EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST



Spring/Summer 2020
Volume 36 | Number 2

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.

For most of human history, "Literature," both fiction and poetry, has been narrated, not written—heard, not read. So fairy tale, folk tales, stories from the oral tradition, are all of them the most vital connection we have with the imaginations of the ordinary men and women whose labor created our world.

—Angela Carter

[I]n its true sense, "organic" form is by far the most complex and ingenious of any form imaginable. No geometry, however elaborate, can match the astonishment of, say, blood vessels. That would be a structure worth striving for: the structure of organisms! When a story "lives," I think it generally has all the breathtaking, indescribable complexity of a living hierarchy. Organism, organ, cell—novel, scene, sentence: form shades off into the same particulars that evade and inscribe it.

—Richard Powers

Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a a standstill. Without books, the development of civilization would be been impossible. They are engines of change (as the poet said), windows on the world and lighthourses erected in the sea of time. They are companions, teachers, magicians, bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are humanity in print.

—Barbara W. Tuchman

But having a really good understanding of history, literature, psychology, sciences—is very, very important to actually being able to make movies.

—George Lucas

Fiction is truth. I think fiction is the truest thing there ever was. My whole effort is to remove that distinction. The writer is the midwife of understanding. It's very important for me to tell politics like a story, to make it real.

—Arundhati Roy

Front Cover: Stephen Wolochowicz



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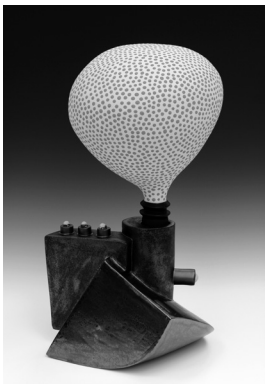
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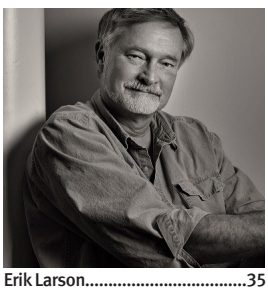
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FROM BEARS TO BIRDS—VISUAL STORYTELLING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

A Conversation with
JANE KIM


Kelly Hsaio

ANGELIKA PAGEL

INTRODUCTION

Jane Kim is a visual artist, science illustrator and creator of the ongoing Migrating Mural *project, which highlights endangered wildlife that share migratory corridors with human habitation.* Generations*, which Jane and her team executed in the foyer of the Weber State University Kimball Visual Arts Center in the fall of 2018, is part of the project's second phase and celebrates the endangered Monarch butterfly, together with additional murals in Springdale, Arkansas, and Winter Park and Orlando, Florida. Jane received a BFA in printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design and a masters certificate in scientific illustration from California State University, Monterey Bay. Together with her husband, Thayer Walker, she is the founder of* Ink Dwell*, a studio creating "art that explores the wonders of the natural world." She has produced work for the National Aquarium, the de Young Museum, the Nature Conservancy, the Smithsonian Institution, Facebook, Recology and Yosemite National Park. Her most epic feat to date is the mural* The Wall of Birds *for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, which she completed in 2015 after more than two years of intensive research and labor. In 2018, Jane and Thayer published the stunning "artistic journey" of this endeavor in book form as* The Wall of Birds: One Planet, 243 Families, 375 Million Years.

CONVERSATION

Welcome, Kim. You've stated that your goal as an artist is to "enhance public spaces with wondrous images." It was both a reassuring (in the sense of: there is still beauty in this dismal world!) and exhilarating experience when, after my night class, I passed you and your team working away in deep concentration and silence. I didn't dare interrupt this almost meditative labor with a banal "hello," so this is quite the privilege to be able to sit down and chat with you. Let me start by asking you about the epic mural you recently created for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology—it was completed about a year ago?

Well, it was completed in 2015. It's colloquially called *The Wall of Birds*, but the official title of it is *From So Simple a Beginning—Celebrating the Evolution and Diversity of Birds*. It was about a two and a half year labor of love.

In the fabulous book documenting this artistic endeavor, you state that The Wall of Birds *depicts "all of 243 modern families of living birds, five modern families that had gone extinct in the last thirty thousand years, twenty-one prehistoric ancestors, and a ten-foot caiman, to remind people of the mind-bending reality that the crocodile family is more closely related to birds than it is to other reptiles." Once the mural was finished, you hibernated on the couch for a month and binge-watched Harry Potter—and a slew of other shows. What made you get up again and go on?*

Well, I definitely needed breaks in between. But I love what I do, and so the hibernation on the couch is not so much a vacation as it is catching up—getting some much needed rest. Once I feel that I've gotten that rest, I'm wanting to be back at it again. I get bored. So it really was just that—a hibernation period.

As a student and I were marveling at your Instagram posts, she wondered how you did

come to embrace the theme of nature, of flora and fauna, in your art? Has it always been part of who you are? Was it something you "grew into"?

I think the answer is a dual factor. I was absolutely inspired by the natural world from a young age. Before going to art school, all of my drawings were technical and depicted subjects that were very near and dear to me, like nature. But after having attended the Rhode Island School of Design, I had many years of exploring other concepts and subjects. I did have to find my way back to the natural world, and coming back to it was like coming home. It was something that I felt so passionately about my whole life. Taking the art to the level of supporting and celebrating the planet, helping people connect with and understand it, felt gratifying and purposeful. That's what drove me to continue this type of work.

I was reading somewhere that when you were little, you drew on your walls?

I did. (Laughs) I was obsessed with bears from a very young age. I collected over 300 stuffed animals, pictures, figurines. I had a subscription to a magazine called *Teddy Bear Review*. I loved making teddy bears, using the patterns from the magazine. Every time I had an obsession with an animal or plant, its expression was shown in the form of art making. That was fundamental to my core, my fabric.

Your parents didn't mind you drawing on the walls?

I don't have any memory of them yelling at me or saying, "You can't do that." But I kept it contained in my bedroom.

You received your BFA in printmaking from the Rhode Island School of Design and a masters certificate in scientific illustration from Cal State Monterey Bay. What was your evolution from a relatively intimate medium like printmaking to large-scale mural paintings?

I was absolutely inspired by the natural world from a young age. Before going to art school, all of my drawings were technical and depicted subjects that were very near and dear to me, like nature. But after having attended the Rhode Island School of Design, I had many years of exploring other concepts and subjects. I did have to find my way back to the natural world, and coming back to it was like coming home. It was something that I felt so passionately about my whole life. Taking the art to the level of supporting and celebrating the planet, helping people connect with and understand it, felt gratifying and purposeful.

You know, they're not too dissimilar in terms of how your mind has to think about it and the process of it. Printmaking is a very process-oriented technique—you need to know how the medium behaves, what it's going to do, you have to have a plan. Not that you can't deviate from that plan, but there is a certain core, a step by step process. It's the same with making a mural. In some ways I feel that I am still utilizing what I love about both disciplines. I do miss the editions in printmaking. I love the history of printmaking and how it was the development of printmaking techniques that helped to disseminate information on a grand scale. For me, that aspect, that concept, is very fascinating and the art I create is with that same purpose: to disseminate information on a large scale for the public, and hopefully I can bring some of that printmaking technique back into my work. I actually stencil. I use a lot of stenciling tools and that is

reminiscent of silk screen and relief printing. Again, my brain is still being used in the same ways.

How do you see your own art in relation to the historic and enduring practice of those seductive and impressive dioramas in natural history museums as well as the scientific illustrations by the likes of James Audubon and Titian Peale in the United States, or Ernst Haeckel and Maria Sibylla Merian in Europe?

All wonderful artists, and a great question. Honestly, I don't see my own art being that different. It is simply an evolution and a growth of exactly what the intentions of these artists were—which was to be highly observant of the world around us, to transport us to different places. In the case of dioramas, in a time where travel was limited, it was really up to these scientific illustrators to bring the wonders of different places to us.

So I think that my work is very reminiscent of both of these practices. I think it's about showing that information is seductive and beautiful. Sometimes it can be seen as dry or boring—but in the many different verticals of art that have been described, and are continuing to be described, representational art, or even just observing from nature and simply depicting it one-for-one, can seem like a mundane and uninteresting technique. However, these artists standing the test of time goes to show that making art in and of itself is such a beautiful process, that it's like a signature—that particular artists bring a certain vision and a certain way of visualizing the world through their hand and their artmaking—that simply being created by a human being does so much for our own ability to perceive and understand the world around us.

I think this is an important vertical especially, because what I love about the blend of science illustration and fine art is that it leaves both doors open. There is definitely a serious information component, but the visuals can leave you to interpret what you wish. That is what is so beautiful about art. I think that when you do the dance between the two, you come away with something even more powerful because it is wisdom, but it's also emotional wisdom. I think all of these artists listed here do that. Who doesn't look at one of Ernst Haeckel's works and not think, "Whoa, geometry is amazing." Being able to see the planet through the lens of geometry is so amazing.

Over the past few years, I've introduced my contemporary art course with a lecture on

Printmaking is a very process-oriented technique – you need to know how the medium behaves, what it's going to do, you have to have a plan. Not that you can't deviate from that plan, but there is a certain core, step by step process. It's the same with making a mural. In some ways I feel that I am still utilizing what I love about both disciplines. I do miss the editions in printmaking. I love the history of printmaking and how it was the development of printmaking techniques that helped to disseminate information on a grand scale. For me, that aspect, that concept, is very fascinating and the art I create is with that same purpose: to disseminate information on a large scale for the public, and hopefully I can bring some of that printmaking technique back into my work.

eco art because I personally find the topic to be timely and prescient. Where do you locate yourself in the contemporary discourse on eco art or public art in general?

I think my tendency is to not worry about what category I fit into. I think I will leave that to the viewers, the critics, the art historians—to figure out where it fits in the world, if it fits in the world—and make work that feels authentic to me. Truly authentic and passionate works don't need to be anything other than that. That is how I continue to move forward and not worry about what kind of role it has in this way.

Where do you see yourself five years down the road? In what niche?

Art categories are really important, so I don't want to say that they aren't. It helps us understand the world, it helps us make sense of complex systems—that's why we have taxonomy, that's why we have first names, that's why we have labels, and so in that way I have worked really hard to keep my work in the public realm. At least in that sense, I feel very strongly about making work for the masses, in whatever shape that takes. Whether it's public art or a mural, or an editorial piece in a wide-distributing journal, or even a small-distributing journal, I think the practice of making visuals to support our understanding of the world is so important. So that's really my goal and focus.

What contemporary eco artists inspire you?

Isabella Kirkland: I absolutely love her work. She was doing it way before it was trendy. She is very smart about her concepts and what she chooses to do with her art. I love Todd McGrain: he is a sculptor from New York City; he did this great project on extinct birds—he created these gorgeous sculptures and placed them in the places where they were last seen. And of course, I will always have a place in my heart for Andy Goldsworthy's work— you can't talk about eco art without making sure that he is a part of the conversation.

For The Wall of Birds *you created the "avian pantone," your own color chart in order to approximate as closely as possible the complex, nuanced and, in some cases, even hypothetical colors of the entire history of the evolution of birds.* The Wall of Birds *was executed in brilliant colors, while the mural you created in the foyer of our Kimball Visual Arts Center is executed entirely in monochromatic, "antique," sepia-toned hues associated with faded manuscripts and documents. Why that choice?*

That's a great question. I am very responsive to my space, to the architecture that I am working with, the feel of the building, what feels appropriate. When I visited here, it was just such a beautiful, quiet, light-filled space. I just felt like it wanted to stay muted and impactful, yet also quiet. There is a beauty in line work, just simple line work, kind of drawing back to the old engraving style. You get a lot of information in a drawing. The piece in the Kimball is called ***Generations***. In an institution of learning, where many generations of students will be passing through, I also wanted to create something that would stand the test of time. I don't think that a drawing will ever go out of style; it will stay sophisticated and elegant always.

The Monarch butterfly mural in the Kimball is part of your current project titled Migrating Mural *which, as you say, is a "series of murals that highlight animals along migration corridors they share with humans." Could you talk about some other murals you have executed in that series?*

Sure. So the ***Migrating Mural*** is an ongoing ***Ink Dwell*** project. Our first series highlighted the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep and was painted along highway 395 in California. It was a 120-mile stretch and the range of the bighorn is

just within that—so it was a very small geographic expanse, and quiet, intimate and very regional. We wanted to do land, sky and sea—so the bighorn sheep was the land. Then we thought about flight migration—what would best represent that, and of course birds came to mind, bats even came to mind. But Monarch butterflies, what we loved so much about them was their range—the entire North American continent. So for that reason, one insect tying together so many places, was a beautiful subject and story to tell. The insect itself is so charming. Everyone knows the Monarch butterfly and has some sort of memory about it. When we think of butterflies, the Monarch is usually the image that comes to mind. Unlike so many other conservation stories, with Monarch butterflies individuals can have a great impact if they choose to, in helping to support more habitat and develop a healthier system for Monarchs. So we wanted to tell many different stories than just one about one animal. We have installations in Arkansas, Florida, Ogden, and San Francisco. So we are thrilled to have three here, and what is more exciting is that, because we had the opportunity to do more than one in one city, we had the opportunity to tell a micro-story in this macro-pod project. Each mural is dedicated to a different time period in the history of art. So the banners at the Ogden Nature Center were around the Arts and Crafts Movement, and William Morris, whom I love because he not only was a naturalist, but brought nature into the everyday through surface design, wallpaper patterns, and inviting people to think about beauty and design in their everyday lives. Which I think is a beautiful idea for the Ogden Nature Center, as they bring nature to everyday life in some capacity. The new arts district in Ogden is fabulous, and I've been dying to do something to highlight the graphic markings of the spots on the butterfly, and so the art district was so perfect for this. And then here, in the Kimball, the tradition of scientific illustration, observing and drawing is what I was inspired by in an educational setting.

Where next with the Migrating Mural *series? More on the Monarch butterfly or on to another migrating species?*

We will continue with the Monarch for another few years, and then we will eventually move to a water migrator. We have a species in mind, though I am not able to disclose which yet.

Could you please talk about your process of executing murals, and in particular about the one here at the Kimball? I am wondering about the enormous amount of research that must go into these projects as well as the process itself. Do you create a layout of your entire design on a blueprint of the wall first, or do you sketch individual ideas and motifs and only afterwards combine them into the mural? How do you use your stencils?

You have touched on pretty much the entire process. There is a lot of research. Like I said, I am responsive to place. I start with a site visit—take a lot of pictures and sit with the photos and my memory. I usually come up with a story before I even start sketching. So there is some narrative that jumps into my mind. From there, I do create a blueprint—get the measurements of the wall and create it on a smaller scale, and start fleshing out individual drawings that I then take into Photoshop. I kind of play around and see what I like, and then sometimes I'll print out the building schematic and then do my final drawing within that framework. I then scan that at very high resolution so that I can blow it up to scale and print out long sheets like wallpaper of the full-scale drawing, and then I hang it on the wall and transfer my image directly. It takes a variety of different techniques. Sometimes I literally put transfer paper behind and just trace it. Sometimes I cut the image out and sort of create almost like a paint by numbers on the wall. Other times I just use it as a stencil directly and then roll paint within it, if it's solid, graphic shapes. There are a lot of tools that

I use for transferring. Then the murals take about 4 to 6 weeks to execute. I always have a team, and we work long days, 6 days a week. I honestly haven't found a shorter method. It is what it is, and it takes time.

Do you sometimes adjust or modify designs as you are working on the wall?

Yes, always. No matter how accurate the original measurements are, there are obstacles, challenges, and hiccups, so we have to be flexible.

Your brush strokes are stunningly precise. The mural at the Kimball seduces both from afar and when "sticking your nose" right to the wall. Could you give us your own insights into that dichotomy of big and small, the whole and the part, the individual and the community?

Maybe it is just the detail-oriented side of myself, but I get really bothered by other murals—and I'm sorry to say this—but you get up close, and it just feels unloved. Pointillism: you see it from a distance and it's magic, and then you get up close and it's magic. Even abstract art, when you get up close, the thoughtful brush strokes—we are seeing the attention to the mark making. It is really exciting. If you don't have that experience from both close up and far away, I feel that I have failed.

I read in The Wall of Birds *that people were surprised about the absence of perches for the birds. Similarly, the Monarch butterflies on the* Generations *mural are also depicted free-floating, suspended in space, as are the various stages of the butterflies' metamorphoses and their food sources. I'm curious about that esthetic decision.*

I love negative space, it's what makes good design good design. For ***The Wall of Birds*** mural, I made a very conscious decision not to add them. Mainly, I didn't want it to feel cluttered. There is a part of me that likes to take this outside of literal illustration and invite you to use your mind and have a line of questioning—I call them imagine habitats. The birds, their shapes, their behavior, is a behavior that is indicative of a certain type of habitat, or mating behavior, or some other thing. So if you look at a bird, and it's in a weird position, your first thing that should come is, "why is it in that position?" You can start asking yourself this line of questions and learn quite a bit about their habitat and their ecosystems just based on the shape that they are making. For this mural, I wanted there to be a dance of scale and movement. It being generational—generations of big and small butterflies—they are not scaled to each other, the flowers are not scaled to each other, nothing is to scale to each other, but each component is an important cog in the little wheel of the ecosystem. One thing does not have more importance than the next—it is all in a dance, and a flutter.



Jane Kim, Angelika Pagel, and Thayer Walker in front of *Generations*.

What role do milkweed and thistles play in the life-cycle and migration of the Monarch butterfly?

The milkweed gets all the love because it is the sole host plant for caterpillars. However, it's not just about milkweed. It's about a variety of wildflowers that support a healthy ecosystem for butterflies in general. Adult Monarch butterflies feed on the nectar of all kinds of wild flowers so it's important to have a healthy variety of native wildflowers. Thistle is unique because there aren't many native thistles. Most are invasive, non-native, thistles. But the wavy-leaf thistle is native to the west. We just brought over our interpretive sign for ***Generations***, and the names of each of the various wildflowers shown are on the sign.

I loved your section on "Ladies' Choice" in The Wall of Birds. *You talk about "constantly searching for females to paint," since the males are usually the flamboyant ones in the avian world. What about the Monarch butterfly? Are there any slight differences in patterning between males and females? And if so, does "our" mural reveal these?*

There are. All the butterflies in the mural are female except one. The way that you can distinguish a male from a female is on the lower wings. There are two spots with pheromone pouches, and only the males have those.

How do you confront the "blank canvas"? I noticed that in The Wall of Birds*, you have a section that addresses just this concern. What advice would you have for aspiring artists?*

I don't know if it's advice or a word of warning. (Laughs) The fear of the blank canvas, or the blank page, in some capacity, never goes away. Or blank sheets for musicians. Any creative field, the anticipation of starting—what is going to be deserving of this beautiful blank page? I love negative space, so sometimes when I see a white wall, there is something so perfect about it that I dare not try to make it any better than it already is. I do think that it is often just in your mind, that fear. The practice is more about embracing the moment and going for it. There are so many techniques. Make a mark on it, and start from there even if you erase it later.

You work closely with your husband, Thayer Walker, who is a correspondent for Outside *magazine and a widely-published author and journalist. Do you mind telling us a bit about that collaboration?*

Absolutely. Thayer and I didn't intend to run an art studio together, but it made so much sense, as our passions are so aligned. We have very different skill sets. We are both storytellers, but we do it in such a different way that when we join forces, it's much bigger, better, and stronger. He is amazing at his ability to reach into the media world, and writing the story about my work in a way that is enticing and interesting on that platform is something I can never do, never dare do. I hate writing or talking about myself in general. Thayer is the one who really sells my work, so not having to do that is really nice. I sympathize with all artists who also hate that aspect of the work, but it is a real part of being a successful, working artist. I am very grateful for his passion for my work and seeing how we can share our skills together. The unsexy part is, he handles contracts, and he handles things that I hate doing but that are also important, and so it has been a great relationship in terms of how we divide our roles in the studio.

I recently assigned students to read segments from Suzi Gablik's seminal 1992 book, The Re-enchantment of Art*, in which she deplores the "loss of any unifying narrative," "the marketing system of seductive senselessness," and instead calls for an art of connectedness, of meaningful art that re-enchants the world. Would you please talk about how the theme of migration in the animal world becomes a metaphor for our human connectedness and sense of community?*

I love the title so much. That is exactly right, re-enchantment. We have become so disenchanted with the world, with art, with humanity, with all those things. So I think this project is in the same vein as those goals. It is about communities sharing the same concept. Ogden is now connected to Orlando, Florida, to Springdale, Arkansas. Wherever these projects are, they become these little monuments to this philosophy. I am so happy for you to include this in the whole narrative, too.

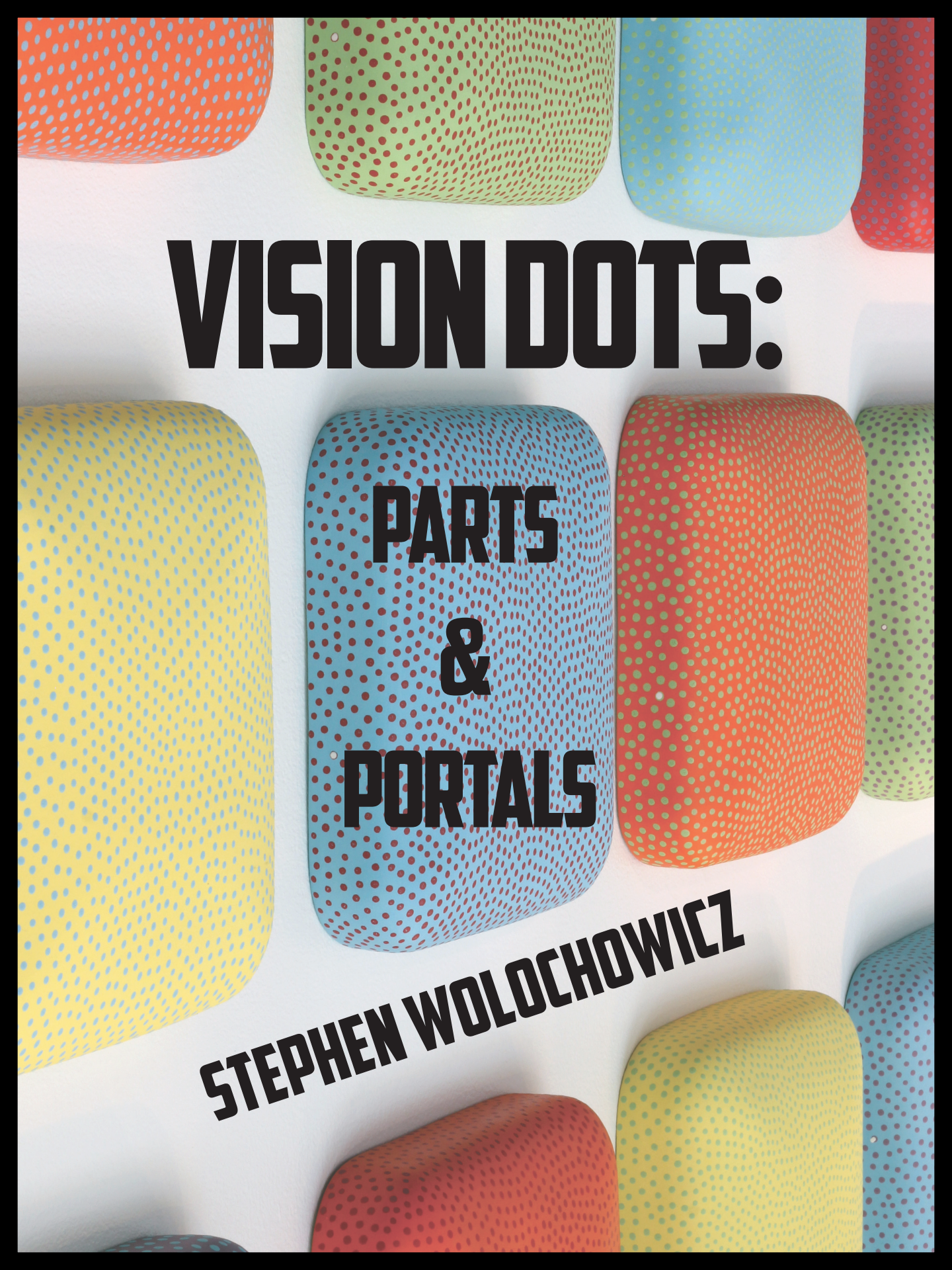
I read this on your Instagram – being in our community and migrating from the Weber State campus down to the arts district in Ogden, and then down to the Nature Center, there is even that connecting of community.

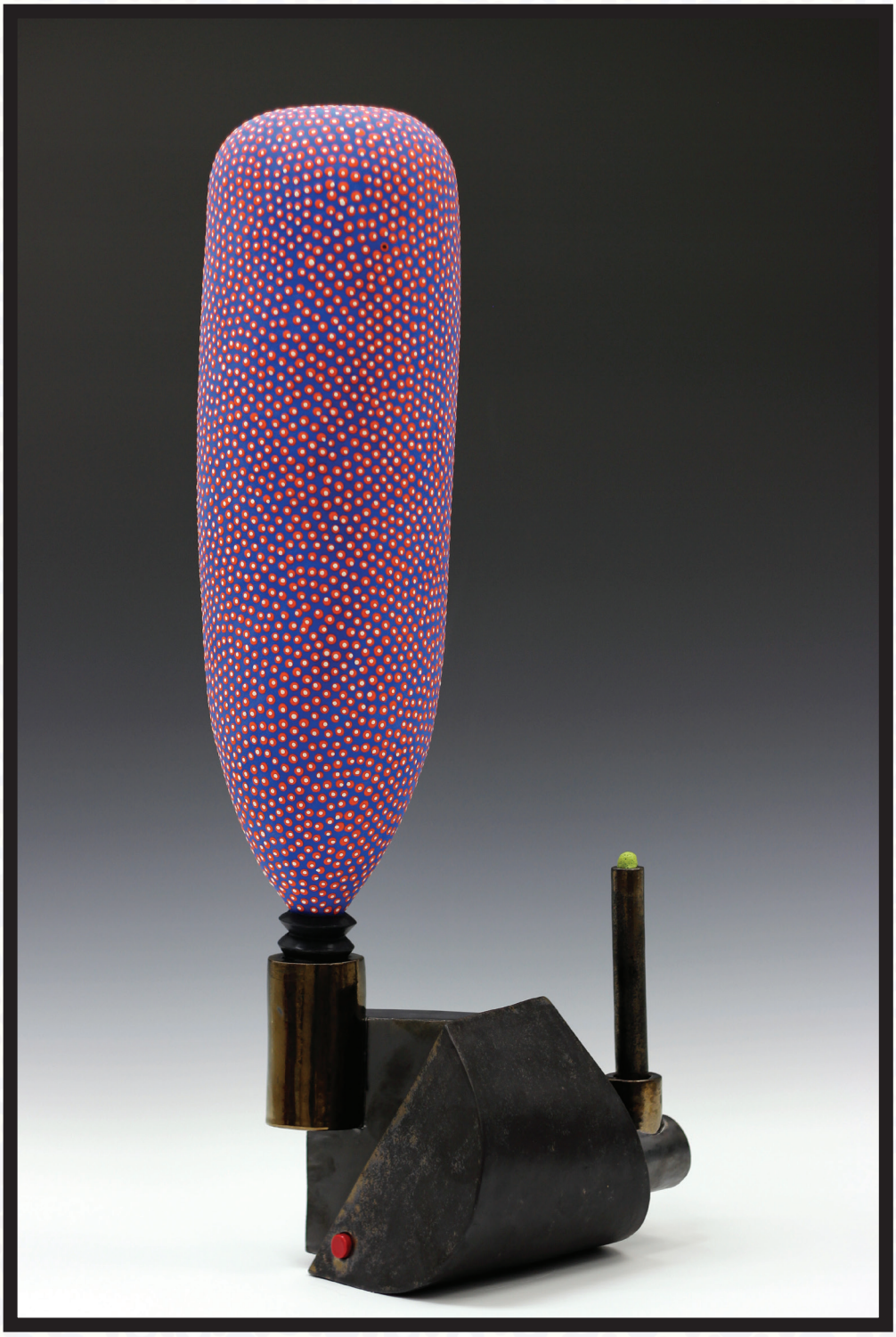
And I get to migrate, myself. Spending a month of time in these different places, and really feeling that environment for a little while—which, by no means, means I know the city, know the culture, know the people, of course—I'm transporting myself, my physical self, to these places as well. It is quite moving and I learn so much—not even just about my own humanity, but also physical materials and how they behave in different climates, different temperatures, different weather systems, in a physical sense. We are often outdoors—this was an indoor mural here, which is unusual, it's our first one, everything else was exterior—so we had to deal with all kinds of weather systems, which really makes me feel like an animal myself. So it is really wonderful to hopefully be able to scatter this project around the whole country and also into Canada and Mexico.

I would like to thank you for, as Eleanor Heartney put it, "taking on the challenges of our environmental crisis" in the Anthropocene and creating awareness of the dilemmas that plague our anthropocentric relationship with nature. I would especially like to thank you for doing so by transforming the white, empty expanse of the foyer in the Kimball Visual Arts Center into an enchanting wall of wonder with a meaningful message.



Angelika Pagel (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley) is professor of art history at Weber State University, with emphases on European Modernism and Global Contemporary Art. Her catalog essay *The Industrial Sublime* (2012) for the traveling exhibition of Edward Burtynsky's photographs reflects her enthusiasm for the art of social engagement. Excerpts from the essay are also published in *Edward Burtynsky: Essential Elements* (2016).

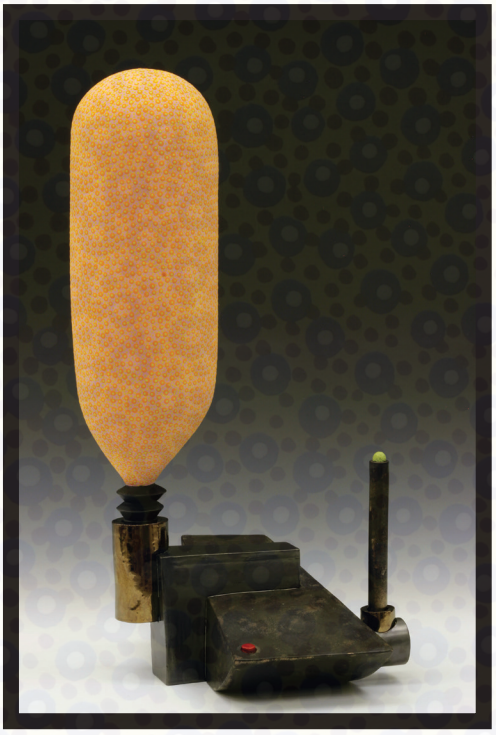

VISION DOTS:
PARTS
&
PORTALS
STEPHEN WOLOCHOWICZ



Blue Torp Tank, ceramic, 26” x 11” x 10”

The artwork I create is entirely composed of ceramic material. My constructed forms are derived from abstractions and draw from an array of thoughts and objects that include themes of industrialization, humor, games, politics, and the environment. While I have specific areas of interest that shape and define my practice, I find it interesting how a viewer perceives and interprets my work.



