) cooking is smelling" (meant as a compliment), or "Co-brother (a man's sister-in-law's husband, who is like a sibling!), let us have coffee." You check off on three fingers: missing articles, malapropisms, neologisms.

You are solitary in your English amidst this crew. You love being educated by the Browns and Whites and Cookes and Michaels in a *bona fide* Anglo-Indian school where all the teachers speak English like the British do! You are aware that some of your teachers are exactly like you in their dark skin. But, unlike you, they have Jesus and names that do not suffocate in the mouths of the American and British and German tourists who frequent the city's oldest club where your father is chief provisions manager. Meaning, he is a glorified kitchen worker, responsible for not letting those "humbug fellows"—your father's favorite curse word—steal from the supplies that feed generationally wealthy well-connected families who eat at the restaurant. Your father never gets to eat there; neither does his family. Once a year, during the week of Christmas and New Year's Eve, your father brings you and your mother to the kitchen staff party, away from the club's patrons and their families. On these occasions, from behind the glorious hibiscus and extravagant plantain leaves screening the restaurant you spy on the club members and their blonde, blue-eyed guests. Very few 'dings' among them. Your father explains that this is because club members are by invitation or inheritance only, and "only very few Anglo-Indian fellows are having their fathers and grandfathers here in India." Your *Dilli* classmates with much more money and lighter skin color than most Anglo-Indians refer to these British descendants as "half lower castes," "native offspring of foreign fuckers," and "inside traitors," the Hindi phrases more corrosive than the English translations. Inheritance is destiny, you mutter, feeling like Thomas Hardy, knowing your father's name is never going to be enough to warrant your entry into the club, no matter how perfect your English.

***

And, then, you are chosen! Mr. Michael's attention strays from the class beauty—milk white skin and straight shiny hair designed not just to torture Mr. Michael, but *you*! How you hate her, this paragon of all virtue, Miss Perfect as you re-name her. You envy her physical beauty and glorious singing voice, but positively smart at her brains as she competes with you routinely in almost all subjects, except. . . yes, English! She and you shadow each other for first and second place every year. But in sixth form, suddenly, you note that she is well behind, earning a mere passing

score on math, English, and even Hindi, her mother tongue! You gleefully believe the rumors that the pretty chemistry teacher fudged a few points to pass the school's acknowledged beauty, the feted heroine of many an inter-school singing competition. You are not happy at the rumors that it is "by hook and crook"—another of your father's favorites—that your nemesis graduates with you to the seventh form.

Mr. Michael is handsome, oh, he is! So tall and fair and with a French beard, like the ones you see in the Hindi movies where handsome light-skinned North Indian actors play internationally traveled scions of wealthy families. A few days into seventh form, still jubilant at your academic prowess the previous year, your beating heart echoes Mr. Michael's footsteps walking up to you before the morning assembly. When he asks you to walk with him through his morning check of classrooms, ejecting the tired, the lazy, and the anxious out of classrooms and onto the field where the morning assembly takes place, you feel yourself stepping forward into your future. You practically walk on air. You are chosen not just to monitor your schoolmates, but as consort to the school's most handsome teacher, and your heart-held desire! Instead of sweating it out in the morning assembly under a searing sun, you get to look out from a classroom window onto the scene below after making sure everyone else is on that field. You are aware along all three layers of your teenage skin that Mr. Michael is closer than close, his warm thigh incrementally pressing up against yours.

You think about all the others who have been the objects of Mr. Michael's affections. You think about Miss Perfect, who, despite on her way to becoming "a stupids"—the math teacher's English hurting your head—was still *there*. On the blazing field below, as Mr. Michael and you watch from above, you note bitterly that she never turns dark in the sun, just pink! You have a stab in your stomach that Mr. Michael is looking at her. You look sideways at him, but your glasses do not cover your peripheral vision and you cannot see. Then, you feel Mr. Michael's arm around your shoulder. You are dying of too much joy. You are near fainting at the subtle but strong feeling creeping up your legs to your chest. You do not know how to react. You should smile archly and direct a sexy barb, the Mills and Boons you read in hiding whisper. You should look proud and offer a witty comment, the Jane Austens command. You should breathe heavily and stay silent, D.H. Lawrence suggests slyly. And, so, you stand there, loving the feel of Mr. Michael's attention, but not knowing how to respond. Your heroines have the right responses. You have a thumping heart and sweaty palms. The one thing you rely on to suffer your life abandons you entirely—words. Mr. Michael's hand slides down the front of your pristine uniform, his face leans toward yours, and your tongue loosens.

***

"Dings kiss on the mouth!" your girl cousin whispers at lunch so only you can hear. You look down your nose at your cousin in what you imagine is the appropriate response of someone who speaks the kind of English that gets them to read the evening news on television, and say, "Rey-a-llee? And, how *does* everyone else?" Your cousin draws back in such a literal gesture of shock that you can only laugh at the cliché of it. "Oh my God! You are like them!" she gasps, and, this time, everyone at the table hears it, and, your mother says "*Vaat*?" in a voice that sounds somewhere between fear and anger, while your father says, "Yes, yes, all her teachers say her English is just like theirs! One day, she will become an English teacher! Or, a news reader! Or, maybe even like Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India! No, *ammu*?" You cringe at the endearment—little one—much preferring moppet or darling. Your cousin starts up, "Actually, what we were saying was. . . " but you cut her off, and say in that supercilious tone used by the headmistress, "Daddy! 'No' and 'yes' are not used like we do in our language, please! And, Mummy, by the way, maybe next Sunday, we can have sandwiches with salami instead?" You think salami is a kind of red chutney, remembering Mr. Michael's breath up at the rooftop, where only the teachers and cleaning staff were allowed per school rules, and, that, only one at a time to prevent "any untoward conduct."

"*Vaat*, now eating like dings too, or what?" your aunt snorts, and your mother ends your campaign from going any further by saying, "I can start teaching you to cook." That shuts you up, because if there is one thing you have absolutely no interest in, it is in becoming your mother or her sister, stuck in kitchens on Sundays while the men have all the time in the world to rail at cricketers, read newspapers, and drink coffee. Also, you do not want to live in a home that smells of coconut oil, mustard, and curry leaves all the time, with bright sunlight pouring in from all angles to let in "wind and light," as the Tamil phrase goes. You prefer the dark interiors of Anglo-Indian homes, with their potted plants, little trinkets set carefully on lace doilies, and books on rattan shelves pushed up against walls. You imagine Mr. Michael pushing you up against a wall full of books. Your father's colleague Mr. Edward has a home like that, which your parents and you are invited to at Christmas. "Mr. Edward is not a real Anglo-Indian, only a *low-err* caste convert to Christianity" your uncle ensures a jab at your father's English aspirations for his progeny. At Mr. Edward's, your parents embarrass you by declining all food since the hosts are meat eaters, god forbid! What if the cake has eggs, despite "Mrs. Mary"—as your father addresses her—assuring everyone that it was a *vegetarian* cake from the *Brahmin* bakery nearby. Your mother's sweet voice, "Better safe than sorry, no? We are not taking any animal products, being Iyers, you see." You want to die! Just to spite your parents' terrible English, and your father's spinelessness in not standing up to your mother, you say equally sweetly, "Mrs. *Edward*, I'd be *so* pleased to have a slice, and *thank you*! I *adore* Christmas. Praise be unto the Lord!" Your

mother stares daggers at you, but your father positively shines because your English is *so much better* than convent-educated Mrs. Mary's! As the sugary confection goes down your throat, you pretend that it is you who is hosting the party in your Anglo-Indian home. Mrs. Michael, you alliterate, evacuating your name.

***

Seventh form is a dream year! Seventh form is a dangerous year. On random days, girls disappear in the middle of the day, with sweaters or a teacher's scarf wrapped sarong-like around their waists. You watch and sweat. You do not know when your turn will come. The lady teachers have prepared all the sixth and seventh form girls in a "health and hygiene" session. The curse will be here, whether you like it or not, so better start preparing. You are shown bulky cotton pads—"sanitary pads," the teachers call them. You wonder how you can walk with that and not have everyone know your secret. Worse, your mother has already prepared you for the rituals to follow, where your shame will be publicized to family.

The sudden bloom of red spares no girl. The boys look away uncomfortable and confused, their own bodies showing no such betrayal yet. You scrutinize Miss Perfect for any signs of change. Some girls—and you are sure she would be one of them—are fortunate enough to have their first time at home. These girls "mature"—a word whose etymology you do not know, but that reeks—at night, an evening, a weekend, or a holiday, the last of which there are plenty of given your thousand gods. Miss *Perfect*, of *course*, her first time would be nothing short of your name for her, you seethe inwardly. You keep watching her for signs of something, but she is. . . *white*! How strange, you note, that the color does not quite fit her as it used to.

You return to school after a ten-day hiatus for Diwali—*Deepavali*, your parents' language like a capillary action in your consciousness—during which you hope but do not succeed in acquiring your first period. The main teacher looks exhausted, and the language and literature teacher, Mr. Gerald, your biggest advocate, looks confused and sad at the same time, an expression you associate with your father. The headmaster, who usually makes his rounds in the mornings and afternoons, is "conspicuous by his absence," as the newspapers often say about politicians who defect before important Parliament meetings. The principal's door remains closed all day. Mr. Michael is nowhere to be seen.

You wait. Eventually, the news sifts down to the seventh formers from the tenth. Your teachers huddle outside classrooms, whispering in compacted misery after assigning their classes some quiet reading. Usually, your favorite activity, your eyes glaze over Maupassant. Instead, you see

yourself in a white wedding dress, with long-sleeved white gloves, your silky hair piled in a French knot, and a disco ball splashing light on a dance floor. Mr. Michael is in a tuxedo with a frilled shirt front, his black shoes squeaking as he pirouettes you. Your pink satin shoes tap the floor elegantly, and you move close, right into his arms, held there warm and very tight. You feel the secret seep of something between your legs. You recognize pleasure before you feel the panic. You feel the long walk to the infirmary where your head teacher telephones your father, who, thick-spectacled and thicker-accented, arrives with your mother, who wears her silk sari and brilliant red *bottu* as though she were attending a wedding. Your shame is complete.

***

"You are right, they are *nothing* like us," your aunt's voice rings in your ears, as she and your mother cook the next weekend. You hear from your classmates, those vacuous vicious beauties, that Miss Perfect has left school to be taken abroad for "treatment." "Loony bin." "Mental, mental." "Mad as a cow, *yaar*!" You are *not* their friend, you say to yourself as you keep your nose in the air and walk away, "She's preggers!" in fading contralto trailing you. You are corroded by guilt at your ill will toward light-skinned, rose-lipped Miss Perfect, who was never, not once, like the other beauties. And, worse, you are ashamed of exulting that Mr. Michael would be all yours now with the competition gone. You wrestle with what you know, but do not understand.

Dings are not Indians! *Dings* are like Muslims! *Dings* have no morals. You start to read about the Anglo-Indians leaving India. You wonder if they are tired of not knowing who their ancestors are, not having uncles and aunts and grandfathers and grandmothers like you do. You note that they are dark like you, with English that is ruined by Hindi, Tamil, Konkani, or Gujarati. In *Dilli*, they eat chutneys and dals and rice, not salami. They drink alcohol copiously, yes, but so do the Punjabis who, unlike them, have real power in Delhi. They are moving *en masse* to Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. England is harder. Only a few make it to the mother country—and you wonder if Mr. Michael is one of them since he, too, has left school, and broken your heart. Do you dare hope that he will send for you? Rescue you from this life?

When the moment of reckoning comes, however, you are saved! Your mother begins an active, ardent campaign to move you to your cousins' school—a "Hindu school, teaching *oww-err* culture" as your aunt and uncle repeat ad nauseam. You hear her reason that many of the families are moving their children to other schools "due to the unfortunate circumstances." You are elated that most of the school beauties are among them, and, therefore, you cannot believe your mother is about to destroy

your second chance at happiness now that you've lost Mr. Michael. Your aunt and uncle are only too happy to add in their thoughts. Your stomach is churning amidst the collective furor and self-righteousness filling your parents' drawing room, when you register your father's voice, low as always but so very clear, "The lotus is blooming in soiled *vaaters*, no? *Ammu* is like that. Like Goddess Saraswati. *Pew-err* with knowledge. Let her study! *Ammu* will not be led astray! Why let the actions of some stupid fellow destroy her learning, no?"

You are chosen. You look at your father. You think about Mr. Michael. You grapple with light and dark, agape and eros. Your vocabulary is expanding. Your education is beginning.

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BEANS

DARIN COZZENS



California Historical Society Collection, USC Digital Library

During her first night as a widow, Edrus lay in the darkness of the bedroom listening to the late-March wind in the branches of the cottonwood outside her window. Sleeplessness persisted in half-hour intervals marked by the chiming of the living room mantel clock. Every so often she patted the other side of the mattress to feel the slight hollow worn by Crue's hips. She thought about how life changed in a day with the losing of a husband. Then she thought about how it had changed in a day over forty-five years ago—October 2, 1930—with the marrying of one. And that's when the idea came to her.

At breakfast, she waited until Hewell was almost finished with his mush before she asked him to run her to town after he got the milking done. She delayed the request partly out of gentleness. It was Hewell, the youngest of her three children, who just twenty-four hours earlier had found his father dead from a heart attack in the same barn Hewell now had to go back into. Yet the bigger reason for the delay was the fear that her son might ask for more detail on the last of her intended errands than she was comfortable giving.

As it turned out, that fear was unfounded. Mopping his mush bowl with a piece of her unbuttered toast, as he did every morning, he repeated back the itinerary—bank, mortuary, newspaper. Then, swallowing the last of his milk, he asked only one thing: "Anywhere else?"

The bank visit had nothing to do with farm business. It happened that the bank's vice-president, Frett Maxwell Jr., was also bishop of the Balford Ward. After his condolences in yesterday's telephone call, he had invited her to stop by and make funeral arrangements whenever she was ready. After funeral arrangements came burial arrangements—with a man named Burl Bigler, whom people of her generation still referred to as an undertaker. The final errand, the one she had thought

so much about in the long watches of the night, took her and Hewell to the end of main street, to the little building that housed the *Balford Clarion*.

As at the two previous stops, Hewell pulled the pickup into a parking spot and reached to turn off the key. But this time, as he reached, Edrus placed a hand on the sleeve of his nice fleece-lined denim jacket. For this trip to town, he had worn what she still called his "school clothes," though his graduation from Balford High School was almost four years past.

She said, "You don't have to come in with me on this one."

He looked at the hand on his arm, then at her. "You sure?"

"I'm sure."

It pained her to say this to him. She owed him an explanation. He was her only son, born nearly twenty years after her two daughters, long after she had given up hope of ever having another child. And with his sisters married and looking after families of their own hundreds of miles away in Utah and Idaho, Hewell would inevitably bear more of the burdens occasioned by his father's death. Those burdens had begun yesterday, when he found Crue sprawled face-first in barn muck beside a spilled bucket of rolled oats. And, with another season of farming upon them—tilling and planting and weeding and haying—the burdens would continue today and tomorrow and as far into the future as she could foresee.

But at least the question of Hewell's leaving home to serve two years as a missionary was finally settled. He had begun talking about that possibility when he became eligible at age nineteen, and she had repeatedly put him off. Wait until after summer; wait until after harvest; wait until after the new year. Though she never admitted the truth to anyone, she didn't want him to go at all; she had, in fact, prayed that he wouldn't go. And now, with Crue's death, he *couldn't* go. She was glad and relieved, yet, at the same time, guilt-ridden for feeling glad and relieved.

But the explanation she owed him, she couldn't bring herself to give him. Any verbal rendering of the plan hatched in the night would have seemed muddled and inadequate even to her. She took her hand from Hewell's coat sleeve and opened the old black patent leather purse she carried with her only when she wore her go-to-town clothes—scarf, sweater, cotton print dress, and sturdy lace-up black shoes shaped sort of like clogs. From somewhere within the purse, she fished a dollar bill that looked as if it had been digested. Proffering the bill, she said, "Why don't you go get yourself a doughnut at the bakery?"

Hewell stared at her. They both knew that never in his twenty-two years had his mother suggested he go buy a doughnut at the bakery. A frugality as congenital as hers did not allow for buttered toast or orange juice at breakfast, much less a bakery-bought doughnut in the middle of the morning. "You sure?" he asked again, finally taking the dollar bill. "I can wait out here if all's you want is to do this alone." Still, he asked no questions. "They got a form you fill out is all."

"I know," Edrus said. "But you go on just the same."

***

She was the only person on the customer side of the want-ads counter. On the wall beside the counter hung a crisp new poster commemorating the nation's bicentennial: 1776-1976. Forty-five years of marriage was almost a quarter of two hundred. To fortify her intention as she waited, Edrus told herself that weathering such a stretch was worthy of *some* kind of attention. It wasn't fifty years or sixty, and certainly not seventy-five—notice of such anniversaries always made it into the paper, with correspondingly longer write-ups—but in a day when more and more marriages crumbled before the kids were even raised, weathering forty-five and a half was no small thing.

But such reasoning was a pretext, and Edrus knew it. She had faith that, thanks to what Mormonism called the sealing of their marriage and family in the temple in Idaho Falls—which they finally got around to just before Hewell's birth—she and Crue would be man and wife for eternity. So she wasn't here to ask what a newspaper could say about a marriage at the end of almost forty-six mortal years. She wanted to know what could be said, at this point, about the start of all those years.

A man approached. He was the only person on the other side of the counter. "How can I help you?" he asked.

Edrus girded herself. "Are you the one who writes the obituaries?"

"I write it all," the man said, "except for school cafeteria menus and letters from concerned citizens. A monopoly on authorship is one of the many perks of being owner and editor all in one."

It took only a moment for Edrus to decide that the phrasing of his last sentence bespoke good humor and not condescension. And with that point decided, she felt easier about moving, albeit indirectly, toward the question she had been thinking about since two a.m.: "How about wedding notices?"

"Those, too," said the owner and editor, a man named Lewis Glenney. "Though, as I'm regularly informed by certain concerned matrons, I lack the female touch."

Edrus clasped her purse with both hands. "Is there any way you could write something that would do both?"

Lewis Glenney looked at her with only the mildest hint of puzzlement in his expression. "If the deceased was married," he explained, "the obituary mentions date and place."

"He was," Edrus said. "October second will be—would have been—forty-six years."

Understanding came into Lewis Glenney's eyes, and he said, "You're Mrs. Penroy." Then he said, "Burl gave me the name yesterday. I should have put it together sooner." After a pause he said, as both apology and condolence, "I'm sorry."