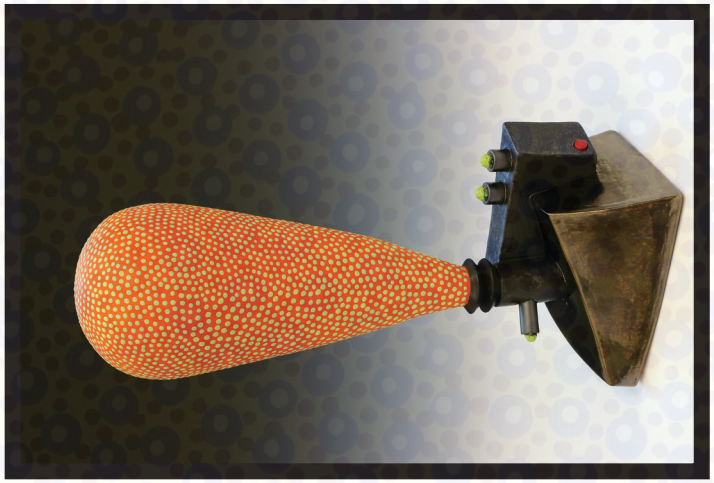


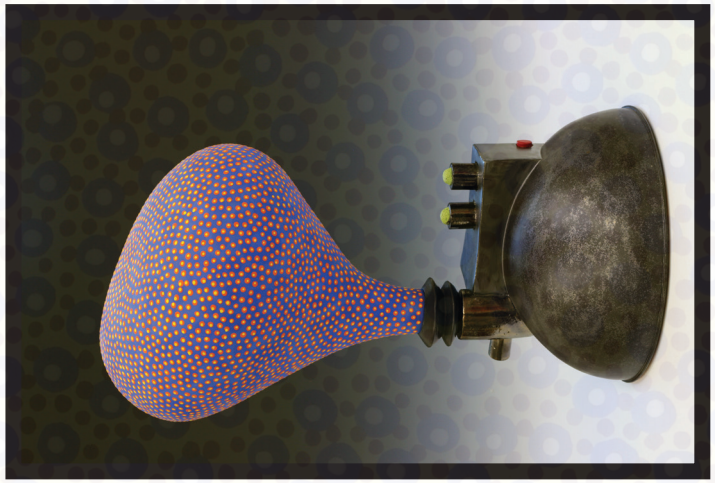
(Left) *Yellow Torp Tank,* ceramic, 26" x 10" x 11"
(Right) *Pink Torp Tank*, ceramic, 24" x 11" x 10"

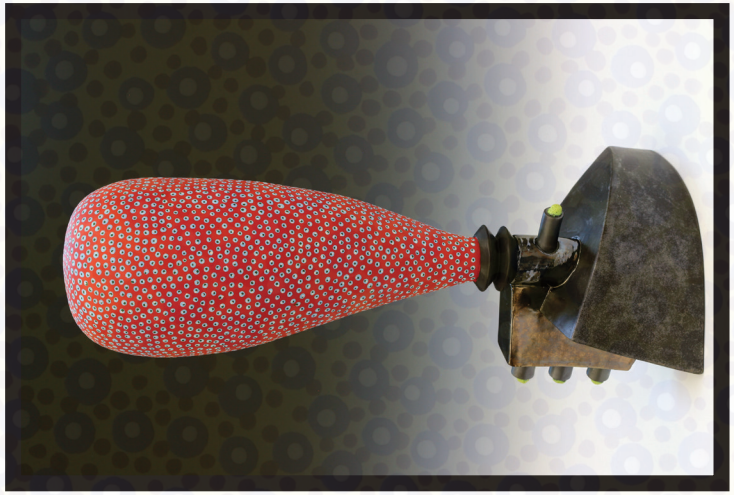


"Parts" Lime Bulb, **ceramic, 17" x 10" x 9"**

The sculptures I create have a carefully crafted ambiguous quality. They resemble or hint at notions of transport, storage, containment, or transformation. Although there are no moving parts, I do imply an internal tension or kineticism within my forms. The inclusion of pipes or piping suggests interconnectedness and connectivity. They signify the conduits that link humanity to my designs.

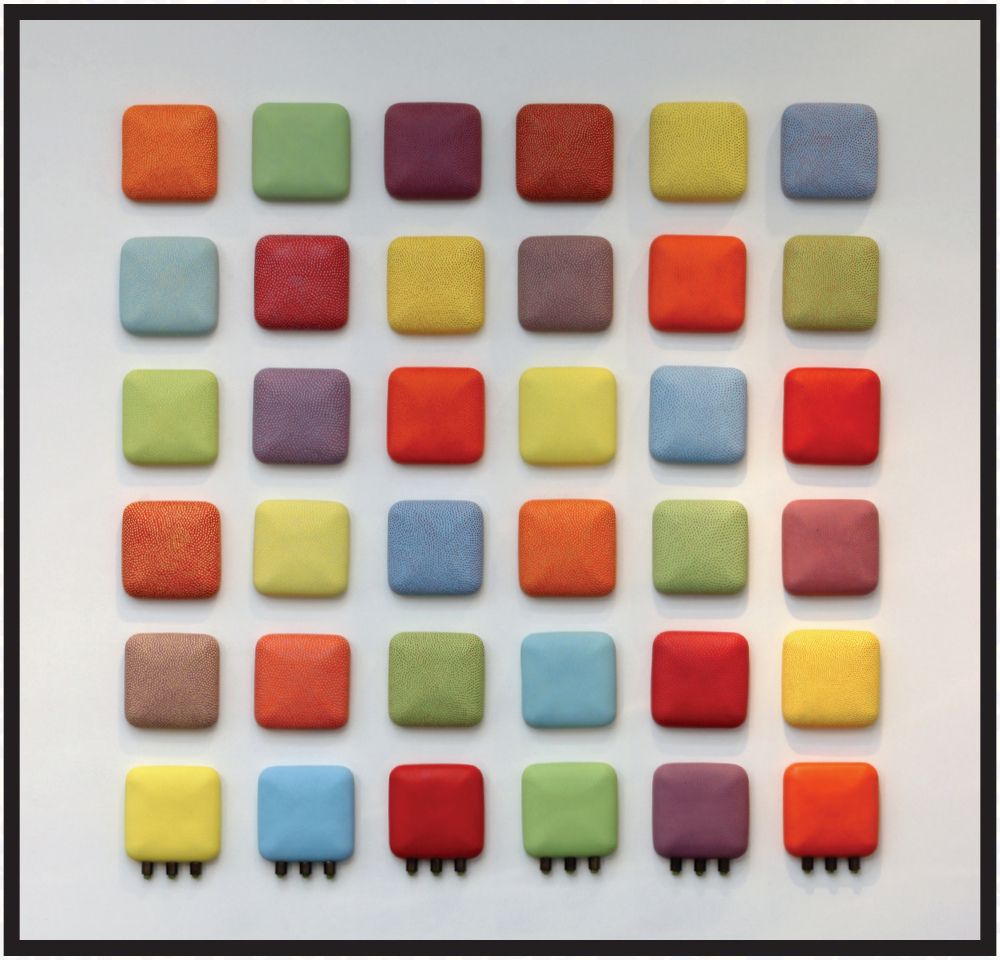






(Left) *"Parts" Blue Bulb*, ceramic, 18" x 12" x 10"; (Right) *"Parts" Orange Bulb*, cerarmic, 23" x 9" x 7"; (Bottom) *"Parts" Red Bulb*, ceramic, 23" x 9" x 8"

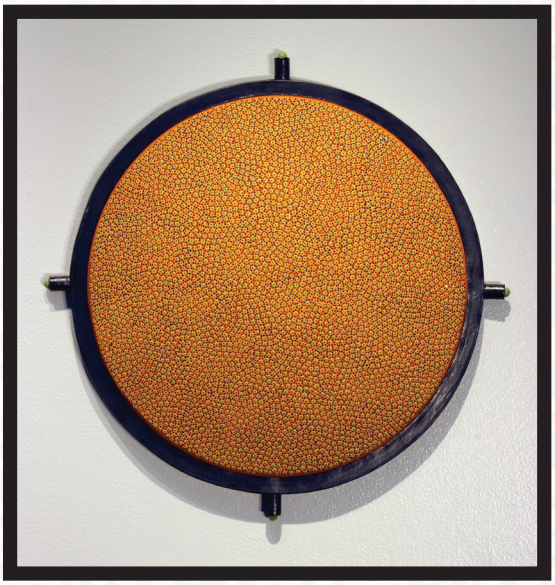
I find it intriguing how the use of color and texture in tandem with simplified forms can convey deeper meanings and retain aesthetic appeal. Infusing metallic surfaces with vivid equiluminant colors allows them to play off of each other in suggestive ways—notably creating a contrasting tension between fun and craft, play and precision.



(Above) *Game Pieces*, ceramic, 10' x 10' x 3"
(Right) *Game Pieces* detail, 12" x 12" x 3" (individual)



I establish layers of content through surface treatment, the construction process, and form. While some of these strata are overt and visible, and others are buried and work below the surface, they offer the viewer ample space for contextualization. The green-colored ooze in the pipes of some of the designs, for example, derives from the palette of a post-nuclear disaster and indicates what might possibly reside inside these forms. The complexity of the designs allows them to be framed in positive & affirming or dangerous & menacing terms, depending on one's point of view.





(Top) *Three Ring Circus* detail
(Bottom) *Three Ring Circus* detail



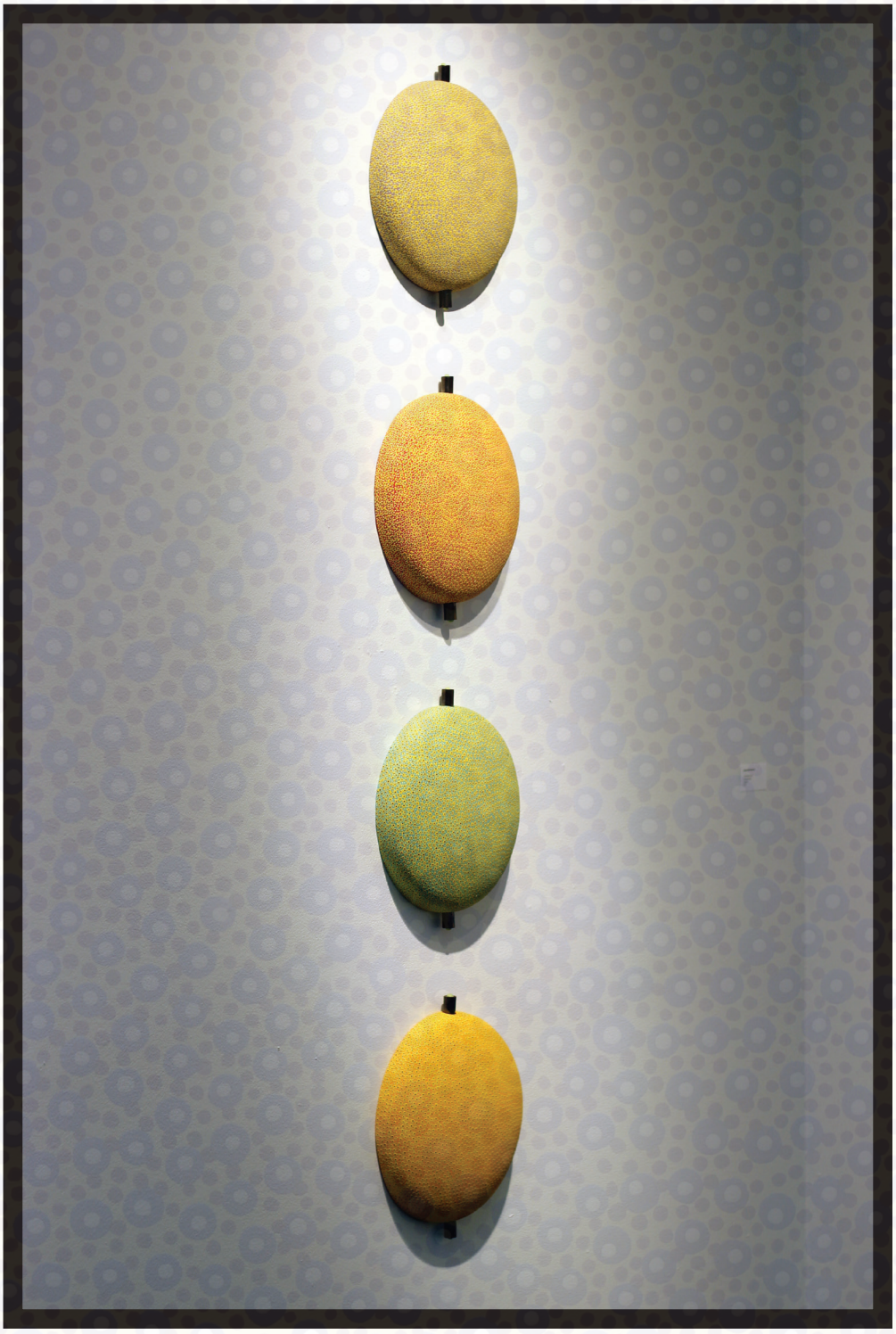
Three Ring Circus, ceramic, 20” x 19” x 3” (individual)

This is also true for the disk and bulb forms. They act as the storage or containment vessels of that ambiguous substance. Some of the industrial shapes are derived and/or directly molded from objects like clocks and smoke detectors—a reference to alarms and the concept of time or lack thereof. Additionally, many pieces contain a white, black, and clear dot within the field of color—a nod to a strategy game like chess. For me, however, that singular dot within a field of other dots is a metaphor for the human experience.

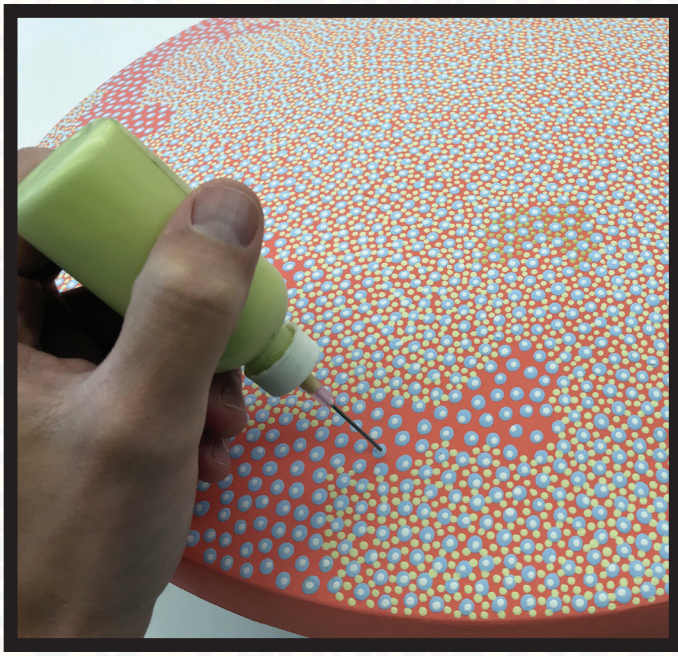




(Top) *Signal Lost,* ceramic, 13" x 13" x 2" (individual)
(Bottom) *Connect Four*, ceramic, 17" x 17" x 4" (individual)



Vertizontal Linear, ceramic, 14” x 12” x 3” (individual)

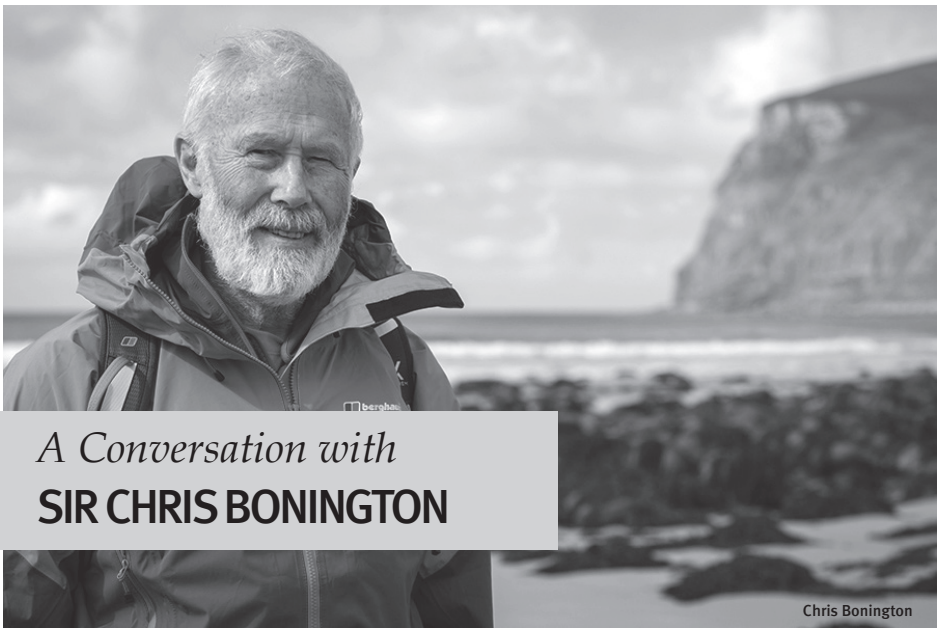




Stephen Wolochowicz was born and raised near Trenton, New Jersey. He holds a BFA from the University of Delaware (2000) and an MFA from Miami University of Ohio (2005). He has taught ceramics at institutions including the University of Notre Dame, the University of Central Missouri, and Central Michigan University. He currently lives, works, and maintains a studio in Ogden, Utah, where he is an associate professor of art in ceramics at Weber State University. Wolochowicz is recognized nationally for exhibiting artwork, conducting workshops, and presenting lectures at galleries, art centers, and colleges around the country.

Stephen's current work combines abstract industrial shapes with organic features. Through the use of vivid color and textures, he adds a playful aesthetic to his underlying concepts. They deal with human invention, the environment, and progress through networks of industrial themes. You can view more of his artwork at StephenWolochowicz.com

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE ROPE—



Chris Bonington

A Conversation with SIR CHRIS BONINGTON

MIKEL VAUSE

Chris Bonington, mountaineer, writer, photographer, and lecturer, started climbing at the age of 16. He made the first British ascent of the north wall of the Eiger and led the first ascent of the south face of Annapurna in 1970, the biggest and most difficult climb in the Himalayas at the time. He went on to lead other successful expeditions, including the first ascent of the southwest face of Everest in 1975, and reached the summit himself in 1985, then aged 50, with a Norwegian expedition. Now in his eighties, he is still active in the mountains, climbing with the same enthusiasm as he did at the beginning. Chris has written 17 books, fronted numerous television programs, and lectured worldwide to corporate audiences.

Chris was educated at the University College School in London and at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst. He served as president of The Alpine Club and the British Mountaineering Council as well as chancellor of Lancaster University. For his achievements in mountaineering exploration, he was awarded the Founder's Medal of the Royal Geographical Society, the Lawrence of Arabia Memorial Medal of the Royal Asian Society, and the Livingstone Medal of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. He was knighted in 1996 and pronounced Commander of the Royal Victorian Order (CVO) and a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE).

I first met Chris in the summer of 1989 and can now look back at 30 years of warm friendship bound by our joint passion for mountains. I have also had the honor of editing Chris's expedition diaries. This interview took place in Ogden, Utah, when Chris received an honorary doctorate from Weber State University and gave the commencement address to the graduating class of 2018.

What events in your life drew you to climbing?

I discovered climbing, or real mountaineering, when I was 16. I'd seen Snowdon (the highest peak in Wales) from afar because my grandfather lived in Dublin, so as we'd come back from Dublin, we'd see Snowdon Heath and I was just excited by the size of the mountain and longed to get to the top. I persuaded a young friend of mine, Anton, who was in my same class, to come along, and we hitchhiked up to Snowdonia in the middle of winter. It was one of the hardest winters in many years. We hadn't had a clue. We didn't know how to read a map, and we set out to climb the PYG Track, which is one of many routes up Snowdon. Normally in the summer, it's a nice path that goes up to the top, but here you couldn't even see the path. It was snowing with heavy clouds—we very nearly turned back at the car park. However, there were a couple of guys with ice axes and we thought, they must know what they're doing, we'll follow them. We got about half way up and were avalanched off. We went about 400 feet, but stayed on top of the snow and, fortunately, didn't go off any cliffs. I thought it was fantastic, real exciting. We picked ourselves up at the bottom and found that the other two "proper climbers" had also been avalanched. They turned around and went back, so we did as well. I never looked back after that. Also, in the youth hostel, I heard some people talking about rock climbing. I had never heard about rock climbing, and I just knew it was something that I had to try. My uncle was a professional photographer and his assistant, Cliff, was a bit of a climber. He took me to Harrison's Rocks. That's where it all started.

What an adventure. An avalanche on your very first day out. How did you work your way into what was a very close-knit, almost elitist, climbing community?

Well, it really started with Harrison's Rocks—it was just a train ride down from London. I managed to get down there just about every weekend during the school term. Back in 1951, the climbing community was so much smaller than it is now, and so I got to know the climbers at Harrison's Rocks. Most of them were quite a bit older than myself, but I was a natural climber and I was soon climbing the hardest routes. The only other person staying there was Tony Malham, who was at that time one of the best rock climbers in Britain. He was working on a new Llanberis climbing guidebook, so I spent about three days there. When my climbing partner did arrive, Tony climbed with us a bit, but when my climbing partner went back to his children, I went off on my own. I walked over the Glyders and on to the Pen-y-Pass. It looks quite straight, easy, and it *is*; it's only moderately difficult. I soloed it, and then I didn't know the way down. I eventually climbed all the way back down it, and as I got back down to the bottom, an old guy—well, I thought he was old at the time, he was probably in his 30s—was there with three of his pupils. He was a school master, Charles Verndun. He very kindly said, "Well, do you want to join us?" So I tried with them, and we did one of the other routes. He let me lead, because he'd seen how I could climb, and that was the first time I had ever led a pitch. He then invited me to stay with him, and I stayed in Helyg, which is another climbers' club at Ogwen, and I met other top climbers while I was there and climbed with them. Because I was a natural climber, I was accepted, even though I was just a schoolboy.

How did your mother and wife and kids handle having a famous father, husband, and son?

My mom was fantastic. She was a single parent; she almost treated me as an adult. We had long discussions about politics. She was very left-wing, and then in the evenings we read. She and her partner, Margo, would read Shakespeare together and we

also, interestingly, read the Bible. Mom was baptized Catholic, but she'd gone away from the faith. Still, she had me baptized, which helped me when I got married. She also let me go; she encouraged me to be independent. For a sixteen-year-old to hitchhike up to Scotland, to North Wales, in the middle of winter, is pretty incredible.

Then, as I became famous, she loved it. She kept scrapbooks of all my climbs. She also got me through a very good private school. She was in advertising, a copywriter. During the war, when all the men went off, she became a group head of one of the top advertising agencies in the country. But she really wanted to get out of that, and so once I finished Sandhurst, the Royal Military Academy, she left advertising and went into teaching. She did English at school, and one of the great things she did for me was give me a passion for reading. I read *War and Peace* in English at the age of 12. I had read most of the English classics by the age of 14 or so. I think that gave me a grasp of the English language, which would be a huge help to me in the future.

When she retired in Wellesley, which was where she'd been brought up, she started giving lectures about my life to women's groups in the WI [Women's Institutes], and all the money she got from that she gave to charities. When I got the Founder's Medal from the Royal Geographical Society, which was the first public recognition I'd had, I was on an expedition at the time, so she went and collected it for me. Then, when I got my first national award, the Commander of the British Empire, my wife, Wendy, couldn't come down with me, so mum came with me to Buckingham Palace to be recognized.

As far as Wendy went, when we met, I was already one of the top climbers in Britain and had done some very hard climbs, not only in Britain, but in the Alps as well and in the Himalayas. So, she knew I was an adventurer. Her dad had been a Baptist minister—he was a very thoughtful man. The Baptists, of course, think the world was created 6,000 years ago, but he asked questions. He was deeply interested in psychology, and eventually his parish and his colleagues couldn't take it and he resigned. Wendy came with me on my first expedition, but once Conrad, our first child, was born, she couldn't go with me climbing. After that, I was always going away, sometimes for six months of the year, until the later part of our lives. She gave me 100% support, provided she felt I was doing it for the right reasons, which was because I passionately wanted to do it. As always, the risk and the danger, when you're beginning to make a living around climbing, is that you will do something because it was a sponsored climb, or it was a really good offer. On the few occasions when I was tempted to do that, she would ask questions, and each time I would pull out.

It's nice to have a conscience like that, someone who can be that source of support. My wife, Janis, has been very much the same way. She has supported me in all this climbing, running around, writing, and research. But she, too, asks, "Are you doing this for the right reason? What's going on here? Do you really have to be away?"

Many of my climbing friends and colleagues have died climbing. The trouble is, with extreme climbing at altitude, you are exposing yourself to objective danger, or that you make a quick, careless mistake and the statistics are against you. From Wendy's point of view, she knew how dangerous it was and that there had been eight or nine times where there was absolutely no way I should have gotten out of it. I think when you've got children, it's different, because in a way, Wendy had actually chosen to marry someone who leads that kind of dangerous life. But the children, they were just brought into the world by us, and I didn't realize just how much they worried about it, or the pressures they felt, being

the sons of their famous father. I think the example I gave them was one of wanting freedom—they were kind of wild when they were young, and then they settled down, and now they do things they passionately love.

The best thing we can do as parents is to teach our kids to be independent and let them have their heads, hard as it may be sometimes. I had the opportunity to edit your expedition diaries and that allowed me to see you as not just a climber, but as a leader, a husband, and a father. Talk about your expedition journal keeping, if you would.

The really detailed journals were about my earlier expeditions. They move from being a personal account, but were still a kind of a confessional that one needed to have because you couldn't express your doubts or your fears to your fellow climbers. This was even more the case once I started leading expeditions from Annapurna south face and Everest southwest face. But then, I was writing letters home as well. Until the late '70s, really, we were still using letters. You had your mail runner and the mail would come in and you'd be waiting—absolutely desperate for letters from home. Sometimes, if you didn't get a letter from home, you were in a bit of a depression. And if you had three or four letters, it was absolutely fantastic. I was also there having to write reports, and I was having to very often write something for the papers as well. So, I had one of those challenge notebooks, and my diary actually became an extended letter to Wendy. That had advantages and disadvantages—that meant I had a deep and long means of communication, but it also was actually an inhibitor when things were getting really dangerous. I could write about my problems with handling my team members, but when it came to the actual risk itself, I tended to dumb it down a bit because she was going to read it.

I'm sure it must be really difficult sometimes to manage so many independent spirits. I can only imagine what it must have been like to have Doug Scott and Don Whillans on the same expedition, because they are both so single-minded and so independent. I'm sure there are many others who are the same way.

On the '75 Everest expedition, Doug and I already knew each other. The first time we'd ever climbed together was in 1972, and he of course was a leader himself. He's a natural leader, he's a tribal chieftain—he believed in an anarchic system where there's no declared leader, in which his sheer force of personality dominated everything. I'm very much a leader, but I believe that you've got to have agreement. I know what I want to get done, but I talk to people, I persuade people, and so we are completely different in the way we do things. On Everest's south-

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west face, he started being kind of doubtful about it all, and as the climb went on, and we could see it—we had a TV team with us, and we were all interviewed the whole time—Doug came around to seeing that what I was doing worked, and I'd gotten the whole team behind me by essentially the way I'd handled them. Don was different; Don, you couldn't do that with. On the south face of Annapurna, Don got us up the mountain, but he got up the mountain with an awful lot of unhappy people flitting around. After the South Face Annapurna expedition, I knew that I couldn't handle Don and decided to leave him out of the '75 expedition, with a solid majority of the climbers behind me.

How did Don respond to that?

Well, he never forgave me. But you see, we had a tense relationship. I did some of my best climbing with Don. He was the finest mountaineer I've ever climbed with. He had a superb mountain judgment—it was quite extraordinary. But he was also dogmatic; when he'd made up his mind, he'd never change it. One of his comments I will always remember was, "I'll go half way with anyone, but I'll not go further." When you are only prepared to go half way, you'll never meet—and that was the problem. He was also very fond of his beer and his egg and chips, and he didn't get training, and so particularly toward the end he was downright obese and of course tragically died of a heart attack in his early 50s.

You certainly surrounded yourself with some very good mates, who recognized your ability as an organizer and tactician and expedition leader. The other quality that shows up in your writings is that you don't ask your climbers to do something that you wouldn't do.

I think there are two things. First, on my major expeditions I was, even as a tactician, as a mountaineer, on the same level. I think there are different levels of mountaineering—I think the real star, kind of alpine, Himalayan climber is Don Whillans. Don was a real star. Joe Brown was. Doug was. And then you've got the next level down, who are (same with football, same with any team) very, very good climbers. Within a team, you need a combination of the two. Some of your really close friendships develop on climbing trips. Nick Escort was one of the closest friends I ever had. Our families got together, our children are about the same age, and losing Nick hit me very hard. And then the next younger generation down from that, Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman, we got on incredibly well. The final trip on the northeast ridge of Everest, with Peter, Joe, and Adrian Gordon and myself, the four of us were completely attuned to each other and respected each other. My best friend of all is Charles Clarke. We even wrote two books together—that is even a bigger challenge, to not have any friction at all—that is actually a bigger test than going on a climb.

It's hard to explain to people who haven't been there what those sorts of relationships mean. I see that in the photographs of the two of you atop the Black Crag in Borrowdale for a Berghaus advertisement. It is about as choice of an example of the fellowship of the rope as I've ever seen.

It was a professional photographer that took it. It was an advertisement, for heaven's sake, but we thought we'd take a climb before, and I think we really enjoyed the climb, and I think that enjoyment of friendship—the photographer was clever enough and quick enough to catch it.



Chris and Doug Scott after a day on the crags.

The French mountaineer Maurice Herzog was challenged about his account of the first ascent of Annapurna – his book Annapurna *(1952) will always be one of my favorite mountaineering reads. One of the most vocal critics of Herzog was the son of Louis Lachenal, one of Herzog's team members, who felt like his father didn't get due recognition and therefore didn't have the fame and monetary benefits of that fame. He also made the claim that the other major players, Lionel Terray and Gaston Rebuffat, felt slighted by Herzog's treatment on the mountain. In looking at how it came about – with Herzog doing all of the work to arrange the expedition and the fact that they all agreed that he'd write the expedition book – I am wondering how much of an argument they really have. Why is it that in the last 20 years some climbing writers have been doing revisionist history in a sport that had always relied on honor? If you say you made it, you made it, and people believed it – unless there was a real obvious reason not to. Why do you think that that sort of thing has popped up in climbing literature, and what purpose does it serve?*

Well, I think that you've got about three different questions there. Have you read my book *Quest for Adventure*? Read the chapter I wrote on Herzog and the first summit of an 8,000-meter peak. I think that without Herzog, they wouldn't have climbed the mountain. A good leader—and I think Herzog was an extraordinarily egotistical leader—would perhaps have put Terray and Lachenal together, because they were a much stronger pair. But he was determined to take himself to the top when he wasn't as good of a mountaineer. And I think Lachenal probably saved his bloody life, but Herzog, I suspect, didn't acknowledge that in his account. From that point of view, I think Lachenal was probably justified. I don't think that's being revisionist; I think the historian, the writer, has got to look at a situation and then interpret it. And with the protagonist—whether it's John Hunt, Chris Bonington, or Maurice Herzog—there will always be an element of self-justification of your choices and what you did. When John Hunt had Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon use their experimental oxygen set for their ascent of Everest, they were probably every bit as good a pair as [Sir Edmund] Hillary and Tenzing [Norgay]. John's tactics were very good, but one of his big problems were the two strongest-minded members of the expedition: Bourdillon and Evans.

They made that first bid for the summit, but John gave them no chance at all because they were doing it from the South Col. The argument was that they were doing it as a first trial, or reconnaissance, but the fact was that it was a complete, wasted effort. And the plan always was that they'd have the higher camp above the South Col. It was his way of actually handling two members of the team who could have been difficult. He'd always had in his mind that Hillary and Tenzing would summit. Why? Hillary for his sheer strength and determination, Tenzing because he, for heaven's sake, had got to the south summit the year before with the Swiss mountaineer Raymond Lambert, and he knew the route and the odds. John was a very good leader, and a good leader has got to be a good manipulator—at times quite ruthlessly. This is nothing new—as far as revisionist history is concerned—that is actually the interpretation that each generation has of the previous generation's history. At the end of it, you can either agree with that or not. Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is a superbly written book, but it is moderately unfair and very much written from his standpoint. He's making criticisms of other people, when he is just looking out for himself.

Yes, Krakauer is a fine writer. In my own writings, I have taken issue with his attitude toward Anatoli Boukreev – the Russian climber who moved into the spotlight in the wake of the 1996 Everest disaster and who got killed on Annapurna – as well as some of the other assertions he has made.

One criticism you could make of Boukreev is the challenge of climbing a mountain. The challenge of life, basically, is decided by your priorities. To me, if you are a mountain guide and if you are being paid to help people get up a mountain, your total priority is that, and nothing else. Boukreev was an outstanding mountaineer but his challenge was himself. As a guide, not to use oxygen is downright irresponsible. He rushed up the mountain, rushed back down it, and really hadn't looked after his clients at all. Then, when the catastrophe happened, he dashed out there and probably saved quite a few lives, while Krakauer was resting in his tent from having made his guided assent. So Krakauer was in no position whatsoever to criticize Boukreev.

Jon does a similar thing in Into the Wild, *where he justifies Chris McCandless's attempt at going into the wilderness and living on his own terms. And he compares that to his solo of the Devil's Thumb. The difference is, Jon is a great alpinist and Devil's Thumb within his skill set. McCandless going into the wilderness with a bag of rice and a .22 rifle was not wise at all.*

Yes, but that was his choice. If they do things to the direct detriment of other people, yes, that is open to criticism and condemnation. But if you are just going to do something out of what may be an unrealistic kind of ambition, and you die in the process, well, that's what adventure is all about.

Okay, but with McCandless rescuers had to go in and find him – put themselves in danger. He hadn't thought very far through the ramifications of his actions.

People say that in practically every kind of rescue, whether it's here in Ogden or when 9 or 10 people die in the Lake District every year because they are badly equipped—but that's how it is, and I would never criticize that. This business of people climbing things that they haven't been trained for, that's been going on from the very beginning of the sport of climbing. There are loads of questionable attempts back in Victorian times, and they go on. That is part of the human condition—that people, sadly, to bolster their own ego, go and do these

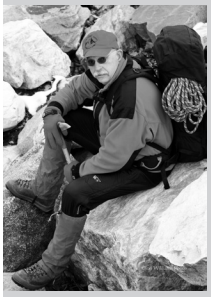
things like poor Donald Crowhurst. He set out in that great race around the world in his sailboat and then realized that he couldn't do it—then kind of cruised around the south Atlantic making a completely fraudulent log of his progress and then realized he couldn't get away with it and committed suicide.

Jealousy of one's success, too, is part of the human condition and pops up in any walk of life. How have you handled criticism that you've had to deal with?

People commonly have a misinformed impression that I was making a huge amount of money from my climbs, when I certainly wasn't. ***Everest—The Hard Way*** (1976), I think, made about a quarter of a million pounds, but the copyright lay with the sponsors and I got out of there with about 5000 pounds paid. I had a budget, so that meant that I could then pay all of my contributors a reasonable amount for what they wrote. So, there was that impression that because I was making a living around climbing, I was doing it to make money, which was rubbish. I was actually trying to earn a fair reward for the intellectual effort that I put in. My job was actually writing, lecturing, organizing. The climb has always been something I've done for the love of it.

Anything you would do differently, if you could?

I don't think I would have done anything differently. Because even though I made mistakes—one of the things that's been ingrained in my mind, Joe Tasker and I were out in front when we chose the route across this wide snowfield that led to our third camp on K2, which ended up killing Nick, and very nearly Doug as well—you have to live with them. It's not guilt, but in life you make the best decisions you can, and as you go on some of them are right and some of them are wrong, but there's no point in wallowing in it. You get on with life and you get on with doing things. There are various mistakes I've done, including some happy mistakes. I am where I am now and I've had a good life, and I've done good climbs. I don't regret the ones I didn't manage to get up.



Mikel Vause (PhD., Bowling Green) is an accomplished mountaineer, professor of English at Weber State University, and the author of numerous articles and short stories that have appeared widely. He is also the author of seven collections of poems, most recently, *A House for Strange Animals*.

FERRETING OUT THE MYSTERIES OF HISTORY—



A Conversation with ERIK LARSON

SUSAN HAFEN

"Gripping and important" and "factual and personal" are adjectives seldom applied to the same books, but are used regularly by readers and reviewers of Erik Larson's work. Larson's ability to enthrall the reader with suspenseful narrative and delight the historian with detailed depictions of characters from the past is the reason why five of his books have become national bestsellers: Dead Wake *(2015),* In the Garden of Beasts *(2011),* Thunderstruck *(2006),* The Devil in the White City *(2003), and* Isaac's Storm *(1999).*

Two of them, In the Garden of Beasts *and* The Devil in the White City, *have been optioned for movie rights.* The Devil in the White City, *which juxtaposed the building of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago with a serial murderer killing his victims near the Fair, won an Edgar Award for nonfiction crime writing, was a finalist for a National Book Award, and stayed on the* New York Times' *bestseller lists for over five years. His new book,* The Splendid and the Vile, *focuses on Winston Churchill from May 10, 1940 (the day when Churchill was appointed prime minister and Hitler invaded Holland) to May 10, 1941 (the night of the Blitz). The coincidence of those dates, exactly one year apart, highlights Larson's ability to find the unexpectedly fortuitous drama in historical events that shape lives and destinies.*

Larson credits his nose for stories to his journalism training at Columbia University, and his love of history to his major in Russian history at the University of Pennsylvania. After reporting at the Bucks County Courier Times *in Pennsylvania, Larson landed a job as a staff writer for* The Wall Street Journal *and later wrote for* Time *magazine,* The New Yorker, The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, *and other publications. He has taught nonfiction writing at San Francisco State University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Oregon. I want to thank the Ogden School Foundation for making this conversation with Larson – the Foundation's 2018 Fall Author speaker – possible.*

CONVERSATION

All of your books document pretty terrific kinds of stories and tragedies. What was the most difficult for you personally to research and write about emotionally?

You know, I don't actually get emotionally involved. I guess it's from my journalism training. There are two parts of me. One part of me recognizes—this is the part of me that listens to NPR—that this is very sad and tragic stuff. And the other side of me that probably listens to Fox News thinks, oh this is terrific stuff. So there's always that journalistic removal that happens with each book. I think that the one that was the most troubling to work on was *In the Garden of the Beast*. Even at the time, there were always political resonances that were sort of chilling. Believe me, if I were doing it today, it would be much scarier to write and read. But as a rule I try to maintain a certain journalistic and narrative remove. I mean, the worse things are, the better the story.

Because your books are historical accounts of real events and people, you must on occasion have had to defend a perspective that goes counter to conventional interpretations. Can you give an example of how you've had to respond to anybody who questioned your perspective?

You know, I don't think I've ever really had to do that. My books are not treated as if they are revolutionarily historical, you know, reviews of existing literature and so forth. They are what they are; they're very well-documented. They tell a story, and it's kind of hard to say, well, the world thinks that something very different happened in the case of the Lusitania, and so forth. People may be arguing that elsewhere, but I personally have not had to rebut that kind of thing. In the case of *Isaac's Storm*, however, my first sort of narrative history, I did get some pushback from this little cadre in Galveston, who felt, I think they were offended, that I was taking down this local hero, Isaac Cline. He was the chief weatherman, and there was this myth about Isaac Cline, and what I pretty conclusively proved was that it was a myth. He did not save the day for anybody, least of all himself. But beyond that, I really have not had a lot of pushback about anything.

The reason I ask that question is that when I read Dead Wake, *with Winston Churchill at the center, I was stunned because of his role in blaming Captain Turner. And you kind of implied that in some ways Churchill had been aware of, but not instrumental in, endangering the Lusitania. So I wondered if that was an account that surprised people or created a reaction?*

No, no. The thing about Churchill setting up Turner is that it's all in public documents. It's so obvious and so there, given the context. And it's

like, why? Why is he blaming Turner when there was this catastrophe caused by the submarine command, when everything else would say, you know, the propaganda benefit of accusing and laying the blame on the submarine commander Jordy was so huge? So what I imply, if you will, but what I am unable to prove, is that Churchill, et al. were trying to cover up the fact that they had this Room 40 entity—the cryptanalysis section of the British Admiralty during the First World War—and were in possession of all these secrets that they did not want anyone else to know about. But I never got any pushback about that. I don't think anyone who knows or reads my work even cares. And interestingly, I was a little concerned because, obviously, Churchill is a big deal and this whole Room 40 thing is very controversial in terms of whether Churchill himself could have stopped this by notifying the captain. I took it as far as I could, but I wasn't certain either way. There's no smoking memo. But there was that specialist historian who decided finally in the end that there was a plot. You couldn't say who was involved or whatever. And that was pretty much how I left it. So even there I was going out a little bit on a limb for those who are really Churchill fans.

However, interestingly, this new book of mine—***The Splendid and the Vile***—is sort of a new and fresh take, believe it or not, on Churchill. In order to get access to his diary, I had to make a pitch to, well, it was the diary of Churchill's daughter, Mary. I had to make a pitch to her saying I would like to see it—it was not yet available to the public—I'd love to do it, and it's my background. I didn't hear anything for a month, and then I got permission to look at it—I was one of only two people who got permission for this! I got permission to look at it because she had decided to read ***Dead Wake***, and she loved my respectful treatment of Churchill.

For me it invoked the possibility that FDR knew about the Pearl Harbor attack. It was that kind of—

Anytime there is a question in the midst of a massive tragedy, there is always a conspiracy theory to go with it, Pearl Harbor being an example of that.

Speaking of The Splendid and the Vile*, does that title refer to the character of Churchill?*

It actually refers to a passage from a diary kept by one of Churchill's private secretaries, Jock Colville, who becomes a character in my book. In most books about Churchill, Colville is sort of a secondary source, quoted in passing, but in my book he's a character. And in one of his accounts of the particularly horrific night of the Blitz, a very beautiful account, he makes a reference to the splendid and the vile, which to me summed up that entire period.

Last night you talked about your books being kind of narrative suspense thrillers. It's the way you usually have two themes, like streams of narratives coming from different perspectives.

Not necessarily. People often say I have this shtick where I've got two narratives converging and that's really only the case with the ***Devil in the White City***, and totally fortuitous.

And Thunderstruck.

It was not planned, believe me, with ***Thunderstruck***.

And Dead Wake*, sort of.*

Very different conception, though. That's not two things coming together—that's story. These are the necessary components of the story, that's my feeling.

So it wasn't contrived, in other words, as Thunderstruck *possibly was where you brought in two disparate things.*

But again with ***Thunderstruck***, I don't see it as contrived. I think that's a wrong word. The thing that I was interested in exploring was this intersection between these two careers. This killer

and the ace of wireless. How did that happen? As a way of looking at the period and looking at the people. It was a way of bringing forth all the cool stuff from that era.

It was fabulous.

I'm glad you liked it, because it was my black sheep. It was my black sheep because, for artificial reasons, my publisher chose to release *Thunderstruck* on the very day that they released Obama's first book, *The Audacity of Hope*. So my book was really essentially lost. I mean, it hit the bestseller list fairly quickly, but in terms of overall attention, it was lost in the process. I had an unguarded conversation with my publisher on the phone, and I asked him how the Obama book was doing, and he said it's doing so well that it's sapping all their resources. And then he stopped, and I thought: Oh, I get it, that's a problem. So my book got slightly lost at the beginning, but I've always had high hopes. But happily, I've heard from so many people who say that's their favorite. I don't understand how that could be. But it's nice.

I'd have a hard time choosing my favorite. I liked all of them. Do you have a favorite?

No. I have an economic favorite. *Devil in the White City.* It's done very well.

When I was researching your work, I found that two of your books have been optioned for films, Devil in the White City *and* In the Garden of Beasts. *Those are great, but I thought, why not* Dead Wake *and* Thunderstruck*? All four of them are perfect for cinematography. How do you feel about those being made into film, and what would you like your role to be involved in that?*

Devil in the White City was optioned by Leonardo DiCaprio. It's been under option off and on for almost a decade. It's been renewed by different people. Kathryn Bigelow had the option for a while, and now it's with DiCaprio and Robert De Niro. One of the challenges with *Devil in the White City* is that it's a hard book to do in a single movie. I've always felt that. How do you capture both elements? If you don't capture both, all you have is a period *Silence of the Lambs*. Nobody's gonna focus just on the World's Fair. They're gonna focus on the serial killer. But the real story—the thing that spurred me to write this book—was this juxtaposition of dark and light. This killer and the fair. And the fair, for god's sake, they call it the White City. And to do that is very complicated, especially in the course of an hour and a half or two hours for a film. But happily, in this next iteration, we're going to redo the option, and we've decided that DiCaprio's backers are just gonna buy the book outright for an extended TV series, like one of these HBO features, which is what I think it needs to be. Something really classy like *The Crown*. Tom Hanks bought the option for *In the Garden of the Beast*. It's been renewed and

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My goal is to always be moving forward. I'm a writer. I don't do film. I just want to keep doing my books. If I start becoming a consultant on these films, I'm going backwards. I don't want to rehash stuff. I don't want to have to think about this. This is a resolution I made very early on dealing with Hollywood. Ideally, they know what they're doing; they're experts in doing this. This is not my field. I give them rights to this project. I follow the advice of Tom Wolfe, who said essentially: what you do with Hollywood is, you take your book to the fence, hand it over, take the bag of money, and go. (Laughs) So that's my approach.

renewed and renewed, and I don't really know where that is. He still seems intent on doing the film. It's ideal for him. He loves period characters, so we'll see what happens.

So Tom Hanks wants to star in that as –

William Dodd. And that's another one where I think it'd be a much better extended series, because then you get to deal with the gradual evolution of Hitler's control, his consolidation of power, his dealing with his own insurgents, with the storm troopers and so forth. You could have that juxtaposition back and forth. Very effective in the course of an extended TV series, whereas it's hard again to do in one sitting.

How do you feel about the two recent cinematic portrayals of Winston Churchill, since you've dug so deeply into that character? You have Lithgow in The Crown*, and you have Gary Oldman, of course, in* Darkest Hour*. And both of those have Room 40, so what were your reactions to those?*

I have to tell you, I did not watch *The Crown*, I deliberately did not. At that point I did a lot of research and writing, and I still needed to get my sense of who Churchill was without seeing someone else's portrayal. I finally saw one late episode of *The Crown*, and I saw Lithgow and got a sense for how he portrayed Churchill. Then, I finally felt comfortable enough to watch *Darkest Hour* and watch Oldman, and I was completely put off by the Churchill portrayal. He comes off as a senile old drunk, frankly. That was not Churchill. And even though I am not an expert, I was pretty close to some things and can say that the film takes many odd historical liberties.

That's why I hope you get to have greater involvement in your two books so you can make certain –

I'm not going to have that. This is a personal thing with me. My goal is to always be moving forward. I'm a writer. I don't do film. I just want to keep doing my books. If I start becoming a consultant on these films, I'm going backwards. I don't want to rehash stuff. I don't want to have to think about this. This is a resolution I made very early on dealing with Hollywood. Ideally, they know what they're doing; they're experts in doing this. This is not my field. I give them rights to this project. I follow the advice of Tom Wolfe, who said essentially: what you do with Hollywood is, you take your book to the fence, hand it over, take the bag of money, and go. (Laughs) So that's my approach.

I didn't know if you'd want greater involvement because last night – and I loved this phrase – you described yourself as the animator of history, and because film then becomes the animation, the sort of realized vision . . .

What I love is what I can do to make this happen using the reader's imagination. Film takes much of that away because it presents what you're supposed to see. And I just like to think about,

what are readers taking away from this? What scenes are they getting? What's lodged in their mind by what I write? That's what I concentrate on. And I'm not going to get that with movies.

Well, you do a wonderful job because every time I read your books, I see them as movies. And that doesn't happen for me for many books.

That's good. And this is why I don't have a lot of photographs in my books. I want the reader to build the picture in his or her mind. I don't want people constantly thumbing back to a photograph and saying, oh that's what that looked like. Because I've done that work already. I've looked at those photographs, and I'm trying to convey them to you.

One of the things I'm also interested in is the reviews of your book. In one review of the Dead Wake *in* The Guardian*, Richard Davenport Hines, who's also written about the Lusitania, was quite positive. What he didn't like were the parts about Edith Bolling Galt, which he called sort of a worrisome distraction. Which surprised me because I love those sort of gossipy light details about Wilson's affair with Edith.*

I was not aware of that because, as you know, I don't read my reviews, except the one from my daughter, which I quoted last night. And the only reason was because I had a story there. But I don't read my reviews because even the very positive ones can say something that's not right, that's not what I do, or maybe that is what I do. And suddenly that's rattling around in my head. So I don't read reviews. I reject that completely. I'm so into context, what's going on at the time. The fact that Wilson is so besotted with this woman is, to me, wonderful. It humanizes him. I think he was a great president. I'm surprised when I hear from people saying, Oh god, what a revelation. Wilson was such an idiot. Twitter, you know. People have no filters. And I didn't have that impression at all. I think that made him an even greater president—that he was able to deal with everything in the way he did while being totally in love. I mean, how many of us can separate our personal lives as effectively from our working lives? So I found that very powerful.

And each icon also has a personality and a personal life and quirks, and learning some of those things makes them more interesting.

Well, that's how we go through life. I mean, you're not solely a communications professor. That's what I'm trying to get at, actually. That's the whole essence of this next book, ***The Splendid and the Vile***. The timestamp is May 10, 1940, to May 10, 1941. It's a very concise but also very meaningful period, and my goal is to assert a context that has been left out of all the books about Churchill. And here he is dealing with all this stuff. He's written all these great speeches, but in the meantime he's a father, he's a husband, he's a friend. He needs the counsel of others, and all of these other things are going on. He's also broke. He needs a financial bailout the day the Blitz starts, and that's what I'm trying to bring in. It's going to be essentially studying the context. All of this other stuff is going on that I think will frankly make him seem even more brilliant.

What are your narrative streams for The Splendid and the Vile*? Is it his story or his daughter's story? Is it going to be a thriller?*

It's a thriller. It's a thriller narrative. It's a thriller to the extent that it can be, but it's going to be a very different structure. Very Vonnegutian.

Last night when you spoke at dinner I told our table that I would be interviewing you today, and I asked what questions they wanted me to ask you. One of my table mates suggested that, rather than prompting you to talk about your writing, you could talk about any subject you wanted. Well, what subject would you want to talk about?

That's a great question. I think it would have been a possibly unpopular subject, but I would have wanted to talk about Trump and the similarities between him and Berlin in 1933-34.

You mentioned that writing In the Garden of the Beast *now would have been scarier because of current politics.*

In the run-up to the presidential election, people kept asking me, Well aren't you afraid, because of your book and all that stuff? And my response at that point was, No, I have trust in the American political institutions and that Trump does not have an armed militia at his disposal. He's not capable of arresting the opposition. Since then my view has changed. I think he's become a much more significant danger. He's no Hitler. He doesn't have the smarts to be Hitler. I think that's our one saving grace. But he's got little Hitlers who work for him, Stephen Miller being one of them. And I'm worried. I would have talked about that. And if I didn't talk about that, then I would talk about my daughters. Because daughters are infinitely distracting.

I understand you are deeply knowledgeable about Russia and Russian culture. Have you thought about doing something about Russian history?

Well, I love Russian history, and that's why I went into Russian history. I had the most fantastic Russian history professor. He was an exiled Russian prince at the University of Pennsylvania, and he's the one who turned me on to it. The thing is, what am I going to write about? I'd love to write about Ivan the Terrible, Catherine the Great, Peter the Great, none of the revolutionary stuff. And the problem is: to write about that, you really do have to know Russian on a level that I don't know. And I could not restore and really write about those things without spending five years learning Russian.

You'd have to get into the real nitty-gritty of things. It's not like, with Churchill, this current book. It'd be great if I knew German, because there's a contrapuntal narrative that has been left out of lots of other Churchillian narratives. As Churchill was doing all that he was doing, there was immediate reaction and pushback to him from the Germans and from the propaganda, Hermann Goering and the Luftwaffe. Everything is cause and effect. To my amazement, that's left out of everything I've ever read about Churchill. So there will be this contrapuntal narrative that will add to the suspense. All along the Germans said, we're going to destroy England, we're going to destroy Churchill. Sorry, I got off on a tangent.

You were talking about writing on Russian history.

It's different with writing about Germany because so much material has been translated, and there's so much stuff in the Library of Congress and the national archives. Like direct interviews with these principal characters that have been translated, that you don't need to know German, at least not to the extent that I'm going into these characters. Writing about Peter the Great, I've got to know Russian

So if someone were to do a biography about you, go back and look at your life and see if there's a biographical string that comes out in your own writing – what do you think they might find?

I think they would find me a tedious character and they would give up the biography. (Laughs) There's no strings.

Well, I think about how you started with Naked Consumer, *and then you did* Lethal Passage, *which gave me a sense of your emerging politics, because these were not narrative histories. And then you diverted from politics in some way, because you started talking about* Isaac's Storm *and* Devil in the White City. *So I wondered, are there parts of you that are dropped in?*

One thing that has always been very powerful for me is trying to get to a point where I'm getting a tactile sense of what really happened in these periods I am fascinated by, and for me it's very powerful and even moving to create that sense for myself. And that's not created just for my readers. When I was working on ***Devil in the White City***, I knew I was finally getting there in the book when I had a chance to be at The Brown Palace Hotel in

Denver. I was doing a talk there and was walking into this interior atrium with all of these balconies surrounding the atrium. It's a wonderful old hotel. And as I was walking around this hotel on the third floor above the atrium, I suddenly had this sense—this is going to sound strange—of Daniel Burnham and Frederick Law Olmsted walking along the opposite side and just chatting as they were walking. It was very powerful, that sort of desire to produce a sense, a gestalt, but that's not biographical stuff. I think that has governed my life—as have my kids.

How so?

I've been enthralled with my children from day one.

Last night you mentioned the Nancy Drew mysteries, and I turned to a friend and said, I don't know very many men that know those. I grew up with Nancy Drew mysteries. They really began my reading in second grade and it continued from there. What else did you read that contributed to your love of mysteries?

First of all, I had the biggest crush on Nancy Drew; I read all of the Nancy Drew mysteries. I found her life fascinating. She had this world, and her father who was a travelling detective, and she and her friend George—you just gotta parse that at some point. My thing apart from Nancy Drew was Helen McInnes's spy novels. Ross Macdonald's detective stories, and Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Those were my favorites.

A lot of those were mysteries. And that continues today in your books, doesn't it? Ferreting out the mystery.

There's always a mystery. There's always something you don't know is coming.

Only if you look for it. I think somebody else would look at the same events and not necessarily see the mystery. That's probably the journalistic bent in you.

Every event has a preamble if you look for it. You see the signs, and only if you knew the signs then would you be able to logically think that this is going to be the outcome. If only you could take those preambles and go forward. And so that's the essence of what I do and what helps me determine whether I'm going to do something or not. I looked into doing a book about the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco. Two things happened: You could take all the materials I found about the earthquake and substitute the Galveston hurricane—same thing. So, been there, done that, except for the fact that there was no preamble. It just happened. There was no foreshadowing. No story.

Thank you so much for your time.



Susan Hafen (Ph.D., Ohio University) is a professor and the internship coordinator in the Department of Communication at Weber State University. She has published in the eclectic areas of diversity training, organizational emotions, workplace gossip, human-animal communication and zoosemiotics, lesbian identity, ethnography, and critical pedagogy. Prior to her academic life, she worked in human resources for several multinational corporations.

REMAPPING CONTEMPORARY SPANISH LITERATURE —



A Conversation with ESPIDO FREIRE

ISABEL ASENSIO

INTRODUCTION

Espido Freire (Bilbao, 1974) is a prolific Spanish writer whose work has been well received in Spain and abroad. She uses her family names as her pen name because they are "vibrant and mysteriously androgynous." She holds a BA in English Literature and an MA in Editing and Publishing from Deusto University.

Freire published her first novel, Irlanda *(1998), when she was only 23. The book received wide critical acclaim and was awarded the Millepage Award, given by French librarians for the best foreign work, in 1999. It is the only one of her novels that has been translated into English. She published her second novel,* Donde siempre es octubre, *in 1999, which she followed immediately with* Melocotones helados, *for which she won the* Premio Planeta de Novela, *the best-known literary prize awarded to a novel originally written in Spanish. At 25, she was the youngest novelist to ever receive this award. Set in northern Spain, the novel tells the story of three generations of women. The main character, Elsa, who feels at a loss and disconnected from her family, takes on a search for her family roots. By understanding her family's past and reflecting on her current situation, she can move on and live her life in ways she could not have imagined previously.*

Since then, Freire has published the novels Diabulus in Música *(2001);* Nos espera la noche *(2003);* La diosa del pubis azul *(2005);* Soria Moria *(2007), recipient of the 39th Premio Ateneo de Sevilla;* Hijos del fin del mundo: De Roncesvalles a Finisterre *(2009), awarded the 4th Premio Llanes de Viajes; and* La flor del Norte *(2011). Her last book,* Llamadme Alejandra *(2017), a historical novel set against the backdrop of the Russian Revolution, tells the life and execution of the last tsarina Alejandra Feodorovna. The novel received the Premio Azorín 2017, which ranks among the top ten most prestigious literary awards in Spain.*

Freire has also written books for young adults, short stories, poetry, and essays. Among her essays, Cuando comer es un infierno*: Confesiones de una bulímica (2002) stands out. The book collects testimonies of young women dealing with bulimia, from which Freire suffered when she was young. Freire is a pioneer by nature and the first Spanish writer to model for well-known clothing labels and to launch a perfume. Freire has contributed to numerous joint publications and works as a freelance literary translator as well. She is a columnist for several Spanish and Spanish-American news platforms, including radio and TV. A Generation X-er, Freire embraces technology to the fullest extent. She keeps a personal webpage (www.espidofreire.com), and her readers follow her on Facebook and Instagram.*

For those American readers who don't know you, who is Espido Freire and what inspires her to write?

I am a writer from Spain; I write in Spanish, and I have published 27 different books in the last 20 years. I have published in all types of genres: novels, short stories, children's books, teen novels, drama, poetry, and essays. I have also worked, and still work, for newspapers and magazines writing reports, interviews, and opinion pieces. I am also into teaching and pedagogy and developing human creativity. What inspires me to write is the dark side of being human, the untold, the secret, and the innate need to communicate what I think and what I feel. It is not something concrete. Inspiration is not like lighting hitting you. It has much more to do with a constant state of mind that makes you look inward or outward.

In an interview for Zenda *magazine, you once said that when you considered a career in classical music, you had to deal with huge artistic egos, and that you thought the field of classical music was very treacherous. What about the field of literature? Have you not had to deal with egos?*

I have, but the big difference is that I was a teenager when I tried a career in classical music, and I was not emotionally prepared to face those egos, nor to draw from the good things that experience could bring me. However, ten years later, when I ventured into the field of literature, my personality was much more developed, and I was much more indifferent to big or small egos. They did not affect me personally as much as they had when I was younger. Egos exist among artists, but also among people who are not artists. I believe egos are a hindrance most of the time. If you have an ego, you have a handicap. It is even worse if you must work with people who have it. A big ego doesn't let you work well as part of a team and, most of the time, people with egos don't have enough humility for self-analysis and reflection on their own work. If an artist is not capable of deep, sincere self-analysis, it is very likely that his or her career will stagnate. Most of the great egos are explosions of talent that either do not go on, or they destroy everything around them. My personal effort is to have a balanced personality, because I am not a particularly stable person. Now, instead of ego we may talk about self-esteem. When your self-esteem is balanced, you do not need to push, nor run over, nor have more than what you already have. Writing is a lonely job. First, it is just you and the computer or paper. Then, it is you and the finished book. Then, the criticisms come when you are alone. Therefore, if you don't learn to separate yourself from your work, to know that you are more than what you have written, suffering is assured. And I don't want to suffer anymore.

What does today's literary panorama in Spain look like, in terms of both writers and publishers?

I believe Spain's literary panorama was more interesting, or at least more hopeful, about ten years ago, before the economic crisis. Why? Because there were up to seven literary generations publishing at the same time: people in their 20s and people in their 90s. We didn't have many of each, but we had them. So that offered us a huge and varied perspective. We had Spaniards and Latin Americans; we had bestselling authors; and we had niche authors with a small number of very loyal readers. The economic crisis turned the literary landscape into something much

A big ego doesn't let you work well as part of a team and, most of the time, people with egos don't have enough humility for self-analysis and reflection on their own work. If an artist is not capable of deep, sincere self-analysis, it is very likely that his or her career will stagnate. Most of the great egos are explosions of talent that either do not go on, or they destroy everything around them.

more productive, much more practical. The crisis swept away the latter type of authors, who often showed great quality and offered a different voice. The panorama in publishing houses also changed. Many writers have been discouraged from continuing to write. Media venues have closed: television networks, newspapers, magazines. Both private and public investments in culture have disappeared as well, which left us much more limited.

Now that it seems we are recovering from that crisis the picture is still confusing. It is difficult to find a place if you are not an author who sells a lot. Quality standards are being mixed up with business standards in a more exaggerated way than ever before. At the same time, there is an emerging phenomenon, yet to be explored, which is self-publishing, Amazon.com, social media, etc. Sales prevail right now: authors are very successful, and therefore visible. But high-quality authors will slowly show up again—I hope—if we give them time. There is also a lot being done in the genres of crime fiction and the historical novel. In addition, we find that more young people are showing a lot of interest in writing, not so much with a high literary ambition, but as a medium to express themselves and their emotions. Until now, so many people had never written so much at the same time and with the possibility of self-publishing. So, we'll see in a couple of years what's left of this. We are in transition.

What are your thoughts about women's roles in today's literature, in Spain and in general?

For a long time, women had been an alternative Western voice and, before achieving total inclusion—in Spain, for example, we had around 20% women novelists versus 80% male novelists, according to the scholar Laura Freixas—other women's voices were emerging from developing countries: countries in Africa, the Far East. These women not only told us about a different reality but also presented a female perspective that was much less equal, or much more lateral. This is what I would highlight at the international level.

At the national level, much remains to be done. For example, we need to stop asking the old question, "do women write in this way or the other?" When a major male author writes, they don't ask why he writes; they simply accept that he does. There is also the challenge of getting more female literary critics and editors into senior positions. Many female literary editors are now holding junior positions. In Spain, most readers are women, at least within the novelistic genre, which means authors tend to write with a female reader in mind. This is not always good because, in my opinion, one should write in a much more universal way, not just thinking of a specific market sector.

At the same time, certain topics are currently enjoying wide public interest in social media that have yet to be addressed in literature. For example, the whole phenomenon of "Me too" and sexual abuse, and motherhood and its conflicting relationship with women. All things related to the secret world of women are now more overt in public protests and news articles, but not yet in literature. An example

of this is the universal theme of mourning. A few years ago, a well-known Spanish writer, Rosa Montero, was left a widow while still young, and she wanted to talk about her grief. So, she chose a historical character, Marie Curie, the great scientist and Nobel Prize winner, who was also a young widow, and wrote about what happened to Curie when she lost her husband, while weaving her [Montero's] own grief into it. I cried reading that book, even though tears don't come easily to me. The emotions and pain were so sincere, so intense. So, for the first time, a book written by a woman addressed what really happens when you lose someone you love. ***La ridícula idea de no volver a verte*** (The ridiculous idea of not seeing you again) filled a hole we all knew existed, but about which no one had written before. It is worth reading.

The Planeta Award was a huge achievement for you. How was receiving the Azorín Award for the novel Llamadme Alejandra *(*Call me Alejandra*)?*

Well, they had nothing to do with each other. I'm not saying one was better than the other. Each award simply felt different. I got the Planeta Award with my third novel, when I was still young and very naive, whereas I now know the literary world, and the winning novel is less avant-garde. ***Melocotones helados*** is a difficult, dry novel in which I wanted to show that I knew how to write. Today, on the other hand, I don't need to do that anymore. Therefore, with ***Llamadme Alejandra*** I was able to focus more on literary features rather than experimental ones. I was attentive to the characters' psychology and the historical facts. It is more of a classic novel, in that sense.

The Azorín Award gave me almost as much joy as the Planeta. Above all, I felt less responsibility because, with the Planeta, I was determined to show that I deserved it, that I had not won it by chance. The Azorín felt more like homecoming, a feeling of being reunited with old journalist friends. It has been something totally different, much more relaxed and serene, as I imagine I am now, too.

Why a historical novel? Why the Russian monarchy, in particular? Yesterday, they announced this year's Planeta Award-winning novel, which happens to be a historical novel as well. Is there a resurgence of the historical novel in Spain?

People buy and read a lot of historical novels in Spain, and one of this genre's top leading authors is Santiago Posteguillo[1]. In my case, it has been a development. I have gone from stories that stemmed from my own creativity and fantasy to more realistic novels based on historical documentation. I spent 13 years working on ***Llamadme Alejandra***, doing research and seeking documentation from a variety of sources and archives. My interest in the Russian monarchy comes from when I was a little girl and found a photograph of the last tsarina and a description of her life by chance in a dictionary. I was very young, and I learned what I thought was an exciting fact: they were shot on my birthday. This fact got stuck in my mind. So, for many years I kept reading about when they found the bodies in Russia, when they identified them—it has always been a topic I like. Then, a few years ago, I seriously considered writing a book, either a biography or a historical novel, and I finally did it: a novel told by a first-person narrator where being a tsarina is the least important thing about her. Instead she is a woman in a world that is falling apart—at a time when World War I is ending and the Bolshevik revolution is starting. Everything they thought was righteous is no longer so. It is like the French Revolution sweeping everything away; new times are coming and there she is, suspended in the abyss. That is what I wanted to write about.

How is writing fiction different from writing a historical novel?

[1] Santiago Posteguillo is the 2018 Planeta Award winner with the historical novel, *Yo, Julia.*

In pure fiction, you have only one limit: the pact with the reader. If the reader stops reading the book, it's over. If the novel has a great deal of fantasy, but I lay down the rules well from the beginning, the reader believes it. However, when it comes to the historical novel, the reader expects facts to be true. It's a novel, after all. Not all readers approach the novel with that expectation, but most do. Most readers want to not only read a book but also learn something from the past. To me historical facts do not matter as much as psychological credibility. For the two historical novels I have written, I wanted to know and understand how a person from the 13th and 19th centuries thought. In *La Flor del Norte* (*The Flower of the North*), which is a novel about a Nordic woman who comes to Spain to marry, I purposely included an anachronism: a courtyard in Seville in the 13th century filled with bougainvillea plants cascading down its walls. Bougainvillea is a southern twining plant with beautiful, striking fuchsia flowers. This plant is native to Brazil and was brought to Spain in the 15th century. Why did I do this? Because I needed some strokes of color. Everything else was white and green—it was sad. I needed a metaphor of a different color. Nevertheless, the psychology of the main character Cristina is consistent with her time. She supports slavery because she believes it is normal and even ethically reasonable. She approves abuse: she punishes her servants and slaves physically because she thinks it is good for them. And she agrees with several cultural issues that we would now disapprove of. The challenge was to make her a friendly character despite all this. At the same time, I had to rely on the little data I had about 13th century Norwegian women, because I do not care about historical events and battles. I care about what people ate and drank; whether people used wood or ceramic tableware; and what time they ate. So, in fiction, you don't have to do all this research. In fiction, you can make them eat hamburgers if you want. I spent a lot of time trying to find this type of information, and I loved it!