Edrus studied the editor's face and finally nodded.

"I've got a form you fill out," Lewis Glenney said. "All your husband's dates and facts and so on. If you want to add a little something, that's fine. Then I'll write it up."

"What kind of dates and facts?" Edrus asked, stalling about her *real* question, which would have to come under the heading of "a little something."

"Date and place of birth. Parents' names. School. Military service. Club and religious affiliations. Closest surviving family members. That sort of thing."

Edrus didn't wait for the form. "Born January 18, 1911, in Garland," she said, "to DeLyle and Alice Penroy."

"Hold on," said Lewis Glenney, rummaging beneath the counter until he found a notebook and pencil and started scribbling. "What's your husband's name?"

"Crue—short for Crufford."

"All right," the editor said, scribbling to catch up, "now go ahead."

"He was three years older than me and got to finish school," Edrus said. "It was between wars, so the Army never took him. No clubs. I can't feature Crue with a little club hat or vest." She said this with a wonderment bordering on disapproval—whether for clubs or for her husband's sociability, it was hard to tell. "No," she said, "the only place he went was church. Like everybody else in this town, we're Mormon. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

"*Almost* everybody else," Lewis Glenney said tactfully. "I grew up Catholic."

"That explains why I've never seen you in sacrament meeting," Edrus said.

They both smiled.

"Closest family?" Edrus said, rounding off the list of obituary details: "There's me and the three kids: two girls, Faye and Fonda—married, with kids of their own—and a boy, Hewell, at home."

"That's a good start," said Lewis Glenney as he worked his pencil.

Half a minute went by before the scribbling slowed.

"What I was really wondering," Edrus said when the pencil finally stopped, "what I really wanted to see you about was, could it say more than what people think of as *belonging* in an obituary?"

The editor and the widow looked at each other a long time.

"What did you have in mind?" asked Lewis Glenney.

"When we got married," Edrus said, "there was nothing put in the paper." She locked her knees against the nervousness that went all the way down to the soles of her clog-like shoes. She felt self-conscious and vain at the prospect of any attention to that juncture in her life, even legitimate attention belated forty-five years. "Maybe because there was nothing *to* put," she said. "It was a pretty plain affair in our case." She paused. "It still amazes me. In five minutes, with no fuss *at all*, you can commit to something like forty-five years of marriage. But fuss or not, I just wanted to see what you thought, to see if there was anything that *could* be said."

She searched the editor's face for any foreshadowing of the amused incredulity she had seen in her daughters' faces when, not too many years before their own dreamed-of weddings, they had asked about hers.

"No white dress?" asked Faye.

"No cake?" asked Fonda.

No. None of it.

But Lewis Glenney didn't twitch an eyebrow. Edrus was grateful beyond measure for what he *did* do. He put a hand to his chin and contemplated her request. "The only question," he said finally, "is where to put it. It could just as well go under *Nuptials*, you know."

"No," Edrus said. "No, leave it with the obituaries. I don't want to short Crue none. I just want a little something about the wedding day itself."

"Fair enough," Lewis Glenney said. "Let's see what we can do." Opening a gate in the counter, he invited her through, then ushered her into his little office. He slid a visitor's chair beside his desk and bade her sit. Then he sat in his chair and again took up his notebook and pencil.

For a moment, as if unsure whose prerogative it was to speak first, neither said anything. Finally Lewis Glenney shrugged and went ahead. "Newspapering teaches you to start with *who*—which is as good a place as any for most stories."

Edrus nodded.

"Okay, then," Lewis Glenney said, readying his pencil, "Full name?"

"Crufford Leon Penroy."

"No," the editor said, smiling kindly. "I mean *your* full name. This is your story, too."

"Oh," Edrus said. Then she said, by way of a beginning, "I was an Utley. *U-t-l-e-y*. Edrus Jane."

"Good," the editor said. "Now what is it you'd like this to say about Edrus Jane Utley's wedding day?"

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Edrus proved herself right: there *wasn't* much to work with. The dress and cake were just the most obvious of the trappings missing from her and Crue's wedding. There were no flowers or gifts or photographs (save one grim image taken on the steps of the courthouse). There was no meal or dancing or special trip. And not a whole lot of well-wishing, either. To marry at age sixteen, she had needed her father's permission—which he granted, but only because he wrongly assumed she was either pregnant or lucky not to be.

There was just this:

At eight-thirty on a breezy fall morning, the second day of October of 1930, she and her parents had met the Penroys at the courthouse in Cody. The actual ceremony, performed by a Justice of the Peace, really did take only five minutes. Afterward, one of the mothers timidly suggested they might all go somewhere for a bite to eat. But these were people unaccustomed to taking their morning meal anywhere but at the kitchen table, and nobody knew how to react. Finally, to the great relief of the fathers, Crue said he still had an acre or so of pintos to thresh and time was a-wasting. So he grabbed his new bride's suitcase and one box of belong-

ings from her parents' car and threw both in the back of his, a Model T that was old even then. Then he loaded his bride into the passenger's seat, and, with one celebratory, asthmatic honk of the horn, started the thirty miles back toward the patch of farm he was renting on the Willwood side of the river.

For a moment, the only sound in the newspaper office was the scribbling of the editor's pencil. Then Edrus went on.

When the newlyweds got back to the dwelling where they would start their married life—three rooms, no electricity or running water, and an outhouse twenty yards distant—they changed out of Sunday suit and dress and right into work clothes, without the least pause for *anything*.

The newly widowed Edrus Penroy stopped. So did the editor, who looked up from his notetaking. It was clear to both of them that this last detail had gotten by whatever filter she associated with nuptial write-ups. But it was also clear to both that polite vagueness would hardly serve for the story she wanted to tell. So Edrus ventured elaboration by saying, "Fonda once asked her dad if he didn't think such a start was a little short on romance. Do you know what he said?"

She couldn't tell whether Lewis Glenney was shaking his head or not. His response was that subtle.

"He said, 'Romance don't get the beans out, Sweetie.'" Edrus looked at the editor with something like compassion, as if whatever had to be said in the name of elaboration also had to be heard. "Granted," Edrus went on, "it did take us twenty years to get the girls a younger brother. But the girls themselves made it into the world in normal good time—Faye just a year after the ceremony. Which, by the way, proved my dad wrong on one count but never quite convinced him on the other, I don't think."

The pencil stopped.

Edrus said, "I'm not much good at this, am I?"

"Actually," Lewis Glenney said, "you're a natural."

"I can't figure how to make it sound like it's *supposed* to sound in a newspaper."

"And how's it supposed to sound in a newspaper?" the editor asked with great interest.

"You know—polished."

The editor smiled a wry smile and said, "I'll let you in on a little secret of small-town newspapering, Mrs. Penroy. What passes for polish is most of the time varnish—if you take my meaning."

She did.

"And it is to your great credit, ma'am, that you are incapable of the latter."

Edrus Penroy had not enjoyed a lot of compliments in her life, and never one couched in such refined language. From that point, the telling of the story went easier.

On that day in early October, all those years ago, Crue let her use the bedroom first to change out of her wedding clothes. Only when she came out did he go in. When she saw him again, he was tucking in his work

shirt, hurrying out to hitch up the team. "I hope you know how to handle one of these," he said as he threw two pitchforks in the wagon bed. He helped his bride onto the wagon seat, clambered up after her, then started the horses toward the bean field.

Then came the honeymoon. Edrus had to smile when she used the word. Pile by pile, the newlyweds heaved cured vines and pods onto the wagon until the load hung over the sideboards. All the way to the threshing machine parked two farms up the road, Crue kept the team at a trot. As they waited their turn amid the din and dust cloud, one of the crew yelled at the groom, "What you got there sitting by you?"

"I don't know if any of them knew we were just married that morning or not," Edrus said to Lewis Glenney. "But I couldn't help wondering when another man looked up at Crue and yelled, 'What's your hurry, son?' I know now he was probably warning Crue about overheating the horses. But that's not how a girl is going to hear a comment like that just hours before her wedding night."

That load, Edrus told the newspaper editor, was the first of many. "They'd bag each farmer's beans there at the threshing machine—in hundred-pound gunny sacks, maybe two per load—then put them right back in the wagon to be hauled to town or off to a barn or bin. We didn't have time to run to town, and Crue didn't have a barn or bin. So we dropped them in the yard and rushed back to the field. I worked that pitchfork until my arms felt like they were going to come out of their sockets." Edrus stopped, smiled wistfully. "And by late afternoon *everybody* had a reason for hurrying. There was a storm coming—rain to start with, then wet snow. Either way, it was no good for beans."

The pencil wasn't moving. The editor's office was quiet. Lewis Glenney was looking at her intently. It occurred to Edrus that he really wanted to know whether they had beat the weather.

"We got done," she reported with the slightest tone of climactic triumph. "But just barely. By the time we finished, it was all but dark. The horses were lathered with sweat, and so were we. But Crue was so happy. It didn't matter that we were in for ten years of Depression. He said this was the way to beat a glutted bean market—sell what you have to sell in the fall to pay the bills, but hold on to a dozen bags or so until spring, when the price was sure to go up. Only then, standing there in the yard with it getting dark and cold rain starting to fall, did he think about where he was going to store those dozen bags or so *until* spring."

Edrus stared at the wall of the editor's office as if she could see there what she was remembering.

Lewis Glenney scribbled something, then crossed it out. Then he set pencil and notebook down.

"Turns out," Edrus said, "the only weatherproof storage on the whole place was the house. And the only corner in that house with a completely watertight roof over it was our bedroom."

The editor didn't say anything.

"That's right," Edrus said. "That's where we put them—every last sack." After a moment's pause, she went on. "And we did it by lamplight.

Lugged them through the screen door, across the floor, right into the bedroom—which was hardly big enough for the bed, let alone thirteen or fourteen—or whatever it was—bulging hundred-pound gunny sacks. And it wasn't just the crowding. Newly threshed beans are not clean. Those sacks sifted dirt and dust everywhere, especially around that bed where we were going to spend our first night together. And you know what Crue said when we got them all in there and he finally looked at me by the light of that grimy kerosene lantern—dirty, sweaty, my hair full of bean chaff?"

The editor didn't say anything.

A far-away reflectiveness came into Edrus's eyes, and they welled with tears. "He said, 'This probably isn't very close to what you had in mind for today, is it?'"

When Edrus stopped this time, both she and the editor knew that she had said all she wanted to say. Now she searched Lewis Glenney's eyes. "None of this is much help for what I'm asking, is it?"

"Put it this way, Mrs. Penroy," said the editor. "This story deserves better than the varnishing I'd have to give it in my newspaper."

"I think I knew that before I asked," Edrus said. "Maybe I just needed to tell it to somebody."

The office was quiet. "You ever told your kids?" asked Lewis Glenney.

"The girls know the part about me spending my wedding day in the bean field. But that's all they know."

"And the rest of it?" asked Lewis Glenney. "Whoever you tell that to is going to know their mother a lot better, that's for sure."

Edrus didn't reply. She was thinking of Hewell. Hewell, who waited to be born, waited to go on a mission, waited for his dad to come out of the milking barn, and now waited out in the pickup for her. With both hands she clasped her purse in her lap, listened to herself say thank you and good-bye. But just before she stood to leave, an image formed in her mind. It was Hewell sitting at this same desk cluttered with notes. He held a pencil and was trying to write something. His face wore an expression of profound concentration and wonder. Somehow she knew that the task before him was *her* obituary and that he was marveling, as the writers of obituaries must ever marvel, at all that it had to omit.



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A VIRGINIA COLONEL IN THE WASHINGTON TERRITORY

RON MCFARLAND



Battle of Col. Steptoe on the In-Gos-Se-Man Creek, W.T. Fought 17th of May, 1858. Courtesy National Parks Service. Image by Gustavus Sohon.

August 1857

The sutler's store is a slapdash affair half log and half canvas where whisky and other spirits are purveyed by a cunning rascal from San Francisco named Seth Baker. Spirits are prohibited from being dispensed to the Indians, but although Colonel Steptoe suspects some under-the-counter dealings along that line, he has been unable to catch the sutler in the act. By the time Sergeant Ball gets the colonel to the store, it's too late. The young Umatilla brave they call Coyote is lying motionless, his stomach slashed open and his intestines spilling into the dust. The old Cayuse chieftain Whí-te-na-tá-me insists the man, hardly more than a boy, was drunk, and he accuses Seth of having sold the whisky, which of course the sutler flatly denies.

Whí-te-na-tá-me declares a point of honor was involved and the fight played out fairly per Indian custom. Indeed, the matter might pass in white man's courts as a case of self-defense except that no amount of searching turns up any weapon that Coyote might have used. Sergeant Ball says given the crowd that's assembled, both white and Indian and including a few soldiers and settlers, someone might have taken a knife from the fallen Umatilla brave.

No one has moved or covered Coyote's slashed body, and yellowjackets, always thick in late summer and a terrible nuisance, are swarming over it, feeding greedily. Seth Baker stands slack-jawed at the doorway to his hovel. "I don't know nothin' about it," he whines.

"Injuns!" he spits out a black stream of tobacco, wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

Immediately, the colonel orders the sergeant to cover the body with a trade blanket from the store, and he senses a murmur of approval. They watch Indians from both tribes standing apart and mumbling in their distinctive dialects, not one word of which they can understand. The whites, three or four enlisted men and maybe a dozen settlers, a few of whom the colonel recognizes, cluster at the entrance to the sutler's shack. Witnesses? Is it not incumbent upon him to place Whí-te-na-tá-me under arrest for murder, to convene a military tribunal, and to serve as chief justice of the court?

"The colonel." Really, he is the lieutenant-colonel, more accurately the "*brevet* lieutenant-colonel," owing to his accomplishments during the Mexican War, and so he introduces himself, by the honorary title that attaches to his pay grade as major. Twenty years and two wars into the game, Florida and Mexico, a year wasted in the Utah Territory, and now this. Everyone refers to him as "Colonel." Colonel Edward J. Steptoe. Ned to friends.

As is often the case with such events, there are multiple witnesses and certain to be contradictory and most likely biased accounts. Lawyers they have none, not one, either for the prosecution or for the defense. The colonel will be required to appoint these from among his officers, as in a court-martial if it comes to a trial. But this is no ordinary case of dereliction of duty, drunkenness, absence without leave, or desertion. Moreover, after the hanging of the nine Cascade Indians, including Chief Chenowith, about two years previous, the tribes are less trusting than ever of the white man's courts. That was partly young Lieutenant Phil Sheridan's doing. He's back in the Oregon Territory now.

The colonel also knows of the Walla Walla chief Peo-peo-mox-mox, or Yellow Bird as he was named by some poet among the settlers, murdered by the damned Oregon "volunteers" at the end of 1855, while he was back in the East after the frustrating, abortive Utah Expedition. A case of justice unserved for Captain Gunnison and his men. John Gunnison, West Point classmate, class of '37.

Where is Coyote's weapon, if in fact he had one, as the Cayuse chieftain claims? Whí-te-na-tá-me insists the young Umatilla pulled a knife on him, initiating the fight. If the knife can be produced, the colonel might adjudicate the matter pretty much where they stand under the dry August sun: self-defense. The Indians might proclaim it a point of honor and be satisfied with that, or the Umatilla might exact some form of revenge, but that would be an inter-tribal matter, so long as it doesn't get out of hand. But how will he avoid that dire outcome? To defuse the situation, he places the chieftain under arrest and installs him in the guardhouse, ordering

Sergeant Ball to assure he is watched closely, not from concern he'll attempt to escape, but because he fears the Cayuse might try to spring him.

They do not. Nevertheless, the colonel spends a mostly sleepless night dwelling on the many ways the situation could explode. Twice he gets out of bed and checks at the guardhouse, once around midnight and the second time around three in the morning, but the guards appear alert and aware of what might go wrong. When Reveille sounds at six, it jolts him out of a drowse rather than a sound sleep. The 12-pound howitzer assures he will stay awake. He splashes cold water on his face and dons his best frock coat with epaulettes.

Davey, the colored boy he has adopted as his orderly, has polished the double row of brass buttons better than any West Point cadet could accomplish, even as a harried plebe. Colonel Steptoe means to make an impression. He means to establish for any who see him, white settler or Indian, that he represents duly constituted authority, power, and justice. He supposes he is trying to impress himself as much as anyone else.

He steps onto the porch of his newly completed quarters to find to his great surprise Sparrowhawk, the Nisqually boy he bought out of slavery a year ago but has not seen in six months and supposed was living among the Yakama. That turns out not to be the case. The boy speaks with him briefly, wasting little of his slight command of English. Young Sparrowhawk has been living with the Umatilla these past months, and he was at the sutler's store the day before. He saw everything that happened, and he knew Coyote very well. It happened as Whí-te-na-tá-me said. Coyote (Sparrowhawk says his proper Indian name) drew his knife and rushed at the older Cayuse when Whí-te-na-tá-me refused to sanction the marriage of his daughter. His refusal was based not only on Coyote's unacceptable offer of horses but on the fact that he had already promised the girl to another, to a Yakama warrior of considerable power and wealth in horses, some of them seized from the Umatilla. Knowing that, Coyote felt doubly dishonored.

Whí-te-na-tá-me leaped aside when Coyote slashed at him and suffered a slight wound on his hip. The colonel had not noticed that, or he would have had Assistant Surgeon Randolph attend to the injury.

"The blood on this knife, Coyote's knife, belong Whí-te-na-tá-me," Sparrowhawk says as he produces the blade. He points to a slight smear of blood on the guard. "Whí-te-na-tá-me blood," he repeats as he hands the knife to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Steptoe. Then the boy hurries away. He does not turn back when called.

In the brief court proceedings that follow, the Cayuse chieftain is exonerated: self-defense. And the Umatilla are mollified with his promise of horses to young Coyote's band upon the union of Whí-te-na-tá-me's daughter with the Yakama warrior Lat-kin-tot, which only approximates the sounds and spelling of his actual moniker. Lat-kin-tot is a cousin of the notorious Chief Kamiakin. The colonel congratulates himself on having acquired some measure of trust from the surrounding tribes. Case closed.

Five days later Sergeant Ball reports the disappearance of ten mounts from the stables. From the various options, which tribe is culpable? The Yakama? The Cayuse? The Umatilla? Colonel Steptoe's suspicion lights on the Palouse, under their leader Tilcoax, who is outspoken in his enmity, but it could be anyone from any tribe, even the ostensibly friendly Nez Perce, who proved so hospitable to the Lewis and Clark company fifty years back. Kamiakin and Qualchan are always possible. Or probable. Or it could prove some loose gathering of disaffected young braves out to show their mettle.

In any event, it's an unacceptable way to celebrate the waning of summer, 1857. Colonel Steptoe files a report with Major Mackall, the assistant adjutant general in San Francisco and another Academy classmate, and dispatches Captain Dale with a troop of dragoons, but to no avail.

December 1857

During his two years in the Washington Territory establishing the cantonment and then building the fort, settlers have started calling it "Steptoeville," and the colonel is flattered, but he has stuck with "Fort Walla Walla." His superior in the territory, Colonel George Wright at Fort Vancouver, would otherwise think him presumptuous. Ned Steptoe is a modest man, inclined to reticence that some senior officers interpret as lack of confidence. Perhaps that's one reason why he did not accept President Pierce's commission as governor of the Utah Territory in preference to Brigham Young in 1855, but the president, an old comrade from the Mexican War, could not grant him the assurances he needed, and Steptoe suspected the friendliness of the Saints, as they call themselves, to be more apparent than genuine. In any event, his career in the Army has not provided him grounds for great self-confidence.

What if he had taken the field against the Pahvant Utes? He might have exacted some justice greater than that provided by the kangaroo court composed of the uncooperative Mormon jury, but at what risk to the Saints once the Army moved on to California? He exercised restraint, but perhaps his superiors have seen it as indecisiveness. Ever conscious of the consequences of his acts, the colonel has been averse to risk. Has he perhaps been overly conscious? Can a field officer prove too conscientious?

Of his family, a world away, his father likes to say, "The Steptoes have ever been responsible, conscientious citizens. If we're not among the First Families of Virginia, we are surely among the Second." That's his father, the good doctor. Like his great grandfather before him and like his younger brothers, Will and James. Only he, Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Steptoe, appears to have failed the family's expectations. His father is a physician of some stature in Bedford County, numbering among his patients the staff and "servants," as he refers to them euphemistically, of Thomas Jefferson's nearby "Summer Monticello"—Poplar Forest. The estate resembles a miniature Monticello, and folks say the former president used it to escape the pressures of public attention when he was in office.

"Oh, Father, Grandfather, Mr. Jefferson," the colonel wants to say, "they are *slaves*." Not that he would ally himself with the clamoring abolitionists. He has read of mad John Brown and his sons in "Bleeding Kansas." Even though he misses his family in Virginia, the colonel has felt relieved to be hundreds of miles away from all that. The "maelstrom," a word familiar to him from a story by Mr. Poe.

Grandfather James Steptoe, who served many years as the influential and powerful clerk of Bedford County, attended William and Mary College with President Jefferson and they became lifelong friends. The colonel was ten the year Jefferson passed, the same year as his grandfather, and he met the former president once when he visited his estate with his father. He was seven then and was admonished to remember that occasion the rest of his life, and he has.

The mild autumn, the colonel's favorite season, yields to the wretched winter of 1857-58. Isaac "Little Ike" Stevens, quondam governor of the territory, is gone, thank God, a burr under Steptoe's saddle blanket with his half-baked, unratified treaties with the Yakama, the Palouse, the various tribes in these parts. Not to mention his winking at the incursions of settlers on Indian lands, the predations of gold miners on their way north to Colville, and the random massacre inflicted by one militia army or another under the command of this or that political crony. The colonel and his few hundred men are under orders to "keep the peace," to sustain certain agreements with the peaceful tribes, at least so long as they remain peaceable.

Often he asks himself whether they're here to protect the settlers from the Indians, or the Indians from the settlers. It is a toss-up always. If the whites keep moseying along the Oregon Trail, all goes well enough, he thinks. It's what happens when detours occur, or when some wagon train hunkers down and stays a while, starts a ranch, plows up some land for crops. Or cuts off cross-country in search of gold. History will decide. He does what he can. He does not hanker to become what his maternal grandfather, Captain Brown, called a "man of destiny." Although he will admit he wanted to think otherwise when he was a fresh young second lieutenant headed from West Point to Florida.

Late in the fall of 1857 he acquires three lieutenants, two of them fresh out of the Academy, and sixty "fresh fish," as his sergeants like to call the new recruits: the usual mishmash of farm boys looking to get off the farm, city boys from San Francisco seeking adventure, and migrants from the East who wash up destitute on the banks of the Columbia. They also get some sweepings from the bars of Fort Vancouver and Fort Dalles, older men claiming to be still in their thirties and desperate for three meals a day. Take what comes your way. Try to shape them into soldiers. About a third of them, mostly the older ones, run off, desert, usually taking a few souvenirs with them. Lucky if they don't swipe more than a gun and a horse and saddle. The colonel's policy is to shrug off the former theft (gun) and to pursue the latter (horse), usually to no avail.

The best of the new lieutenants is Ethan Allen Henry, who has seen some action against the Comanche in the New Mexico Territory, a Ver-

monter related on his mother's side to the Revolutionary War hero of Green Mountain Boys fame, a handsome lad. He comes with a most attractive young wife, Gleanne, and two children, a boy about five years old and an infant daughter. He envies the lieutenant's happiness but wonders at the wisdom of imposing the rigors of frontier Army life on a young family. A military post, he thinks, is no place to raise children. He recalls his sister Nannie's advice twenty years ago not to marry so long as he stayed in the Army. He wishes now that he had not listened to her.

As autumn tumbles toward the hard winter mentioned above, the colonel also acquires the worst catarrh he has ever endured. For him, albeit he has never boasted robust health, this disease appears to have become chronic. He once thought of investing in this part of the world and of settling down here, but no longer. Perhaps Fate has imposed this judgment upon him for having abandoned the family's medical profession in favor of his maternal Grandfather Brown's profession of arms. Grandfather distinguished himself at the Battle of Cowpens during the Revolutionary War, and through his son Matthew, who represents Virginia in Congress, he secured Ned Steptoe's appointment to West Point, much to Father's consternation. When he was seven, Ned's mother died and his father remarried, an admirable woman he calls "Ma." She's a Claytor, assuredly one of the "first families." He has seen little of his half-brothers and half-sisters in recent years. He has applied for leave in the fall of 1858 but suspects it will not be granted even though it is past due.

His illness strikes hard about two weeks before Christmas, laying him low, and with it comes a blizzard of historic proportions for the region, and with that a bout of increasingly recurrent melancholy the colonel finds difficult to describe or to suppress. That November he turns 42, and now, after more than twenty years in the Army, after serving against the Seminoles in the Florida War; and commanding his battery "with distinction" during the Mexican War, where he won brevets to major and lieutenant-colonel; and after leading an expedition across the continent to the Utah Territory, realm of the Mormon theocracy, and on to San Francisco, he finds himself utterly disconsolate. He cannot account for the sensation. Unmarried and alone—but why understate the matter? Feeling quite desperately isolated and adrift in a place he once thought amenable, he now sees himself an abject failure.

He pens two lugubrious letters, one to his beloved sister Nannie and one to his father, confessing what he can only describe as remorse. "I have aged ten years in two months," he laments hyperbolically. He decries his decision to attend the Military Academy. He might better have remained at the university at Chapel Hill. There had been a woman, Caroline, the lovely daughter of a prosperous plantation owner. Well, that was long ago. He mourns the passing of so many in his family, he the "military Arab" who has seen so little of his kinfolks during these tumultuous days back East. Reluctantly, at Doctor Randolph's insistence, he takes to his bed.

Despite adhering to Assistant Surgeon Randolph's prescription of careful exercise and long, very warm therapeutic baths, his health and

morale have reached a low ebb when Gleanne Henry visits on Christmas Eve with her two children. The invariably cheery young woman reads to him from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which made a bit of a sensation in England after the Mexican War and has been staged in London. She refuses to allow him to settle into what she calls a "funk." The word is new to him. With that silly word, she consigns his black melancholy to a mere "funk." He laughs. He has not laughed much of late.

Moreover, she has a soft, sweet voice, and she joins Randolph in singing a few Christmas carols, which furthers his cheer. She brings fresh cinnamon rolls, and with a warm rum punch served up by his assistant surgeon, Colonel Steptoe drifts into the first comfortable sleep he has enjoyed in weeks. When the troops celebrate New Year 1858 with the usual roar of ordnance, he has recovered sufficiently to drink a few rounds to President Buchanan, who will need all the good will and good luck they wish him.

May 1858

Around the first of May, Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel E.J. Steptoe takes the field for what he informs Colonel Wright will be a reconnaissance in force, the aims of which will be to confront Tilcoax about the stolen mounts; to inquire into the intentions of Kamiakin, the powerful chief who is part-Yakama, part-Palouse; and to cross the Spokane River north to Fort Colville, where the Spokane tribe is reported to be harassing gold miners. Prior to setting out with about half the troops at Fort Walla Walla, the colonel learns that two miners have been murdered when they strayed east from the usual route and into Palouse country. Accordingly, he will alter his path a few miles east, crossing the Snake River where it angles westward toward its eventual confluence with the Columbia northwest of "Steptoeville." He calculates the distance at 300 miles to Colville, returning by the more direct route of around 200 miles.

The colonel knows of the planned military road to be constructed under command of Captain John Mullan (USMA 1852) between Fort Benton on the upper Missouri and Fort Walla Walla, and he suspects the tribes that would be affected may be aware of the threat it imposes. For all these reasons and a few less compelling, Colonel Steptoe is convinced now is the time to show the flag. The troops have been more restless than ever, having been cooped up through these severe winter months. The young recruits who will make up about a third of his column did not enlist to build barracks, stand tedious hours on guard duty, and drill, drill, drill. The farm boys have had their fill of tedium. They long for action, adventure, an opportunity for heroism and glory. They yearn to prove their manhood. This "little foray," as he refers to it in a note to Colonel Wright, will snap them out of their "winter doldrums."

The colonel's force is comprised of 130 dragoons and forty mounted infantry, two 12-pound mountain howitzers, a dozen Nez Perce scouts, and twenty or so drovers, ample resources, he thinks, to give the hostiles a good drubbing, should any such appear to want trouble. He anticipates

no such confrontation. He fondly hopes his troops won't need to employ the damnable musketoons. These outdated weapons, the 1847 Springfield model, still standard for the dragoons, must soon be replaced. Their 22-inch barrels are reminiscent of the old colonial blunderbuss, range negligible or, as Sergeant Ball puts it, "Couldn't kill a rooster across the barnyard." One company of dragoons is equipped with the new Sharps breech-loading .52-caliber carbines; most of the mounted infantry carry the Mississippi long rifles, which boast good range but are practical only for dismounted troops.

About halfway to Fort Colville, as the column follows a small stream, the colonel's fond hopes are dashed. A hundred miles south of his destination, on a very warm day in mid-May, his boys, as he thinks of them, although he's aware that most of them are men, Sergeant Ball being fifty if he's a day, are set upon by hundreds of Indians. News accounts will vary between six hundred and a thousand.

They are confronted by a consortium, an agglomeration, but not really what one might call a "confederacy" of tribes. There seems to be no single leader, but Steptoe suspects Kamiakin must be involved. The column proceeds north at a slow, cautious pace, the colonel ordering his troops to hold their fire even as the painted hostiles shake their weapons, pierce the air with shrieks and taunts, and dash toward the column, wheeling away only a few yards from the troops, tempting them to fire the first shots. He recognizes Palouse and Yakama among them and what he takes to be supposedly peaceful Coeur d'Alene and Spokane, maybe some Kettles. He has made it his business to recognize the differences. He is impressed with the restraint shown by his boys. The noncoms have trained them well.

Later that afternoon, as the sun beats down on them and the Indians increase their efforts to draw their fire, a priest gallops to the head of the column, and Captain Dale escorts him to the colonel, who recognizes him as Father Joset of the Coeur d'Alene Mission that lies a good fifty miles to the northeast. His cassock is so powdered with dust that it seems more beige than black. The priest offers to negotiate with whatever tribal leaders he can identify, and Steptoe agrees but insists they must stay on the move. Nothing positive comes of the good father's efforts, but it is too late to turn around, so the colonel makes camp near a pond and asks the priest to assure the chiefs they will head back to the Snake River in the morning.

The troops pass a sleepless night listening to incessant drumming and yowling as the Indians whip themselves into a fury to be unleashed the next day. A young bugler named Murphy who boasts a fine Irish tenor attempts to build their spirits with a few drinking songs, including the popular "Garry Owen," and some Stephen Foster tunes like "Oh! Susanna" and "Camptown Races," and these are picked up from campfire to campfire, but when he sings "My Old Kentucky Home," a sadness falls over them and presentiments of death. The hostiles sustain their clamor. The drumming doesn't stop until dawn, but an hour before the sun cracks the horizon, Colonel Steptoe quietly turns the column back to the

south. With luck, the Indians will accept this maneuver as an apology of sorts. He has insisted, via Father Joset, that his column simply wished to proceed north to Fort Colville and he intended no harm.

But the colonel has no luck. Perhaps he used up his supply against the Seminoles in Florida and against the Mexican forces at Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, Chapultepec. Kamiakin will later declare that if the colonel intended no harm, he would not have come with so many troops and he would not have brought the cannons. No matter. Around noon, the Indians attack the column from the low hills on both sides and from its front and rear. The attacks are not coordinated but are an ad hoc sort of affair. A handful of Yakama fire a volley of arrows and discharge their trade muskets, then retreat. Or were they Spokane? No matter. The colonel, commanding from the middle of the column, dispatches dragoons under Captain Dale and three lieutenants, including Ethan Allen Henry, who moves to the east, where a swarm of young Palouse warriors rage across the small stream.

Colonel Steptoe levels his six-shot, cap-and-ball revolver at what he thinks is a young Palouse brave, pulls the trigger, and nothing happens. Misfire. By the time he pulls the trigger again, the boy is right on him. This time the Colt responds, and the boy drops from his pony. The colonel sees him in that instant as a boy, not a warrior, or a hostile, or maybe not even as an Indian, but a boy. In his twenty years in uniform, this is the only person the colonel has killed at close quarters. He has been responsible for many deaths over those years, but as an artillery officer he has not committed the killing so "intimately," a term that will occur to him much later. He has shot the boy in the bare chest, has glimpsed, but only glimpsed, the spurt of blood from the wound. Perhaps the wound was not fatal, he will tell himself.

As the combat sprawls through the hot, dry afternoon, Colonel Steptoe directs his forces to a small hill that looks to be the highest elevation available, and there he draws them into a position he suspects is far from impregnable. The drovers corral the livestock in the center, and the sergeants and officers space the men around the periphery, instructing them to stay low and to preserve their ammunition. The noncoms allocate extra cartridges to the soldiers they think will use them most effectively, even though it is too late for that, too late to avoid the wild firing that happened earlier when the men were terrified and dodging arrows and gunshots on frightened horses. And they are young, many of them, too young to die, to have died already. The bugler, Private Murphy, will not be singing tonight or ever again. The trusty Captain Dale lies dead somewhere, his body not recovered.

Assistant Surgeon Randolph and a corporal whose name the colonel cannot recall are tending to the wounded. Sergeant Ball reports they have no more than five or six rounds per man, and water is running low, much of it lost when two wagons capsized. In addition to the two officers, four enlisted men are known dead, and more than a dozen are wounded, three of them severely. Lieutenant Henry is among the latter. He dies just

before midnight, while the remaining officers and sergeants are meeting with the colonel to decide a course of action. When he learns of Henry's death, the colonel takes a deep breath and walks into the shadows to weep. The memory of Gleanne Henry and Doctor Randolph singing "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" at his bedside on Christmas Eve seems a mockery.

Of the three apparent options, Colonel Steptoe at first is inclined to stay where they are and try to hold out until a relief column arrives from Fort Walla Walla. He sent two Nez Perce scouts and Corporal Sedgewick back to the fort on that mission when his column first came under attack. Two of the sergeants, not including Ball, argue for charging southward at daybreak and taking their chances. After all, they haven't enough ammunition to repel another all-out attack. The two howitzers proved all but useless and are being buried to keep them out of hostile hands, although the colonel doubts the Indians would know how to use them anyway.

Sergeant Ball and the chief scout, a Nez Perce named Timothy, advocate the third option: They might slip through a gap between the camps of the Palouse and the Coeur d'Alene. Timothy's scouts assure them this can work.

Timothy claims his cousin, an important Palouse chieftain, will make their escape possible, and he advises the colonel to collect any disposable livestock along with all the supplies that cannot readily be carried on horseback and leave that to distract the tribes when they attack the next morning. They will quarrel over the spoils, he tells the colonel. They will not likely pursue the soldiers—why risk it? Besides, the tribes have also suffered casualties. Timothy knows this, he says, because of what his scouts overheard when they slipped close to the surrounding camps, and he can hear the laments in this night's drumming.

The Aftermath

So, they "succeed," if such a word is merited. The colonel will never be altogether certain how they managed it. They escape with the loss of only nine men killed and six wounded. But the word "only" is not one Colonel Steptoe would employ. He has written too many letters to bereaved parents and spouses over the years. He will not use that word. "Only."

Newspapers will call it a "disaster" and will misrepresent nearly every detail of the colonel's mission and of the ensuing battle. Timothy's name will be left out of the accounts, which will focus on the deaths of Captain Dale and Lieutenant Henry, who leaves a young widow and two young children, one of them "a baby girl." They will call attention to the "wretched performance of the musketoons," which the Army will soon replace altogether. In fact, when Colonel Wright sends a punitive expedition against the Northern Plateau tribes four months later, they will be armed with the new Sharps carbines, and they will heavily outnumber what the reporters refer to as "the savages." They will overcome the disorganized tribes without the loss of a single life and with only slight casualties.

For Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Edward J. Steptoe, this retribution offers no solace.

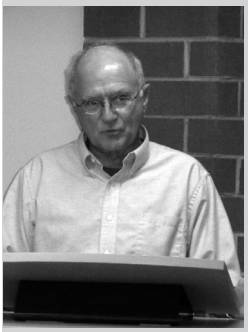
Father Joset writes an elaborate and perceptive commentary on the events, copies of which he sends to his superior in San Francisco, to Colonel Wright, and to Major Mackall. The colonel is to be "commended," the priest maintains, for his "brilliant escape from an enemy of overwhelming numbers" and for his "good success" in dealing with the tribes in the vicinity of Fort Walla Walla. The colonel is a "gallant officer held in the highest esteem in the Washington Territory." These plaudits will fall on deaf ears in the East, where General Winfield Scott hears mostly what the journalists have written. When the colonel appeals for a hearing on the event, he is ignored. Colonel Wright has taken care of matters and Captain Mullan will proceed with his military road as planned.