Let's talk about your work in the field of literary translation. Translators may articulate their own voice and style as they translate, just as the translated author's voice may break off from the original text. Is this the case with your translations?

When I translate texts, I always try to be as faithful as possible to the author and hide my voice because, as a writer, I have my own voice and opinion about the text. Except for cases of obvious proofreading mistakes that I can fix, I try to be very faithful. To be faithful to the meaning, you must decide what is more important—keeping the original meaning or maintaining the original form. I almost always opt for meaning. My maxim is to interpret the text, except for poetry translation. Poetry . . . poetry is unfathomable; it gets out of hand. So, to be faithful to the text or the author, you often must overlook literality. Translating poetry is the most difficult. It truly proves the translator's talent and language proficiency. Some people argue that one must be a poet to translate poetry. I don't agree with that, but I do believe you need a great command of language and imagination. Translating a manual on how to operate a machine is not that big of a challenge. For those of us who love language, poetry is the challenge. Plus, by translating, you learn a lot of about your own language and other authors. I think it is a beautiful vocation.

Have you thought of translating, or have you ever translated, your own works?

No. I think there are people much more capable than me, and I would be tempted to write the same text again. My Portuguese translator said that, within the Portuguese cultural context, there were things that would not be understood. Then, if I were to translate my own work into another language, I would miss that. Does this make sense? My first novel *Ireland* takes place in a Spanish rural setting. Then, they asked me for permission

to substitute certain rural habits for Portuguese ones. So, for me it is more interesting if someone from the target language translates. I am very flexible. In the cases where my novels were adapted to film, when they asked me if I wanted to write the script, I told them that I would prefer someone else to write it. I would like to watch the process, to learn and see how the text grows, but not do it myself, because whoever takes that text will do it within their own parameters and rules. The text is now an excuse to build something else as good as possible. Honestly, I am happy with the translations of my work so far. The last translation has been into Italian: a short story from the collection titled ***Mentiras*** (***Lies***).

In addition to writing, you have always been, and still are, very involved with teaching. What does the writer Espido look like as opposed to the creative writing professor Espido? How similar or different is writing literature from teaching literature?

They have nothing to do with each other. When you write, you can be vague and mysterious. When you teach, you must be transparent, clear, and blunt. Literature is the art of subtlety. Teaching is the art of repeating the same thing as many times as necessary. Then, when teaching creative writing—I have taught fewer literature courses as opposed to an infinite number of creative writing seminars—you have to explain what the writing process is like in a simple and clear way, always taking into consideration the students' own writing process which, most of the times, is wrong but they don't want to change it because it is what they know and what has made them happy. Then I gradually dismantle some of their manias and, above all, some of their misconceptions, and I try to professionalize them. It is going from writing on impulse as an amateur in your spare time to taking seriously the task of finishing a novel or a collection of short stories. The latter requires discipline, study, self-criticism, training, time. I didn't do this before, but now I teach time management to students because we have complicated lives. I only teach adults, who usually have a family, job, and other responsibilities. They need to learn to carve time out of their busy schedules. And, above all, I hold them back because it is much more important to think than to write. Every student wants to get to the writing stage and finish the book. And I say, "Stop. It's not like that." Writing is about thinking, developing, asking yourself what would happen if you change one character for another. Do not rush into writing; plan it. This takes them a lot of time, same as me when I started writing. I also try to use humor a lot in class: I tell them about my mistakes, about the times I messed up. And then I apply the principle of authority; that is, everyone can argue in my class, but I am the teacher. These are classes, not workshops. Workshops are much more democratic.

One more question about literature: do you think the humanities are in crisis? And, what role do universities and literature professors play today?

Yes, without a doubt, the humanities are in crisis. In fact, everything that does not produce money immediately and is not profitable on a large scale is in a crisis. The problem is, the humanities are profitable, but not immediately. The humanities help develop a worldview, a way of being critical, of contrasting your reality with that of others, which takes time and involves a process of maturity, and which may be very uncomfortable at times and for certain institutions: the humanities, for example, are unconceivable during dictatorships. For the humanities to flourish, we need two things: free time and freedom. Why time? Time is money. Time is truly very valuable, but it is not about investing our time like dollars in the stock market. Time is about enjoyment and leisure; it is about soaking up ideas and beauty. The humanities teach you

to enjoy and process that enjoyment. When it comes to any form of art, the humanities teach you to know what is good from what is bad, what is mediocre from what is excellent. Once you are inside the humanities, and have learned about literature, art, or music, they no longer fool you easily. You won't buy the same things; you will consume differently; you will become critical. But, for the current market system, being critical is annoying. Notice that incitement is rewarded. Being rebellious and provocative is rewarded as opposed to being critical.

However, there is a small elite that lives off the arts, and they live very well. This means there is still a demand, but you must work on what I call the literary or artistic tapestry. And this is where educators, museums, libraries, and universities are key. And so is the user, the reader or, in other words, the consumer of the arts. If one of these links breaks, the entire system is interrupted and becomes much more fragile. So, what role do universities play here? For many years universities in Europe were designed to forge thinkers and workers of excellence. In recent years, their mission has been to produce skilled workers that could strengthen the market. I believe the U.S. is different: higher education has become a business. I don't have anything against it being a business, but it must be critical of itself. How profitable, for example, is it to get a master's degree in contemporary American literature compared to a master's degree in social network management? You get quicker results, right? But often what really gives status and prestige to a university is not so profitable at first sight. A university's ranking depends on the talent they hire, and on original work and research. Universities ideally should be able to maintain the balance among research, education, and profit. If I were not profitable as a writer, I would not have lasted 20 years. Also, the quality of knowledge, that is, the quality of education is crucial . . . The philologist or linguist is the master of language, and language

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is a crossover tool. It delivers everything: translation, oration, creative writing, advertising, speechwriting, and a thousand other things. However, if we are not able to tell our students that this is valuable, what do we do?

Literature and art offer huge possibilities and something no one ever talks about: social advancement, the same as what used to happen with football players, boxers, or models. It was possible for someone to come from a humble social background and earn a lot of money, or even climb the social ladder. The act of writing or devoting yourself to art, and being good at it, also allows you to have media fame that you would not otherwise have. Media fame is priceless today. It can't be measured in real money. As I built up my career as a writer, I always took this into account.

Can you tell us about your literary tours? What do you get from them professionally and personally?

The literary tours started because I wanted to combine two of my passions: traveling and telling stories. Then, at some point, I discussed the idea with a well-known travel agency in Spain. They liked it very much, so we started with a trip to southern England to retrace Jane Austen's footsteps. The tour was an unexpected success. It filled up immediately. The following year we offered the same tour twice back to back due to demand. After that, they asked me to organize other literary tours. So, I choose a novel or a character I know well and about which I can spend ten days talking comfortably—the tour in Russia is ten days long, whereas the Jane Austen tour is four days. We now offer the Russia tour every two years.

Yesterday marked 19 years since you were awarded the Planeta. How have you evolved creatively during these years, and what are you working on now?

My entire life experience since then has matured into a creative mindset that you cannot have at age 25. The creative process for me now is much less mystical and much more practical and structured. I have written in a variety of genres, and now I am more into depth than length. I tend to write increasingly shorter but sharper texts. I think my passion for writing and telling stories has grown. I am also working on an augmented reality program for one of my texts in partnership with the Universidad Complutense. I have high hopes for this project since I would be the first one doing something like this in Spain.

I am very much looking forward to learning more about the augmented reality project. Thank you very much for your time, Espido. Until next time.

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Isabel Asensio (Ph.D., Vanderbilt) is a professor of Spanish and the chair of the Foreign Languages Department at Weber State University, where she teaches basic through advanced Spanish courses. She has also taught a number of courses for the Honors Program, Women and Gender Studies Program, and the Master of English Program at WSU. Her research interests include translation and interpreting studies, Hispanic women writers, and cultures of Spain and Latin America. She has received official ACTFL Oral Proficiency training, which has greatly impacted her choice of teaching strategies over the years. She is currently the vice president of the National Collegiate Hispanic Honor Society, West region.

Espido Freire

How Not to Love Him?

Sure, go ahead," my stepdaughter says. "Go have some coffee and, if there's any change, I'll call you."

She blinks her stiff, discolored eyelashes, same as her father's, as I kiss his closed, light blue eyes. Iris is waiting for me, holding my bag. We get in the hospital elevator and look at each other in silence, forcing a smile. She was left a widow a year ago: she wears black, an appeased mourning accessorized by a spectacular pearl necklace. Her husband was quite wealthy: somewhat wealthier than mine. He made a fortune with a freight company, my Enrique with real estate.

"She appreciates you very much, right?" Iris asks.

I nod. I obviously had to deal with suspicion and skepticism at first. I was younger than my stepchildren by several years. It made sense: a foreign girl, forty years younger than Enrique. I've spent the last eight years being subject to suspicious looks and careful scrutiny. But they've seen how I went out of my way for him; how I cooked his favorite meals; how I served as mediator for him and his children and took turns caring for him until I had to devote myself to him alone. It was me who insisted that he distribute his inheritance while still alive; me, who has settled for a third. A little over a third. The jewelry was not part of the inheritance. Nor were the company shares. Neither were a couple of trust funds under my name that I manage. All right, it's well over a third.

***

Of all of them, my stepdaughter was the most relentless. Now she is my ally, my advocate.

"How hard we judged you!" she said, tearfully, two weeks ago. "It must have been so hard for you, Mariona."

When Dr. Luengo told us that Enrique had gone into an irreversible coma, I snatched the file from his hands. First, I reddened, then, I turned pale. I covered my face with my hands. My stepchildren, surprised, left the room to cry one after another.

"Since you wouldn't fall in love with an older man, you thought no one could love your father."

"Yes, you're right."

"Your father saved my life."

"And you saved his. Without you, my father was a bitter man. He didn't notice his grandchildren. Not to mention me…"

***

Iris and I are sitting facing each other.

"How are you?" she asks.

"Exhausted."

"It will be over soon. Don't worry. It is a tough pill to swallow but, with all the arrangements, the funeral, the services… two months will go by before you know it."

"I know, I know, but it is hard."

"Anyway. You know you can count on me for whatever you need."

In a year or so, we will both return to our country. She is a doctor. Unfortunately, we couldn't register the clinic we opened two years ago under our name, but we want to manage it, like the rest of our investments. The watchful eye of the master fattens the calf. Deep down, Enrique's family must be eager to get me out of the way. What would they do with a 40-year-old stepmother? I have taken care of him; I have kept him entertained; I have done my part without causing headaches.

"You've done everything right," Iris says and strokes my hair with her delicate hands. She's wearing her wedding band and a diamond ring. "Gradually, subtly, with no pain…"

"I had a good teacher."

"When are you going to…?"

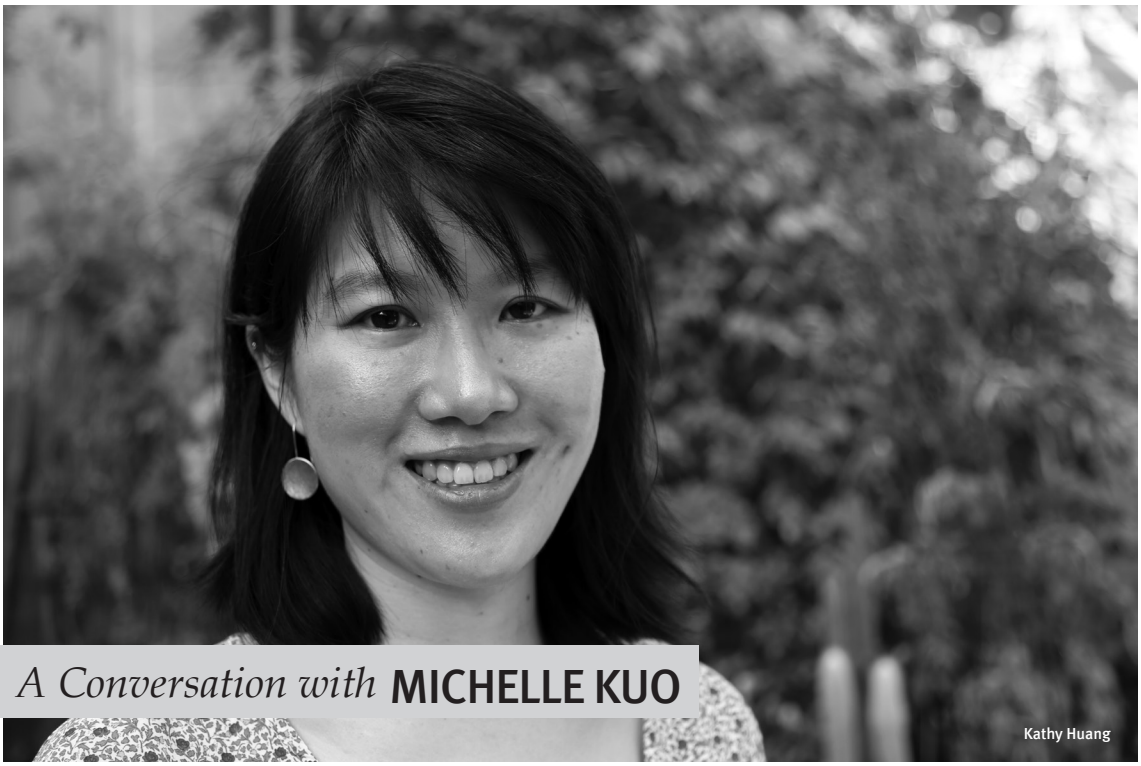
"Tonight, I think."

And suddenly I realize that this is it: tonight, I will finally be free. I think she's right, I've done everything right. I have been a thoughtful, committed, loving wife…. In general, it hasn't taken a huge effort. Time makes the heart grow fonder. How not to love him, if he has solved all my problems? After all, I am cautious, professional. I'm very demanding on myself. That must be how I was raised. Tonight, then. My Enrique won't find out. Nor anyone else, of course.



– Translated by Isabel Asensio

Teaching, Prison Education, and Social Justice—



A Conversation with **MICHELLE KUO**

Kathy Huang

MEGAN M. VAN DEVENTER

INTRODUCTION

Michelle Kuo is a passionate and authentic advocate for education, prison reform, and rehabilitation efforts for incarcerated persons. This compassion stems from Kuo's own career and life experiences. After completing her undergraduate studies at Harvard, she became a teacher in Helena, Arkansas, through the Teach for America program. Eventually, Kuo left her teaching post to attend Harvard Law School and, following graduation, began working as an immigrants' rights lawyer. Currently, Michelle Kuo is a professor of history, law, and society at the American University of Paris.

Kuo is the author of Reading with Patrick, *a memoir that traces the relationships, challenges, and complexities she faced while teaching English at Stars, an alternative middle school in Helena. The book documents Kuo's decision to leave her teaching post at Stars to attend Harvard Law School, and her decision to return to Helena when she learns that one of her former students, Patrick, is on trial for murder. It captures her efforts to tutor Patrick as he awaits trial and chronicles their shared hardships, compassion, and allyship as they learn together in prison.*

Throughout Reading with Patrick, *Kuo details their mutual experience as she witnesses a life drastically different from her own. She reflects on her own role in mentoring Patrick with honesty and accountability, asking how teachers can best serve students with multiple challenges. Based on her evolving relationship with Patrick, Kuo's narration guides teachers, scholars, and advocates toward equity and justice in classrooms, work environments, and America at large.* Reading with Patrick *is, indeed, a transformative experience as readers empathize with both Michelle and Patrick and witness how the power of literature and learning bridges their two worlds.*

Kuo has authored numerous articles and short pieces reflecting on her experience as the daughter of immigrants, prison education and culture, navigating social and economic injustices, and family dynamics. The following conversation captures Kuo's various observations and has been revised and edited for clarity.

CONVERSATION

For fans of Reading with Patrick, *what is your current relationship with Patrick? Do you two still stay in contact, or has that become too challenging?*

We do still stay in contact. We write a lot of e-mails. I think we're tied to each other forever through this intense experience of reading and writing, but I think we regard those experiences differently. For instance, people ask, "What does he think of the book?," and I think he loved the parts I read to him about his mom, but he didn't want to read any parts with the scenes of the jail. Where I saw transformation, he remembers jail; those are very different kinds of memories. I wanted him to read parts of the book so he could see my point of view of his talent and growth and potential and transformation, but you can't force these things on people.

So how is he doing now? He's still struggling to find a job. He's in Helena. He sees his daughter quite a bit, which is good. His daughter is doing excellent; she is flourishing at school and loves math and reading. That's the good news. The bad news is that I think it's still more of the same. He still doesn't have a stable economic situation. I've become even more radicalized in the past couple years in terms of my politics; in terms of being certain that we need a stronger safety net that provides food stamps, that provides health care, that eliminates debt for formerly incarcerated citizens. And those are things that I thought about more abstractly before I saw Patrick going through what he's experiencing now.

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When I read Reading with Patrick*, I found you to be quite critical of yourself. You utilized a dual lens of describing your actions and also a retrospective gaze weighing the affordances of those actions as you interacted with different students at Stars. Vulnerably, you name feelings of guilt in the book so readers can consider privilege. Can you speak about your internal exploration as well as the angst communicated by you, the narrator?*

Guilt is so tricky. I think liberal guilt gets a bad rap; it's often used as a derogatory insult. And I've thought about that because there is a spiritual guilt that I don't think is a joke, that I don't think is shallow. That's the kind of guilt that understands fundamentally we are not doing enough and that understands what it is to look in the mirror and to see that one is not living up to one's principles. So some of the guilt in the book is an attempt to grapple with our human limitations. I wanted to tell this story to show what it would look like to attempt to have a human connection. I think the guilt comes from recognizing that I am an interloper.

The other element of the guilt, of course, is that my parents are immigrants, so I think a lot of the guilt comes from their constant reminders that I owe them something. That I'm indebted because of their sacrifices, and I think that creates a lot of guilt as a kind of self-introspection and self-questioning. I think a lot of that guilt comes from constantly asking, "Is it worth it to do this if I lose my parents' love?" or, "Is it worth it to do this if I can no longer get my parents' approval or if they think I am an unfilial child?"

That ties into my next question: In your New York Times *article, "How to Disobey Your Tiger Parents in 14 Easy Steps," you state, "I have been moved by young readers asking me how they should talk to their parents about career choices. Their families come from Nigeria, China, Ghana, India, and South Korea. These teenagers and college students are at a crossroad in their lives. They want to change the world but fear losing their parents' love." You capture this so beautifully. What would you tell young people and those who work with young people, who feel they are up against their parents and possibly the whole world?*

This sounds very bleak, but it's important to tell people at that age that you will never get

your parents' approval; you will never get them to see you as you want to be seen. That sounds really bleak because it might be in the rare case that the parent does come around and sees a child exactly how they want to be seen, but in most cases you spend your life chasing after it. And when you spend your life chasing after that, you're in a constant state of friction—you are constantly trying to change for somebody else. Nobody likes that feeling; everybody resents a person who is trying to change them constantly. I tell students, "Once you stop seeking that approval you will feel liberated; you will actually be able to love them as they are, rather than to love them conditionally." And ironically, that's what you dislike about them right now, that their love is pure and conditional.

Guilt is so tricky. I think liberal guilt gets a bad rap; it's often used as a derogatory insult. And I've thought about that because there is a spiritual guilt that I don't think is a joke, that I don't think is shallow. That's the kind of guilt that understands fundamentally we are not doing enough and that understands what it is to look in the mirror and to see that one is not living up to one's principles. So some of the guilt in the book is an attempt to grapple with our human limitations. I wanted to tell this story to show what it would look like to attempt to have a human connection. I think the guilt comes from recognizing that I am an interloper.

The other thing that I tell students is, "You can navigate the world in ways your parents cannot imagine—don't forget that." You most likely have more fluent English, a stronger world of references. More likely, you have more education than your parents, you have more tools at your disposal, and you're more likely to be more self-realized, so as you fight for recognition from your parents, don't forget that they are the ones who are more powerless in the relationship. Not just because they're immigrants, but because they're parents. It's always much more likely in a parent-child relationship that the child will grow up and leave the parent, rather than the parent leaving the child, and every parent is in fear that they'll lose the child, so when you recognize your power, you don't need to fight so hard. I give this advice, but I still desperately seek my parents' approval—but less than I did before, partly because as you grow older your parents seem more fragile.

When you were writing Reading with Patrick*, who were you hoping would read it? Who were you writing to? Who was your imagined audience?*

There were two audiences. One that I like and one that I don't. One was the smug liberal who always has the right opinions, gets outraged easily, has a secure position, and doesn't morally question himself—that's the smug liberal. So I offer myself as a naïve liberal who confronts her moral limitations when she can't do what she thinks is the right thing, which is to stay a little longer in a rural place. I wanted the smug liberal to reflect on, "What have I given up? What risks have I taken?"

The second type that I really love are the idealistic people who put themselves out there, who take a few risks, who understand that other people are going to say stuff, such as people said to me, like, "You're such a bleeding heart" or, "You just want to go make yourself feel better by doing this." I love people who don't care about those cynical voices and understand this work is not perfect. I don't think too highly of

myself; I just want to be a part of the world. I wanted to honor their attempts and state, "I see you, I see you trying," and they're obviously from all backgrounds and all races.

Also, as the book became a book and I talked to more and more Asian Americans, I also realized that I had been writing for Asian Americans. I had never read a book where these conversations with parents were on the page, or where an Asian American was figuring out how to fit into race conversations that were mostly about white and black. There were a lot of Asian Americans who had told me that they too had turned to African-American history and literature or had discovered their own heritage very belatedly because they hadn't learned about it or their parents hadn't told them about it. I think it's still a conversation; I don't think Asian Americans are visible in this country, so I think I was also writing for them. Trying to help them find some courage in their decisions.

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Seeing our own experiences mirrored in literature is so important. And you provided your own students with this experience at Stars when you brought in relevant, young adult literature in your classroom and gave your students time to read. Why was that an effective pedagogy?

We tried to read "Sonny's Blues," which is a great James Baldwin story, and maybe I taught it poorly or maybe they just didn't have the tools to read it. So I had failed at many things before I brought in popular young adult literature. There was a part of me that was worried about giving them books below their grade level because they were in eighth grade, but then I realized I just needed to get them turning pages, get them deeply immersed, and then they would start pursuing things at their grade level. I started looking up all the different books that students loved, and there were certain authors that just kept on coming up: Sharon Draper, Sharon Flake, some Walter Dean Myers, Robert Jordan for the older ones. The classroom atmosphere totally changed when every student had a book they were carrying around. Students would come to my classroom early in the morning telling me they had stayed up all night reading. It was electric; I don't think there are more special moments than connecting a student to a book, especially students who don't think of themselves as readers. And it was cool that everyone was really into it—there wasn't one student who wasn't.

It's work that can really change lives.

I think it was also key that each student has his or her own book. That always feels different. Students really light up when they are doing something different from other students.

There was a part of me that was worried about giving them books below their grade level because they were in eighth grade, but then I realized I just needed to get them turning pages, get them deeply immersed, and then they would start pursuing things at their grade level. I started looking up all the different books that students loved, and there were certain authors that just kept on coming up: Sharon Draper, Sharon Flake, some Walter Dean Myers, Robert Jordan for the older ones. The classroom atmosphere totally changed when every student had a book they were carrying around. Students would come to my classroom early in the morning telling me they had stayed up all night reading. It was electric.

They lose the fear of wondering if somebody else will do it better. They stop thinking there is only one right way because someone is doing something totally different. It's true also in the discovery of the book. If they each have a different book they're reading, they are liberated from the classroom interpretation.

For anyone who is considering teaching in prisons, what would you want them to know beforehand?

I think teaching in prisons is transformative. It's the most hopeful experience I have had in any social justice situation. It's probably the happiest I've been in any of the kinds of work I've done, and it's because when you're in the classroom with incarcerated students who want to be there, there's such a sense of shared urgency. You don't doubt the books you teach; I never doubt the meaning of the text when I'm teaching in prison because people bring such thirst and their own knowledge and desire to connect with the text. I guess my advice would be—it's similar to advice for any other classroom—to give room for students to express their individual tastes. I think sometimes teachers want to teach prisoners about prison literature and sometimes students really don't want that. They want to read other stuff, not about themselves and not something so depressing. Then, to create an atmosphere where people can feel curious about one another and open because there's so much arbitrary injustice and strictly enforced order. The classroom can be this real refuge where you are allowed to have slightly chaotic discussions, to disagree with one an-

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other, to express curiosity with one another. Often the classroom is one of the few integrated spaces, so it's also a chance for people to work out tension, or conflict, or curiosity about one another's backgrounds. And so, I think a teacher really needs to create—it's a huge pressure—that space where people can enjoy one another and then also be willing to experience conflict in a productive way.

Similarly, what would you like to say to educators who are doing this hard work of social justice and advocating for equitable education in their classrooms, schools, and communities?

For that one, just: thank you. It's thankless work. For educators who are doing this work, I think they're the real deal. They're in the classroom, which is still the hardest job I ever had. They're working with people who have witnessed violence and experienced trauma. They have so many hats on: they have to be advocates and therapists and counselors. They do amazing work.

Michelle, thank you for engaging in this conversation about relationships, schools, education, and justice. It's been a pleasure hearing your wisdom and learning from you.



Megan M. Van Deventer (Ph.D., University of Minnesota) is a visiting assistant professor of English Education at Weber State University. Her research interests include socially just teacher education, diversity in children's literature, and effective, equitable instructional strategies for teaching reading and writing in classroom settings. She enjoys partnering with local school districts to support pre- and in-service teachers working in classrooms to best serve students, making school an accessible and enjoyable endeavor for all.

UNDOING THE WORK OF HISTORICAL ERASURE—



A Conversation with **JESMYN WARD**

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INTRODUCTION

On March 28-30, 2019, Weber State University hosted its thirty-fourth National Undergraduate Literature Conference featuring Jesmyn Ward as the keynote speaker. Ward grew up in the rural South, in DeLisle, Mississippi, before graduating from Stanford University with a B.A. in 1999 and an M.A. in 2000. She also earned an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Michigan in 2005. After briefly living in New York City, Ward returned to her home on the Gulf Coast. Today, she is an award-winning, internationally recognized writer of fiction and nonfiction. She is also an associate professor of Creative Writing at Tulane University.

Ward has won numerous prestigious awards for her writing, including a "genius grant" from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and two National Book Awards (not only making her the first woman to win the award twice, but also recognizing her gifts as on a par with the likes of William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, John Cheever, and Philip Roth, among others). She is the author of five major works: Where the Line Bleeds, Salvage the Bones, Men We Reaped, The Fire This Time, *and* Sing, Unburied, Sing, *along with numerous essays and interviews.*

For readers who are familiar with Ward's lyrical prose, they know that her work encompasses individual as well as universal life experiences. As she said in her acceptance speech at the 2011 National Book Awards ceremony, "I understood that I wanted to write about the experiences of the poor, and the Black and the rural people of the South, so that the culture that marginalized us for so long would see that our stories were as universal, our lives as fraught and lovely and important, as theirs."

I had the privilege of having a conversation with Jesmyn Ward, which took place in front of a live audience on the campus of Weber State University. We discussed a wide range of topics, including written questions from students and questions from the audience.

CONVERSATION

You have written three novels, numerous essays, and a memoir. Did you conceive the three novels, Where the Line Bleeds, Salvage the Bones, *and* Sing, Unburied, Sing, *as a trilogy?*

When I was writing them, I didn't necessarily conceive of them in that way. I didn't have some sort of overarching story or design for writing the three books. I was just writing the stories that came to me. Now after they've all been written and published, one can look back at them and say, "Oh, they work as a trilogy," especially because the next novel I'm working on is a complete departure from the world of Bois Sauvage and from the characters I was working with before. I didn't design it as a trilogy. I wasn't that thoughtful and focused. I was just feverishly writing the stories that came to me.

With your lyrical prose and sense of place you are often compared to fellow Mississippian writers William Faulkner and Eudora Welty. How does that make you feel?

It's overwhelming praise. In some respects when people give me that kind of praise, my knee jerk reaction is to feel unworthy of it. I grew up worshipping these people; I read their work all throughout school. It's hard praise for me to accept—it's very flattering. Sometimes it makes me a little uncomfortable.

Who are some of your favorite writers?

I just read for the first time ***Dust Tracks on a Road*** and then also ***Jonah's Gourd Vine*** by Zora Neale Hurston. It's easy for me sometimes to forget how important she is to me and to my work because she's such an obvious answer. I really love her work. I've always loved Louise Erdrich's work. Whenever someone asks me that question, my mind begins to blank.

Your work confronts racism in the South, especially in your community. This might sound a bit invasive, but why did you go back to DeLisle, your hometown, after you had left and were living in New York City?

That is a question that I am constantly asking myself, and on good days my answer is that I went back because I wanted to be around my family. That's my place of inspiration, the people I write about are from that place. I have a huge, humongous family. Fifteen years ago, my maternal grandmother's family had a reunion and there were over 200 of us. That's just a quarter of my family. My hometown only has around 1200 people in it, so I'm probably related to nearly everyone in my town. There's just something about living and growing up in a place like DeLisle. I have two kids now, so I'm raising my kids there. There's value in that experience and allowing them to have that experience where they feel very much a part of a community and of a place. Also, I write about the kind of people that are in my family and community. The place I write about is inspired by southern Mississippi.

I haven't written all of my books *in* Mississippi. I've only written one of the novels in Mississippi. I wrote ***Sing, Unburied, Sing*** in my hometown. Writing that book there keeps me honest in some ways; it lends urgency to my work and what I'm writing. Now my decision to stay, on good days, is the right decision, and, on bad days, sometimes I don't feel like it is. It's where I want to be, but I don't necessarily know if I'll be there forever.

Do your family and the people at home treat you differently now that you are famous?

People in the community who don't know me or my family that well, they might treat me differently. But as far as everyone in DeLisle and within Pass Christian goes, to them I'm just a bookworm.

In the various courses and book clubs I am involved in, we are reading and discussing your work. Your language is lyrical and beautiful, especially in Sing, Unburied, Sing. *I wondered how important music is to you and what kind of music you listen to.*

It's interesting because where I grew up, people still listen to the blues. I grew up on the blues. At the same time, I was a kid of the '80s, so I grew up hearing '80s pop that everyone else heard. Also, I grew up hearing some soul music from the '70s, Otis Redding, Marvin Gaye, and Al Green. Some of that informs my love of music and about the music that moves me. Once rap and hip hop came to the South, that was a big thing for us. We felt represented. We felt seen. We listened to a lot of it. Now as I get older—I don't know if this happens to everyone—I feel like I've reached the age where it's harder for me to find current music that moves me in the same way as when I was young. It's not as easy for me to find stuff that resonates with me, although I have a spot for chopped and screwed music. Recently I've found what Barry Jenkins, who's

the director of *Moonlight*, does every time he comes out with a movie soundtrack. He collaborates with OG Ron C who is this DJ out of Texas. He is in the vanguard of chopped and screwed music. Barry sends these soundtracks to OG Ron C, and he chops and screws these older songs. I just found the *If Beale Street Could Talk* soundtrack that was chopped and screwed, and I heard Al Green's song "Beautiful" chopped and screwed for the first time. It sounded amazing.

Can you tell us about what you are working on right now? Is it okay to talk about it?

I feel like it's a great thing to talk about because I know there may be some writers here who are struggling with their writing the same way I am struggling with mine right now. I am working on a novel set in 1800s New Orleans during the height of the domestic slave trade. It follows a slave woman who is being marched south to be sold at the slave market in New Orleans. It's unlike anything I've ever written before. I've never written anything that requires so much research. It also inspires so much fear that I'm going to get it wrong. I have to sit, wrestle with difficult material, and put characters in difficult situations. The writing is going very, very, very slowly. I am struggling.