"Bloody Kansas," as the journalists have named it, remains the featured spectacle. The inland Northwest lingers as little more than a sideshow. A much bloodier drama, a full-blown tragedy of epic proportions, is yet to be staged back East. Coming soon.

By the time the colonel reaches his quarters at Fort Walla Walla, Gleanne Henry has already been wearing black for two days. When he calls on her, she holds back her tears as he supposed she would, for she has been an officer's wife on the frontier for six years. The children will be all right, she assures the colonel. Ethan, her husband, greatly respected and admired Colonel Steptoe. Ethan would want him to know that. She will go "back home," she tells him, to Athens, Ohio, where her father teaches at the university.

"Do you blame me?" he wants to ask. "Don't you blame me?" But he does not put such a question to her even though he feels the need to be forgiven. Not by the Army or by General Scott, but by Lieutenant Henry's widow. If only, unbidden, she would say, "I know it was not your fault."

The colonel's request for a leave in the fall of the year is granted. When he returns to western Virginia, his family celebrates him as a hero, and he finds that nearly unbearable. He knows when he returns to active duty, he can expect neither promotion nor amenable posting. He knows the rest of his life will be consumed by sadness and regrets. He almost looks forward to the coming maelstrom.



Ron McFarland (professor emeritus, University of Idaho) retired after 50+ years of teaching literature and creative writing. His twenty-odd books include a study of regional memoir, *The Rockies in First Person* (2008), *Appropriating Hemingway: Using Him as a Fictional Character* (2015), a biography, *Edward J. Steptoe and the Indian Wars: Life on the Frontier* (1815-1865), and his prose and poems on angling, *Professor McFarland in Reel Time* (2020). His book on Gary Soto is slated for publication later this year. His current projects include a book of short stories tentatively titled *The World According to Wibbles*.

THE MAGPIE

MELODY GRAULICH


Ovidiu Cozma

Every day I see magpies sweeping around the vast northern Utah sky from my sitting room, windows facing every direction, craggy mountains creating a bowl of foothills and plowed fields, stark now in December, no other houses in sight. They travel in gregarious groups, wearing ties and tails of snowy white, shiny black, iridescent blue startling in the sunlight, all black-billed, all looking exactly alike. So how was it that I came to believe that the one sitting on the redwood deck rail outside my western window was always the same one, his head—her head?—cocked and peering in at me?

Though flying flamboyantly around my yard, the magpies are wary, seldom dropping down to my back deck where I throw sunflower seeds for Flannery, my pea hen, seeds later stolen by chickadees, who add gray to the magpies' tuxedo attire, by purple finches and bold speckled flickers rap, rap, rapping at my cedar siding. Even in the winter, when food must be scarce, they stay away, though I once saw two of them fight for a vole carcass abandoned by my cat in bloodied snow. In the spring, their "swooping season," they glide by with long sticks balanced in their bills, to construct nests I see only when the leaves drop in the fall, big baskets high in the willows, well buttressed by many branches, not at all like the straw nests the robins build above doorways and window trim, too small, leaking blue eggs to crash on the ground, and falling as soon as the nestlings begin to lean out, leaving corpses to pick up if the cats do not find them first. So careless, like humans, how do they thrive?

Once teaching a Bill Kittredge essay about his grandfather trapping magpies in a cage and then shooting them one by one, I asked my class why people hate magpies, and a western boy answered, "Because they're scavengers. They're associated with death." Another said his brother cuts off the wings of the magpies he shoots and nails them to the barn. "A couple dozen there now." By the next class I had learned,

and shared, that between 1966 and 2014, the black-bill magpie population decreased by twenty-six percent.

Now those same boys carry guns into the Idaho State Legislature, I think, to demonstrations here in Utah outside the state epidemiologist's house.

People dislike birds that prosper despite our presence. My brother-in-law who runs a fishing boat calls sea gulls "the rats of the sea."

But someone besides me thought magpies were stately because a group of them is called "a parliament." This solstice season, I can share this information only by email, with a poem for a subject line: "for lovers of birds and words."

Anyway, because I am at home every day, all day, by myself, I noticed that magpie staring in at me, not five feet from the picture window that frames postcard views of the steep wrinkled Wellsville mountains. A postcard with a tall elegant bird with a foot-long black tail close-up center.

I hope he, or she… I google and find "Sexual Size Dimorphism and Morphological Sex Determination in the Black-Billed Magpie (*Pica pica sericea*) in South Korea," and discover that in order to differentiate sexes the bird must be killed so the researcher can search for gonads. Which the researchers do.

I decide the magpie is female because I am. There is no term for a female magpie. She claims she is beautiful when she struts along the rail.

I hope she is not so fascinated by me that she will fly into the window. One summer day I found a dead kingfisher who had crashed into another window, on the pond side of my house. I buried her in the pond, where in happier times a heron fishes for tiger salamanders, where sandhill cranes announce their arrival in spring and fall from miles away by bugling *ah-ah-ah-ah*, each note higher than the previous, then stop by to stalk across the freshly plowed fields, hunting insects and fallen grain in the furrows.

I saw a dead magpie only once, just a few weeks ago. Magpies often squawk, but this time the whole parliament chorused, outside my east windows, much closer than they usually come, stepping around and then leaping, a kind of circle dance. I had never seen them so distressed. Then I saw a magpie lying on the brown grass, in the center of their circle. I was watching a ritual, a funeral. It lasted ten minutes, then all but one flew off.

Magpies mate for life.

Magpies, like crows, belong to the corvid family.

When I found a dead barn owl in the woods, my then-husband wanted to throw it in the garbage can. I laid it in a freshly plowed field behind the house, where the vultures could spot it, and I could watch them wheeling, then landing and feeding, finally rising to give the owl a sky burial, an "enskyment," as Robinson Jeffers envisioned.

Barn owls look like they are wearing masks.

I am glad he is my ex-husband. He threw me away too. This terrible time is easier without having to try to cheer him up. But he is a ghost in the house. It makes me smile to think of the magpie saying, "Nevermore." Like ravens, they can learn to talk, if trapped and tamed in cages.

In 1803, Lewis and Clark sent four magpies from what would come to be called Montana across the plains to Mr. Jefferson. They all survived. I wonder how long they were in the cages. If they were caged for the rest of their lives.

My magpie stays silent, not "wok-wok-woking" or "squawk-squawk-squawking" as the other magpies call when they gang up to chase away a red-tailed hawk. She has no one to talk with.

My magpie watches me during the day while I sit with my legs up on the sofa, alongside my dog, reading or typing. She *sees* me. I don't know where she goes at night. When it's dark I see only myself reflected in the glass, a sixty-nine year old woman with silver hair coiled into a knot, wearing a dark blue fleece for months now, covered with cat hair, a string of peace flags across the window behind her to prevent birds from flying into it.

No wonder magpies don't fly into my windows: of all birds, only a magpie can recognize itself in a mirror.

The Scots believe that magpies have a drop of Devil's blood under their tongues. If one is seen near a window, death is not far behind.

I marked my calendar when I first saw her, or when I first realized she was watching me: December 13. I pay attention to my calendar or I don't know what day of the week it is. Seven days ago. Tomorrow is the solstice, a day of rebirth. But our tale is told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

That's how I come to believe she is always the same bird. In this bleak December my calendar states is 2020.



Professor emeritus at Utah State University, Melody Graulich has published numerous essays and books of cultural criticism, but only began to write fiction and personal essays upon retiring. She has published stories in *Ploughshares*, *Front Range Review*, and online.

AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS

DAVE BARRETT



Shkumbin Saneja, Train Accident Series 90, https://www.flickr.com/photos/22197136@N00/2786543010

Whether it was an unkindness of ravens that did the deed (or a murder of crows the true culprits of the crime) was a mystery to most: But Billy Bettis, El Sombrero's lead dishwasher, knew because Billy saw the whole thing go down from start to finish.

He'd been sleeping rent-free that summer of '94 within the crumbling bricks of the unburned half of the abandoned Snowflake Cracker factory on the eastside of downtown Republic: a stone's throw from the Burlington Northern line where it ran through the center of town on the Trent Street trestle. He'd been breakfasting on cold Vienna sausages out of a can when he witnessed the first derailment.

Billy had fashioned himself a makeshift apartment inside a room on the ground floor that seventy years prior was the accounting office at the factory. He had a Gatorade five-gallon cooler atop a wood bench in one corner of the room; for a sink, a large metal pot he occasionally cooked out of as well. His bed was two pallets laid end-to-end; his mattress remnants of three styro-foam coolers he'd found inside the building and cut flat; his covers a slightly worn sleeping bag Will Ailing, the eldest son of Ben and Myra Ailing, owners of El Sombrero restaurant where Billy worked, had gifted to Billy.

Billy's rent-free system breaker was not without its flaws. At first, the rumble and whine of the trains moving past had him tossing and turning on his pallet bed like a creature ridden with seizure. He cursed aloud his decision to spend another summer rent-free and beat the

man! But, gradually, over the course of days, he became accustomed to the thunder of their traffic. He was lulled by the rhythm of the cars as they chugged, huffed, and labored past; assimilated to the strange symphony of sound and weird cacophony of shape and shadow as they slid to and fro, to and fro—at all hours of the day and night. They were like a river in his mind: breaking the tedium of his days, brightening the loneliness of his hours. Eventually, they'd even brought a kind of peace to his soul: that is, until the first ravens showed up, and turned his day into nightmare.

The first two birds appeared days earlier. They were bigger and blacker than the crows, and their wings had the luster of coal. Their beaks were larger and sharply hooked, and they sported shaggy throat feathers like the bearded mane on a male lion. They croaked instead of cawed. On the ground, their strut was punctuated by big two-footed hops. And they tended to travel about in pairs, whereas the crows flapped about in large groups.

Billy had been nursing a quart of Pabst Blue Ribbon just after sunset when he spied the first pair circling the thermals over Republic. He watched in amazement as they dropped to earth out of the darkening lavender sky in the time it had taken him to swallow two sips of beer.

Croaking loudly, they landed on the rails of the center track, opposite and parallel to each other. They cocked their heads knowingly towards one another, then proceeded to hop back and forth in zigzag fashion from rail to rail, croaking ever more loudly and excitedly now and engaged in a jig-like dance. Even then, Billy realized they were talking to each other; by the way they cocked their heads and rubbed their beaks against the rails, Billy somehow knew they were up to some kind of mischief. When Billy took a long draw of beer and belched, they startled and soared off, roosting on the roof of another empty brick building across the way.

It was a bluebird morning that first ill-fated day. Billy was sitting on a dilapidated office chair he'd found inside another room of the factory, forking the aforementioned Vienna sausages into his mouth, watching it all through the door-less doorway of his office when two additional pairs of ravens joined up. Like Ninja warriors, they dropped out of the cloudless sky, joining the first pair on the tracks, hopping back and forth, back and forth from rail to rail in that same zigzag jig-like fashion he'd noticed days earlier. There was a more subdued croaking going on between the birds when suddenly, the largest of this gang of six let out a blood curdling scream:

"Kaa Ka Kaaaaa! Kaa Ka Kaaaaa! Kaa Ka Kaaaaa!"

Billy dropped his fork. Not only were the ravens hopping in zigzag fashion between the rails, but they were picking up rocks with their beaks and stacking them on the rails, including six larger stones Billy would later learn they'd managed to wedge between six gaps in the rail links directly opposite each other. To the west, Billy heard the foghorn-like wail of the Eastern Zephyr as it barreled towards them bound for Canada with a load of California rice, picking up speed now as it exited downtown Republic. The lead raven let out another "Kaa Ka Kaaaaa!" and the gang of six flew off in every direction.

Billy dropped his can of sausages when the Zephyr hit the first gauntlet of stones. When the train hit the second gauntlet, it began to rock and roll side to side, increasingly violently. When it hit the third, its wheels came off the tracks, the train keeling over on its side, tearing into the gravel with a ghastly grind of gear and metal and a deafening and deadening thud, throwing twenty rail cars of California's finest on both sides of the track.

The aftermath of this derailment was nearly as surreal as its antecedent. Billy watched in horror as the burly conductor climbed free of his capsized engine: crawling out of the side-window of the train that was now his roof-window. One side of his face was caked with blood and torn flesh, and he was holding something against the other side of his face (something Billy later learned was an eye dislodged from its socket). He ran stumbling away from the wreck in the opposite direction of Billy: slipping on rice scattered on both sides of the track. He fell hard on his hip, then righted himself several times like a man in the grip of some strange treadmill of a dream, vanishing from Billy's view when he reached the Trent Street trestle overpass, scrambling down the embankment to the city streets below.

The gang of six were the first to feast on this manna of their making, croaking and screaming wildly in delight.

"Kaa Ka Kaaaaa!"

Later, a sky-darkening phantasmagoria of other aerial creatures joined the windfall party. First, a murder of crows, then flocks of pigeons, then swallows, sparrows, and starlings, then resident raptors, and later still bald eagles the Review newspaper said flew all the way from Lake Coeur d' Alene thirty miles east when they too got wind of the spoils along the Republic tracks.

Billy vacated his humble abode at the Snowflake Cracker factory the next day, taking up Will and Jerry Ailing's offer to share their attic space above El Sombrero restaurant, where they all worked. Billy had thought of telling his story to the police, but he had a warrant out for a jaywalking ticket he had not paid.

"Fuck the cops in this town!" Jerry told him—passing a joint he and his brother had been smoking in their lofty hideaway. "They'll just give you the third-degree, toss you in the can, and throw away the key!"

"Jerry's probably right," said Will, taking a big hit when Billy passed the joint Will's way. "Who knows if they'd even believe you, Billy? Remember how they laughed and chuckled and rolled their eyes at us when we tried to warn them about Al Zeller!"

Alfred Zeller was a 77-year old arsonist who Billy had caught trying to burn down the boarded-up butcher shop in back of El Sombrero a few years earlier. Zeller had set fire to a dozen abandoned buildings that summer and wound up suiciding by straddling his Chrysler Gran Fury between the rails on the same overpass Billy had watched the conductor scramble down from the day before. Zeller had been in a car chase with

the Republic police and positioned himself so an early morning train crushed him and his vehicle. Will and Billy had tried to warn the police about Zeller's antics a few days earlier, but the police had scoffed at their story, mimicking smoking an imaginary joint and telling "the boys" they had "over-active imaginations" (giggle-giggle cough-cough).

"I suppose you're right about that, Will!" Billy said. He smiled sheepishly, taking another token hit when the joint came his way again. "No sense in making an ass out of myself twice, I suppose!"

Billy thought the Ailing brothers were all right—even though they were rich kids (by Billy's standard), smoked too much weed, and got over-excited about ideas and politics Billy could make no sense of (in particular, Will, the college graduate in the Ailing family).

Nevertheless, Billy's new sleeping space was a welcome relief after the buzz of activity that followed the first derailment. A S.W.A.T. unit hazed and scared off the ravenous birds with shotguns, sirens, laser lights and smoke bombs. Then railroad workers cleaned up the spill, righted the damaged train and limped it to a repair yard with one engine pulling it forward and a second engine pushing from behind. Afterwards, a 24-hour security patrol puttered up and down the tracks in ATVs and on foot to prevent further attacks. The derailment was at first thought to be a terrorist attack, and it wasn't till days later, after reviewing some early—1994—surveillance video footage, that the true black-winged culprits were identified.

Two weeks after the first derailment, the second derailment occurred five miles west of Republic. This time the video footage was detailed and conclusive enough that the authorities knew how the birds did it. This second derailment made national, even international news. And soon thereafter a pattern emerged: reports of similar derailments happening elsewhere; a train pulling thirty railcars of rice south of Portland, Oregon, was derailed; another carrying California almonds lost its load outside of Sacramento; even reports of derailments from far away Germany, Russia, and Japan. Yokel locals in Republic took to blasting away at every 'raven' in sight—but, for the most part, blowing away common crows instead of their intended target.

"It's like the ravens have figured out how the simplistic thing works—a train moving about on two rails—and now they can fuck it up at their bidding!" Will had raved to Billy, Jerry, and other guests in the loft above El Sombrero. "It's a revolutionary act, gentlemen!"

Billy knew, from his own eyewitness, there was truth to what Will said; but then Will proclaimed something that gave all of them pause: "The real question, boys, is now that the birds know how to do what they do, will they do it for purposes other than feeding their gut? Is it possible they might do it for reasons we cannot imagine at this time? Perhaps with malicious intent?"

And Will launched into a lecture on a news articles about baboons in Capetown, South Africa, who aggressed on human populations on a scale not seen before: bashing out windows on cars on a highway from an overhead bridge, ransacking homes when occupants left for vacation;

how bats swarmed a church in Romania during a midnight mass, terrorizing the parishioners; how FWP officials in upstate Michigan reported an unprecedented upswing of deer and moose attacks on people.

"Is it possible, gentlemen—that what we are really witnessing here is Mother Nature biting back at us humans? Is it possible that they have had enough of the wreck we have made of this planet and are taking matters into their own hands?"

When Will wiggled his eyebrows rapidly up and down in Groucho Marx fashion and puffed on his blunt like it was a Groucho cigar, Jerry and the others laughed uproariously at Will's parody of rhetoric from a Japanese Godzilla flick. But not Billy. When the blunt came round his way again, Billy declined the offer and passed it to the guest on his left.

Jerry and Billy were working as day laborers washing windows at the Washington Water Power impoundment facility in late July when Will's prophecy came true.

The Washington Water Power Dam was a remarkable sight: a testament to humankind's dominion over the earth. It was built at the base of Republic Falls, where years ago Native peoples fished for salmon with harpoon and net and spear. The impoundment facility was the iconic eight story New Deal era landmark brick building adjacent to the dam. It was where the turbines, generators, transformers, and transmission cables that produced and distributed the electricity for the masses were housed. And it was where, while working upon thin scaffolding planks above the roiling falls hundreds of feet below, Billy and Jerry witnessed the crowning catastrophe.

Both young men swore they had experienced harbingers before the event.

Billy, sleeping on a cot next to a wide-open window on the Riverside Avenue side of the second story loft the night before, said he awoke in the middle of the night with a feeling he was being watched. When he rolled over, none other than the large raven he'd witnessed stacking the first stones on the rails the morning of the first derailment was perched on the sill staring at him. (Billy said he had no real way of proving that it was the same raven. . . only that he knew because of its unusual size and the great hook of its beak.) He said this nocturnal visit sent a shiver to the bottom of his soul. He added that the most unnerving thing was not that the bird was glaring at him or really threatening him in any obvious manner, but that he recognized the intelligence in the creature's eyes; and, though he admitted this might have been interpretation on his part, that the magnificent bird seemed almost sad and/or apologetic. Billy said he rubbed his eyes to be sure he was not hallucinating, and when he opened them again, saw the ruffled tail feathers of the raven as it swooped away into the night.

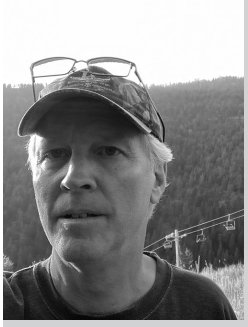
Jerry, perhaps not wanting to be out-shined by Billy's story, said his harbinger occurred as they arrived at the work site in the dim light of dawn. Jerry was sitting with his legs dangling over a scaffolding plat-

form as it was hoisted to the top story of the building (they washed the building's windows from top to bottom), when he became aware of a commotion in the turbulent waters downstream of the dam beneath them. At first, he thought it was a fallen man struggling to stay afloat in the frothing water, then, upon closer inspection, noticed that it was not a man at all—but a large osprey that was struggling in the powerful main current. The bird's body was completely submerged and its great wings slapped desperately on the surface, as though it was drowning. Then Jerry realized he'd read it wrong again! Suddenly, the osprey rose from the whitewater cauldron below with a huge 30-inch trout in its talons, the bird rising and falling back into the river three more times before it dragged its prize to shore and finished it off atop a large basalt boulder.

Jerry and Billy's scaffolding planks had just been lowered so they could work their wipers on the sixth floor power station windows when they heard the tinkling warning bells of the Western Flyer approaching the Monroe Street trestle, loaded a hundred cars long with Montana coal bound for China. The Monroe Street trestle was built in 1919 and was considered at that time—and even now—an engineering marvel. Its massive concrete support columns straddled the Republic River a quarter mile downstream of the dam, at a height of 330 feet over the river and the Peaceful Valley neighborhood downstream of the falls.

When the Flyer blared its horn three times and then three times more before crossing this chasm, Jerry and Billy put down their wiper blades and looked at each other from their respective planks with a feeling of dread. Their gaze focused on that span of trestle directly over the river. When they saw the gang of six fly off just as the Western Flyer approached that span of trestle, they were not surprised. Their limbs trembling in horror at what was to come next, they sat down on their scaffolding planks just as the Western Flyer hit the first gauntlet. Even before it hit the second gauntlet, it began to rock side to side, side to side. When it hit the third, it careened spectacularly off the tracks, plunging like a hissing thundering long-assed snake into the river below. And without having to say it to each other, Billy and Jerry knew that the ravens had taken it to the next level.

Their war with the human species had begun in earnest.



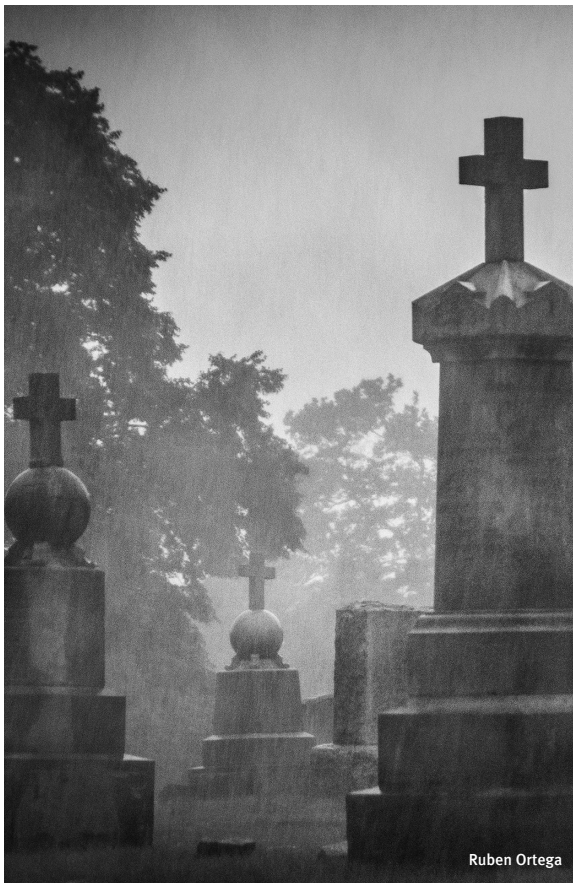
Dave Barrett lives and writes out of Montana. His work has appeared most recently in *New Reader*, *the Bark!*, *fresh.ink*, and *Revolution John*. His novel, *Gone Alaska*, was published by Adelaide Books. He teaches writing at Missoula College and recently completed a new novel titled *Executives of The World*.

CEMETERY VODKA AND THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

SHANE BORROWMAN

And it further appears that the living do not remain deeply involved with the dead unless the living imagine that they see in the dead parts of their own lives – and deaths.

—Norman Maclean,
The Unpublished Custer Manuscript



Ruben Ortega

When I visit the dead, I take a lawn chair.

I open the chair on my step-great grandfather's unmarked grave, its center ditched inward. Seated there, I can see the frontage roads for the biological highway that's led to me.

My great grandmother, dead of a stroke the same month Reagan was shot. My sister, crushed by a boat trailer in the summer of 1978. My cousin Keith, crushed by his blue Ford that same summer while changing its oil and found by his father, June, dead of a heart attack at home alone in 1993. My mother found him.

Great aunt Alice, killed by smoker's emphysema and alcoholism in 2001, her husband Nick dead of equally bad decisions in 1994.

My paternal grandfather, a Pearl Harbor survivor, killed by cancer and diabetes in 2002, resting next to my grandmother, dead of her own cancer in the fall of 2012.

My paternal great-great grandfather, who died before my memory begins. His wife, whose 1975 funeral is the first memory I hold, the first memory to have context and cohesion.

Great uncle Ted is not buried here. I visit him sometimes but can't take my lawn chair.

I can see all of this, four decades of death, from an aluminum chair that straddles Chips, who married my great grandmother after her husband, Earl,

in the veteran's cemetery behind me, shot himself not long after Christmas of 1952.

I get strange looks from other mourners in the cemetery, bereaved spouses and children who wear church clothes and bring small bouquets of flowers to single graves—graves where they stand awkwardly, shifting their weight from foot to foot, before solemnly walking back to their cars.

I wear faded jeans, a black leather jacket with a broken zipper, scuffed boots that make me look like a vandal.

I take a half-pint of vodka.

I never bring flowers. My people are not flower people.

***

Born in October of 1928, Ted was the seventh of my great grandmother's eleven children. I have only one picture of him from his youth, a sepia-tone shot of a boy, maybe eighteen, dressed in a striped suit. He wears a tie that seems to have large tropical leaves broadcast down its length. Its knot is a perfect half-Windsor, and a matching pocket square rests against his left breast, arranged in a faultless two-point fold. His father, Earl, a veteran of World War I and dapper dresser, likely taught his son both the knot and the fold.

Ted's hair, short at the sides and long on top, is pushed back and up in a rebellious DA, a style invented, maybe, by a Philadelphia barber in 1940 but not yet made popular by either Elvis or James Dean. If this is Ted's high school graduation photo, then he'd be too late for the style to be original and too early to be trendy.

Regardless of how hip the cut may have been, Ted's hair is long, measureable in inches, and his father would have hated it. Earl was a blacksmith by training, a smelter-man by trade, and a veteran of the Great War. Ted, like most of Earl's other children, was born in Yellowstone Park, in Wyoming, just outside of the Montana border.

***

More than 2,000 white crosses dot the roadsides in Montana, the state with the 3rd-highest fatality-on-the-road rate (behind Wyoming and Mississippi). These crosses are the product of a failed American Legion attempt to slow motorists—an attempt that began in 1953, the year Ted's father shot himself.

Ironically, the safest time to drive on Montana roads, according to the National Motorists Association, was during the "no daytime speed limit" period from late 1995 to mid-1999. In those years, speeds were only inappropriate if they were deemed not to be "reasonable and prudent."

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Mothers Against Drunk Drivers has long supported the white-cross program, yet Montana drivers seem particularly committed to drinking and driving. DUIs accounted for 42% of Montana's roadside fatalities in 2011, up from 39% in 1996, the first "reasonable and prudent" year.

The American Legion's white crosses are constructed locally with donated material, and volunteers both install and maintain them.

These white crosses are marked with neither names nor dates. Those left to grieve provide flowers and any other decorations.

The Official Montana Travel Site argues that the crosses "are numerous enough to notice, yet infrequent enough to startle at seeing. They stimulate reverence, sorrow, sympathy, curiosity, and caution."

***

I keep a picture of Earl Hochstrasser, Ted's father and my great grandfather, on my desk.

The photograph shows Earl in his doughboy uniform and has not aged well. The sepia-tone brown is dark, like milk chocolate, and his clean-shaven face is a washed-out tan. Two large white spots dominate the right side, at the level of his ear and above his shoulder. They're places where the matte has worn off and torn off, exposing the cardboard below.

At some point, the photograph broke nearly in half, and it was repaired badly with now-yellowed tape.

Earl's round, clean-shaven face is turned slightly to the right, and his hair is combed straight back from his forehead. He looks not only posed but poised in this uniform portrait, probably taken in Tacoma or Olympia. Seattle was designated off limits by Camp Commander General Green, who was worried about his troops' time in that city's various and varied "dens of vice."

Earl's young, just twenty-four, in 1918. While the photograph hasn't aged well, the two collar disks on his uniform are remarkably visible. On his left, a circular symbol carries two crossed cannon barrels to indicate his place in Battery C of the 37th Field Artillery, which had just formed at Camp Lewis and would disband a year later without ever joining the Allied Expeditionary Force on the Western Front. A disk on the right simply reads "U.S.," indicating Earl's status as a member of the regular Army.

During his final training in trench warfare, the November Armistice was signed. Earl returned home to Anaconda, Montana, where he would be buried in the Veterans' Cemetery in 1953, his grave marked by a square bronze plaque set flush with the ground.

Finding Earl's bronze marker in a field of identical markers always takes time, partially because I never do it stone sober. The cemetery in Anaconda is right next to the court house, and police cars troll steadily by. They never stop.

***

I stand before Ted's roadside cross—two feet across on a post as tall as me. The whole thing is large, maybe seven feet. My Ford is pulled off the road, stopped just beyond the Fairmont Hot Springs interchange. Pieces of wreckage still dot the landscape decades after the accident, including a hubcap that's cracked and oddly warped by fire.

I take the hubcap as a souvenir, keep it on my workbench in the garage for a few weeks, finally throw it away.

Ted's body is buried in Helena, next to a wife who died before I was born. That grave, surrounded by strangers, does not call me.

Ted's American Legion cross is covered from top to bottom in flowers, all of them plastic, all of them vibrant and fresh and new. They are not faded by the sun, not covered in road dust, not covered by the pulverized rubber that slowly builds on things left by the road. Pink roses at the pole's base. Gerbera daisies, mostly shades of yellow and red, in the middle of the post, white roses climbing above and below. A massive bunch of yellow roses, purply-pink peonies, and light green lilies at the top, resting on the cross's arms.

The Legion installed this cross, but they don't decorate. Family members are supposed to do this, but it wasn't us.

We are not flower people, and this highway marker is a babble of voices, an almost-nonsense conversation I can't pick out of the crowd.

Pink roses mean happiness and joy, while white symbolize both secrecy and innocence. Peonies call for good luck, red and yellow roses for love and friendship. Lilies represent final peace.

The roses frame the daisies in the visual center of Ted's American Legion Cross—daisies that sometimes mean purity and love but also mean secrets kept forever.

***

I don't see the picture from the local newspaper until 2011, fifteen years after Ted's accident. The picture's clipped in a rough square, and the paper feels yellow. The caption by the Associated Press reads simply, "Butte, Mont.—Montana Highway Patrol officers survey the Monday morning wreckage on Interstate 90 after Ted Hochstrasser, 67, of Anaconda, Mont., steered a stolen car he was driving into the path of a US West utility truck. Hochstrasser was killed. The truck driver suffered minor injuries."

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The caption does not do the photograph justice.

The car Ted stole appears in the background, the driver side smashed in from the headlight to the backseat. Some of the door may be peeled back, likely to remove his corpse.

In the foreground, the utility truck Ted hit head on is partly revealed, flipped onto its side or top, one wheel jutting upward at an improbable angle.

Forty-three years before, Ted's father's death made the newspaper, too, although there were no pictures.

***

According to the best data available, the suicide rate among adults during the 1950s was four times higher than

the suicide rate among the young and eight times higher than the suicide rate among the elderly.

Economic stress had much to do with this, especially in rural states like Wyoming and Montana.

Alcohol played a significant role. Firearms were the preferred method.

***

The Anaconda Standard, in its Thursday edition, January 8 of 1953, reported Earl's death less than a day after it happened—a report carefully circumspect in its details: "Earl F. Hochstrasser. . . was found dead Wednesday afternoon in the family apartment. . . ." The report is sandwiched between an extensive story about a March of Dimes benefit basketball game and a retiring school teacher's recounting of the highlights of her largely uneventful career.

The longest paragraph in the story about Earl lists his "Surviving relatives"—from his wife and six sons to his five daughters, all eleven paired with their spouses, including "Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hochstrasser." All the names are given, along with the hometowns.

It's a lot of detail about a lot of family, much more detail than is given about Earl or his death. More details unfold in the following days, none of them about Earl's actual death.

From *The Anaconda Standard*, Friday, January 9, 1953.

HOCHSTRASSER – The body of the late Earl F. Hochstrasser. . . is at the Finnegan company funeral home, at which place funeral services will be conducted Saturday afternoon at 2 o'clock. Rev. Elder Robert Davies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints will officiate. Interment will be in the veterans' plot in Hill cemetery.

From *The Anaconda Standard*, Monday, January 12, 1953.

. . . the women's chorus of the church sang three hymns, "Guide Me to Thee," "Abide with Me" and "Sometimes We'll Understand." Mrs. Joseph Summers played the organ accompaniment. L. Russel Hochstrasser, Tacoma, gave the closing prayer at the chapel.

Many friends attended the funeral. The casket was banked with a profusion of floral offerings.

Four sons and two sons-in-law were pallbearers. They were George E. Clayton of Livingston, Nick Charney, Jay, Jack, June and Ted Hochstrasser, all of Anaconda.

***

The Deer Lodge County coroner didn't file his report until early February, almost a full month after Earl's death. All of Earl's particulars are listed, from his birthplace in Providence, Utah, to his mother's maiden name, Alice Fullmer. Born on May 12, 1895, he was a veteran of "W. W. No. 1" who died at age 57.

The language of Earl's death is painfully clinical in its description of his "Brain laceration and hemorrhage Due To Gun shot wound in head."

The circumstances of Earl's death are described in this same laconic way: "Probable suicide own home. Apparent self inflicted gun shot."

***

Six days after Earl Hochstrasser's death, my great grandmother unburdened herself in a wounded widow's wail to Ted's closest older sister, Betty, my grandmother who would die in the summer of 1989, still drinking a case or more of beer daily:

Dear Betty,

*I don't know how good I can do this but the sooner it is done the best it will be. Dad was on afternoons & his day off was Tues. He stayed out until 2 AM. . . Peg said [*when he came home*] what have you been drinking, he said ginger ale high balls and she said no wonder you are so happy. He joked for about 10 or 15 min. but he couldn't hardly get in the doors to bed room.*

So Wed. morning I decided to let Dad sleep & had put up his lunch but I set the clock for 1:30 so he would be up & I could give him coffee before he went to work.

*I walked in the bedroom [*later*] & there he lay in a pool of blood.*

I ran to him but I knew it was too late, but still hoped a Dr. could help him. Then all the cops came & sent for Jack & June he said Dad had use his gun.

[O]n Christmas night he went out & drank a lot & then came home & drank a lot of wine. He said he never wanted to spend a Christmas like that again, now he won't have to but mine will always be worse.

I hated to have Dad drink so bad cause he wasn't like himself at all but Betty I loved him so much he knew I did why did he want to do that to me.

I had an L.D.S. service & it was so nice. Russell said the most beautiful prayer at the close of the service. Russell is ugly but he has the most beautiful voice I ever heard. Aunt Reta ask me if I didn't feel uneasy that morning but I never I even felt real good. Aunt Leona said it just was to happen.

At first, I was sure I would leave here I mean the apt. but it was the only home we have had so I think now I will stay.

The paper just said Dad passed away at home.

The letter goes on for twelve full pages. My great grandmother describes Earl's love of the smell of cedar, the wood of his coffin. As a veteran of the Great War, his funeral included a gun salute she liked and a flag she wished she could throw away.

She explains how Jay, Ted's older brother by eight years, couldn't come to his father's funeral until Ted sent him $25.00.

She describes how tight money will be for a time, given the amount Earl borrowed to pay his tabs at the bars across the east end of town. But two veterans' groups sent $150.00, and Earl's life insurance was just over $4,000.00, the average annual salary in the U.S. in 1953.

Every floral display sent to the funeral—dozens of them—is described in detail, including one from "that little hunch back & her husband in Gardiner."

***

For more than four decades, Montana has been among the top three states in terms of suicides per 100,000 residents.

Men are three times more likely to commit suicide than women, although women are more likely to attempt suicide.

Military veterans, like Earl, kill themselves at three times the rate of the rest of the population.

In 90% of successful suicides, depression and alcoholism are key triggers.

***

While the coroner undoubtedly got most of the details right in 1996, he reached the wrong conclusion.

No doubt Ted died of a "Massive cerebral trauma" that occurred in an auto accident, one caused by a motorist driving the wrong way on I-90.

But the accident happened at 10:00 o'clock in the morning, on what was Ted's wedding anniversary, although his wife was long dead by then. Ted was driving a stolen car. He stole the car from a woman in Opportunity, stole the car from a driveway almost visible from the home where I grew up.

When Ted stole the car he would die in, the woman who owned it ran into the yard to stop him. Ted tried to run her down, narrowly missing her but damaging a picket fence as he turned left onto N. Hauser and headed for the highway, passing the long-abandoned trailer park where I was largely raised, where I remember Ted sprawling on my great grandmother's nappy gold and brown couch, a huge belt buckle—silver and shining—resting on his flat stomach.