One of the things that is super hard for me when writing this novel is that I concentrate so much on character. I'm sitting with this character who is being robbed of nearly everything that human beings take for granted. She can't have a family, and she can't have a romantic relationship. She can't have any of that as an enslaved person. She is being put in a position where she is completely powerless. How does she then retain her sense of humanity? How do you navigate that powerlessness and still hold on to the sense of self and retain a kernel of agency? In everything else that I've ever written, my characters deal with difficult circumstances, but they still have a sense of agency. They still have a sense of themselves and their humanity, whereas with this character, it's really, really hard.

That's one of the reasons why I was stuck because at the beginning it was so difficult for me to figure out. I'm writing this from a first-person perspective. I'm really sitting with this woman who is enduring this. How does she hold on to herself? How does she not lose her mind because she is being dehumanized in this way? I figured out my answer for that; now the writing is coming a bit easier, but this is still one of the more difficult stories that I've ever written.

Last night, during your keynote address and reading for the NULC dinner, you discussed racism in this country as it stands today. Do you see yourself as a voice for education and awareness on this topic?

I sure hope so.

Recently, I read that less than ten percent of high school seniors in the United States realize that slavery was the underlying cause of the American Civil War. Isn't that appalling?

It's what I heard when I was in high school. I heard it from kids, and I heard it from adults, who should know better, right? Who would argue that slavery was not the cause of the Civil War? It blows my mind. There are historians who I follow on social media, and they post articles where they cite the declarations that the states made to the Sixteenth Amendment of the Union. We are doing this because of slavery. It's very frustrating, but that's part of the reason why I write about the people who I write about.

Part of the reason I wanted to write the book I'm working on right now is because I was listening to NPR one morning on my way into work. I teach at Tulane University in New Orleans. There was a show about the domestic slave trade, and they talked about the fact that in the early 1800s millions of slaves were brought to New Orleans from the upper South, like Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. They were then sold to cotton and sugar plantations.

One of the things that were so shocking to me when I heard that report was the fact that they were kept in slave pens. There were dozens and dozens of slave pens throughout New Orleans, and it was appalling when I realized that that system really enabled New Orleans to be the city that it is. The landscape itself was that slavery was evident everywhere, yet today much of that has been erased. There are only two markers where there had been slave pens, and one of them was in the wrong location; some of that has changed. Still, there's that erasure of history and erasure of truth. I want to write about that in my work.

Why do you think Americans, in general, ignore their history?

It's easier to ignore the truth. It's easier to rewrite history because I think that it allows many people to lead easier and more comfortable lives. It allows them to avoid reckoning with the truth of how this country was established, what made this country what it is. It's easier for us to lie to ourselves because it enables us to believe in this idea that we're all created equal, we exist on a level playing field, we all have the same opportunities and choices regardless of race, class, gender, or all of the above. That's not the truth. It's never been true.

Speaking of your work, Men We Reaped *and* Salvage the Bones *both include the event and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; do you think this was a turning point in your life and in the Gulf Coast?*

Talking about Katrina, it's weird; we've rebuilt, but everything is completely different than it was before. I don't know if you've seen photos of the Mississippi Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. I was there, and then the day after Katrina passed, we went to the Gulf of Mexico, to Pass Christian, which is the town right at the water's edge, and it looked like photos that I had seen of cities during wartime. It was very surreal. I don't know how to explain it. There were entire gas stations, supermarkets, businesses, and churches that had disappeared. They were gone. There was rubble everywhere.

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When we go to the town there's a railroad track that bisects the coast and that runs from east to west. We had to stop at the railroad tracks because we couldn't get over the tracks—there were houses lining along with them. They'd been picked up off their foundations and then deposited on the railroad tracks by water. It's hard for people to imagine who haven't lived through something like that.

In my literature course, we are reading Salvage the Bones*, and I asked my students to submit questions. One student wanted to know what was your experience with the*

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dog fighting? There's a lot about pit bulls and dog fighting, right?

Pit bulls are still the dog of choice for most of the black people in my community, and in my family this has been the case since I was really little. My dad owned pit bulls when I was growing up, and sometimes he fought them. I witnessed dog fights when I was little in DeLisle and in Pass Christian. I remember he'd bring his dogs over to New Orleans and sometimes he'd fight them there. As a child, it was probably traumatizing for me, but I seldom think of it that way. I do remember being frightened when we were watching the dog fights because—even though the dogs were very intent on each other—the violence of those fights scared me as a kid. I'm so empathetic and I loved my dad's dogs. Pit bulls are sometimes called the babysitting dogs. I felt like that when I was young. There were times when I would think that when my parents left; this was the '80s, so they'd say, "Go outside and play!" My dad's pit bulls would watch after me, and when I cried they would lick the tears from my face. They were very tender dogs, so when I would witness them fighting it was a very difficult and mixed experience for me. I drew from some of that when I was writing the dog-fighting scenes in ***Salvage the Bones***.

My brother, who was three and a half years younger than I am, and my brother's friends, who we grew up with in the neighborhood, when they could get a dog all got pit bulls. Sometimes they would fight them, and they would have their dog fights out in the woods. I, like my nerdy lame self, would hike into the woods and say, "Stop it! Don't fight dogs!" They'd be like, "Oh, get out of here." They would call me names and then drive me out of the woods; I would try to stop the dog fights when I got older, but I couldn't. Some of that I drew on to write the scenes in ***Salvage the Bones***.

Another student wondered why you chose teenagers as protagonists and why there is a lack of parenting in Salvage the Bones *and* Sing, Unburied, Sing*?*

I don't know if I can give you a good answer to that question. In some respects, I'm very interested in what happens to kids who are made to bear adult burdens before they should have to. That's something that I find myself returning to again and again, wanting to figure out how young people navigate that. How do they live through that? How do they discover—how does that inform their sense of self? Yeah, I think that's something that haunts me, and I write about it again and again in my work.

Is that autobiographical?

I don't know. Maybe part of the reason that I write about teenagers a lot, especially young black men, is in part due to my brother. In some respects, all of my work, in one way or another, is sort of writing toward him. I didn't

have the chance to live through adolescence and into adulthood with him. It's very sad when you say it like that. In some ways, I'm attempting to write about that again and again. Maybe that's what is drawing me to that work and to those characters.

One more student question: if you could go back and change anything in any of your novels, is there anything you'd change?

I said that specifically last night. I know that many writers are ashamed of their first novels. I've heard stories about writers withdrawing all the copies of their debut novel from the university library system because they don't want anyone to have access to it. There are things that I would definitely change in my first novel. I don't have clear fixes for them, but there are things that I'm dissatisfied with. I would probably have to completely rewrite the book in order to be completely satisfied with it. I don't feel that way about ***Salvage the Bones; Sing, Unburied, Sing;*** or ***Where the Line Bleeds***.

I'm very interested in what happens to kids who are made to bear adult burdens before they should have to. That's something that I find myself returning to again and again, wanting to figure out how young people navigate that. How do they live through that? How do they discover—how does that inform their sense of self? Yeah, I think that's something that haunts me, and I write about it again and again in my work.

In Sing, Unburied, Sing, *we discussed quite a bit your use of the supernatural, and I've heard you talk about it in other interviews. Could you tell us why you have included that, why it's such an important part?*

I've been wanting to write something using the supernatural for years, something that touches on magical realism, but I couldn't figure out how to do it. I was a little nervous about it because I'd never tried it before. When I first set out to write ***Sing, Unburied, Sing,*** I knew that Jojo and Mam would have some sort of supernatural sense. I didn't think that Leonie would be as gifted as Jojo and Mam, but I knew that there was something weird going on with her.

I was researching Parchman Prison and found out that kids like Richie, kids as young as twelve years old, were sent to Parchman. That's insane. They were re-enslaved and suffered and sometimes died in prison; their suffering, their lives, and their deaths had been erased. I had to write this character; I wanted him to have agency. I wanted Richie to interact with Jojo and with other characters in the present. The only way I could accomplish that was by making him into a ghost. Not only were there these supernatural elements—his world that I'm writing about—but ghosts also exist. I just wrote ahead and tried to figure it out; I was afraid while I was writing it because I knew that I would have to invent this entire world that would have to have its own logic and feel like a real sort of sensory experience to the reader. I was nervous about whether or not I'd be able to pull it off. But now that I've done it, I've opened up my work to embrace the supernatural, and I want to do it in everything. So we'll see if I do.

What about the mythical? What about the Greek myths and the Voodoo King Jojo at the end. Can you tell us about that?

I wanted Richie to interact with Jojo and with other characters in the present. The only way I could accomplish that was by making him into a ghost. Not only were there these supernatural elements – his world that I'm writing about – but ghosts also exist. I just wrote ahead and tried to figure it out; I was afraid while I was writing it because I knew that I would have to invent this entire world that would have to have its own logic and feel like a real sort of sensory experience to the reader. I was nervous about whether or not I'd be able to pull it off. But now that I've done it, I've opened up my work to embrace the supernatural, and I want to do it in everything. So we'll see if I do.

With *Salvage the Bones*, I wanted to include the Greek myths because I wanted Esch's world to have texture. I wanted her to have something outside of herself and outside of the world that she knows that she could draw upon. She needed something else that informed her ideas about herself and the world that she lives in. That's why I wanted to use Greek myths with *Salvage the Bones*.

About *Sing, Unburied, Sing*—well, I've always been interested in Voodoo. I don't know any practitioners personally of Voodoo, but I've heard stories about earlier generations of my family who practiced Voodoo. I've always been curious about it; I thought this is a good opportunity for me to learn more about it if I make one of these characters a practitioner. It gave me the excuse to read and learn about it. While I was reading about it, I began to think differently about Voodoo and the spiritualities that come out of the African diaspora. I discovered that these spiritual traditions allowed people who were made powerless in every other aspect of their lives to feel like they have some sense of agency and some sense of power. If they prayed to this spirit, gave this offering, and came up with this concoction, then maybe they could effect change in the world in some way. It allowed them to have some sense of power and of self in a world where they were made to be livestock.

Audience: I recently read Salvage the Bones *and adored it, and I wondered after reading that piece that your voice was just so strong. I wonder if you have any advice for budding writers on how to find such a strong voice.*

That's a good question. The first thing I would say is to read everything. I read everything. Not only did I read literary fiction and poetry, I read in those genres where I asked myself if I'm responding really strongly to something—I try to read like a writer, and I ask myself what is making me have this response? What do I love so much about this work? I try to emulate that in my work, and when I come across stuff that I don't like, I try to articulate to myself, "Why do I not like this? What is it about that that's just not working for me?" I try to avoid that in my own work. Through imitation and avoiding the things you don't like, you start to work your way towards your voice.

One of the aspects of literature that made me love reading so much when I was a kid was just the beauty of the figurative language. Vivid imagery always ensnared me when I was younger. Because I value that as a reader, I try to incorporate that in my own work. In my workshop classes, it's not a very popular choice. It's often something I have to pay close attention to, my language and the way

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I'm using it. It's easy for people to critique because it's not in fashion. I give you that sort of answer because you have to figure out what brought you to reading and writing initially. Try to incorporate that in your own work.

I'm also a big believer in this idea that place influences character, so the place where my characters are from influences who my characters are, what they have experienced in the world, how they see the world, how they process what is happening around them, and how they'll see one thing and it makes them think of something else. I'm very aware of that from my first draft to my last draft. I'm always thinking about, "Who is this character, what are the experiences that they've had, and what are they seeing in life right now in the scene? Is this situation going to make them reference something else or associate two unlike things together and create this amazing metaphor?" That's something I'm always thinking about too.

Audience: What do you believe are the underlying differences between those who concede to cowardice and those who find strength through bravery?

That's a big question. I could say that integrity and noble intention motivates bravery, but from my own personal experience and the experience of the people around me, bravery is often motivated by a sense of desperation. People get desperate, and they feel like they have no choice but to be brave if they are to survive. Bravery is motivated by noble ideals, but sometimes I don't think it's that cerebral. People do what they have to do because they feel desperate, and they feel that they have to do it.

Audience: I was touched by your discussion last night. I had the privilege of attending the Mississippi Literature Conference in July, which addressed the slavery that was all over Mississippi. It is not visible anymore; it's been swept under the rug. I remember that participants floated a proposal to heighten the acknowledgment of slavery in Mississippi instead of the glories of the Confederacy. They're proposing to erect monuments to slaves next to these Confederate monuments, so both are visible. What are your thoughts on that?

That is also a difficult question for me to answer. It's interesting for me because I come from the kind of place where every other street name is the name of a Confederate. Every elementary school, high school, is the name of a Confederate, every other courthouse. So it's not as if that element of our history is just relegated to a monument here or there. It's been memorialized in the very landscape. The Confederate ideals have also been imbued into the very social fabric, into the very heart of the place where I am from. It's one of the reasons why people who look like me live much different lives from white people. We live very different realities.

We have very different choices. We have very huge disparities in wealth, in health, in education, all across the board.

It's great when the history of slavery is recognized in a monument, in a plaque. It is made visible, and that's fantastic. I am hesitant to rejoice, however, hesitant to embrace this and say, "Great!," when the very fabric of the place is marked and formed heavily by the Confederacy and by the philosophy that made the Confederacy possible. It's very uneven, and it sort of feels like a band aid on the surface of an amputation. I've often heard people say that the South won the war philosophically, as far as American culture goes. The South won the war, and I agree with that.

How so? Just that the wounds are so deep?

Yeah, the wounds are so deep, and philosophically we're still a racist society. They won. There are millions and millions and millions of people in this country who believe that people like me are less. We are worthless, and they believe it with everything inside of them. It's very hard to convince these people otherwise—to convince them of my humanity or of the others' humanity. The South won the war philosophically. I can see that.



Jesmyn Ward and Kyra Hudson at the 2019 National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

Thank you so much for your time, Jesmyn. It was a pleasure, and an education, for all of us.



Kyra Hudson grew up in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains in east Tennessee. Her mother was a professor of German and French languages and literature at Tusculum College. Kyra has been surrounded by storytelling her whole life. After many starts and stops, she embraced the academic life with an undergraduate degree in English, French, and German from Tusculum College. Her graduate studies took her to the universities of Kansas, Georgia, and Tennessee, where she received her degree. Along the way, she traveled extensively and studied in France, Germany, and England. Kyra has lived in Ogden, Utah, and has taught at Weber State University for thirty years. Presently, she teaches English composition and introductory literature and fiction courses.

"PROUDLY WAVING O'RE OLE WEBER"—



Weber State University Archives

A Conversation with JEAN HOWE ANDRA MILLER

SARAH SINGH

INTRODUCTION

I had the opportunity to sit down with professor emerita of French, Dr. Jean Howe Andra Miller, and get her perspective as one of the first female faculty at Weber State University. Jean was the only child to Dr. Rulon and Margaret Howe. Her father was a physician trained at the University of Chicago and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Jean was born in Chicago in 1938 and lived there until her father enrolled in the Army Reserve during World War II. The family moved around until returning to Ogden in the mid-1940s, where Dr. Rulon became one of the founding doctors of what was to become the Ogden Clinic system.

Jean graduated from Ogden High School in 1958 and enrolled at the University of Utah, where she earned a degree in French and English in 1960. During her time at the University of Utah, she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and the Beehive Honors Society. While at Harvard to earn her master's degree, she met Nadia Boulanger and also had a class with the young Margaret Atwood. Jean remarked that many of the settings in The Handmaid's Tale *reminded her of Harvard Square and the Widener Library.*

All of her adventures and experiences eventually led Jean back to Ogden and her career as a professor of French at Weber State University, where she is also a generous contributor to the university's Special Collections housed in the Stewart Library.

CONVERSATION

How did your career at Weber State get started?

Leland Monson, Dean of Humanities at the time, had been one of my father's patients. Dad took the bull by the horns, called him up one day, and said, "My daughter is finishing a degree at Harvard. Could you use her services in your French section?" Monson said, "Oh yes, we're moving toward trying to set up a four-year curriculum. By all means, send her our way." And there I was, age twenty-three, beginning my college career here at Weber.

What was it like being a female professor at Weber at that time?

I was very young when I started teaching at Weber. I had completed most of the work toward a master's degree in French literature from Harvard. I wound up as a young woman surrounded by pretty much an all-male faculty in the foreign languages department, sharing an office with a very kind, sweet man named Victor Hancock. He was also the department chair, which made it a little difficult because, if something delicate hit the fan, you know, he'd have to tell me to leave the office. This went on for a couple of months, and then the chair of the general faculty at that time, Dr. Monson (who had also been my instructor for freshman English at Weber), found out about this and said, "Men and women cannot share offices on this campus." So they had to relocate me, and I think at that time I had an office with a part-time person who was just working into the faculty, and that was Dr. Inge Adams.

Women at Weber College back then were considered socially part of the "faculty wives," which was an organized group, and the faculty

wives didn't know what to do with me as a single young woman. When I did eventually marry Carl, they became much friendlier and said, "Oh, it's so nice now that you're one of us." But those faculty women who were single could just ignore the social scene, or they could go to an event sponsored by the faculty wives. But soon the female faculty on campus started forming some very close friendships. My first friend on campus was Nikki Hansen. I was fortunate to work with two wonderful colleagues, Lucie Swanson and Inge Adams. Lucie was my colleague in French, Inge was in German. Also, the other female faculty member on the second floor of the old building #4 was Dr. Pat Henry in the mathematics department. We got together, had coffee together, went to lunch, and formed strong friendships. In the late 1960s, the College of Arts, Letters and Sciences was created. All female faculty members had their offices moved to the top floor of the Union Building. We had three offices to share among twelve professors. It was very inconvenient for us but we formed close relationships. Salaries were not at all equal; that did not change until the 1970s when Title IX came through. That required that female athletes be paid on the same basis as men, I believe, in the college. That impacted female faculty and faculty employees.

At that time several women I knew, Helen Farr and Inge Adams, formed a review panel, and they would look through the pay scale and try to compare a female faculty member's salary with a male's having the same amount of preparation. Turned out, my salary was equal to that of a male faculty member teaching in philosophy who had a master's degree from Stanford. And I thought to myself, "Well, I think that's the first time that Stanford has been equal to Harvard." Anyway I have many, many other fond memories. There was of course the Women's Pants War. The women in the social science department claimed that they were the first to wear slacks to work, but Inge, Lucie, myself, and Pat argued that we were, in fact, the first. We broke that little barrier!

Since your retirement and looking back over the years, what do you remember most about teaching?

I have many fond memories of teaching here at Weber State. I did everything from a family French workshop, which I invented, to teaching foreign language to kids on the Suzuki Violin Method because I play violin, so I'm, you know, familiar with both processes; I invited the parents to come with one or two kids, and prepared materials. You'd go over them once a week, play games with what I'd passed out, and then give them the handout and ask the parents to try to reinforce the kids. After about ten sessions, they had a lot of fun; I had a lot of fun, too, and adored working with the kids.

Are there any students that you still remember to this day?

Yeah, I have many fond memories of my students. They came from all over the world. I had a student back in the early '70s from Saudi Arabia who was uncomfortable, and I remember thinking: "Well, you know, this is probably the first time in his life that he has had a class where there are women in class, and an instructor who is a woman," because their society is so sexually segregated. But after the grades were in, he came into my office and said politely, "Madame, I have enjoyed your class so much. I want to give you this small gift," and it was a beautiful ivory necklace. I said, "Oh, I can't take that," and he responded, "Oh, it's nothing, it's just camel bone." So I don't really know if it's camel bone or ivory.

I also had an adorable Japanese student, who was very smart and intense, and I remember she would come up to me and bow and call me Dr. Andra-san. She gave me the title of highest respect. I had students from Africa. Those poor students from the French-speaking African countries. They were so penniless and just so hungry. And they'd get to a point of desperation and pass by my office and say, "***Madame, j'ai faim***. Can you give me a little money?" And I'd pass them a twenty. Oh, those poor kids—they had quite a struggle.

How many female professors were there when you first started? You mentioned Inge Adams and Lucie Swanson.

There was Pat Henry and, in English, LaVon Carroll, Nikki Hansen, and Florence Barton, who later moved over into Education. Olive MacCarthy in Education was a dear friend also. In Nursing, of course, most of the staff was female—Helen Farr became a very good friend. Helen, to give her credit, was the leading force in getting our salaries equalized with the men's. There were really very few female faculty here in the '60s and '70s. Things started changing very much in the '80s and '90s. And those of us who were here in the beginning—we were sort of the godmothers of it all; we formed very strong friendships. Of all of those friends, the only remaining one is Helen Farr.

When did you meet your first husband, Carl?

In 1963, I decided I needed some more experience with France. Howard Hatch was an instructor in French at Brigham Young University and invited me to join the BYU travel study to France. We met at La Guardia airport, but saw no young men in the airplane except for this absolutely exhausted looking creature just sort of leaning against the airplane. I said to one of the students, "Who is that?" And she said, "Oh, that's Carl Andra. He is exhausted because his father just died, and he's been helping his mother move her furniture out of their family home in Lincoln, Nebraska." He was a character. He always liked to make jokes—like, there were three of us who were fairly tall blondes and Carl called us his Valkyries. As we walked around Paris, he would walk behind us so if any of the pinchers or flirters walked up behind us, he would shoo them away. He took a protective role for us. I didn't see too much of him actually that summer because he was out at the Alliance Française on the west side of Paris, and I was living on the east side of Paris and going to the Sorbonne for a foreign student instruction. But right at the end of summer—I was staying with a lovely couple, the Andersens, up by Clichy, which is in the northwest section of Paris—he invited the Andersens and myself and some other people to dinner in the Latin Quarter, and we just decided to keep in touch. He had his teaching degree from BYU and was anxious to get into college work, so he had started his master's degree program at BYU and was about to finish it. In '65, I think, he was hired by the English department here at Weber.

*I also had an adorable Japanese student, who was very smart and intense, and I remember she would come up to me and bow and call me Dr. Andra-san. She gave me the title of highest respect. I had students from Africa. Those poor students from the French-speaking African countries. They were so penniless and just so hungry. And they'd get to a point of desperation and pass by my office and say, "*Madame, j'ai faim. *Can you give me a little money?" And I'd pass them a twenty. Oh, those poor kids – they had quite a struggle.*

Tell me a little bit about Carl.

Well, we were married in the fall of '67. Our daughter was born in '69, and he had quite a few adventures here at Weber State. He was an excellent writer, both fiction and literary studies. He also had an incredible sense of humor. I'll never forget when he was the MC for a dinner honoring Bob Mickelson, who had been named dean of the College of Humanities, and Carl delivered the funniest toast you could imagine; everyone was just roaring and was rolling on the floor. Unfortunately in '75, I woke up one morning and found Carl bleeding, and when we got him to the doctors they diagnosed kidney cancer. They removed an enormous tumor from his left kidney, but by that time the

cancer had spread throughout his body. He taught as long as he could and wanted to keep going, until Dr. Burton, I think it was, finally just had to tell him to stay home and rest. That was heartbreaking.

He was very witty and could pull the funniest, cleverest ideas just out of the air. He was also a good writer. They used to have a competition for faculty called the Cortez Writing Contest, where he placed second both times. He was something of a poet and had a few very nice poems. What's sad about his early passing is that he was working towards a Ph.D. at that time—we all were—so he did not get to complete his degree. He would have gone on to be a very first feature-type writer as well as a good poet.

How did the foreign language department grow during your tenure?

When I started out, there was myself, full-time in French, and Victor Hancock, who did about one French class a quarter and was the department chair and taught Spanish. The teaching load was very high, about fifteen hours a quarter. The department had one full-time and one part-time faculty in German, and soon built Spanish up to about three or four positions. For most of my career, we had three to four full-time in French, plus some adjunct faculty. Gary Godfrey was a former French major who graduated from Weber and came back to teach in the 1970s. As the department grew, Spanish had six to seven full-time people on tenure-track, plus a string of adjuncts. German would have three tenured professors. Then, Italian was taught part-time by Oren Moffett, who was very gracious, and there was a professor of Japanese. We'd add up to a staff of about fourteen, fifteen full-time. I put in a good thirty-four years.

When did you get your Ph.D.?

You could not move beyond associate or assistant professor without a Ph.D. I started mine before Carl became ill, and Michelle was just a preschooler. I had done a little work in the 1970s at the University of Washington in Seattle toward the Ph.D., so I had collected, I think, about twenty or so Ph.D.-level credits which the University of Utah, where I eventually went, graciously accepted. I had to complete about another twenty credits before I could do my general exams. In the meantime, what happened within my personal life considerably slowed all of that down. I give many, many thanks to my dear parents, who helped me so much with Michelle during that difficult time when I was struggling to do all of this. I finally got that degree in, gosh, I think about '73. I wanted to advance in rank and get the raise in salary, too. I mean, I was a single parent. I had some pride and wanted to do what I knew I could do.

What precipitated your creating the Andra Collection here in Special Collections?

Well, I think part of it was the inspiration of the Howell collection, because we knew the Howell family when I lived on 37th Street and Tyler. Our neighbor across the street was Martha Howell Thompson. Judge Howell was a prominent district court judge in Ogden, and his family donated his extensive collection of beautiful bound books to Weber State University. My parents said, "Well, let's do something like that for Carl," so that was the impetus for creating the collection in his memory here.

Tell me a little bit about what the Andra Collection entails?

There are about two thousand books, maybe, representing about two hundred or so authors. It focuses on twentieth and twenty-first century works, and mainly poetry, but also essays, novels, and theater. It includes some classical standards from the twentieth century, not just in English but several other languages: Spanish, French, Polish, German, Saudi Arabian, and even Persian. We do have some precious works in there, such as a copy of ***Men Without Women*** signed by Ernest Hemingway. That belonged to the father of a student of mine, who persuaded him to donate it to the collection. The collection has grown a great deal; I'm very proud of it.

What are your plans for the future of the collection?

I would like to continue to sponsor poetry readings in connection with the Andra Collection. I'm very much in favor of bringing in our Utah poet laureates and maybe poet laureates from the surrounding states. I have recently started sponsoring a writing competition mainly for students in the English department, although certainly students from other departments should be invited as well. The intent is to encourage students to research within the collection and then write an essay that is loosely connected to their findings. We started it last year; I was very pleased with the paper that was submitted. This year we are offering three prizes—the first for five hundred dollars, the second for three hundred dollars, and the third for two hundred dollars—we're putting one thousand dollars toward the Andra Collection essay contest.

I got the idea of having this student essay contest from Dr. Anca Sprenger, a professor of French at BYU, who is the wife of our current dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, Scott Sprenger. I approached Dean Sprenger with the question of how to make the Andra Collection visible and meaningful within the campus community and then, a few days later, I had dinner with the Sprengers. Anca told me that BYU awards stipends to students who do significant research within their library, and I thought, "Voilà!"

Voilà it is, indeed! Thank you, Jean, for taking your time to share your stories and thoughts. It was a pleasure.

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Sarah Singh is the head of Special Collections and an assistant professor in Weber State University's Stewart Library. She has an MA in Russian History from Utah State University and an MLIS with a focus on archives from San Jose State University. She is the co-author of four books on the history of Ogden. She is also a co-host of an upcoming podcast series called "Zion Gone Bad" that focuses on crimes in Utah's history.

MY OTHER FATHER

ROBERT JOE STOUT



Utah History Encyclopedia

I grew up with two very different fathers. The one who came home just after five was well-organized but distant. He didn't drink; he seldom missed work; he seldom interfered in anything I did. He was well-read and could recite Wordsworth, Shelley, and Tennyson that he'd learned from his year of college, but I only remember seeing him read newspapers or magazines like *Life* and *Collier's*.

Often in the evenings he sat listening to the radio and playing Solitaire, but during the summer and on weekends he filled most of the daylight hours working in the garden, or digging a root cellar, or mixing and pouring concrete for a sidewalk. Often he had me help, but I don't remember that he insisted on it or assigned me specific chores. I can't recall him hugging or punishing me physically in any way.

He was who he was, a daily presence, mildly affectionate, determinedly opinionated, dedicated to routine. He wasn't at all like my other father—the one I truly admired and wished to emulate.

Every boy would want a father like my other father. He had climbed the Great Pyramids, hunted leopards in Ceylon, smuggled himself across the Rhine hidden beneath gunny sacks. He had been a college running back, a soldier, a ventriloquist, a used car salesman. He had supped in Marseilles and photographed Maori dancers in New Zealand and crossed the International Date Line through raging seas that made everybody on shipboard sick except him. He was a friend of the great Cap Gudmundson, who'd defied the Bolsheviks and who had thawed and eaten the flesh of Siberian mammoths, and of Drew Pearson, who wrote for all the papers and went on national lecture tours that thousands of people paid money to attend. He had traveled throughout the United States with opera

singers and former congressmen and European dignitaries while working for the Chautauquas, the great tent shows that pre-dated movies and radio and television and brought music and lectures and plays and magicians to virtually every small town in America.

This other father was very different from the father who came home every day from the sugar factory. I knew he was different because I had pictures of him posing on the railing of the steamship S. S. Tahiti between two lovely women, neither of whom was my mother. *What a Beau Brummell!* someone had scrawled across a snapshot of him, young and clean-shaven, his fedora tipped at a jaunty angle, a cocky smile defying anyone to contradict him.

I didn't have to fabricate his adventures because the photos carefully pasted into albums detailed experiences in jungles and on shipboard and in cities and with friends. There were platypuses and leopards and the Sphinx, castles and mosques and elephants and racing cars, sunsets in Tahiti and double-decker buses in London and half-naked native dancers in New Zealand. There were Chautauqua posters and programs and letters and itineraries, maps and stamped documents and newspaper photographs.

I don't remember pretending to be my other father or trying to recreate any of the things that he'd done, but I loved to page through the albums. Notes in white ink around the snapshots chronicled the adventures of a hero who, unlike baseball players or movie stars, I didn't have to share with anyone else.

Anyone else, that is, except the factory worker—my everyday father.

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I found it very difficult to reconcile him with the man in the photographs. I know from personal experience that memories build on themselves and grow as though they have lives of their own, but some of mine have stayed with me, virtually unchanged as the years have passed, especially those when my everyday father became my other father. Reminded of some past event, he would re-create E. B. Fish pounding a podium as he denounced Bolsheviks, or John Philip Souza gyrating his baton in front of applauding audiences.

He would imitate a lecturer grandiloquently greeting his audience in "Grass Pants" instead of "Grants Pass," Oregon, and describe a Louisiana state patrol car, siren screaming, zigzagging over gravel roads to deliver a Bostonian lecturer to Houma after he'd showed up in Homer, Louisiana, because, being from Boston, he pronounced the two words backwards. A warming glow filled the room as he and my mother

relived experiences as exciting and fascinating to me as Frank and Osa Johnson confronting a rampaging rhinoceros, or Richard Halliburton sailing a Chinese junk across the Pacific.

Occasionally, friends from my other father's Chautauqua days would visit. Looking back, I can only presume that they detoured to where we lived specifically to see my parents; otherwise, no one came to that part of Wyoming unless they were running away from something or were lost. One visitor I distinctly remember was Oliver Burkhart. He had a booming voice and moved his arms and hands as though intending to do prodigious things with them. I watched him transform himself into a German train conductor, a Mexican laborer, a New England college professor, a talking poodle. He pantomimed a magician getting bitten by the rabbit that he pulled out of a top hat and animated an extravagant story about an amateur actor who finally pronounced the lines, "Oh my God! I've been shot!," when someone off stage riddled his butt with a salt-filled shotgun charge.

Sometimes, as I watched my two fathers come together, the Beau Brummell from the photographs would flick across the features of the sugar factory worker, a teasing resemblance, a possibility, a series of overlapping shadows. That adventurer on shipboard, that friend of Cap Gudmundson, that climber of pyramids and hunter of leopards peeked through eyes brightened by a visitor's admiration. The face took on a jaunty, cocky air, and the voice lost its everyday dullness. My father looked younger—happy—as he must have looked when the photographs in the albums were taken.

I think, deep in my heart of hearts, I wanted my everyday father not to be the same man as my other father. I wanted the Beau Brummell not to wind up in a sweat-stained cotton work shirt with only memories of a Chautauqua to share. And though I had witnessed occasions when the two seemed to merge, I didn't understand how—or why—the father in the photographs had become the father whom I knew. Probably I still don't fully understand, even though I've read a great deal about the Great Depression and have experienced traumatic losses in my own life. But since I first began to perceive that I had two fathers, the one I called "my other father" has existed within me, a living organism who has infiltrated choices, decisions, dreams.

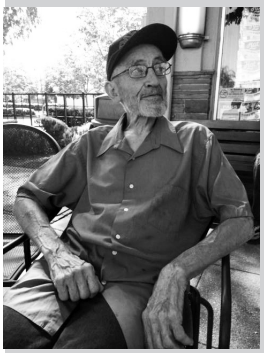
Some psychologists claim that each of us feels an obligation to

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fulfill the unfulfilled portions of our parents' lives. If that is true, perhaps it explains my own vagabondage, joining the Air Force instead of attending the state college in my home town, going to Mexico after my discharge, refusing to continue in graduate school and spending the winter in Montana rooming houses, leaving what my friends called "a great gig" at a language school, leaving a magazine editorship to go to Europe, preferring poetry to accounting, directing plays to being a copy editor, playing with my kids instead of working overtime to provide them with what late twentieth-century Americans called "security."