He would have been young then, only a handful of years older than I am now. Maybe the age Earl was when he put the last ginger ale highballs on his tab.

But the car's owner was no stranger, was someone Ted had known for years, and he was more than six miles from his own home—where, as police chief Connors noted in an interview with the local paper, Ted's own car was parked.

How Ted came to be so far from home so early in the morning of his last wedding anniversary was never established, and no one could say why even at ten o'clock in the morning, beyond the most obvious of reasons, his blood alcohol content was over .20, double the legal limit and pushing for triple. Given these circumstances, Deputy Coroner William Bloodgood saw no reason to mark the death as anything but an accident.

The investigation never came to anything, it seems, and all police records were destroyed after a ten year wait, destroyed before I ever saw the picture in the newspaper or found the American Legion roadside white cross. Maybe everyone looked at the BAC and decided any man that drunk that early was simply incapable of acting in his right mind.

It's an easy enough mistake to make.

I think about Earl, though, about ginger ale highballs and self-inflicted gunshot wounds and wedding anniversaries. I think about genetic markers. I think about 1953 newspaper stories and the coded language of suicide announcements in small towns.

***

Sitting in my lawn chair over my step-great grandfather's grave, feet

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stretched to the edge of my sister, I take a drink from a brown-paper wrapped bottle. My son bought me a flask for Christmas last year, but I can't bring myself to use it. There's an encoded message in a flask, a message not only about drinking but about making plans to drink. And at eight years old, my son should not already understand me this well.

Absolut is good cemetery vodka, smooth and based in wheat. Stolichnaya works, too, with its mix of wheat and rye. They share a foundation that crafts their identities. But I'm no Crystal Head-drinking snob, and even Popov can do the necessary work. Those two spirits, so radically different in the ways that matter to the palate, have the same foundation in grain.

Alcoholism is genetic, some scientists argue. More argue that alcohol abuse is a learned behavior. My grandmother drank cans of Rainier while she put her makeup on every morning. I enjoyed fetching can after can for her, carefully lifting the ring and tugging the pull tab open, usually without cutting myself. Every family reunion across the 1970s included kegs of beer, Ted and his brothers gathered in a loose circle anchored against a garbage can filled with ice and arguments.

Suicide—or at least the depression that can lead to it—goes back a century, blackening and burning branches all along my family tree.

Patterns of self-medication repeat across generations.

Degrees of success vary, but most of Ted's siblings died too soon and usually sober.

I visit the cemetery and bring vodka.

I visit Ted and listen to the floral display left by strangers.

I am the only man left, now that Ted's youngest brother is gone. It's on me to maintain the markers, to watch for settling, to rebuild the flower boxes when the weather breaks them down, to remember.

From where I sit and drink, I can see more than four decades of family life, of spouses buried side by side, of children near their parents. Dates inscribed in marble, military service in bronze. They are my blood, and while heredity is not destiny, parts of me were written in pencil before I was born.

And I am learning the language of flowers.



Shane Borrowman is a professor of English at The University of Montana Western, where he teaches classes in creative writing, editing and publishing, and zombie literature/film. He is editor or co-editor of six collections of original scholarship and four textbooks, including T*rauma and the Teaching of Writing*, *The Promise of America, and Authenticity*. Additionally, he is author of the memoir *Mistakes Were Made: Reflections on Being a Mediocre Father*.

HONEYMOON AND A UTAH MASSACRE

ELIZABETH HENRY


Elizabeth Henry

If we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving, and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves and of threatening ourselves with death.

—Pablo Neruda

There are very few signs on Highway 50. There are cattle guards and a few fences, but no billboards. Long stretches of road through Great Basin sagebrush and endless horizon open up one's peripheral vision, calm the chatter of one's mind, quiet the constant visual disturbance from the overstimulation of America's Interstates. But on U.S. Highway 50, you can go for several miles with no road sign. The effect is hypnotic; the American mind is so rarely freed.

The effect on me was certainly hypnotic the first time I traveled this road. It was early July, and the second night of our honeymoon—entered into by light of the desert stars. We had entered a desert wilderness. But no images of aesthetic spiritual trials and revivals came to me those several nights of driving west from Iowa City. Instead, all I could see from the passenger side of our pick-up truck were the alpha waves of my opening mind and an expanding horizon. It was a wonderful state—no

expectations, no fears, no better home for the presentation of love's singular adventure.

Our drive through the desert highway conjured some long-footed jack-rabbits who'd been huddling in a scraggly bush on the side of the road, fretting the crossing for some time until the bright lights and roaring engine of a rare 3 a.m. ton of steel panicked them into action—a quick-flighted flash across our headlight beam. We didn't hit a single one. There was room enough on the road for all of us. But the rabbits' frequent dashes across the road were a reminder that the long yards of tunneled light we were following led us through more than nothing.

We did come across one sign that night. Lone and brown it simply read "Gunnison Massacre Site." The sign stood as a lonely testament to a story about the days of the western frontier and its "Indian" wars. The word "massacre"—flashing with our headlight and then gone—offered a reminder of the ruthless confrontations, the heartless deaths, from those days of Manifest Destiny, still rolling by. It seemed significant, this lone, brown sign on the long stretch of highway, a foreboding and looming presence amidst flashing jackrabbits and the occasional burrowing owl.

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Perhaps it was the stark attraction of this one sign in the middle of so much empty darkness, or the suggestive expanse of the dark turnoff it indicated, or our complete lack of knowledge about Gunnison and his massacre, but for whatever reason we turned around—a big event on Highway 50 in Utah. The sign took us to a graveled path, getting progressively narrower, that cut through the Sevier desert—an endless stretch of white sand, salt bush, and lizard life that lay stretched flat and quiet in the most eloquent, late-night kind of way. The silent, still night was accompanied only by the rough sound of gravel on the tires and rocks in the wheel wells.

After half of a mile down this bumpy road, we came to a circle. In the middle of the circle stood a tall, gray, stone spire, shaped something like a dulled shark's tooth. We turned off the engine. We got out. We heard no sound but the crack of our engine cooling and reshaping itself. Then a distant wind through no trees—just thin silvered sage leaves—whistled a little. Though the sky was very dark, the desert had a faint glow that spread to a rimmed horizon. We thought that the stars might have been casting that glow on the iridescent rock and luminous salty sand we were in. But there was also the sense of live things around us, their eyes glowing and watching. They might have been coyotes, though there

was no yapping or barking. They might have been rabbits, or large-eyed owls. Or they might have been a creature's from some rarely seen liminal world where another sentience begins to operate, certain and sensuous just the same. We took a blanket from the truck and lay down next to the big tooth.

There was no story engraved on the site of the Gunnison massacre. No further explanation whatsoever. We listened to the dry wind. There were some stories in that wind, though—sad and bereft—about losing things. If the Old West tells a story of violent conquest, the old desert tells a story of loss. The dull whistle of a summer's wind through fragrant clusters of crouching sage was enough to tell the story of evacuation, relocation, relentless Manifest Destiny, and the revenge and resistance that I imagined must have taken place at the site of the Gunnison Massacre. Call it a ghost, or the mind's ability to imagine other voices—but I heard emotion and sorrow in that thinly haired whistle. It chilled me.

That large rock that marked the site bore a small plaque screwed in, which offered only a date: "October 26, 1853." Here lies some old blood, and maybe a few scattered bones from more than a hundred years before, still decalcifying. I wondered if I heard those bones, or the dry whisper of bone dust as it shimmered lightly over this old desert sea basin. But the stone bore no text, no sign that described what happened here or why this site was important. To research and discover that story seemed a way to mark and remember this honeymoon moment. It was the only way I was aware of at the time. I did not yet know that all the words written about this site would prove unrelentingly blank—unable, or unwilling, to explain.

***

In spite of the scattered life that maintains the high desert of Utah, most Euro-American explorers and pioneers of the 19th century avoided this region on their trails west. They needed more water. The Oregon Trail steers clear of this desert. And the Mormons, after they founded their desert Zion near the Great Salt Lake north of there, avoided southern Utah for as long as they felt they could. When they did push south, they began to push out the Pahvant.

We know well the stories of such encounters. It's what defines the frontier in our culture—a place where people fight. Historian Patricia Limerick reminds us, though, that such fights appear clearly defined only from a long distance. The stories become more complicated the closer one gets to them. It's like the Rockies, says Limerick:

> Go past the plains, past the foothills, and into the mountains themselves, and neither clarity nor precision remains an option. What you have in front of you—more to the point, what you are immersed in—is a labyrinth, a sprawl of peaks and valleys and parks and meadows and canyons in no discernible patterns. This is not a mountain range. This is a mountain jumble, and it extends for hundreds of miles. (120)

The stories behind the Gunnison Massacre appear to be one such jumble. Mormon migration met Ute-Pahvant nomadic hunters on a lonely desert landscape that held little water and less big game. There was a jumble of Mormon troubles. And the urge to build a railroad that crossed the continent brought even more trouble than

The stories behind the Gunnison Massacre appear to be one such jumble. Mormon migration met Ute-Pahvant nomadic hunters on a lonely desert landscape that held little water and less big game. There was a jumble of Mormon troubles. And the urge to build a railroad that crossed the continent brought even more trouble than Mormons alone. When Captain John Gunnison went through this region in search of a Pacific Railroad route, that trouble exploded.

Mormons alone. When Captain John Gunnison went through this region in search of a Pacific Railroad route, that trouble exploded.

John Gunnison was a New Hampshire native and West Point graduate. He began his military career fighting the Seminole in Florida. He then assisted with Andrew Jackson's infamous "removal" of Cherokees from their homes in Georgia. Shortly thereafter, Gunnison joined the Corps of Topographical Engineers so he could move west—apparently the southern swamps were getting to his health. He was assigned to the Howard Stansbury Expedition to survey the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Out west, his health improved and Gunnison greatly enjoyed the dry stretches of open air which being an Army Corps surveyor gave him access to. When the expedition had finished its work, Gunnison stayed on in Utah for a winter (1849) to study Mormon religion and culture, from which sprang his book *The Mormons or Latter Day Saints*.

It was the only book about Mormons published by a non-Mormon sympathizer at the time. Some say the book ingratiated Gunnison to Utah's Mormons; others say it was studiously or even resentfully ignored by them. Mid-19th century Mormonism had, by this time, a siege mentality. After the book's publication, Gunnison left the region to return to a post in the Great Lakes for awhile but was soon re-appointed to the southwest to head up a survey of the region for a Pacific Railroad route. He was killed while trying to finish this survey.

It's difficult to piece together exactly what happened the morning of October 26th, 1853. As historian Robert Kent Fielding points out, the event is "almost lost" in contemporary books written about Utah and Western American history. What shows up as fact often isn't substantiated by primary sources or documents. Actually, there are no primary sources. Descriptions of the massacre are all second-hand. Though some of John Gunnison's party survived the attack, they themselves did not record the event, or stick around long enough during it to witness many of the details or memorize their attackers' faces. As Fielding says, "There are no records of this event, in print or out of print, that will stand the scrutiny of scholarship"(iii).

Fielding himself pieces together his book-length story of the massacre from articles in the local Mormon newspapers that covered the story with a Mormon spin at the time of Gunnison's death: *The Deseret News, The Millennial Star, The Mormon, The Seer, The Western Standard*. He relies, too, on a second-hand report drafted by one Lieutenant Edward G. Beckwith, who was some

twenty miles from the massacre the morning it occurred, as well as the official reports of Governor Brigham Young, both of whom also had a heavy hand in the editors' statements in the newspapers listed above.

Just days before the massacre, Gunnison's team had split into two: Lieutenant Beckwith in one part, Gunnison in another. The winter was fast approaching and they still had significant ground to cover. The night before the split, Beckwith wrote that the whole party camped in a "beautiful valley in one vast Artemisia plain, surrounded entirely by grassy mountains" full of geese and ducks and herds of antelope. On October 25th, the teams split off and Gunnison's men cut west into harsher, colder territory. First, they moved through the great sagebrush plain, full of black-tailed jack-rabbits with hawks careening overhead, then through a region of sloughs populated by geese, ducks, brant, pelicans and gulls. Gunnison's team decided to camp where the Sevier River bends and banks into the Sevier Lake, in a shelter of willows. Early that dawn, Gunnison and his men awoke, unarmed, to a small band of men in native dress, armed with both guns and arrows, intent on ambush. Of the ten men camped in the desert that night with Captain John Gunnison, seven were killed immediately, four escaped, with several escapees critically wounded.

Twenty miles away, Lieutenant Beckwith and his half of the party slept soundly. Later that day, two men who had escaped the Gunnison ambush made it to Beckwith's camp in time to gasp out something like "Indian attack" before they and their exhausted horses collapsed in front of Beckwith and his men. Beckwith struck camp hurriedly to try to make it to Gunnison's site before that next nightfall.

They didn't make it. By the time they came anywhere near what remained of Gunnison's men, it was dark and they had to stop short of the site. They spent that night listening to snarling and yelping coyotes, "the low rumble of growling and snapping into the long hours of the night" that they rightly assumed was the sound of coyotes making a meal out of their dead comrades. The commander of the region, Captain Robert M. Morris, was with Beckwith by then and writes it was the longest and most dreadful night of his life. They too were unarmed, and kept watch against another attack throughout the night.

At dawn, they came upon the bodies and the task at hand was to determine how, whether, when, and where to bury what remained of Gunnison and his men. Since the bodies were shredded, Beckwith chose not to carry the fragile remains back to the main camp with him. There were too many pieces. Ten days later, they returned to the massacre site, circled a two-mile radius and brought in scattered bones, which they buried in separate graves. One thighbone was all that remained of Captain John Gunnison, that and a chunk of his hair, which was sent to the Captain's widow back East.

At first, Easterners accused Mormons of instigating the attack. Lieutenant Beckwith himself headed up the investigation and determined that the Mormons weren't involved, but rather the Pahvant were acting in revenge for an earlier attack on their people by the Hildreth party, a group of white, non-Mormon migrators on their way to California. When a small group of Pahvant had questioned the migrants' right to pass through their land, scuffling ensued and the migrants shot three unarmed Pahvant.

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Non-Mormon Anglos suspected Mormon involvement in the massacre. It was known, for example, that certain Mormon factions didn't want the railroad coming through and disturbing their isolated religious freedom. Was the Gunnison attack a Mormon attack against the Pacific Railroad route itself? Some folks thought so. Some were suspicious of the fact that Gunnison had not been warned of Pahvant hostility when he'd visited the nearby Mormon village of Fillmore, the day before he died. Fillmore's Mormon citizens had been warned to "fort up" against an Indian attack because of increased tensions between whites and natives in the region, but they did not, apparently, pass on this warning to Gunnison before they let him head out to the desert unarmed and alone with his small party of surveyors. Some had speculated, therefore, that the Mormon villagers of Fillmore wanted Gunnison to take the fall instead of themselves, knowing that the Pahvant law of revenge would then be satisfied and the villagers would thereby remain safe.

The fact that none of the victims had been scalped—the custom for this band in this region—suggested to some that the Pahvant were not involved. Moreover, although one man in the party was attacked by a bullet, the Pahvant at the time had no guns. Other bands of Ute had guns, but those bands lived far from this place and were largely at peace with whites. Previous engineers had passed through the same region and had been kindly received by the Pahvant. Moreover, Gunnison's survey records and logs had been taken during the attack, which was not a typical act for the Pahvant. So some journalists and theorists suggested that Mormons disguised as Pahvant had attacked Gunnison and his men, especially since survivors in flight had no time to "scrutinize their assailants very closely." Part of the motivation for these stories, it appears, seems to have come from those who criticized Gunnison's *History of the Mormons* as being overly friendly to the Mormons. It was an effective rhetorical strategy for the enemies of the Saints to accuse Gunnison's killers of being those Mormons with whom he had wrongly sympathized too much. On the other hand, there "was a strong motive for throwing the odium of it upon the Indians, for the Mormons being at war with them might justly hope that the United States would inflict a severe chastisement upon the guilty party, which would be in effect, to fight the battles for the Mormons"(27). The shredded bodies of Gunnison's group were made much of in local papers. Mormon papers

accused the Pahvant of dismemberment and mutilation, although Beckwith himself had written it was probably the coyotes. Even if it was Pahvant, it was not clear whether the attack was an endorsed act of the tribes or renegade bandits violating the wishes of the tribe.

Lieutenant Beckwith filed a report, but no outside official investigation was made by the State of Utah. Governor Brigham Young offered sympathy to the Indians by justifying their conduct as retaliatory for the California-bound Hildreth's treatment of the same band. Since Governor Young had no interest in prosecuting the natives, the federal government agents in Washington were left to incur their largely uninformed justice. Their activities, as one would expect, caused more tension and ultimately resulted in more massacres. Most historians attribute the cause of the more famous and devastating "Massacre at Mountain Meadow" of 1857 to the Fed's mishandling of the Gunnison outcome. Utah history, says Fielding, may well have turned out differently had there been no Gunnison massacre. "The agencies of cultural change were neither revelation and authority, as anticipated by Brigham Young, nor individual freedom of choice and reason, as Captain Gunnison had anticipated. Instead, they were the forces of war, of enforced cultural conformity, and of transformed economic productivity"(129).

Enforced cultural conformity and the forces of war had nothing to do with anyone's religion or reason. Nor was the surveyors' science enough for the country to make a rational decision about train tracks, despite its fastidious labeling and cataloguing of the West's natural history. It took the Civil War for Congress to finally pick a route that landed, with its golden spike, in northern Utah, hundreds of miles north of the site where surveyor Gunnison had died. It took wars and massacres for tracks to be laid in the West; and it took many more massacres, removals, and reservations for things to "settle" in our relations with this land's indigenous inhabitants.

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That night we had moved on foot with a headlight beam to guide us, circling the truck, moving into darkness. It soon became clear that the darkness was the better means by which to see the desert. So we shut off the

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headlights, like Ed Abbey in his Moab mobile home shutting off the generator to see the dark world around him. Without the artificial light, the desert glowed—evanescent with white, salty sand and moonlight upon it, with the teaming life of spirits past and shrubs present peering out at us from empty spaces. We wandered apart for a while, and then came together, deciding it was best to stand and face the desert in an embrace.

As I held my husband that honeymoon night, I felt a wall, right in front of us. Behind that wall I imagined the generations, people who have more history here, long before the Mormons came. I wondered what stories they told of this place, how their grandmothers taught them to weave beautiful baskets from what my culture calls weeds. Their stories were part of that wall, but also my only door through it. I began to hear those stories then, whispering, reminding us of loss, and of what more we stood to lose. But here, too, were stories of sun gods and straw brothers, of coyotes with wit and wisdom, and of stubby plants with deep roots to the underworld, causing rain and bringing forth human souls.

Our obliviousness to nature, said curmudgeonly Ed Abbey, is "held in place by ways of speaking that simply deny intelligence to other species and to nature in general, as well as by the structures of civilization." Motors shut out voices of birds and wind, lights eclipse stars and the night, air conditioners hide the season; malls, offices, and autos "finally obviate any need to step outside the purely human world at all"(13).

But standing on the desert plain that summer's night, this boundary seemed to me more like skin, albeit toughened and scarred. Like skin, there were passageways, openings through which to perceive this place. I could take in the atmosphere and absorb it. I could breathe and sweat and pray my own contributions to the atmosphere. My skin wasn't so much a boundary as a medium of exchange. I needed those openings. I needed more contact, more bodily and spiritual and linguistic tools with which to forge the long bridge across our culture's cavernous separation of body and spirit, language and reality, humans and nature, human and human.

On that royal-blue summer's night, the barren expanse of rock and sand told its own new stories, sang to me its desert songs. Utah's Great Basin and its nocturnal spirits of skink, vole, and burrowing owl were undoubtedly wafting about us. Perhaps a band of coyotes saw us standing there in the midst of their hunting grounds, home of the jack-rabbits. I felt that buried in that sand or gestured by the wind were the stories of equilibrium, storm, blossom, and disruption that every desert has to tell.

We felt the death of people and hope that had occurred there. We felt our own, pending.

And that night, too, we felt syncretic with the wild—open to the possibility that this cusp of desert we stood on had something to teach us about cusps. Dry air could come in, the cell shape could change, and the rutted pathways of my mind could shift current with each new wind that blew through it. We needed to keep shifting, for the married road ahead.

I learned more about compromise and mutual evolution from simply standing in the desert at 3 a.m., listening to the wind blow, than I had learned from weeks of researching the twisted tales of innumerable conflicts,

fragmented and contradictory, that swirled around the site of the Gunnison massacre. There was no sense of reconciliation or adaptation recorded in the colonizers' history books, no hint of syncretism allowed for in the recorded stories of Mormon-Pahvant relations. But the desert had its lesson.

So I'll never believe the old books and theories, the elegant sentences and rhetorical structures, or the signs posted, are truer than the silent eyes and wind of those short minutes in a Utah desert at 3 a.m. Indeed, we had come there, had been beckoned there, by a lone sign on a lonely highway. We had read the sign and followed the sign to find nothing. But in that emptiness we had found it all.

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DIPTYCH: A MOTHER-DAUGHTER COVER UP

CAROL MOODY



One-size-fits-all

Her kids aren't home from school yet. She rips open a package from "The American Image Corporation" and reads the text on the paper insert: *Watch yourself shrink in the marvelous new Sauna Suit, made of durable vinyl. Melts away inches. Covers the body, causing it to perspire with the slightest exertion. Effortless way to look younger and feel better.*

She unfolds the suit, more like a lawn and leaf bag than a marvel, and steps through its neck opening. As she pulls up the shiny, silver plastic, she's careful to cover her sacred Mormon underwear—her temple garments, made of white cotton-polyester. She fans the fingers of one hand, smoothing the holy fabric at mid-thigh as it bunches. With her other hand, she tugs the vinyl over the navel mark—a half-inch of raised horizontal stitching—a symbol of the promises she made in the temple. She's to keep her body chaste and healthy. She sends her arms through sleeves like sausage casings, then cinches the collar over the neckline of her special underwear.

Still in her closet, she reaches for the designer dress she longs to fit into. The synthetic orange-and-white-color-block fabric—iconic for the 70s—sways against her Sauna Suit as she turns left then right in the mirror. She rehangs the dress and heads to the fridge for a sugar-free Tab cola, her pantlegs swishing as she walks, making sounds like

faint static between two radio stations. She thumbs through magazines at the kitchen table, readying herself. Just outside, the school bus brakes hiss and squeak.

She must've known we'd notice her sitting there, swallowed up by a puffy onesie. Before we could look sideways at each other, she'd say, "This is Mommy's new sweatsuit. It helps me lose weight." Her daughter of eleven years, I knew that losing was important. I knew that because it was all she ever talked about. She pretty much stayed the same from one weight loss fad to the next, only grumpier. *So, what was lost, exactly?* She didn't lose like our great aunt Marie did. Marie lost her arm as a kid in a farming accident. My cousins said she got it stuck in a hay baler or something. At family reunions, when our old aunt leaned in to hug us, the empty sleeve of her blouse flapped at her side like a windsock on a dull, grey day. The word "lose" was full of nothing but fear.

Keeping quiet was the thing to do. No telling. No friends over. No cracking up when Mom's plastic bottom stuck to the pleather couch, lifting a cushion with each rise. No staring at her long, sweaty toes, gripping the linoleum as she paced the hallway, talking on the wall phone, wrapping herself in the curly cord. We were left to wonder about the mystery of it all; sealed and contained head to toe, *how did she manage to go to the bathroom*?

By the end of the week, Mom did shrink unless the amazing Sauna Suit grew—now strained and frayed at the edges. Either way, hers was a body hollow and grumbling for food, dampened and choked by trapped air. Hers was a mind hemmed in by God, a voice telling her to look like the other women, to yield to the words of the patriarchs as she commanded her kids, "Hurry up, God damn it! Don't you dare miss the bus. I've got a day!"

Before the ladies' luncheon, our mother would shimmy and squeeze and girdle her middle—dead set to wear the new dress. She'd meet with the other churchgoers against the Equal Rights Amendment and watch slideshow images of the slender and commanding, shampoo-set of a woman: Phyllis Schlafly, the conservative activist of the 1970s, determined to kill the ERA. The men in the church printed pamphlets assuring women of their happiness at a husband's side, their divine role as nurturers, their predestined place in the home.

The leaders gave Mom a stack of brochures to distribute amongst her neighbors. I picture her taking the long way home that day. She was shy.

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To traffic in political material in the Colorado suburb she'd recently moved into was the kind of overwhelm she'd likely avoid. I imagine her seizing the steering wheel at ten and two, swerving off the straight and narrow—her wild hunger urging her to Winchell's. "I'll take a dozen glazed," she'd say, "a family favorite." The "STOP ERA" leaflets fluttered in the back seat of the car for weeks, her kids folding them into paper airplanes, and drawing googly eyes and beards on the housewives in aprons.

For as long as I can remember, my mom was obsessed with her body. She was raised in Salt Lake City, two miles from Temple Square. Her mother was ill most of her life, had many caretakers, and died of heart failure when Mom was fifteen. The day after the funeral, her grandmother flew the family to Hawaii. There's a photo of my young mom, standing alone on the beach. She's wearing a light-pink, gauzy swimsuit, her hair perfectly curled, her arms fixed at her sides. She's fragile and fussed over. For the split second of the shutter snap, the sun seems to hurt her eyes as she squints toward the blazing sky; the corners of her mouth pull back slightly, not to smile but to smirk at the ridiculous request to pose at a time as this—a snapshot holding her forever in her grief.

She married in her early twenties, stayed close to her grandmother, and even closer to a church that valued her skills in teaching Mormon doctrine. After the children came along, she'd pop little red pills to keep awake at night, prepping for her Sunday school classes. Fellow members admired her gospel knowledge and wowed over her laminated handouts. I didn't get it. Maybe because I witnessed her Sunday afternoon collapse lasting into Monday. We kids would drop Eggo Waffles into

After the children came along, she'd pop little red pills to keep awake at night, prepping for her Sunday school classes. Fellow members admired her gospel knowledge and wowed over her laminated handouts. I didn't get it. Maybe because I witnessed her Sunday afternoon collapse lasting into Monday.

the toaster, rummage through piles of clothes for matching socks, and dig through her purse for lunch money—the last ones to the bus stop. Or maybe because I wanted more for her. She had a bachelor's degree in English and journalism. I'd run my fingers along a room's length of her dusty textbooks—a body of knowledge held within vermillion-red, emerald-green, and navy-blue spines, raised-gold lettering etched across their backs, long forgotten.

She gains weight. She can no longer fit into her luncheon dress. Depression settles. Hopelessness swells. She abandons her effortless recipe for erasure and stuffs the Sauna Suit into the round metal trash can out back. Her husband is working late again. She says she needs to be alone and tells my older sister, Liz, and me to put the young ones to bed. We watch TV downstairs until the young ones fall asleep on the couch. We carry them upstairs, bare feet dangling, dirt between their toes. Liz is tired. She tells me, "Goodnight." I stay up and read.

An hour or so later, I walk to the bathroom for a drink of water and find our mother slumped over the toilet—a half-empty bottle of aspirin and oblong

blue pills scattered on the tile. She's in her yellow muumuu, the one with a zipper up the middle, the one she wears when it's just us, her family. Its forgiving fabric falls all around her. She hovers over the bowl of pinkish red. *Is she crying? Or is she just breathing funny?* I can't tell. Neither of us speaks. The air is like a thick membrane I must pass through. I slip my hands under her armpits, lower her onto a towel, and roll her over on her side. I give her a warm, wet washcloth. She takes it from me with both hands, shaking and cold. I call Dad and tell him she's throwing up. "It's bad," I say. "It's blood."

I return and cover her sleeping body with a blanket. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, I lean sideways against her back and count her breaths—one, two, three. . . ten, eleven, twelve. . . one hundred one, one hundred two, one hundred three. . . —my mind empty except for simple math. Dad arrives work-weary, his eyes pink and veiny. Together, we lift her to her feet. I find her slippers. He drives her to the ER.

I clean the bathroom with Clorox to leave no trace for the young ones. The presence of her sadness lingers in the sterile air, now stinging my eyes. I stay in the bathroom longer than I need to. I could deal with my mom's rages and the relief that came after. Her anger was like a flash flood. Even when we didn't know it was coming, we could mobilize and get out of the way. I'd start vacuuming. Liz would empty the dishwasher. Mom would recover. We'd soon move through the house like we did the day before. But the sorrow seeped like water from a broken pipe deep beneath the ground, finding its way through dirt, around rocks, and into sandy spaces that sunk. Puddles became potholes; potholes became sinkholes, nearly swamping us all.

I couldn't know then how trapped she really was, her religion bound tight under her pretty dresses. She'd stifle herself in devotion to the men in the church, to the women following the men, and to her own history of image over identity. She'd have moments of crystalline escape in the warm, sugary glaze of donuts melting across her tongue, in sharing the bounty with her kids, in rejoicing with them around the sticky breakfast table—only to be followed by a sluggish return to her native habitat, organized religion, and her first language, Mormonism. A suppression of self that would become the story of her life.

Mom spent the next ten days in the hospital while Dad cobbled together members from our church to care for us. Other than generic soundbites that she'd be okay or that the doctors would

I could deal with my mom's rages and the relief that came after. Her anger was like a flash flood. Even when we didn't know it was coming, we could mobilize and get out of the way. I'd start vacuuming. Liz would empty the dishwasher. Mom would recover. We'd soon move through the house like we did the day before. But the sorrow seeped like water from a broken pipe deep beneath the ground, finding its way through dirt, around rocks, and into sandy spaces that sunk. Puddles became potholes; potholes became sinkholes, nearly swamping us all.

make her better, Dad didn't talk about her illness. Neither did we. We lived inside a giant silence with our dad. We kids were good at it; he had to be—he was our lay minister (the bishop). We'd hear him speak from the pulpit. He'd tell us God was in charge. If we obeyed, God would do the rest.

I rode with Dad in the family station wagon to bring Mom home. He went inside to discharge her, leaving me waiting in the car. I crawled over the seats to the way back and knelt on the floorboard. Through the hatchback's rear window, I watched the revolving doors to the medical center spin people in and out and wondered which version of my mom would emerge. Would she be in her orange and white dress, wide-smiled, sized and shaped like the women in her *Ladies Home Journal*? Or would she be small in the way I found her trembling in the bathroom? The catch of dread in my gut told me she would be the mom whose adult life had crashed into my young one.

By the time Dad rolled her out in a wheelchair, my feet had that prickly, pins and needles feeling. She was wearing a pale blue housedress with tiny, eyelet flowers stitched across the neckline. Her face wore no expression at all. I remember thinking that the doctors must've gotten it wrong; she didn't seem any better. While Dad helped her into the car, I turned and peeked over my shoulder at them in the front. I heard Mom say, "Please don't tell the congregation." I don't quite remember Dad's response or if he had one. But I do remember her cranking the rearview mirror her way, seeing her face for others, then fluffing and reviving her brunette curls—flattened by days of bed rest. Dad jogged around to the driver's side and slid behind the wheel as she pushed the mirror toward him. With a low tone from the back of her tongue, she said, "I have stomach ulcers. You tell them that." Dad, staring out the windshield, nodded in agreement.

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Had I just witnessed an excuse in the shape of a lie form in her mouth? A believable enough lie that would withhold healing from her. *And Dad was in on it*?

I couldn't quite comprehend why Dad would go along with Mom's story. Even I knew that she didn't have stomach ulcers because that's what Granddad died of earlier that year. Too weak to get out of bed, he ate only oatmeal or Cream of Wheat. Mom ate all things sharp and spiky, like barbeque-flavored potato chips and pretzels. She didn't waste away, despite her trying. She had a sickness that made her say "yes" when she meant "no" or "I don't know"—pasting duty over doubt, a pulling and pulsing, a stopping and starting, leaving her stalled out in bed for days.

From then on, Dad would tell the tale of bleeding ulcers, not the suicide

attempt, not the severe clinical depression. I was learning something about those two. Something clear and confusing at the same time. Silence was one thing. Lying seemed another—a sealing of love and hurt, a devotion that sent her tumbling into a familiar darkness—as he dutifully turned the key to drive her home.

Still in the car, still inside that crammed moment that felt like forever, they must have forgotten their daughter was with them. I'd learned in Sunday school that God's name was sacred, used only to pray. At home, when Mom was mad at us, she'd use His name to swear. Alone in the back, I sprawled out flat on the bench seat. With the crown of my head pressed against the carpeted wheel well, I wondered if God could be both at once—a prayer and a curse.

Dress Code

My freshman dorm window overlooked the parking lot and main entrance to student housing. I leaned against the glass, watching parents lifting and lugging their eighteen-year-olds' suitcases, juggling their books, and hugging out their goodbyes. My older sister, Liz, had dropped me off earlier that morning. She'd helped me cart two moving boxes up the stairs to my room in Deseret Towers at BYU in Provo, Utah—the Mormon-owned university. Dad was working. And Mom, she was on a trip with her church lady friends.

It was 1980. Ronald Reagan was running for president. Black Sabbath released the record *Heaven and Hell* with the album art of three cigarette-smoking angels. I worried about a movie star as president. I worried that I wouldn't fit in at BYU. Then I worried about wanting to fit in at such a place. I had an attitude that I'd been growing for about a year. I had discovered Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, Gloria Steinem, and Alice Walker. Satire and feminism were becoming the brands of my youth, separating me from my unwavering peers.

Earlier that summer, I'd traveled with friends to Europe on an art history tour. The month-long experience rescued me, practically resuscitated me, from a past life—a home life of velvet paintings from Tijuana, where blue ballerinas danced across beige landscapes, and scrawny cowboys rode horses into burnt orange sunsets. Dad bought in bulk. "A painting for every room," he'd say, placing the fuzzy renderings randomly throughout our house. My way out of bargain over beauty was the study of real art and the lives of artists.

The first week of school, I lined up with fellow co-eds—their polyester pantsuits pressed and shiny, their blown-out hair big and bouncy. I was from Colorado, only a state away, but standing among them wearing a Neil Young t-shirt and a distressed jean skirt, I was a world apart. We were filing into the administration building for fall registration. Deep in thought, wondering whether I should take a class on the Transcendentalists or Shakespeare 101, I spotted a young man pointing at me from behind a table near the door, his arms waving like a traffic cop. I was to get out of line. I did. As he sprinted my way, I read his nametag: *Chad, Returned Missionary, Bolivia*. Stopping just two feet in front of me, he said, "You can't register unless you comply with the BYU Honor Code. You're wearing flip-flops."

"Obviously," I mouthed back.

"Did you hear me?" Chad repeated himself, "Your footwear is against

the honor code. You can't register." I scrunched my face at him—an immature gesture that seemed necessary at the time. As I spun around and walked away, he yelled, "By the way, that slit up the back of your skirt goes waaaay above your knees." I kept ignoring him. I kept moving. I hadn't bothered to read the "Style of Our Own" pamphlet that BYU had sent with my acceptance letter. Women were to wear modest pantsuits and dresses; "grubby attire" was not allowed outside dorm areas. I was several feet away when Chad added, "And don't re-enter the line 'til you can obey the rules." I pretended not to hear, my sandals slapping a steady cadence as I ditched him.

Well, I did come back, but not until I had crossed the street to a nearby maintenance building where I'd asked for a thigh's length of duct tape. I re-entered the queue barefoot, flip-flops in hand, and my skirt sealed shut with silver tape. I handed my student ID to a young woman at the checkpoint next to Chad's. She winked at me, shooing me through the doorway while Chad frowned in protest.

No typing skills to speak of, with barely two years of waitressing behind me, the only on-campus job I could apply for was modeling for the art classes. "I hire all kinds," the department secretary said. I slid my application across her desk as she pointed to the Rolodex of cards by her phone. I assumed that's where she kept the "all kinds." She snatched her notepad and reading glasses, stood up, and walked along the side of her desk to face me.

"Such long legs, my dear. How do you ever find pants?" I wasn't about to tell her that I shopped at the Army-Navy store across town. Somehow men's pants came in all sorts of lengths, while women's clothes were made mostly for the average gal. I was an outlier. Nearly my father's height in my teens, I'd overhear my mom and aunts troubling over my size, once discussing the possibility of hormone shots to close my growth plates.

"And your hair, does it always lay so flat?" Meaning, you poor thing, you clearly don't perm it. Without asking, she twisted a few strands between her fingers and thumb and flicked them back—my hair, now flailing with static like she'd rubbed a balloon across my scalp.

"How tall are you, anyway?"

"Six feet, maybe more." I replied.