I may be wrong; I might have become who I am even if my other father hadn't given up his Beau Brummell life to work in a sugar factory, but I don't think so. I didn't want my children to grow up as I had, wishing their father were who he had been, not who he had become. (I also realize that many times in their lives my children may well have wished I was someone other than I am!) Each life is distinctive, unique, and as far as we know each of us only has one to live.

So as I pack a change of clothes in a bag and head for the bus that will take me to a deserted Mexican mountain school to meet the leaders of a band of supposed anti-government rebels, I wonder, briefly, what my children say about this father of theirs who was more a partner and a friend than an authority figure and who left them with gaps in their own growing up that each in his and her own way has had to struggle to fill.



Robert Joe Stout's poetry has appeared in a variety of publications, including *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Rambler*, and *The Mid-America Poetry Review*. He has published three novels and the nonfiction books *Why Immigrants Come to America* and *Hidden Dangers*. He lives in Oaxaca, Mexico.

STONE, WATER, SUPERSTITION, AND BLOOD

NATHANIEL FARRELL BRODIE

Damon and I were walking to Cape Royal, clearing downed trees before the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park opened for the season, when a four-foot long, wrist-thick gopher snake, brilliant gold and bright black, drifted across our path. I put down my chainsaw and followed the snake, just shy of grabbing it, parting branches to better peer into the desert mahogany in which it took shelter, chattering all the while to Damon until I looked back and realized that he was gone.

I found him at the end of the Cape, leaning against the safety rail, looking into the hazy depths of the Grand Canyon.

"What happened to you?"

"I'm not supposed to be around snakes."

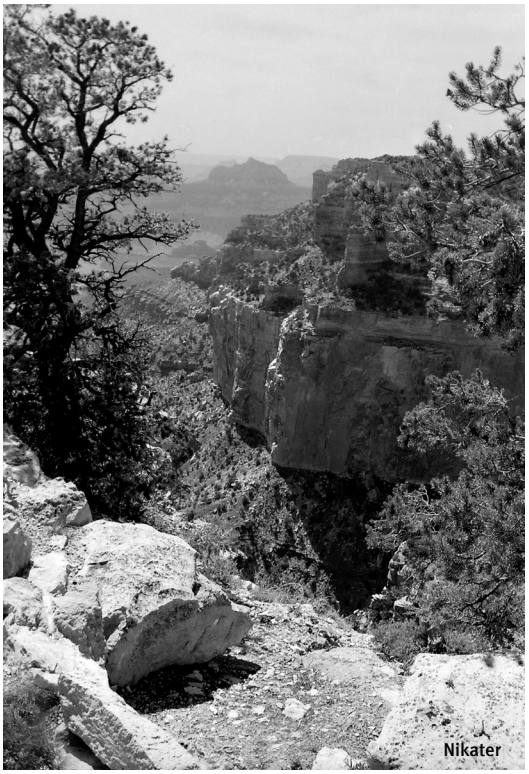
"Oh."

We looked out at the desert.

"Why?"

"Because I'm Diné."

Years later, miles off the South Rim of the Canyon, I sat on a chunk of sandstone amidst a strewn field of clean stones, their unblemished surfaces exposed to the elements for the first time in two-hundred-and-seventy-five million years. Above me was the sheer, four-hundred-foot Coconino sandstone cliff from which the slide had originated. I sat there, looking at the cliff, at the slide, wondering how and why it came about, and thinking of Damon shunning the snake.



Nikater

As to the collapse, which had razed a large section of the Tanner Trail, I considered the cliff itself, formed from an ancient aeolian sea of sand. Perhaps the extensive cross-bedding within the boulders of the slide signified that the dunes that formed this particular section of cliff were particularly unstable, and this ancient dune instability eventually led to this collapse. Perhaps a rare instance of rain fell on the surface of these dunes, then the moistened sand hardened, was covered by dry sand, and this unusually ossified sediment layer proved the weak link. Or, broader still, the fall may owe to how the Tanner Fault—which the trail exploits to descend to the Colorado River—weakened the cliffs to the forces of erosion.

But all that just set the stage. More relevant are the processes by which the cliff was primed for the final, violent kinetics. There is scarp retreat: when groundwater percolating through the porous sandstone reaches the underlying and impermeable Hermit shale and is sluiced out onto the surface. The

running water scours the shale and in time the cliff overhangs its undercut bed. When the sapping reaches a vertical joint in the overlying rock, the cliff collapses in landslide. There is frost-wedging: when water freezes it expands by nine percent; thus when snowmelt seeps into a crack in a rock and refreezes, it wedges the crack apart. When the frozen water melts, it penetrates deeper into the expanded crack, removing particles that helped glue the rock together, further fracturing the rock when frozen again. There is root wedging: amidst the slide were the remnants of an absolutely pulverized piñon; perhaps the tree had shot roots through and through a system of cracks in the cliff, roots that wedged the cracks wider and wider as they fattened. Or perhaps the general seismic activity of the region—the five earthquakes of magnitude 5.0 or bigger since 1900—helped trigger the collapse. Or perhaps the fact that when the moon passes especially close to the earth, its gravitational pull causes the earth to bulge four to forty inches towards it. Perhaps a particularly strong pulse along an underlying telluric current. Perhaps a sheep hoof, a lizard pushup, a human voice. Or perhaps, as the geographer J.B. Jackson put it, "mysteries that fit into no pattern": the shifting of a Kachina in sleep, the strict whim of Yahweh.

In the end, I'll never know. Nor does it matter. On a broad scale, there is nothing mysterious about the mechanical processes I sought to interpret: rock erodes and tumbles to rest. But I do believe in fey processes or fluctuations; a miniscule, improbable, powerful event, as with the quintessential chaos theory metaphor of the flapping of butterfly wings in Brazil causing a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. It could be that this force, or agent, or whatever, has simply not yet been discovered, as with all the phenomena in the world—germs, neutrinos, tectonic plates—that, before they were empirically verified, were dismissed as unlikely or impossible or simply never imagined.

This, then, is why I thought of Damon and the snake.

There is much in this world that we recognize but don't yet understand. Coincidences. Accurate premonitions. Dejà-vu. How certain animals sense earthquakes, or how the fly knows when I have her in my attention and thus evades, just as my wife,

On a broad scale, there is nothing mysterious about the mechanical processes I sought to interpret: rock erodes and tumbles to rest. But I do believe in fey processes or fluctuations; a miniscule, improbable, powerful event, as with the quintessential chaos theory metaphor of the flapping of butterfly wings in Brazil causing a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico. It could be that this force, or agent, or whatever, has simply not yet been discovered, as with all the phenomena in the world – germs, neutrinos, tectonic plates – that, before they were empirically verified, were dismissed as unlikely or impossible or simply never imagined.

from across a crowded room, will feel the touch of my eyes and turn to meet them. How coyote willow seedlings, borne by floods to sprout thirty feet above the creek, unerringly know the exact direction to send their roots towards water. How the light from Betelgeuse affects the cells of an aspen leaf, or a solar flare scrambles the navigational ability of butterflies. Much of what we will never comprehend is linked to, or gives rise to, certain superstitions. Yet within the murky waters of superstition are suspended grains of truth.

Take, for example, Damon's belief in not just the snake taboos that accompany his father's Navajo bloodlines, but the animistic beliefs that accompany his mother's Hopi bloodlines: that supernatural power inhabits everything, that not just snakes but stones, rivers, and clouds possess their own existence. Western physics acknowledges that all these objects contain potential energy, and, in the case of a thunderhead, kinetic energy, but many Native Americans—and indigenous people the world over—go beyond that: they believe that rocks had life. Scientifically, this is false: if living can be defined by cells and the electrical synapses between cells, rocks—inert, cell-less, passive—are, as they say, stone-dead.

I'm a skeptic through and through, and in the case of the Tanner slide, believe in little besides the protean effects of water molecules. But still, I can't wholly dismiss the belief that rocks contain within themselves power or life. For I quite easily accept the fact that water percolates through seemingly impermeable sandstone, that the stone in time saturates with liquid, that the dry air at the stone's open faces draws the water through rock pores to the surface, where it forms a thin film; that this liquid film evaporates and leaves behind crystalloid evidence of calcite, gypsum, halite. To me, the rock's inhalation and exhalation of water resembles breathing, and so the Hopi, if not scientifically correct, are at least poetically accurate—the insensate stone breathes, and what breathes, is, in a way, alive.

Or if that stretches belief, put it this way: if one accepts that the mechanical and chemical processes working within a rock, and thus the rock itself, are inextricably threaded into the fabric of what we consider living, breathing life, then to separate the two, to draw distinctions between living and rock, is, in the end, meaningless.

I worked for a season on Grand Canyon's National Park Service fisheries crew. As part of an invasive trout reduction project, we waded all fourteen miles of Bright Angel Creek with backpack electroshockers, culling the trout and documenting the native fish. Well, all fourteen miles except for the stretches immediately upstream or downstream of the confluence of Ribbon Falls Creek. For the Zuni tribe holds Ribbon Falls in a sacred light: they believe that they and all the fish in the creek originated from the water cascading from those falls. Out of respect for their beliefs we didn't use our electroshocking backpacks near the confluence. Even so, during one of the meetings between the park and the tribe, the Zunis mentioned how there had been a dramatic increase in "tasing" incidents on the reservation, and hinted that they thought this increase could be attributed to the electroshocking of Bright Angel Creek, some few hundred miles away. As much as my Western consciousness finds this hard to believe, even ridiculous, this same consciousness does believe in the tenets of chaos theory, or the concept of quantum entanglement, and I cannot thus outright dismiss the Zunis' beliefs.

For all the knowledge I have gained through rational, linear thought, through systematic investigation and objective analysis, I also know that these same processes have limited me, distanced me

from alternate ways of knowing or being. In his book *One River*, the anthropologist and ethnobotanist Wade Davis relates how shamans of various Amazon basin tribes combine different plants to make entheogenic potions such as ayahuasca. The potions are effective only because of a unique mixture of chemical compounds, yet the range of compounds within the pharmacopoeia of the rainforest is so great that thousands of years of trial-and-error testing cannot explain the shamans' success in discovering the correct combinations. When questioned by Western anthropologists and pharmacologists, the shamans said, simply, *the plants sing to us.*

In his poem "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," Walt Whitman relays how he became "tired and sick" of an astronomer's proofs and figures, charts, and diagrams, and had to glide out into the "mystical moist night-air" and look "up in perfect silence at the stars." (In this he was following the path laid for him by Wordsworth, among others, who claimed that "one impulse from a vernal wood" had taught him more than "all the sages can.") In a way, that's what Damon came to represent for me. Not so much the mystical—the two of us had drunk too much whiskey and watched too much *South Park* together to allow any romantic visions of a modern-day Noble Savage; besides, he could riff on Carl Sagan or the latest nature documentary for hours: he wasn't wholly content with incertitude—but his intrinsic silence, his assured belief that countered my questions.

Twice we walked forty miles along the river paths of Buckskin Gulch and Pariah Canyon. Twice we tread the same ground but passed through different worlds. If Damon was awed by the beauty, he also accepted it, content as he was with retracing the pathway his ancestors had taken for tens of thousands of years. If I was awed, I was not necessarily content: as a writer I struggled with a loss of words for the beauty, with the way it reduced me to a pre-linguistic state: making bird chirps, swooshing sounds, motions with my hand describing lines, waves, ripples, curves. The canyons revealed language as sham, as impotent symbols and structures unable to capture the expanse, the shifting light on the curved walls, the brilliant green of a young cottonwood's leaves against the red rock. My inarticulateness was no small thing: putting the right words in the right order is how I piece the world together.

Over the seven years I spent in the deserts of the Colorado Plateau, I'd cycle through the ouroboros-like gamut of ways of being and knowing. Sometimes I'd be searching for causes and effects and struggling with words and sentences; other times I'd enter into extended moments of stillness and simple being, of seeing the stars in perfect silence. Many of these more meditative moments pressed into me from my surroundings—sitting in the shade of an overhang, stunned into stupor by the heat, or later, at sunset, looking out

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from the lip of the rim, stilled by the hum of the open spaces. There's a wonderful moment in one of John Wesley Powell's journals when this consummate questioning naturalist writes, simply, "on the summit of the opposite wall of the cañon are rock forms that we do not understand," and leaves it at that.

David Abram, the philosopher and cultural ecologist, writes often of these powerful, corporeal moments of simply being, and how they are akin to indigenous ways of knowing the world:

> I believe it is possible to experience Merleau-Ponty's radical undoing of the traditional "mind-body problem" simply by dropping the conviction that one's mind is anything other than the body itself. If one is successful in this then one may abruptly experience oneself in an entirely new manner—not as an immaterial intelligence inhabiting an alien, mechanical body, but as a magic, self-sensing form—a body that is itself awake and aware, from its toes to its fingers to its tongue and its ears—a thoughtful and self-reflective animate presence. If one maintains this new awareness for a duration of time, becoming comfortable enough with it to move about without losing the awareness, one will begin to experience a corresponding shift in the physical environment. Birds, trees, even rivers and stones begin to stand forth as living, communicative presences. But I have forgotten, or only rarely known, how to truly listen with my body. I have always had to intentionally attempt to quiet what Susan Sontag has referred to as a "perennial, never consummated project of interpretation."

In her essay "Against Interpretation," Sontag explains that "Real art has the capacity to make us nervous. By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable." Obviously, the desert is not a work of art. The canyon was created, not by a craftsman god, but by the incremental eons. The rasp of water over rock is not trying to "say" anything. And, in the case of the Tanner slide, I wasn't trying to interpret its subtext, only its physical and historic processes. But still, Sontag is onto something, and Joseph Wood Krutch echoes the refrain in *The Desert Year*:

> The fact that I never had stayed long in any part of the monument country may be the consequence of a certain defensive reaction. There is a kind of beauty—and it is presumably the kind prevailing throughout most of the universe—of which man gets thrilling glimpses but which is fundamentally alien to him. It is well for him to glance occasionally at the stars or to think for a moment about eternity. But it is not well to be continuously aware of such things, and we must take refuge from them with the small and the familiar.

The Grand Canyon so transcends our accustomed cognitive capacities that we use any tool at our disposal to cage it into comprehension: analyzing the minute physical processes; using the frames of "viewfinder" telescopes on the rim; listening to an ever-helpful Park Service Interpretative Ranger provide statistics designed to subject the canyon's staggering phenomena into small and familiar frameworks: how many Rhode Islands can fit into the National Park and neigh-

boring monument, how many Empire State Buildings stacked atop each other will equal the Canyon's height or span, how many dump trucks would be filled by a day's worth of transported river-silt.

Damon, and the rest of the trail crew in general, tended to regard such factoids—and the way of knowing the Canyon from which they arose— with a good deal of suspicion and scorn. An Interpretive Ranger's knowledge of the Canyon was dismissed as gleaned from books, and thus shallow—as if you could learn how to run a rapid or recognize the pressings of heat exhaustion by reading a book!—while the crew's deeper knowledge was seen as arising from our hard work, our blood on the rocks, our "body that is itself awake and aware." And there is a truth to this.

But I'm a voracious consumer of Grand Canyon facts and factoids. I love knowing that all canyon layers were laid down long before the North American landmass rammed into the African landmass to form Pangea, or that, as impressive of a geologic record as is the canyon's rock, eighty percent of the earth's history is lost in the canyon's geologic "unconformities." I like how the detached, disinterested gaze of the Interpretive Ranger allows one to see the canyon as a riddle, the features and essence as a problem to be solved.

And yet I also enjoyed Damon and the crew's immersive and ebulliently subjective way of knowing the Canyon. I envied their capacity for what the poet John Keats called "negative capability": "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." And I, too, place greater trust in the state of deep envelopment that comes when my body responds in a tacit, intuitive way to work or play, when I lose myself in wroughting stone, or when I know exactly, easily, how to run the pool table, every shot flowing, or when the perfect words come or the sentences complete one after another on the page: those heightened, perfect, rare instances of flow. Trusting this instinctive wisdom, in those moments, is far preferable to my annoyingly persistent postmodern doubts about my own experiences.

Furthermore, the bite-sized facts and factoids dispensed by the Interpretive Rangers carried a weight of conclusiveness that seemed somehow suspect, untrue to our understanding of the ever-shifting world of the Canyon, a world which seemed a continuum of possibility and a web of interrelations, some of the strands of which stretched into the unknowable fogs of mysticism. To take one thing out of that strand and hold it to light and say: "this is this, period," seemed, well, wrong. It wasn't just the

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fact that the world was mutable: it was ultimately unknowable. We felt, as George Steiner put it, that we were "transients in a house of being whose foundations, whose future history, whose rationale—if any—lie wholly outside our will and comprehension."

Many in the crew also felt that scientific knowledge detracted from their sovereign experiences, as though knowing the intricacies of the geologic record or species names for plants or animals removed the object from a general, democratic knowledge and into the realm of esoteric elitism. As though rigid scientific methods of objective analysis or the dispassionate pursuit of knowledge tarnishes the luster of awe, diminishes the great mystery of life and existence. Far better the direct, personal, sovereign, even naïve experience, objectivity be dammed. But I figure that knowledge gained through the fickle senses is best paired with knowledge from another, more objective or even empirically verifiable source. I've never found the pursuit of scientific knowledge to ever detract from wonder. On a certain level the crew is right: I could admire that gopher snake without knowing its genus, much less species (*Pituophis catenifer*). When hiking with a botanist spouting Latin species names or a geologist speaking in terms of aphanitic igneous rock, I've had to suppress the urge to throw them into an *Agave americana* rosette or down an exposed breccia pipe. Discovering through later readings that the brilliant red shards of the lower Redwall are actually semi-precious, gem-quality jasper delivers far less a thrill than the initial discovery of the jasper by cracking open a stone with a single blow. And, perhaps in the end, loving without knowing is more important than knowing without loving. But knowing the story behind the jasper—a story of transgressions and regressions of an ancient oceanic sea over a fifteen-million-year period; a sea teeming with ancient life that died en masse and compressed into rock; in the process of which certain shells morphed into jasper—does nothing but further my appreciation of the gem shining in my palm.

Not everyone on the crew distrusted the scientific worldview, and there were different reasons for doing so among those who did. Damon put faith in his native traditions. Shayne didn't appreciate how science contradicted the strict Christian beliefs of his upbringing. I always figured Jake just didn't like how scientific facts impinged upon the imaginative potential of the world, and preferred instead to delight, even dwell, in that apriori moment when a shadow could be a lizard or, well, a rock spire an "iguana dick." Some believed in a dichotomy between a cold, rational mind and a warm, intuitive heart, and put their faith in the latter. Many on the crew were simply uncurious or uninterested in the canyon beyond its role as a place to earn their daily bread. As Anaïs Nin put it, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."

What united the crew's disparate outlooks was a need to ground any and all understanding in self-understanding, in how the perceived world worked through us in action and experience, sensation and emotion. Immersed as we were in the canyon, day in, day out, for months and years on end, the line between self and surroundings blurred—it was hot, we were hot; it rained, we became wet, we took shelter. After a time, there was little separation between environment and cognition. We'd become part of the canyon—prickly pear glochids embedded into my skin and were absorbed into my bloodstream. Moving across the jumbled mass of the Tanner slide, the lines in my palm pressed against the sedimentary lines of ancient slipfaces; the finely seamed angles of cross-bedded dunes mirrored

the crow's feet starting to wing my eyes.

Scientific detachment wasn't for us. As Sontag wrote about Marienbad, we fancied ourselves immersed in "the pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy" of the irreducible rock, heat, wind. Even now, what I remember and how I remember the canyon is bound to the sensuous. Like certain desert annual wildflowers, which sprout only when specific and exact temporal conditions of sunlight, temperature, and moisture have been met, my memories are both involuntarily cued by the senses and return me to scenes defined by senses: the shovel's rasping scoop and the curt, snickering dig; the way a mule's shoes struck sparks against rocks as the pack trains shuffled downtrail in the early dawn; how a lightning strike would split a ponderosa's bark into a ragged vulva that dripped butterscotch sap where cambium met heartwood.

That a place could so bludgeon the senses yet be one of the most sensuous places I have ever been is one of the Canyon's greater paradoxes. Sensuality abounded: raindrops plopping into the river and riverdrops rising in perfect synchronicity back up towards sky. Standing wet on a warm rock in the middle of the creek after a swim, the current causing the brilliant pink mats of coyote willow roots to sway above the dark riverstones, the water beading like pebbled stars on my bare skin, and a nebula of cottonwood fluff floating slow and steady upcanyon, so that I could stretch my head and have them dissolve on my tongue, the tiny seed cracking between my front teeth.

This engorged sensuality is what I remember of the Canyon. How we remember a place, and what we remember of a place, is deeply meaningful, and the seemingly random nature of associated memories reminds me that if I find a great joy in deciphering complexities and making connections—in life and on the page—I find an even greater joy in knowing the world is so complex that we'll never make all the connections. That there is, in Ted Hughes phrase, "meaning that will not part from the rock."

At the time, I was surprised Damon wouldn't want to grab the snake and note its forked tongue, its overlapping scales, its lidless eye. I was disappointed, too, figuring that someone who loved the Canyon as Damon loved the Canyon should want to know everything about the place he loved, in as fine and visceral detail as he could. But I couldn't hold that against him any more than he could hold against me my pointed if relatively pointless musings about the genesis of the rockslide that wiped out the Tanner Trail. Damon helped me see the Canyon as a richer and more meaningful place, a place of stone and water, superstition and blood.



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DEATH OF THE DEFENDER

PAUL J. DRISCOLL

On Friday, January 29th of 2016, the last Land Rover Defender rolled off the assembly line in the Midlands town of Solihull, England. The demise of this legendary line of four-wheel drive workhorses marks a significant milestone in automotive history.

The world seems just a bit smaller and a lot softer for it.

Land Rover, now owned by the Indian car maker, Tata Motors, continues to make its line of luxury SUVs—the Range Rover and the smaller, more affordable Discovery LR4s, among other models. Oh, the company almost immediately announced that the Defender would return—in some fashion or another. As I write this, the release of the neo-Defender is imminent, although almost three years overdue. We learn from the company that the new model—built in Slovakia—will be "respectful of its past, but not harnessed by it."



The author's 1965 Series IIA Land Rover. The hole in the bumper accepts the hand-crank rod.

Gone forever is the true utilitarian rig known the world over.

We all know these cars from newsreels of United Nation vehicles and the iconic images of African safari touring rigs. These are Land Rover Defenders, or their predecessors, the Land Rover Series vehicles. That old car on the cover of whatever outdoor gear and clothing catalog is lying around your coffee table? Almost always an old Land Rover.

Rovers, as they are almost universally known, are uncompromised vehicles of adventure and wild places. At one time in the 1970s, the company claimed—not unrealistically—that the first motor vehicle the majority of the world's population laid eyes upon was a Land Rover. Rovers were early penetrators of the African, South American, Australian, and Central Asian interiors. For better or worse, wherever Brits were to be found—from the Caribbean to the Ganges, from Lahore to Nairobi—Land Rovers followed.

No other vehicle could be so realistically fixed in the field as a Land Rover. Backup hand-crank starting was standard up into the 1970s—just like the old Ford "Tin Lizzies." Aluminum alloy body panels do not rust and are soft enough to pound out major dents with river rocks. Exposed rivets on the body panels—now a retro-chic feature on some American-made trucks—remained proudly displayed over several decades. The electric windshield wiper motors could be overridden and operated by hand if necessary. How practical is that?

The most common engine was an underpowered gasoline four-cylinder that could be timed and tuned to run on hangover saliva. But the company was (and remains) respected for its diesel power plant engineering. The drive trains through the late-1960s had to be double-clutched in the low gears, just like classic Italian sports cars. Early spartan-like Land Rovers featured innovations such as on-the-fly engagement of four-wheel drive and later full-time all-wheel drive. Most importantly, though, these hand-made Land Rovers were just plain fun to drive, blending British sports car moxie with get-you-there-and-back reliability.

Those early vehicles won international favor among scientists, explorers, and engineers, but also among writers and artists. Ernest Hemingway, the young Stephen King, and Tom McGuane all drove Land Rovers. Bob Marley owned one. So did Robin Williams. And Steve McQueen. The warbling guitar hero John Mayer keeps one on his Montana spread. Edward Abbey wrote about them and marveled that a man with a couple hundred feet of rope and a Land Rover could "accomplish goddamned near anything." A Land Rover starred in the classic 1980 Indy movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*.

Those Rovers trace lineage back to the diminutive American military Jeep, which was shipped, well, by the shipload into England during the build-up to D-Day. As the war wound down, the thieving Brits expressed interest in building a rugged four-wheel drive vehicle of their own, primarily for the export market into the British Empire. The prototype vehicle was famously mounted on the frame of an Army Jeep. Designed and built by Maurice Wilkes—who had worked for a couple years at General Motors—the Rover featured power take-offs front and rear, at least initially to operate farm machinery. Aluminum was selected for the body panels and driveline components because in post-war England a lot of big military aircraft was being scrapped while steel remained scarce.

By the early 1950s, Land Rover had gained a reputation for rugged durability and—not unlike the Volkswagen Beetle—a distinctive appearance, availability and interchangeability of parts, and a worldwide support and distribution network.

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Exposed rivets on the body panels—now a retro-chic feature on some American-made trucks—remained proudly displayed over several decades.

"Dad, there's a guy on TV who drives a car just like yours."

I was preparing dinner one evening in the mid-1980s for my six-year old daughter at a friend's house, which featured satellite-dish television. Curious, I ducked into the den to watch my first episode of *In the Wild with Harry Butler*, a PBS staple of the era. Butler, a naturalist and field biologist, was known by my daughter as the "bugs and snakes guy," and indeed, each episode featured Harry and his trusty Land Rover 109 exploring the flora and fauna of the remote Australian interior.

Since I was living in the hinterlands of southwest Montana at the time, I had sought out a vehicle that would get me back and forth to my day job in town, which seasonally required four-wheel drive. Land Rover had recently abandoned the U.S. market in a kerfuffle over safety and environmental considerations, such as air bags, padded dashboards, and emission controls. In the U.S. market of the time, new Land Rovers cost up to twice the price of contemporary Jeep CJs and Wagoneers, International Scouts, early Ford Broncos, and the derivative Toyota Land Cruisers. The used market for Rovers was surprisingly affordable, though. I took the plunge and bought a used 1965 Land Rover Series IIa from a widow who had raised three boys using it. My recollection is the price tag was slightly south of three thousand dollars.

Looking back on it, though, that rig has carried me all over the West, outlasted two marriages and a covey of girlfriends. Over thirty years and roughly two hundred thousand miles, I have replaced or rebuilt four carburetors, three generators, two water pumps, one clutch, a front-end, all four leaf-springs and shackles twice, and several oil seals and bearings.

The original dealership decal read: Knievel Imports, Butte, Montana. Yeah, *that* Knievel. Evel's family ran a new car dealership that imported Land Rovers, among other cars. There were probably four or five Land Rover dealerships in the state at one time. Today, the closest is in Spokane.

Looking back on it, though, that rig has carried me all over the West, outlasted two marriages and a covey of girlfriends. Over thirty years and roughly two hundred thousand miles, I have replaced or rebuilt four carburetors, three generators, two water pumps, one clutch, a front-end, all four leaf-springs and shackles twice, and several oil seals and bearings. Since day one, it has left tiny oil splotches wherever it has been parked for more than a few hours. It has stranded me exactly one time, on pavement, and was inconsequential in that a friend accomplished a field repair the next day using a shard of aluminum beer can to bridge a burnt voltage regulator connection. That fix to get me through the day lasted about three years.

Not unlike the British Empire, Land Rovers are simply built to last, or perhaps more accurately, they're both built to die very slowly. It's been estimated (by the company, of course) that more than 75 percent of all Land Rovers ever made remain roadworthy.

When Land Rover introduced the Defender badge in 1991, many of the Luddite, old school Series owners were skeptical, myself included. The Defender

featured a coil-spring suspension all around. Each unit had full-time all-wheel drive powered by either an aluminum block V-8 petro, modified from a retired Buick tooling, or a long-stroke diesel. Some of these early power plants kicked out about a hundred horses. (By comparison, a new Subaru can approach twice that power). With big markets in desert climates of the Middle East and elsewhere, the Defender did not initially offer air conditioning or even a car-radio, which according to legend was because Land Rover couldn't figure out how to make either of them effectively leak oil.

The Defender proved over time to be as capable and popular as its predecessor Series Land Rovers. It became the international fleet-vehicle of choice for the United Nations and many law enforcement agencies, oil and gas exploration companies, scientists and geologists, and utilities operating in remote places.

Unfortunately, imports into the U.S. market were extremely limited due to Land Rover's refusal to install emission control devices, mileage improvement systems, and safety features onto the Defender. (To be clear, owners of the early Series rigs routinely open beer bottles on the all-metal dashboards. Further, a Land Rover Defender, like most fun cars, is not purchased on the basis of high mileage, low emissions, or safety.)

A portion of the U.S. market would be addressed by the Range Rover and later the Discovery and LR3s and LR4s—nice cars in many regards, I suppose, but not even close to the cachet and capability of the crew-cut, muscular Land Rover Defender. Consequently, most Defenders in the U.S. today are "gray market," which is to say imported from Canada, Central America, or other Defender-rich markets. Many served time in military or fleet-vehicle sectors abroad. Veterans of Desert Storm and the post-911 campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan know well these military Defenders used by the British and other allies. The Defender also figures prominently on the wide screen in movies such as the recent *James Bond* and *The Fast and the Furious* franchises.

A well-used Defender from the late 1980s or '90s runs upward of twenty thousand dollars in the U.S., if you can find one. In the face of such multi-decade successes and solid value, why would Land Rover discontinue the Defender?

I dunno. Go figure.

As with all other makers of sport utility vehicles, Land Rover had long ago joined the race toward comfort, highway performance, and up-scale styling and luxury offerings. Some claim the company initiated that race with its Range Rover offerings and perhaps the finish line had been crossed.

Over recent decades, the Defender had become something of a neglected sideline. That contract with the United Nations? Long gone. Fleet



Land Rover slowly evolved from the Series models into the Defender, as evidenced by this 1984 ex-Canadian military unit that lacks only the nameplate, which was not applied until 1991.

purchases by governments and international businesses are in the rearview mirror. To paraphrase a Defender owner and world traveler, "Land Rover may have opened up all those remote continents, but Toyota is maintaining them." The company lost four billion dollars in the U.S. in the fourth quarter of 2018. Whatever profile and ability the new Defender assumes, it's got a rough road in front of it.

Perhaps one day some capable car company will once again offer a reliable four-wheel drive vehicle with minimal electronics, hand-operated windows and open-air venting, big torque rather than raw horsepower, and sheer exuberance in the driving experience.

In the meantime, Land Rover may be offering the next best thing. The company opened up a portion of the Solihull plant in 2016 to a "Heritage Restoration Programme." Old Series Land Rovers and Defenders—all two million of them ever built—can be sent in and fully restored at the factory, in some instances by the same workers who assembled the originals, according to the company.

Until mine is ready for a makeover, I'll just hang onto the fifty-year old dreadnaught. I was a young man when I bought the thing and my assessments may be skewed by the passage of years. The tires seem good, the brakes fair. The engine's tired and a valve clangs around upon startup. Still, I sometimes park it in front of a local brewery or tavern where young men in particular seem to think it's good luck to touch the grill emblem. On rare occasions I'll light up a Camel straight and ask if any of them would care to try starting the Rover using the hand crank. That always raises a crowd and is good for a few rounds of beer. ("Hey! There's an old guy who says he can start his truck with a stick!")

There's another reason to keep the Rover on the road, I suppose. Truly, a stinking old truck reeking of ninety-weight oil may be seen by many as nothing more than an environmental nightmare—a ridiculous vestige of a past best left behind. But that call to adventure and wild places remains and the proper vehicle to get one there and back still seems a big part of the romance.



Chris McGowan

Paul J. Driscoll is a third-generation Montanan. He has lived and worked throughout the West as a newspaper reporter, editorial cartoonist, technical writer, editor, illustrator, and website manager. He currently lives outside of Helena where he develops illustrations, natural history articles, and essays for regional and national publications. His writings and illustrations have appeared in the online journal *New West* and the *Washington Post National Edition*. A collection of natural history essays is due out in late 2021. He has owned a 1965 Series IIA Land Rover for almost 35 years and estimates that many of its 250,000 miles have been accumulated on two-track dirt roads to nowhere.

Jane St. Clair

Hair Like Julia Roberts



Every night the Aedis de Pater Desierto gathers in the Arizona desert wilderness to pray. If there is a bright, well-lit pearl of a moon that casts enough light, they sit outdoors on the desert ground, bowing their heads, meditating, giving thanks, and praying.

It is two in the morning and on this night the moon is bright enough to illuminate the ritual of the Aedis. Ellen is on her knees next to her husband, Joshua, and now she looks at his profile. Moonlight creates a silver aura silhouetting his turban and beard. Joshua is a holy man who has passed through the doors of perception many times, and she has seen him fall unconscious in a state of holy ecstasy. The Pater Desierto himself arranged their marriage eleven years ago, and the Pater allows them to sleep together once a year for procreation. Other than that, they live apart in single sex dormitories. Three months ago Ellen gave birth to Joshua's daughter. Joshua is a stranger to her.

Ellen is staring at Joshua. She decides he looks like a nice man. It is July and the temperature was well over 105 that day, but now Ellen feels a chill over her body. She shivers and pulls her silk undergarments and flaxen shawl closer to her body, and longs for Joshua to put his arm around her to warm her. She longs for him to touch her. Moreover, she longs to hold her baby, now in some other woman's arms. She longs for her baby's smell and the touch of her plump baby flesh.

Ellen believes the longings she feels are errors of mind, and that during night prayers, her mind should be on God alone. Yet the longing comes from a place beyond her mind, perhaps even from her soul itself, and then she catches herself. Such thoughts are blasphemy.

Some months ago Ellen went through another phase of blasphemous thoughts. She had a monkey mind that jumped up and down and then fixated on a longing for meat. The Aedis are vegetarian but Ellen craved meat when she was pregnant. Her doula told her that her baby did not need meat and nor did she, but meat was all Ellen thought about. Then, just as her guru predicted, the wild monkeys flew away and she never again thought of meat. Ellen believes that this new set of blasphemous thoughts eventually will dissolve too.

Yet even weeks later, as she was riding the shuttle to her job in Tucson, all Ellen thought about was holding her baby. Monkey mind had become an obsession, and instead of saying her hourly prayers, Ellen thought about how she and the baby could live on their own. The obsession so overwhelmed Ellen until she wrote a note for Joshua. The note said, "I want to leave the temple."

The next night during prayers she passed the note to Joshua. He read it, crushed it, and put it in the folds of his robes. Ellen took his lack of reaction to mean that she was in error. Her heart beat faster, and her face turned red in humiliation, and she was so embarrassed by her own weakness she began to cry. Joshua never reacted, not once, to any of that.

The next night as they were kneeling side by side in prayer, Joshua placed a tiny scrap of paper in the pockets of Ellen's dress. Only later when she was alone in her bed, she found the courage to read it.

"I want to leave too," the note said.

Ellen's heart pounded in fear. She had never known anyone who left the temple. It was forbidden, and if you did, you subjected yourself to the Doctrine of Return. When Ellen joined the cult, a friend sent her emails and links about people who had left Pater Desierto and who were either forced to return to the cult or later found dead.

The next night Joshua passed Ellen a second note. This time it said, "Pretend you are sick and meet me at the North Gate at 8 o'clock."

When Ellen told the driver that she was sick, it was the first lie she had told in more than a decade, and it scared her. I am no good at lying, she thought, and I have no idea what I'll say if a master asks me why I'm waiting at the North Gate instead of taking the bus to work.

But Joshua and the baby were already there waiting for her. He was behind the wheel of an automobile owned by the Pater himself, and he was holding the baby. He looked strange in that context. In spite of his turban and robes, he looked modern and competent. She slid into the front passenger seat and took the baby in her arms.

"What did you tell them?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"How did you get a car?"

"I just took it."

They drove to Tucson on an unpaved two-lane road with steep shoulderless drop-offs that meandered precariously around mountains. Ellen had a dreadful fear that they would fall and plunge to their deaths into one of the deep canyons below.

"Where are we going?" Ellen asked.

"I haven't decided," Joshua answered.

"I have a job at a shoe store in El Con Mall."

"Do you really want to keep selling shoes?"

"No," Ellen said. "No, I don't."

And then she began to laugh hysterically, as if she were drunk.

"I don't want to keep selling shoes," she said, "and I'm not even sure I want a baby or—."

"Or a husband?" Joshua finished the sentence for her.

"But the thing is I have a baby and a husband."

Ellen kept acting silly and laughing, and her voice sounded lightheaded and drunk.

Joshua looked at Ellen in a careful way. She was acting strangely, but maybe she was just a strange person. He wouldn't know. He looked at her again. He could not classify her as pretty or smart or any of that, but then he had no previous girlfriends to compare her to, and he had no classifications for different women. She was just Ellen, a person he did not know very well.

He turned off the Interstate and into the city center of Tucson, and drove the car into an underground garage.

"We'll leave the car here," he said.

"Do we have any stuff in the trunk?"

"What kind of stuff?"

"You know, stuff," Ellen said. "Furniture, clothes, books."

"No."

"We might need stuff."

"We probably will."

Tucson's urban center is an unimportant place whose time passed with the passing of the railroads. The downtown area has a few up-to-date public buildings, a few mostly empty offices, an ancient cathedral, many closed-down stores, and much Mexican graffiti.

It was too hot to be outdoors, so Ellen and Joshua went into the public library. The blast of air conditioning felt like instant climate change, a drop of over forty degrees. Ellen took the baby into the bathroom and put paper towels on her bottom, for she had no diapers. For the first time in eleven years, she took off her head coverings. Her hair had gone to waist-length, but she had it closely braided around her head. She peered into the mirror, and decided she looked old and plain.

"You have red hair," Joshua said when she and the baby came out.

"Auburn actually," she replied.

"My mother has red hair."

"My mother has brown hair," she said. It was an unimportant detail to know about someone, Ellen thought, especially when you know little else. She decided to share something important.

"My mother was mad when I joined Aedis," she told Joshua. "She said I was making inappropriate choices."

"Why did you do it?"

"I have no idea," she replied. "It was something to do. I liked having someone tell me what to do all the time. What about you?"

"I heard the Pater speak, and I wanted to be like him," Joshua explained. "Then I got close to him and found out he was all messed up."

They stayed in the library until it closed at five o'clock. As they walked back into the dusty heat, Joshua kept looking at Ellen and the baby and thinking here he was—a grown man with a family and no way to provide for them, and that soon it would be dark. They went to bed at seven in the Aedis, so five o'clock felt like evening to Joshua. The Aedis had prayers at five o'clock, at seven, and twice during the night in order to keep their consciousness on God at all times, even during sleep. That night they would not pray at all.

Ellen and Joshua sat in the shade of some olive trees in the park in front of the library. A man with no teeth and who wore layers of dirty clothes asked Joshua for money. When he didn't give him any, the man spat on Joshua and called him a goddamn hippie Arab. It was unbearably hot, and soon it would be dark.

"Maybe we shouldn't have stayed in the library all day," Ellen said.

"It was best to read and collect ourselves," Joshua replied.

"You're right, of course."

The truth was Joshua had no idea what was right. For over fifteen years he had lived in a world of filled-in squares of time, his days divided into matrices of assigned tasks sectioned off by the ticking of clocks and the Pater himself. Now his future stretched before him like endless desert landscape and filled him with dread, constricting his chest in tight anxiety.

"I'd been thinking about leaving for a long time before I wrote you the note," Ellen said.

"Me too."

"How long?"

"Maybe a year."

"That's why we never had to talk about it," Ellen said. "We were both thinking the same thing. God was with us. It must be right for us to leave."

Joshua did not feel like talking. He was realizing that they had no place to go to the bathroom and no place to sleep. They had nothing to eat.

The city buildings were obscuring the evening sunset, a dramatic light show of turquoise and orange streaks ending in a deep purple finale. An old witchy woman with wild matted hair stood in front of Ellen. The woman had a terrible odor and for some reason, she wore fingerless gloves. Ellen instinctively pulled her baby closer to her chest.

"The cops won't let you sleep on the library lawn," the woman said. "See that sign? The one about curfew?"

"Yes," said Joshua.

"What? You're surprised I can read? Shit. I'm a college graduate." The old woman grew suddenly angry, but just as quickly, her tone softened.

"Cute baby," she said.

"Thank you," said Joshua.

"If you're hungry, you go by the pizza place at Church and Main. When people don't come and get their pizzas, they just throw them away."

"We're not hungry," Joshua lied.

"I don't want to steal your baby," she said to Ellen.

The old woman had a limp so that one of her feet stomped and the other dragged when she walked. It took a long time for her to disappear. As soon she was out of sight, Joshua and Ellen walked to Church and Main. Ellen and the baby hid while Joshua went into the dumpster and retrieved two cartons of untouched pizza. They ate both of them. Ellen chewed pieces and then put the cud into the baby's mouth. They folded some paper and put water from a public fountain in it, and then dropped water into the baby's mouth. Ellen wished she were nursing the baby, but the Pater did not allow any one woman to bond too closely to any one child.

Just as they finished eating, a tall heavy man in a white apron, white tee shirt, and white pants came out of the pizza place.

"You'll have to leave or I'll call the police," he said.

"We didn't do anything," Joshua replied.

"That's just it—you don't do anything. You should get a job. Look at you! You dirty Arabs!"

Joshua turned his back on the man, and Ellen followed Joshua. She believed he must know what he was doing and where they were going. It was now very dark and yet still very hot. Ellen was sweating, especially with the baby held so closely against her body. They were walking away from the downtown area and under a tunnel where railroads pass overhead but yet two men were sleeping underneath it. Their clothes were piled up in a heap that reminded Ellen of the rumpled mess left after Frosty the Snowman melted. One man had a large black garbage bag of tin cans next to him, and when he saw Joshua and Ellen, he pulled the bag closer toward himself. Karma, Ellen thought. He thinks I'll steal his bag. Karma coming back to me, from my thinking the old woman would steal my baby. Ellen decided she would have to learn to trust others if she was going to get along in the outside world. She sat down next to Joshua on the hard sidewalk with their backs against the black sides of the tunnel. It was cooler and darker in the tunnel, and she supposed no one would arrest them there for vagrancy.

"Are you from Tucson?" Joshua asked her.

"No," Ellen replied. "I just went to the university here. I grew up in New York."

"What about your parents?"

"I just have a mom," Ellen said. "She's a therapist. She always let me do whatever I wanted. No matter what I did, she'd say I was making great choices. That was her thing: you're making great choices, Ellen. She was upset when I joined the temple, but she said she would pay for my therapy when I got out."

"Did you know that the Pater joined us because we both were from Jewish backgrounds?" Joshua asked.

"That's dumb," Ellen said. "I've never been in a synagogue in my life."

"I got so I couldn't stand to be around the Pater," Joshua said. "He repulsed me. He was making me sick."

A train passed overhead, shaking the entire area, making the baby cry and waking up one of the men. Ellen could not sleep that night—she had only small lapses of unconsciousness. Once the sun came up, she stayed awake.

"We'll eat at the pizza place again," Joshua said. "Then we'll go to the library."

"We can't stay at the library every day."

"One thing at a time," Joshua replied in an annoyed voice.

"I'm sorry," Ellen apologized quickly. She had been wrong to say that. She wanted him to lead her. He had no idea how much she wanted him to lead. She believed Joshua knew how to manage their future because he was ten years older and more experienced. He knew they couldn't just stay in the library tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. It had been wrong of her to say anything.

Within a few hours, the downtown area had more traffic. People were walking to their jobs, looking busy and distracted to Ellen, as they posed over their little electronic devices and barely noticed one another. Ellen and Joshua just kept walking too, as if they were going somewhere. Ahead of them was a pinkish red cathedral with a statue of St. Francis on top. It was built in a maze of archways around one large church, where people were going in and out to morning mass.

"The church office looks open," Joshua said.

A large black middle-aged woman was sitting at the reception desk, and now she greeted them in a musical Kenyan accent.

"What a beautiful baby!" she said. "Do you need to see Father Michael?"

"No," said Joshua.

The Kenyan woman had what Joshua defined as "joyful soulitude," radiating religion and spirit the way the Pater had when Joshua first met him. The memory saddened him because all of that was lost now. He explained their situation to her, and asked her permission to use her telephone.

"Of course you can call your friends," she said. "But you can't live on the streets with a baby. We can give you shelter for the night."

Ellen breathed in relief. The few moments in the cathedral had felt luxurious with air conditioning, lighting, and soft carpeting until Joshua told Ellen to wait outside for him while he went into a small adjacent office to make his telephone call. The heat was so intense she felt the wetness of her eyes drying up.

Joshua was about to ask his father for money, and he did not want to do that in front of Ellen. The knot of anxiety in his chest sunk into his belly as the phone rang in Chicago.

"I've waited ten years for this call," his father said.

"Dad, I have a wife and baby."

"Out there in the desert? Are you nuts? You have a wife and a baby?"

"Dad, we need money," Joshua said.

"I'll send you three airline tickets, that's what. Three airline tickets."

"We need money, not airline tickets."

"Where do I send the tickets?" his father asked.

Joshua hesitated, and then gave him the address of the church.

"You said you're staying with friends." His father's voice was angry. "How can friends live in a church? I don't believe you. Are you on the streets or what?

"No," Joshua lied. "We're staying with friends."

"I'm sending airline tickets to the church. Three one-way tickets to Chicago."

"Don't do that, Dad."

"You're in no position to tell me what to do after what you've done to your mother and me. You should be ashamed of yourself. After what you put us through, you should be ashamed."

The Kenyan woman wandered into the room and was staring at Joshua with deep sympathy.

"A letter may come for me here," Joshua explained, putting authority in his voice as he hung up the phone. "I want you to keep it for me."

"Of course, my son. But won't you be staying with us?"

"We have appointments all afternoon," Joshua lied. "I have to leave now."

The sun was burning hot, even though it was still morning. Without hats or shelter, their skin was turning the sunset color of homeless people. The baby had stopped crying that morning, and that worried Joshua.

"I made some calls," Joshua told Ellen, "and we should be coming into some money soon. We'll look for an apartment and buy it when our money comes in."

Joshua had no idea how to look for an apartment, so they just kept walking around the downtown area. The only place they saw for rent was a small circular house that had long ago been a sweet shop. It was shaped like an ice cone with a light brown bottom and a white swirly top like a swirl of vanilla ice cream. To Ellen, the place looked sweet and cold in a world that was hot and cruel. They waited outside the ice cream house for several hours for the owner to come by. Finally Joshua went into a gas station where an attendant let him use the phone to call the owner.

Ellen pictured herself living in the ice cream house. Its two rooms were odd shapes. One was a tiny kitchen overwhelmed by two huge freezers, and the other was a big circular room with windows all around it and a counter where people used to buy cones.

"It could be quite homey," the owner said. "It's only $400 a month."

"I love it," Ellen said. "We could move in tonight. Do we have $400?"

"You kids'll need $1200 to rent it," the man replied. "You know—first and last month's rent, along with the current month. I need a $1200 deposit."

"We'll have to think about it," Joshua said.

"Not many will rent to people like you," the owner told them. "You should grab it."

After he drove away, they walked to the library again. It was only two in the afternoon, and Joshua had no idea what to do next. The baby had not moved for several hours and seemed to be breathing too slowly.

"You stay here," Joshua said. "I'm going to check and see if our money came."

He walked alone to the church, knowing that no money had come. The Kenyan woman was talking into the phone, and that annoyed him so he

walked out. He felt faint and dizzy from going from extreme heat into air conditioning and back into heat again.

Joshua walked for several blocks and came to the Department of Economic Security, which was housed in a flat ugly building with a 1980s corporate feel. He thought maybe "Economic Security" meant welfare department so he went inside. The walls were a sick yellow, and the floor was a strange worn-out linoleum in the obscure gray color that floors become after too many footsteps and too little swabbing. People were sitting in a row of wooden chairs in the reception area, and Joshua recognized the old witchy woman from the night before. They both looked down to avoid one another.

Joshua went into the bathroom and took his turban off for the first time. He was balding and had more hair on his face than on his head. His head looked particularly white in contrast to the sunburn of his face and neck. He looked strange, even to himself, and he could understand why people in the outside world had been leery of him.

The social worker who met with Joshua was a middle-aged Latina woman with soulful eyes and a quick way of speaking. When he explained that he had a three-month-old baby, she grew upset.

"Why didn't you come here last night?" she asked. "It's already four o'clock and you're undomiciled. I don't need a Section 8 Undomiciled at the end of my day."

She pulled out a brochure of available apartments for him. By now Joshua's head was aching, and he felt weary from hunger. The listings used words he did not understand, like "studio" and "2BRS," and he did not know the difference between living on the north or south or east or west side of Tucson. He felt tears well up in his eyes, and he bit down hard to hold them back. He had no idea which apartment to choose. He looked at the pictures of the apartments. Trying to decide on one gave him so much anxiety that he just picked one at random. The social worker gave him fare for the bus and directions how to find the apartment, and then she gave him food stamps. She told him to return tomorrow and she would give him money for essential furniture. She phoned the landlord to alert him that two new Section 8 residents and their baby were on their way to his place.

"Now remember—save enough for carfare tomorrow," she said. "Come back first thing tomorrow morning."

That night Ellen and Joshua were able to shop at a grocery store. For the first time in two days, they had enough to eat, and the baby had diapers and a bottle of formula.

"It's a wonderful place," Ellen said as they walked inside the empty apartment. "It's nice and cool. The blue rugs are pretty."

"I made a great choice," Joshua said.

Night was falling. The baby was asleep and Ellen was washing her hair as Joshua stood in the doorstep of the apartment. His view was of the parking lot that supported the shopping center where they had brought groceries. He felt extremely pleased with himself as he stood in his doorway and watched cars come and go, enjoying the cool air conditioning on his back.

The nextdoor neighbor came out and sat on his tiny porch, one that was identical to Joshua's. The man was dressed in a Harley Davidson shirt and smoking a cigarette in the semi-darkness.

"I really like this place," Joshua said. "The fitness center. The bathroom. It's all good."

The man took a drag on his cigarette and ignored Joshua. Joshua did not notice that he was annoying the man and just kept talking in an expansive way.

"I really think it's a great place," Joshua said. "Really great."

"It's okay," the man said. "White walls. Blue rugs. I've lived in a million of them. They're the same all over the goddamn country."

Inside the apartment Ellen was holding her baby. She was sitting on the blue carpeted floor of the living room with her back against the white wall, afraid to put the baby down so as not to wake her. It was peaceful there, more peaceful than the railroad tunnel. The apartment had an unadorned plainness. She would have preferred the ice cream house.

Her wet hair was drying quickly in this place without humidity. Her red hair was long and thick in tight curls down to her waist.

Ellen was remembering a day some years ago when she was twelve years old and in middle school. She was with girlfriends, giggly sweet girlfriends, and they had gone to a movie. It was a Julia Roberts romantic comedy, and the actress played a beautiful heroine with a thousand men after her. Which would she choose? Which man would she love and cherish? She was so beautiful and she had so many choices. Every girl wanted to be like her.

After the movie Ellen's girlfriends told her she looked like Julia Roberts. Ellen was thrilled but she had said no and put on the false modesty that preteen girls assume when their girlfriends compliment them. But you have big curly red hair, the girls insisted, hair like Julia Roberts.

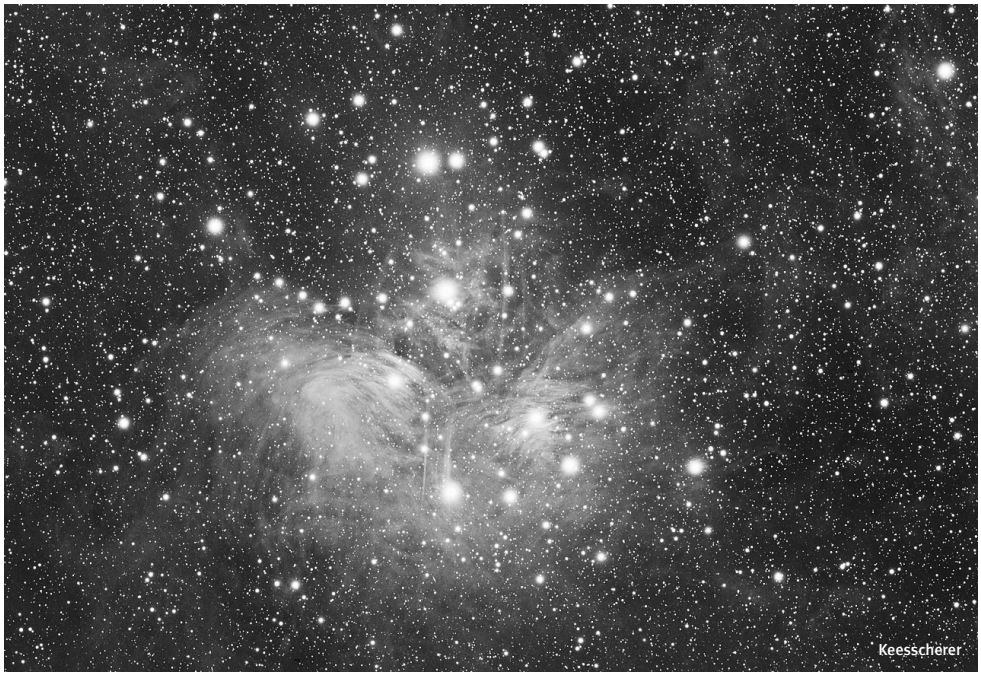
A wet tear cascaded down Ellen's cheeks. She was thinking about Joshua. She was holding her baby and thinking about her choices—the choices from the past, and the choices to make later.



Jane St. Clair graduated from Northwestern University and worked on the staff of *Sesame Street*. Her first novel, *Walk Me to Midnight*, was published by Oak Tara Press in 2009. Over 20 of the her short stories have appeared in literary magazines and anthologies, and she has won several national writing contests, including Writers Network. She has published 24 children's books in Korea, and 54 children's stories with the Arkansas Reading Project.

Christian Monson

Immeasurable



Our Father who art in Heaven…"

I stop listening and start counting. The population of India is one billion, two hundred and ten million, one hundred and ninety-three thousand, four hundred and twenty-two. China's is one billion, three hundred and fifty three million, eight hundred and twenty-one thousand, two hundred and fifty-three. That's two billion, five hundred sixty-four million, fourteen thousand, six hundred seventy-five people I've never met and probably never will. When you think about it like that, shouldn't never meeting one person seem trivial?

"… grow up strong and healthy …"

Adam isn't next to me. He's up by the pulpit with nine of his friends giving a blessing to Tess's brand-new baby boy.

"… discern good from evil …"

I'm alone in the last of the thirteen pews, the short one where no one ever sits. I told Adam this is where I wanted to sit from now on. Not with Tess, not with her husband David, or their new child. Sometimes Adam is asked to pass the sacrament, and I get to sit completely alone, adding the hymn numbers, multiplying the people in the cold chapel by the seconds on the synchronized clocks.

In the hallway after sacrament meeting, Tess is holding her child, rocking him. "Hey, are you doing okay?" she asks me and runs her fingers through her child's hair.

"I'm fine."

"Are you coming to Relief Society?" she says.

"I don't know," I say. "I'm tired."

"Come on," she says. "You haven't been in three weeks."

"Four," I say. "Okay."

Adam is talking to David. They are smiling. I can see the particles of light dance from their white teeth to their white shirts and drown in their ridiculous ties. The American flag, the twenty-three and one half trombones.

In Relief Society meeting, twenty percent of the women have babies, and half of them are crying.

How can we be better sisters? How can we be better wives and mothers? This is the lesson. Tess is sitting next to me. With one hand she shakes a toy in front of her baby, who lies on the floor. The other is on my leg.

After the meeting I am a star floating aimlessly in this frigid universe. The other sisters come like comets and asteroids. Do you need anything? I can always ask Lehi to come give you a blessing. Others are like planets, slowly falling into me. Read the second page in the ninth chapter of L. Tom Perry's book. I was praying last night and I thought the first verse of the sixth chapter of Third Nephi might really help you.

We get home and Adam kisses me on the forehead. "Are you all right?"

"I'm going to go for a walk," I say.

"Don't you want to eat," he says and embraces me.

I spring away. "I'm just going to campus."

The dry Utah heat is radiating off the asphalt of the bike trail, and the sprinklers are making their wide sweeps across it. Every time I walk to campus it takes thirty-seven minutes. I've made this walk forty times. That's one thousand, four hundred and eighty minutes, or twenty-four and two-thirds hours, barely more than one day. To reach one month, I will have to walk it one thousand, one hundred and sixty more times, but that is what I'm going to do.

On campus I go to the small observatory on the seventh floor of BYU's ESC building, climbing the one hundred and fifty-eight steps to get there. I am no longer a student, but my old professor and thesis advisor Dr. Graham gave me a key.

In the observatory, I just sit until the sun goes down. I think about the millions of pathetic sperm Adam released into me and the chances in percentages that the weak one made it first, the one that couldn't hold out just another month. The decimal goes out for pages. I calculate the trillions of miles between this galaxy and the next, the incredible emptiness between even the closest stars. Then I find the number of miles the earth must travel in thirty days, and it is so small that it sometimes makes me weep.

When the sun finally does go down, I open the roof and peer out the telescope at unbreathing, sleepless space. I search for the planet that twirls somewhere out there, the one where my miscarried child should be waiting. So many people have assured me this is the case, pointed at the sky with their fingers. The gospel doctrine teacher said she would be right on the other side of the veil when I get to Kolob.

It is easy for them to think this could be comforting when their babies are breathing and smiling and riding this useless planet around the sun. None of them knows that this galaxy alone contains one hundred million stars all swarmed by planets, and in this hundred-billion-galaxy universe, I could visit one a day and never see them all before everything collapses in its whimpering end. I hate them all for it. I hate their homemade cookies and their cards. I hate their puking babies that they can so carelessly rest on one hip, not knowing the microscopic points of balance keeping them from death, handing me printouts of conference talks and invites to Relief Society activities.

I am twenty-two years, five months, and eighteen days old. I am exactly sixty-five point three four inches tall. I have blonde hair and blue eyes. I have three freckles on my throat that form a scalene triangle and a scar on my left knee that is thirty-six millimeters long.

I graduated from BYU seventy-three days ago with a Bachelor of Science in physics and math with a minor in astronomy. I had two honors recognitions and the highest GPA in my department at a solid four point zero. I was published once in the *Utah Journal of Astrophysics* for my research concerning the orbits of planets in trinary star systems. I have a perfect one-seventy on both sections of the GRE.

I married Adam last August, eleven days before the start of the semester. He is twenty-two years, nine months, and two days old. He returned from a mission to Taiwan in May of last year, and that is also the month we started dating. Exactly fifteen days, four hours, and ten minutes afterward, we had our first kiss. He is a rising junior at BYU and has two years left before he will graduate with a degree in information systems with a minor in Chinese. He has a slightly above average GPA of three point zero nine. He told me his Chinese advisor said he "kind of has a knack for languages."

He proposed twenty-nine days after we kissed at eleven thousand, seven hundred, and fifty-two feet above Provo on top of Mt. Timpanogos. I knew he thought it was romantic, but at least thirty-one other returned missionaries had done the same thing that year. While the earth turned its back slowly to the sun and Adam built up the awkward courage to get down on one knee, I counted all the excited announcements in the summit's log-in notebook.

"Wait," I said when he kneeled down. He was struggling to get the ring out of his pocket, and I said, "Wait, stop."

His face flushed. "There's just something you should know before you ask," I said.

"What?"

"I can't have children," I said.

"You can't have children?" he said as if those four words made no sense together. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," I said. "They told me when I was fourteen years old."

"What do you mean? They told you what?"

"The doctor told me something is wrong with me. I can't get pregnant."

"There's no chance?"

"He said I can't have children," I said. "Do you still want to marry me?"

He kneeled in silence, and I stood there. "I want a family," he said finally. "And I know Heavenly Father wants me to have a family," he said. "I've fasted and prayed, and I also know he wants me to marry you. He has a plan for us."

"Adam," I said. "You can't be waiting for a miracle. Do you still want to marry me?"

He dug the ring out of his pocket. It gleamed like a star. In Provo every street corner has an outlet where you can go in and promise to pay ten, twenty, thirty percent extra if they give one to you on credit, or they'll fit them into your grandpa's old band. It's just a rock, but I could see what it meant to him, to become sealed to a woman in the temple, to bring her through the veil and speak the sacred names. "Of course," he said. "I love you."

It took just forty-one days before Adam asked if he could give me a blessing.

"Please don't do this," I said.

"What's the harm," he said. "I know Heavenly Father will bless us with a family," he said. "My patriarchal blessing says my seed will number great in the Kingdom of the Lord."

Six months and three days after he gave me that blessing, after he poured the olive oil into my hair and laid his hands on my head, after he called upon the Spirit of God to heal my womb, my urine caused a home pregnancy test to read positive. It was the day after the spring equinox, and the northern hemisphere was beginning to tilt toward the sun.

Adam had lied and waited for a miracle, and now he had it. I knelt before the toilet and vomited over and over again, eleven times, then twelve, and when it seemed everything inside of me had been expelled, my body just kept trying. I lurched and heaved like that with my eyes red and bulging for three hours and twenty-seven minutes until Adam came home from classes.

When I told him why I myself was not in class, he cried with joy and threw his arms around me. "I knew it," he said. "The power of faith." That evening we read the scriptures and Adam prayed. Afterward we made love. I felt how he and I met together, and the cells inside me that we'd created, how they divided and multiplied out to what I thought would be forever. Our closeness had accomplished the impossible.

When I told Tess over the phone, she cried. "Let me introduce you to my obstetrician," she said. "Want to come baby clothes shopping with me this weekend? This is just incredible. I can hardly believe it."

The four months of my pregnancy passed this way. Everyone in the ward saw me as a miracle and a blessing. Everyone stood up in testimony meeting and said I was how they knew the power of the Priesthood was real. After Relief Society meetings I had an orbit of women. Let me know if you need a ride to the doctor. When I was pregnant, ginger really helped with the morning sickness.

A month before she died we had an ultrasound. The doctor waved the bursts of energy across my belly, and the monitor erupted with the image of a human girl. In the center pulsed her rhythmic heart.

"Would you like to hear?" the doctor asked us, and Adam and I listened to it thump its measured beat. The sound was full, and it echoed through my ears. Nothing found a place in my mind but that sound, so loud I wondered if the bounds of this universe could really contain it. We listened until the doctor smiled and said, "I'm sorry, but I do have another appointment soon."

We named her right then, "Noel." I went home and threw away my applications for MIT and CalTech. I bought baby books. I measured fabric for a blanket and footy pajamas. I got a little mobile to hang above her crib, one with planets and rocketships and a tiny sun in the center. At night, after Adam fell asleep, I would lie awake and try to blank my mind again, fill it with nothing but that sound again.

I walk home. The sprinklers are still on. On the sidewalk just a little past Cougar Stadium, a cat scurries in between the streams of water. When she finally gets away from one, she takes three confident steps before the next one hits her. Finally, she makes it to a bush.

I crouch down to look at her. "It's okay," I say. "It's not really raining. It's okay."

She whimpers.

"Come on," I say. "It's okay. Let's get you dry." I reach in, and she doesn't resist as I lift her out.

It takes another eighteen minutes to walk home, and her tail begins to brush across my arm. She is maybe seven pounds and a few ounces. She is black with two white splotches above her eyes like constellations.

At home Adam is working on homework, and I say nothing. I take the cat into the kitchen. "I'm sorry," I say to her. "We're going to have to get you wet again."

Adam comes in and laughs out loud. "What are you doing?"

"Giving her a bath."

"Who is she?" he says.

"'Pleiades,'" I say. "Like the stars? Her eyes just kind of sparkle like that. And it's pretty, right?"

"Honey, what are you doing?"

"Giving Pleiades a bath."

"What, are you planning on keeping this cat?" he says.

Pleiades is struggling and growling in the sink. "Can you use human soap on cats?" I say. "I don't think you can. Shampoo?"

"We can't keep a cat."

"Watch her right quick," I say. I go and get shampoo from the bathroom. I lather it into Pleiades's skin. She squirms in my hands.

Adam touches my arm. "I know what this is about."

I turn on the water to rinse Pleiades, and she starts to thrash. "You don't know anything," I say.

"We just can't have pets in the apartment," he says. "We'll get kicked out."

"She has to stay here," I say. I shake his hand off my wrist.

"I wish she could," he says.

"Yeah, right," I say.

"Please," he says. "Maybe when we move we can get a cat, but just not right now. It's not up to me."

"It's never your fault," I say.

"What do you mean?"

"She's staying," I say. "Okay?"

"This is about Noel, isn't it?"

I cringe when he says her name, his tongue pronouncing all four distinct sounds. "I said you don't know anything." I dry off Pleiades with the dish towel and take her back to the bedroom.