"Uh-huh, I see," she mumbled, her voice becoming flat and clinical. She had me take off my shoes, sit, crouch, stretch my arms out wide, then place my hands on my head. Between each pose, she'd pause and jot down notes. Moving through the positions was like a funky geometry—rectangles dividing into triangles: tilting, turning, obtuse, acute, then obtuse again. That's when an image of a favorite painting I had discovered over the summer flashed through my head: Picasso's

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Young Ladies of Avignon—five powerful women—standing, slanting, squatting—hardly a curve, only elbows, knees—sharp and pitched, thighs, torsos—slant and certain. The women's eyes, dark and piercing—staring right at you—watching and noticing. I closed my eyes and tried to remember each of theirs—the menacing, the muscular, the don't-mess-with-us bravado.

The secretary cleared her throat to get my attention. I watched her write: *Leggy, acne, broad shoulders, scar on right knee, crooked toes—placement: figure drawing or oil painting*. I thanked her and held the doorknob to leave, expecting no work because of my weird-looking feet. Before I could open the door, she said, "It's not a steady job, you know. We'll call you."

For my first session, the instructor handed me a thin cotton robe and what seemed a sheer, one-piece swimming suit with spaghetti straps.

"What's this?" I asked.

"It's a flesh-toned leotard. BYU prohibits us from painting nudes."

"I thought they'd just paint me in my clothes," I said.

The instructor, raising his eyebrows and widening his eyes, replied, "Nope, that's not how it works. The students need to see your physique, your anatomy."

An instant flush spread across my face. *What was I saying? Was the automaton Mormon part of me talking now, warning me to be modest so the young men wouldn't have sinful thoughts?*

I held the peachy-colored suit close to my chest as I remembered how Chad, the hemline policeman, told me to cover up or else. This week, I was to be seen as naked, though I would be not-quite-naked in a sheen of polyester. That's when the Kurt Vonnegut part of my brain rushed in to save me with the absurdity of it all. *Could I be inhabiting another version of the made-up religion, Bokononism, from* Cat's Cradle *—a faith providing the people with better and better lies? —the Bokononites rubbing the bottoms of their feet together for love and connection, even though they knew their religion wasn't true?*

I paused in the vertigo of my thoughts. Myths and rules like internal winds and currents urged me to leave. This time, though, I felt a strange calm rising, keeping me there. *Was it possible that running under the chatter of Mormon commands were the subliminal streams of bare, beautiful humans, of* Young Ladies of Avignon *who spoke to me too?* I looked at my hands, chapped and freckled, gripping the fabric. A single, detailed image that centered me—the solid, broad-shouldered me. I was one of the "all kinds," after all.

"Is there a problem?" the instructor asked, tilting his head forward.

"No, sorry for my hesitation. You see, this is my first job this semester."

His eyes softened as he stepped back and sat on the edge of his desk.

"Let me get this straight." I said, "I wear a form-fitting onesie because your students can't see me naked to paint me naked?"

"Ridiculous, I know," he replied. "However, this is highly professional, and you can leave if you feel uncomfortable."

"No, I'm good." And I was. Despite the bizarre leotard decree, my flaws, my wounds, my vertical expanse were what got me there.

I changed in the adjoining single-stall bathroom. My clothes in a heap on the floor, I faced the mirror above the sink. *What if Chad could see me now?* The young woman who rebuffed him, standing unabashedly naked in the Harris Fine Arts Center, the middle-most part of BYU—the university he so dutifully vowed to defend.

I overheard the students filing into the studio as I pulled the leotard over my skin, now dotted with goosebumps. The silky, see-through fabric outlined my hips, abdomen, and breasts. I took a deep breath, draped the robe over my shoulders, and opened the door. Through an open window across the room, a row of aspen trees diffused the late light of day into smudgy shadows across the floor. While the students finished setting up their canvases and shuffled their paints, I stood barefoot near the instructor. He announced the rules for the session: "Do not comment on the model's body, do not touch the model, and do not talk to the model."

I removed my robe and stepped onto a raised platform in the center of the room. The teacher had me sit on a stool with my left hand holding the outside of my upper thigh, my right arm slack and straight, my knees falling away on either side, my torso angling forward. Students' eyes surfaced from behind their easels then disappeared, their silent gazes swirling about the room. I imagined them painting my defiant eyes, my female form—de-idealized.

The whole of my body settled onto the wooden stool. Sweat spread beneath my feet as my toes pressed onto the plywood floor. I felt myself expand with each stilled breath. I stared ahead and wondered about my unseen future, about my place in this place,

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and how I hadn't spoken to my mom since classes started. What would she think of her daughter's big, bold pose, her daughter's stomach soft and saggy as she bent forward? That's when an image of my mother returned to me, an image of her in the bathroom—lying on her side. Her body exhausted and freed—no girdles, no support hose, no Playtex-Cross-Your-Heart bra—my flesh warming hers, how I'd placed my hand on her bare neck, her vessels—rivulets of life—beating into my blistered, kid-sized palm. The weight of her body relaxed onto mine, her blood pumping hard, fighting for her.

How we waited, undone together, the rest of the world dissolving around us.



Carol Moody holds an MFA from the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University. Her writing has appeared in *Book XI: A Journal of Literary Philosophy*, issue VI. She is a nurse turned speech therapist turned writer. She lives in Salt Lake City and often retreats to the canyons and dark skies of Southern Utah.

READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

THE MIGHTY FIVE

Two years ago, Mark Sundeen reviewed the history and results of Utah's "Mighty Five" campaign to promote tourism in the five national parks in Utah – Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands, and Arches – for Outside *magazine. He wondered if the campaign had worked too well.*

Utah had a problem. Shown a photo of Delicate Arch, people guessed it was in Arizona. Asked to describe states in two adjectives, they called Colorado green and mountainous but Utah brown and Mormon. It was 2012. Up in the governor's Office of Tourism, hands were wrung. Anyone who had poked around canyon country's mind-melting spires and gurgling green springs knew it was the most spectacular place on the continent—maybe the world—so why did other states get the good rep?

The office hired a Salt Lake City ad firm called Struck. The creatives came up with a rebrand labeled the Mighty Five, a multimedia campaign to extol the state's national parks. . . . By 2013, a 20-story mashup of red-rock icons towered as a billboard over Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles. A San Francisco subway station morphed into a molten ocher slot. Delicate Arch bopped around London on the sides of taxicabs. . . .

The campaign introduced to the mainstream a type of adventure that for decades had only a cult following. Unlike traditional park fare—peaks, woods, wild animals—canyons are an acquired taste, less achievement and more mystery, an immersion into the stone innards of creation that can be at once sensual, hallucinatory, and religious.

The Mighty Five campaign was a smash. The number of visitors to the five parks jumped 12 percent in 2014, 14 percent in 2015, and 20 percent in 2016, leaping from 6.3 million to over 10 million in just three years. The state coffers filled with sales taxes paid on hotels and rental cars and restaurants. The Struck agency brags that the state got a return on its investment of 338 to 1. The clink of crystal flutes bubbling with Mountain Dew echoed across the land. . . .

Since then, Arches has been swamped often enough to shut its gate at least nine times. . . . Meanwhile, in Zion, hikers wait 90 minutes to board a shuttle and an additional two to four hours to climb the switchbacks of Angels Landing. There, visitors sometimes find outhouses shuttered with a sign that, although specific to excrement, might well express the condition of the Utah parks as a whole: *"Due to extreme use, these toilets have reached capacity."*

Source: Sundee, Mark. "Utah Wanted All the Tourists. Then It Got Them." *Outside*, 29 January 2020, https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/national-parks/utah-mighty-five-tourism-campaign/.

IMPACT ON GATEWAY TOWNS

Gateway towns are the communities at the mouth of national parks. Utah has four – Moab, Torrey, Bryce Canyon City, and Springdale. Each of these towns is experiencing enormous growth – of tourism and gentrification. They have problems with ensuring that they have enough water to meet the growth, that they have enough affordable housing for year-round and seasonal workers, and that they can maintain a sense of community for long-time residents. Recently, three of these towns elected new mayors – each of them faced with dealing with these issues. The Spectrum *sent out a questionnaire for the mayors-elect asking how they plan to tackle their biggest challenges and what they see for the future. The main points each brought up were about water, housing, and tourism management.*

Joette Langianese (Moab): It will be important to network with other communities and federal/state officials to gather information on what is working and what the challenges we will face as the population and interests in recreation on public lands continue to grow.

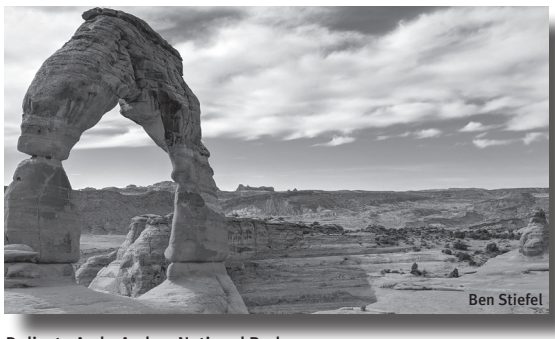
Mickey Wright (Torrey): State and federal agencies must understand the impact their decisions have on small towns and counties that must provide visitor services. Everything from water, campgrounds, RV parks, hotels, restaurants, housing, public services, and the workers needed to support all these businesses must be considered. The county currently provides many of the needed public services, but their resources are also very limited. The greatest need is help developing and providing housing and public services.

Barbara Bruno (Springdale): The state and federal governments can help by allowing us to enforce our own land use ordinances. We need to be able to maintain our "village scale" environment and unique aesthetic. We need to be able to regulate the number of properties that are allocated to nightly rentals in order to keep housing for residents and employees of the town and its businesses.

Source: Will, Sophie K. "Meet the New Mayors'-Elect of Utah's National Park Gateway Towns." *The Spectrum*, 24 November 2021, https://www.thespectrum.com/story/news/2021/11/24/meet-mayors-elect-zion-arches-capitol-reefs-gateway-towns/6253796001/.

MESSING UP MOAB

Moab, Utah, is one of the cities affected by increase in tourism. The tourism economy relies on tour guides, restaurant staff, hotel staff, and services sector employees – all of whom are being priced out of the housing market. In the past five years, mobile home parks have become particular targets for developers, who can triple the property values by evicting long-time, low-income residents and replacing them with second-home owners. As reported by Richard Markosian in Utah Stories*:*



Delicate Arch, Arches National Park

The Moab Master Plan states that if current build-out rates continue at the pace they are at, water usage will need to decline per-capita by 52% to provide enough water for both residents and tourists. Besides supplying water to its 5,300 residents in peak season, Moab needs to supply water for an additional 19,000 visitors. This requires a huge amount of additional capacity which is provided by three tanks

and several aquifers and wells. The city needs to drill at least two more wells in the near future to accommodate projected demand and population growth. . . .

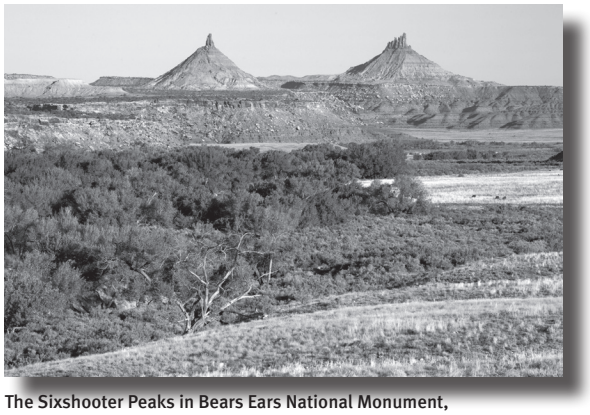
Accommodating growth while preserving the quality of life of Moab is a huge balancing act that Moab leaders are working to solve. The main barrier now is that the city is still extremely congested, and all amenities and infrastructure are maxed out at peak season. Locals and leaders have the mindset that they currently do not want to see more tourism in peak season.

Source: Markosian, Richard. "Moab Growth Limited by Building Cost and Water Supply." *Utah Stories*, 3 May 2022, https://utahstories.com/2022/05/moab-growth-limited-by-building-cost-and-water-supply/.

BEARS EARS

Federal officials, including at the U.S. Department of the Interior, have often had fraught dealings with the nation's 574 federally recognized tribes across the Lower 48 and Alaska. In the late 19th century, federal officials removed Native Americans from their ancestral lands, including from Yellowstone, the nation's first national park.

Recently, the Biden administration reached a historic agreement to give five Native American tribes—the Hopi Tribe, the Navajo Nation, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Pueblo of Zuni—joint management over the Bears Ears National Monument.



The Sixshooter Peaks in Bears Ears National Monument, U.S. Bureau of Land Management

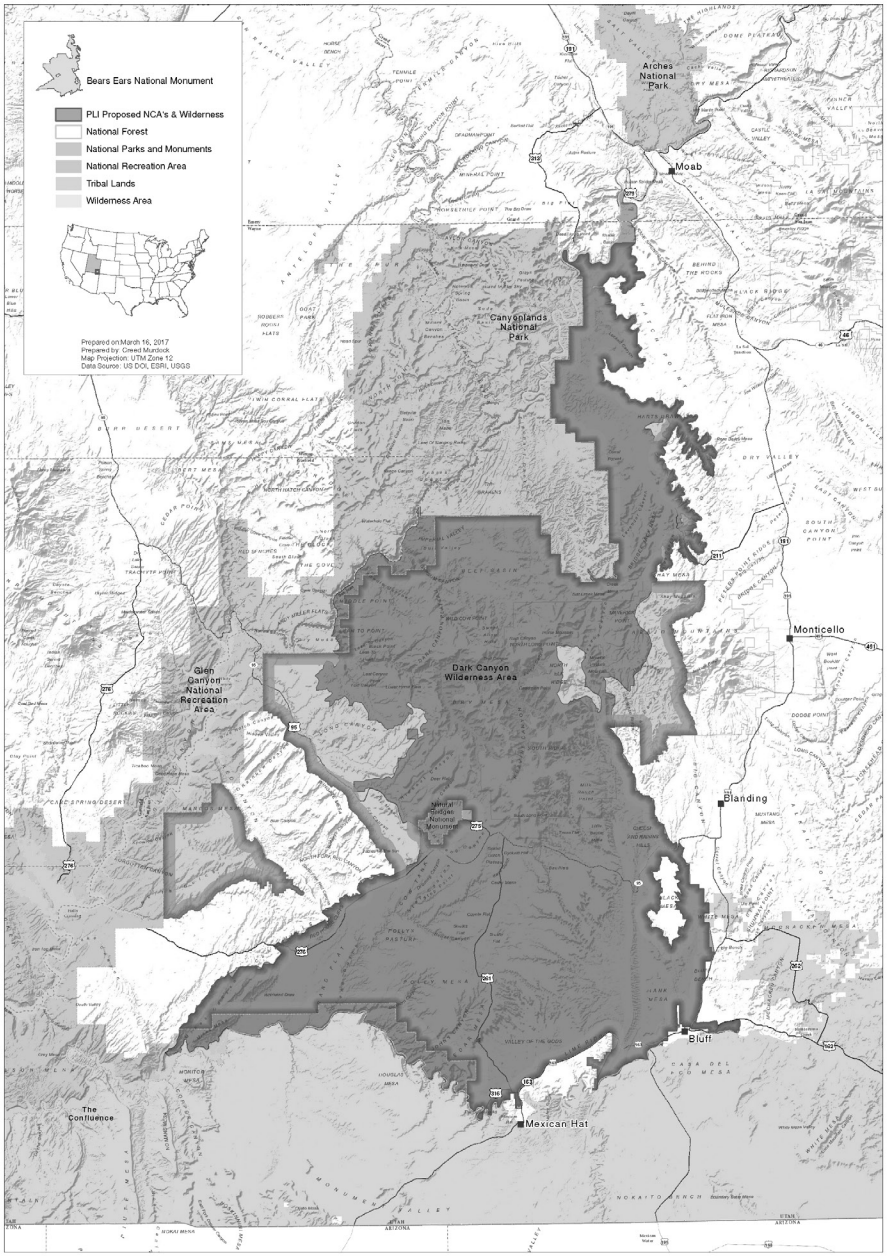
Humans have inhabited the southeast corner of Utah for 13,000 years, carving arrowheads from stone, farming corn, painting images on rocks and creating communities on the mesa tops. But in recent years, Bears Ears has been at the center of a fierce political battle over America's public lands.

In 2016, President Barack Obama established the Bears Ears National Monument, named for a pair of tall buttes that resemble the top of a bear's head peeking over a ridge. His proclamation recognized the land's "profoundly sacred" meaning for many Native American tribes.

Eleven months later, in December 2017, President Donald Trump shrank Bears Ears by more than 1.1 million acres, or about 85 percent. While conservative lawmakers cheered the decision, activists protested outside the White House and in Utah.

In October, President Biden used executive orders to protect 1.36 million acres in Bears Ears—slightly larger than the original boundary that Obama established. The orders also reversed Trump's cuts to the 1.87 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante monument. And they reestablished the Bears Ears Commission, which comprises one elected officer from each of the five tribes.

Source: Joselow, Maxine. "Native American Tribes to Co-Manage National Monument for First Time." *The Washington Post*, 20 June 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/06/20/bears-ears-national-monument-tribes/.



Source: Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, prepared by Creed Murdock, 16 Mar 2017, https://suwa.org/issues/bearsears/.

EDITORIAL MATTER

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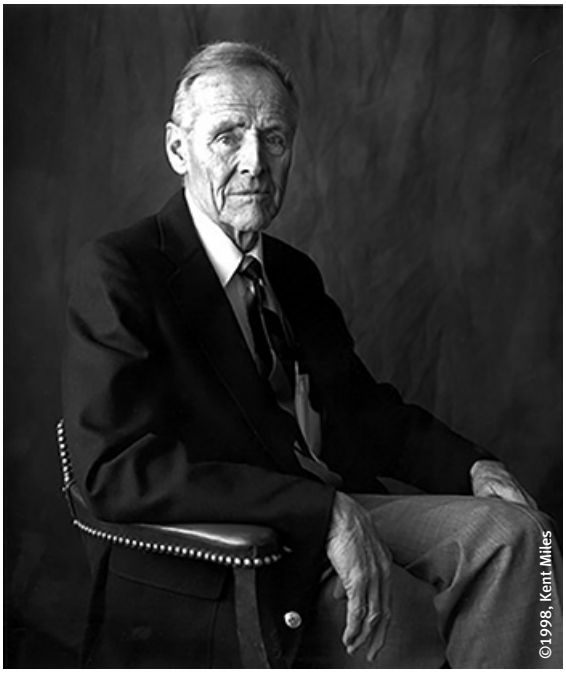
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