Adam comes in without knocking. "Please," he says. "If we need to talk about Noel, let's talk about her, but we can't keep this cat."

Pleiades is exploring the bed, but as he comes closer, I pick her up. She leaves three red streaks down my arm. "Look," I say. "You startled her."

"You need to let her go," Adam says.

His skin flushes and his pupils shrink and expand in the light. I can tell he thinks he's smart. He thinks he's said something profound, maybe even poetic, like his cliché, boring proposal. I hate him too, hate the sum of his thoughts. They do nothing but subtract from everything I am.

"Adam," I say. "You don't know anything about this. You don't know anything about my baby. You don't know anything."

"You can't blame me," he says. "It wasn't my fault."

Pleiades is digging into the blankets. "It was your fault," I say. "I never even wanted her."

"I didn't know that could happen," he says.

"Right," I say. "Yeah, we need some food for Pleiades," I say. "Do we have any sliced meat? Milk? Or that's not actually good for cats." I pick Pleiades up and walk back to the kitchen.

Adam follows me. "If you didn't want her anyway, then why are you even upset?"

"I'm not."

"Then why do you want to sit in the back of the chapel? You haven't been going to Relief Society. Tess says you haven't let her come visiting teaching in a month. You're demanding we keep stray cats."

I put Pleiades on the floor. She wanders around looking in cupboards. "Tuna," I say. "Cats love tuna. Hand me the can opener."

Adam picks her up and walks to the front door. "No," I scream. I chase after him as he descends the twenty-four steps to the lobby door. "Stop." I grab his arm.

"We are not keeping this cat," he says. "We can't, okay? That's just the way it is, okay? Just like Noel. It's just the way it is. It's no one's fault." He opens the door and sets Pleiades on the ground. She doesn't look back but instead runs off into the city.

I fall to my knees. "It is your fault," I scream. "It's all your fault. I didn't even want her. Four months? All you could give me was four miserable months? They could've cut her out of me at five. I don't care. Kept her plugged in in one of those glass cubes. Thirty days? Seven hundred and

twenty hours? Forty-three thousand, two hundred minutes? That's nothing, and it's all I'm asking. I didn't even want her, just one single more month with her, and it's all your fault."

He kneels down beside me, eclipsing me in the pale student housing light. He says something about her waiting for us beyond the veil. He says something about eternity. I stand up and run out the door.

I walk the path I always walk. There are no cars on the road or lights on in any of the buildings. I call for Pleiades, but of course she doesn't respond. I check under bushes and under cars, but she is nowhere. It takes me twenty-seven extra minutes to get to the observatory, or sixty-four altogether.

Inside I think about the meaningless word people keep saying to me. "Eternity." They treat it like a number, but it isn't one. I cannot find the derivative of eternity. I cannot insert eternity into an equation and make it make sense. And most of all, I cannot put my eye against the telescope, look out into eternity and see anything but the inherent stillness, the ultimate pause of everything.

I was fourteen when I found out I couldn't have children. I'd begun menstruating some time before my thirteenth birthday, and each month it was unbearable. Of course my mother told me that was just part of being a woman. She didn't realize it was any different for me than it was for her. When I passed out from pain during seminary one day, though, she finally took me to a doctor.

"The problem is certainly reproductive," he told me. "I'm sorry to tell you this," he said. "It's unlikely you'll ever have children."

For many days I held this in my mind and tried to figure out what it meant to me, until that Sunday at church, when the lesson in Mia Maids was about the blessings of motherhood. Nobody knew about me, and on the chalkboard the teacher drew a big Venn diagram. One circle was for the blessings men receive.

"The Priesthood," said a voice up front. "Leadership."

The teacher then pointed to the other circle. I was sitting in the back. That was the first time I remember numbers running through my head like they do.

"…bearing children…"

One tear rolled down my cheek and fell onto my knee. I felt the splash on my leg.

"…caring for children and the home…"

A second tear fell off my face.

"…eternal motherhood…"

A third tear came, then a fourth, a fifth. I counted each of them and the seconds they clung to my chin before dropping. No one could see, and no one noticed. I ran out of the room, down the hall and out into the churchyard. I stared at the sun and felt how it stood motionless while I spun helplessly around it. I stood there measuring the turn of the earth and counting my tears.

That night I don't go home. I push five chairs together and sleep in the observatory. I leave the roof open and watch as meteors come crashing through the layers of my planet, the one I'm stuck to.

The sun comes up, and it wakes me. It's Pioneer Day, so there will be no classes. Tonight there will be fireworks, and Adam and I were supposed to meet Tess and David over by the stadium to lie on a blanket and watch the show.

"Is that okay for the baby?" I'd said to Tess.

"I don't know," she'd said. "Why wouldn't it be?"

Adam has called several times in the night. I delete each voicemail without listening. It is a long time before the fireworks, and I don't want to go home. Instead, I go to the university library. I print off one hundred and twenty fliers. They read, in size seventy-two font, "Missing Cat! Black with two white spots above her eyes. Responds to 'Pleiades.'"

By the time I'm finished hanging them, the sun is setting and people are beginning to shoot off fireworks and bottle rockets. The streets are lined with people in their geometric blanket formations, on lawn chairs, their coolers opened. They're facing the stadium, waiting for the show.

I'm walking in between the blankets when I see a cat running from the explosions in an apartment parking lot. I follow her and find Pleiades again trembling underneath a truck. I take her to the observatory.

When I get there, Venus has showed herself, and Adam calls again. He's with Tess and David, and they're still expecting me to meet them. I'm sure Tess is talking in a pointlessly high-pitched voice to her baby, waving toys in front of his face. I'm sure if I go, she'll have had decided on the most delicate way to tell me he grinned for the first time or held a rattle. I let it ring its full eight rings and go to voicemail.

The fireworks show starts, and we are close enough that the shock waves shake the building. Pleiades cowers under a chair. I pick her up and rock her till she purrs. "It's okay," I say. "You know, people think these fireworks are special, but they're not. They can't even leave the atmosphere. They can't even reach escape velocity, which is basically nothing."

Pleiades rubs her head on my hand, and I keep talking to her. "The fastest manmade object is the Voyager One," I say. "It's going so fast that it's about to leave the solar system. It's going eleven miles every second. Still," I say, "if it were headed straight for Andromeda, the nearest major galaxy to ours, it wouldn't make it before the universe ends in sixty billion years."

She is warm in my arms, and I can feel her vibrations in my own chest. "That," I say, "is what eternity means."

The night everything went wrong and Adam rushed me to the hospital, they delivered my dead daughter and brought her all stiff and elephant-like to where I lay immeasurably emptied. I guess some women need to feel the matter finished or even try to breathe life back into it, but I just held her and counted things. The doctors came in to console me and explain, but I did not listen.

"…along the uterine wall…"

I counted her ten fingers, her ten toes.

"…possibility that after another month…"

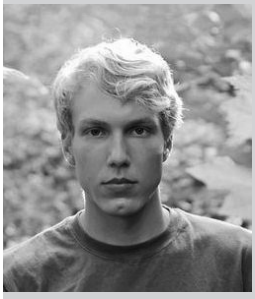
I counted her two eyes and how they lay at perfect distances from her two ears. I counted her four limbs, her two hands and her two feet.

"…never come to full term…"

I counted her one eternally muted heart.

A Brief Description of Mormon Doctrine

The Mormon faith maintains certain doctrines regarding gender roles, family, and reproduction. Specifically, men and women have different roles in the church and home that are emphasized and taught from a young age. While men are both religious and familial leaders ordained with the "priesthood," women are responsible for caring for the home and, most importantly, carrying and raising children, which is seen as an incredible blessing and one of the most important roles God has given to humanity. Additionally, family is a focal point of Mormon doctrine. A fundamental practice of the church is "sealing" family members so that they will remain together throughout eternity. A high value is placed on large nuclear families and harmonious homes, and this is reflected in many hymns and scriptures. It is not uncommon for members to be married and starting families before graduating college.



Christian Monson received his BA in English and German from the University of Arkansas in 2012, after which he was a Fulbright Fellow in Germany. He currently lives in Mallorca, Spain. His work has also been featured in *Black Rabbit Magazine*, *Analog Science Fiction & Fact*, and *Daily Science Fiction*. You can see more at ChristianMonson.com.

Jim Morgan

Deep Ends



algotruneman

It was just a little trickle in the shower, a fleeting flash of gold, just a little bit sour. Jack hummed the words in his head. Now he was becoming a bathroom poet? And not a good one. Quite a step down from his glory days of eardrum-rending songs in that perfect echo chamber. But Jack no longer gave voice to music. His operatic days were in another life. You have to take what is coming. Accept realities. Deal with them.

Nice philosophies, perhaps, but wasn't it ironic that an aerospace engineer who designed controls for intercontinental ballistic missiles could no longer control his own incontinent ballistic bladder. Try as he might—even sitting down like a girlie-man for ten minutes on the can—he couldn't fully drain his plumbing before entering the shower. There was always some leakage. Always.

Would Stella notice? Of course she would. She had her mother's nose and could detect, like a bloodhound to a spoor, the faintest trace of urinary transgression. Stella had last cleaned his bathroom a week ago. Her scolding voice still reverberated, "The shower is not a toilet!" Well, Daughter, forgive me, for I have sinned.

He finished soaping, shampooing, and rinsing, then toweled off and returned to the shower with a rag and a spray bottle of Clorox. He squeezed the trigger and tiny droplets sprinkled out, descending in a fine mist over the undrained puddles. That should remove all trace. Grasping the safety rail, he leaned over to wipe the floor, but felt something sear like blazing rocket fuel through the muscles of his back. Oh Lord, that hurt! He groaned and straightened up

Undaunted, he tried a new approach. After all, he was an engineer. He balanced on his feeble right leg, extended his left, dropped the cloth and swished it around with his foot. But his right knee buckled; he lost balance, almost fell. The wrinkled sole of his left foot slipped and screeched on the tiles, incredibly loud, like a semi skidding on a rainy road.

There was a pounding on his bedroom door. "Are you all right in there?" Stella called. She clearly had her mother's ears also. He thumped twice on

the wall, their agreed upon "okay" signal. Twice for "yes" made more sense than once; after all, if you were lying in a heap, you'd be lucky to thump once, if at all. "Remember, we need to leave in half an hour," Stella continued. "Be out in ten minutes if you want a quick bite first. We can't be late for church again this week."

Okay. Jack shrugged, flipped the sopping rag into a corner, then shuffled to the dresser for his underwear. Sure enough, Stella had washed and folded them; they were as clean as high efficiency detergent could bleach them, but were not quite white. Old, lingering stains, yellow, gray, and brown remained. And Stella hadn't been happy about it. Next to the shorts was a large box of adult diapers. Jack's face flushed red. Another indignity. Ignoring the less-than-subtle hint, he selected the least-stained briefs and an undershirt, and made his way to the closet.

His Sunday clothes were right in front, organized for ease of dressing. The charcoal gray suit hung from a wooden hanger, his black belt nestled in the trousers. Next to it was a clean, white shirt, and looped around the collar was his red-and-blue-striped silk power tie, the one he'd worn to important meetings back when his work was still a career. The knot was already tied, forming a *Stroopdas*—Dutch for hangman's noose. Just insert head and tighten. Beneath were his black wingtips with a pair of black stockings inserted.

Last week he'd just left the clothes crumpled on hangers or strewn on the floor, and they stayed where laid until Stella discovered them. He knew he should be grateful to her and winced, feeling a ripple of shame and self-loathing. He was less than useless. All he did was make things harder for others. If one of his missiles had veered this far off its intended course, he'd have pushed the destruct button. In the past year, he'd considered auto-destruct for himself, but held back, hoping for a clean splash-down, harmless to his loved-ones. That hope was fading.

There was another rap on his door. "Last call for breakfast."

Well, he'd have to miss it. Jack retrieved his Sunday wardrobe and laid it on the bed. He turned back to shut the closet door, then suddenly noticed how spacious it looked inside. Many of his comfortable, if careworn, cardigans, golf shirts, and slacks—old friends, heirloom gifts from Christmases and birthdays past—were missing. Stella again. She meant well, no doubt, but what was so hard about giving him a say? He looked around the room to see what else might be missing. Nothing obvious. He sighed. At least the framed portrait of his beautiful Mary was preserved on the end table, close to his pillow. Next to it was a glass of water and a neat array of pills, just enough to preserve him, not enough to O.D.

He sat on the bed and pulled up his pants, glancing at Mary's picture, seeking reassurance. He didn't want to burden his kids, but refused to leave his home. He really would rather die. Mary and he

had lived their suburban dream for decades in their red-brick rambler at 4321 Blisthoff Lane. They'd raised a son and two daughters here through alternately fun and difficult elementary, junior, and senior high school years. Looking through the rear window blinds he spotted the old swing set that had held and propelled dozens of juvenile backsides into joyous altitudes. Back and forth. Up and down. Worn out chains and plastic seats repeatedly replaced and recently refurbished for the new generation of grandkids.

Nearby, shriveling gold and brown leaves stubbornly clung to their stems on the old apricot tree. But a few had broken free to flutter across the waist-high, chainlink fence surrounding the swimming pool, to gently land and float aimlessly on the tranquil water of the deep end. Soon the pool would be drained for the season—he'd done the job himself countless times, working the valves under the diving board—to make an empty tomb, covered for the winter by a black vinyl shroud. Soon a multitude of leaves would pile there to rot.

But enough gloomy thoughts. In their comfortable home and well-kept yard, he and Mary had hosted countless birthday and swimming parties and sleepovers, greeted a succession of boyfriends and girlfriends, and had held two wedding receptions. He'd broiled herds of Black Angus on the patio grill, entertaining (or torturing) family, friends, and neighbors with his stockpile of dumb jokes and limericks, while Mary made amends with superb salads and delicious deserts. This was home, a soft place to land during hard times and disappointments. They'd added on a guest room and restroom in the rear to take care of Mary's mom in her faltering years. Jack now occupied those rooms. They'd lived together here many a happy year—the last few as blissful empty-nesters—until Mary moved on, leaving the nest unbearably empty.

At least she left this life easy, he thought. Three steps and a face-plant. No perpetual pain, loss of mind, or carved up body parts. No scorching radiation beams or near-lethal chemical injections. Not for her the lingering death, or half-life, that was his without her.

But the blow of her sudden death had struck him hard, landing him in the hospital for weeks. He'd had to miss her funeral. The stroke had weakened his right side and ravaged his vocal chords. Jack seldom spoke now. Few understood him when he did. Not his former friends. Not his grown-up children. Only the grandkids—especially the littlest ones—seemed to comprehend. They laughed and giggled when he talked.

Shortly after his release, his son and daughters convened a family council—or intervention. The house was too big. Too many stairs. He couldn't maintain the house or yard. He couldn't be left alone; the kitchen ceiling was still black from a grease fire. What if he fell? He could barely mumble; how could he call for help? Who would manage his pills? There were just two choices: sell the house and move Dad in with one of them, or find a nice care center.

"No!" Jack was adamant. He'd remained silent until then, but bristled at that last oxymoron. A *nice* care center? Really? You had to pay someone—a lot—to be nice? Or to care? Not a chance. Those places had often been the butt of his jokes:

"A couple goes to a care center to see how their dad is doing. The director tells them, 'Great! Every night we give him a glass of warm milk and Viagra pill.' 'What?' cry the shaken couple. 'Sure, the warm milk helps him sleep, and the Viagra keeps him from rolling off the bed.'" Or,

"Some siblings interview the manager of an assisted living center in his office, leaving their aging dad outside, sitting in his wheelchair at a busy hallway intersection. He starts to lean to the right, but a passing attendant straightens him up. He soon begins to bank to the left, but a nurse spots him and helps him get back vertical. The elderly man then droops forward, but the ever-efficient orderlies quickly set him upright again. About that time his kids come out of the office and say, 'Well, Dad, we're impressed with this place. What do you think? Would you like to stay here?' 'Hell no,' says the old man, 'they won't even let you fart.'"

None of those stories had a happy ending. Well, maybe the Viagra.

No, those places were not for him. Assisted living was not living. He'd prefer assisted dying. Despite his stroke, Jack was determined to stay put. If he had to move away, he would find a way to autodestruct . . . *accidentally* fall in the deep end of the pool?

So his progeny had acquiesced. Instead of moving him, one would move in with him. Bring the mountain to Mohammed. Jack was in no position to refuse.

Another sharp knock broke in on his musings. "Five minutes to go," said Stella, loudly. She also shouted the same notice down the hall, directed at her boys. Jack fumbled with his shirt buttons.

His son had lucked out and ducked out. He lived out-of-state. That left the girls.

Annie had drawn the short straw. She and her husband, Marcus, left their junky three-bedroom apartment in the city and brought their junk with them, turning Jack's house into a third-world hovel, re-decorated with psychedelic prints, primitive papier-mâché masks, nude etchings and weird concept art. Annie and Marcus took the master bedroom; their three girls tussled for roosting rights in the adjoining bedrooms. They also brought two dogs and half-a-dozen cats—"inside" animals that barked and mewed and chased and shed fur and pet odor all over his furniture, his carpet, and his kitchen counters. Polished woodwork and bookcases became scratching posts; leather chairs became chew toys.

Housekeeping was non-existent, the kitchen became a filthy, cluttered horror. When Annie was small, she had a T-shirt that read, "Clean Rooms are Boring." It was supposed to have been a joke.

Politics, religion, and diet were poisonous subjects; it was just as well he could no longer debate with these crackpot, liberal, new age vegetarians. Jack loved them all, but their idea of caring for him seemed to be limited to sprinkling homeopathic dust onto the pale, semi-solid blocks of soy "toad-food" and slimy green sludge they boiled and served.

He'd retreated to his sanctuary, read books, watched TV, lost weight, and weighed his options. Would life in a care center really be much worse than this? Or even better? Or would, perhaps, the pool's deep end be a better choice? How much longer would he have access?

Fortunately, after six months, Annie and Mark had abruptly moved out. Since Stella was already assisting her elderly in-laws who lived nearby, she quickly stepped in to help her dad. Renting out her own house, she relocated her family to Blisthoff Lane.

Stella hired professional cleaners to scour Jack's house and expunge the pet residue. His damaged furniture got donated; she installed their own, including a 70" flat screen TV to keep her sports-addicted husband happy, and they settled seamlessly in. Soon the kitchen exuded wonderful smells again—roast beef, chicken, and ham—a carnivore's delight—with baked potatoes and gravy. Jack had emerged from his refuge in wonder, half-expecting to see Mary. With tearful eyes, he'd hugged his daughter and even composed an apropos poem:

With three parents aging and sick,
Stella skates through care-giving slick.
In no way deficient,
She scores an efficient
Geriatric hat trick!

Unfortunately, the euphoria soon faded. Efficiency, too, had its price. Stella ran a very tight ship. No slack for compromise. Her husband and boys either obeyed or stayed out of the way. It was a very different equilibrium from what Mary and Jack had fashioned over forty-five years of marriage. He gradually withdrew again to his haven in the back.

Stella's obsession with odor repression was borderline manic. Her grade-school sons still wore Pampers Pull-ups at night. Now she expected her dad to wear them, too? Treating him like a child? Insulting. Unacceptable! The line had to be drawn. Tucking his tie under his collar, he tightened the obstinate Windsor knot. The stroke may have taken his voice—and degraded his motor controls—but his mind was still lucid! He'd be brow-beaten no more.

"It's time to go," Stella shouted to the family in general, her voice shrill. "Now!"

Jack flinched, and flushed again, then felt the dreaded warm trickle in his briefs. Damn it, he thought, this is intolerable. Another sharp rap on his door. It popped open a crack. He quickly turned away to hide the dark patch spreading in the crotch of his trousers. Utterly humiliated, his longing for the pool's depths became acute. He yearned to be swallowed up, to just let go . . . .

"Well, are you finally ready, Dad?" She pushed his door open wider. "And do you think you can keep your pants dry this week?"

He growled. "Why don't you just shove me in the deep end!" Jack struggled to force the words out, but through his rasping croak, only the last two were audible.

"*Depends*?" Stella exclaimed, beaming. "Fantastic! When I bought the box this week, I never thought you'd put them on. No more embarrassing smells, no more stares from the neighbors. What a relief. Okay, everyone, let's go! "

Jack ground his teeth, took hold of his cane and leaned unsteadily on it.

"Billy, come help Grandpa out to the car."

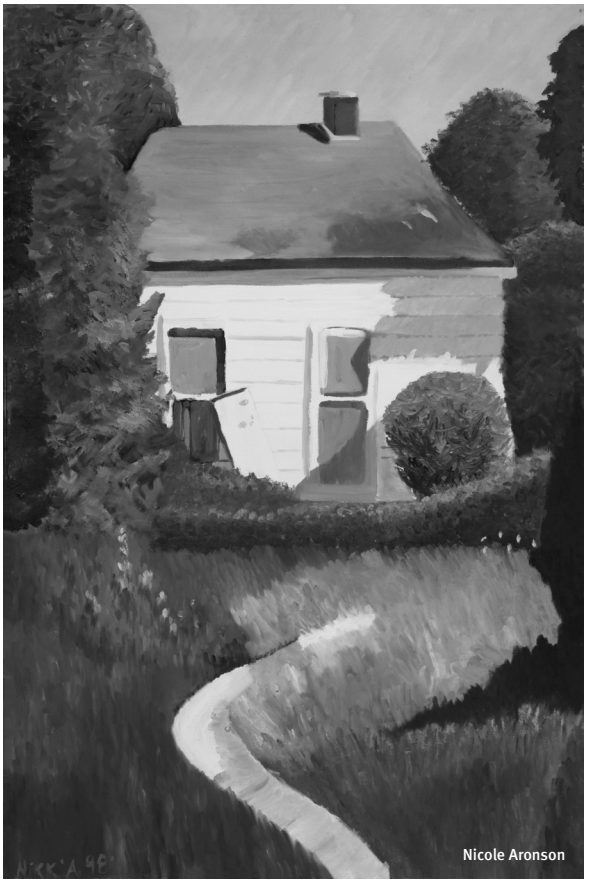
No, Billy, Jack silently urged, just help me out to the pool.



Jim recently retired from a career in business and has started writing short fiction. He has a B.A. from Weber State University with majors in history and German, and an MBA from the University of Chicago. Intrigued with American and European history, he loves traveling with his wife, Jackie, who tries to keep him out of the deep ends.

Jess Guinivan

Salsola


Nicole Aronson

Samson managed to avoid the tumbleweeds for nearly twenty years. The ubiquitous plant piled high along fences, abandoned buildings and stables all over New Mexico, taking root in whatever loose patch of otherwise uninhabitable dirt it could get its barbs into. But not in his yard. Samson refused to landscape in rock and cacti, an approach he thought dreary and defeatist, so he diligently cultivated his lawn, knowing the tumbleweeds only grew easily if you let them. Neighbors lost their own battles to the weed over the years, complicating Samson's. Every winter, the plants would dry out, break, and roll into his yard. He had to put up a fence.

Then one day in November the whole city of Clovis, New Mexico, woke up to a blizzard of tumbleweeds. *Salsola tragus,* Russian thistle, had accumulated everywhere. The ghostly billows invaded in impossible numbers, burying the entire north side of town. They blacked out windows. They smothered mailboxes. Samson made quick work of the removal, taking a day off from work to haul them all to the dump. But come spring, after the first heavy rain, the seedlings sprouted all over his yard: at the edge of his sidewalk, in the cracks of his driveway, on both sides of his fence. They had found every nook and cranny of fallow lawn and dropped seed, planning a future without his consent.

Samson spent the next weekend tearing up the littles ones by hand. The big ones he dug out with a hoe. He wasn't sure what to do about the ones sprouting remarkably from the pavement. They would need to be sprayed, he supposed. The plant would need to be eradicated, the property carefully watched when it inevitably spread. This was not how he wanted to spend his summer.

S

Larry's house was a short drive across town, sandwiched between flat, sand-colored houses just like it. There was no vegetation on the block, only dusty cars, dirt yards, and the occasional skeletal tree. The street, to Samson, looked thirsty. When he arrived, his father-in-law was watching hummingbirds from the kitchen. Larry had birdfeeders outside every window, which he refilled daily. Most were overrun by grackles.

"Assholes," Larry liked to say, pointing at the loud, black pests. "Bully the other birds. They'll take the food right out of your hand." But he said it with a smile. Larry enjoyed the life outside his windows, brutish as it may have been.

"Just missed the roadrunner," he said when Samson let himself in.

"What about the quail?"

The old man clicked his tongue. "He doesn't come around anymore. Think the coyotes found him."

Larry didn't turn from the window, so Samson left him to his birds. He found the usual loads of laundry waiting for him: one on top of the dryer, dirty; another in the machine, ready to be dried. He tended to these before collecting tied-off garbage bags throughout the house, then went through Larry's mail.

"Larry, did you subscribe to the *New Mexican*?" He had opened a credit card statement.

"I don't remember that."

"You gotta be careful about telemarketers. You're not supposed to answer the phone unless you recognize the number, remember?"

Larry frowned. "I guess I thought I did."

Larry was seventy and in otherwise good health, but when his wife passed, he had trouble keeping organized. Samson's wife wanted to move him into a home. "He's not debilitated," Samson had said. "He's just a bachelor." Though some things concerned him, too. Like the birthday cards Larry now sent two, three times a year. And he kept forgetting to refill his prescriptions. Samson knew how much Larry valued his independence and had bought him some time by offering to fill in the gaps. Larry had acquiesced. "But you're never changing my diapers. Let's both spare our dignity."

They settled, without ever really saying so, on piles. Where there was build-up, Samson would assume his help was wanted. Everything else he kept his nose out of.

"I can hide dirty laundry," Samson said of the bill. "But Joy's going to notice a hundred and sixty dollars."

"I didn't sign anything. They shouldn't be able to do that over the phone." Larry was embarrassed. He was getting defensive.

"It's okay. I'll call them."

Samson moved on to dishes while Larry inspected some library books Samson had brought with him. "I already read this one," Larry said, thumbing through a Tom Clancy novel.

"How can you tell?" Larry liked thrillers. They all looked the same to Samson.

"There's a new John Grisham out."

"You ever try that Kindle Joy got you? You can download whatever you want."

Larry mumbled dismissively, already lost into one of the books.

Samson finished the dishes. Finding no other chores waiting for him, he asked if Larry had any weed killer. "We got some tumbleweeds at the house."

Larry whistled. "Not sure how much good it'll do you."

"Yeah, well."

Samson spotted a bucket of household cleaners and chemicals in the garage. Getting to it was another story. The place was a mess, cluttered with two lifetimes worth of debris. Larry had yet to part with his late wife's belongings. Samson whittled a path through the sentimental rubble, excavating as he went: a sewing machine, a dress form, clothes and, of all things, snorkeling flippers.

Larry insisted Samson stay for lunch and that he let him cook. It was nothing special—grilled cheese sandwiches and canned tomato soup—but it was something Larry could make, and he enjoyed the company. And Samson didn't mind being waited on.

"You're still doing okay, right?" Samson ventured. "Because if you ever feel like you need more help—"

Larry was already shaking his head. "I watched it happen to her," he said. "If I ever get like that." He aimed a finger at his temple.

"Alright, Pop," Samson said, and dropped it. He had seen it, too, and couldn't say he blamed him.

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Samson returned home to find his son Nicholas and a friend firing an air pistol at beer cans in the driveway. "You're picking up every one of those pellets," he said.

Both boys were in their late twenties. The heftier of the two, his son, answered without turning around. "We have a broom."

"You get on the exchanges yet?" Samson inspected the garage door behind the beer cans for dents.

"They extended the deadline."

"Because people keep putting it off."

Nicholas's thick shoulders rose and fell, then he scratched agitatedly at his five o'clock shadow. Samson thought the boy could take better care of himself. But at least he had shaved off the beard. "I noticed the tips were better," Nicholas confessed one day. Since then, he'd kept it off, but lazily. He went days between shaves. In the meantime, it itched him something fierce.

"What if you get hurt?" Samson prodded. "What if Jeremy here shoots you in the face?"

"I just forgot."

"Don't just forget until the new deadline now. Freak accidents don't wait for deadlines. That kinda debt can ruin you."

Nicholas lowered the pistol, unloaded it, handed it to his friend. "I'm going to mow the lawn," he said, facing his father. "You wanna move your truck?"

"I don't want you operating anything with a blade until you're insured."

"Mom told me to."

"Well, I'm telling you not to."

"She's gonna be pissed."

"I'll take care of it."

"Fine." Nicholas swept his spent pellets from the driveway and scooped them into an old paint bucket. He cocked his head at his friend, gesturing for them to retreat behind the house, where they would inevitably share a smoke before going inside to play video games.

Samson shut himself in the garage, where it was sweltering but private, and retrieved an old jelly jar concealing a one-hitter. He kept thinking about those flippers. Joy's parents had been land-locked for decades. They'd always meant to travel more, before she was diagnosed. They met on a camping trip and honeymooned in Hawaii—where they got the flippers, maybe. Lupus made travel all but impossible. The two of them hadn't gotten any farther than Dallas as long as Samson had known them.

"A marriage like that makes a man do a lot of soul searching," Larry had confided in him once. "When your wife's only pleasure is a lack of pain."

Samson held deep respect for the man who committed himself to a woman who was his partner in spirit but hardly in life. His own father was out the door before he could know him. Kicked out, his mother told him, but time would tell other stories. Samson wished he could repay Larry for the debts the universe owed him. Maybe he could take him to Florida. Maybe he could dig up the back yard and build him a reservoir.

S

Samson sprayed the salsola sprouting from the pavement before breaking out the John Deere. As he mowed, his mind wandered back to when Nicholas returned, almost seven years ago now. It was March. Samson had been working on the house. He had finally warmed Joy to the possibility of putting it on the market. He was remodeling the bathroom, had torn down the wallpaper, intending to repaint, and found the tacky stuff ran several layers deep. Generations of paisley strata coated the walls, breaking off only in small, unhelpful flakes. He vowed never to buy another house with wallpaper. Finally, some six layers down, he broke through to a dime-sized patch of the original awful green paint.

That was when Nicholas called. Joy had answered, her muffled exclamations drawing his attention from the other room. Nicholas was coming home from Texas A&M—without a degree. He showed up with his white Ford Taurus packed and in bad need of an oil change. He had put on weight. His face was puffy, exacerbated by the twiggy beard he had permitted to grow.

"What happened?" Samson asked, to which Nicolas shrugged.

"My teacher said I should drop."

More coaxing revealed that his grades had been bad in the fall and even worse in spring. His professors—more than one—had suggested withdrawal was preferable to his inevitable failure.

"But why were you failing?"

Nicholas shrugged again, this time defensive. "I just don't *like* it," he said. "Any of it."

Samson allowed his son to move back home. "Temporarily. And if you're not in school, you're getting a job," he insisted. So Nicholas took a part-time job waiting tables at Rib Crib, the money from which he mostly spent on cigarettes and fast food. When he was still there six months later, Samson told him he was moving out or paying rent. Nicholas took on just enough hours to cover the rent and started eating at home. The grocery bills skyrocketed.

Samson resented the murmur of the TV in the other bedroom the most. He had gotten used to a quiet he thought he'd never again have to relinquish. Joy felt the intrusion, too, and for weeks withdrew when he tried to undress her.

"We did it for eighteen years while he lived here," he reminded her.

"But he's an adult now. He *knows*."

It was a month before Samson convinced his wife to sleep with him while Nicholas was home. Even then, their sessions were quiet and short. When he brought up selling the house again, his proposal was quickly squashed.

"Nicholas will just have to move his stuff twice," Joy said.

He didn't think Nicholas had to come with them at all.

Soon enough the housing bubble burst, and nobody was going anywhere. In a few years, nobody but Samson remembered there had been other plans. Nicholas was enjoying the freedom a part-time job afforded him, and Joy, immobilized by her mother's passing, appreciated having her son at arm's reach. Samson never did finish remodeling the bathroom.

S

The weeds sprouted again on a Monday, buying themselves the most time before Samson could get to them. By Saturday, some of them were as large as bowling balls. Samson took a weedwacker to little ones. He'd come back for the shrubs after lunch. He was surprised to find Nicholas at home when he came inside. "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

"I traded shifts with Jeremy. Mom asked me to."

"It would have been Mom's birthday," Joy explained, picking at her cuticles. Her body had always suffered at the expense of her mood. Since her mother died, she had gained fifteen pounds and chewed her nails until they bled. That day, her puffy cheeks and pleading eyes had the effect of making her appear childlike. "I thought we could all spend the day together. Visit her plot."

Samson suppressed the urge to protest and instead took a beer from the fridge.

"Grab me one?" Nicholas asked.

Reluctant, Samson reached for a second bottle. "Nick should really be working," he said, looking at the boy. "He needs the money."

"Jesus, Sam, he works every day," she huffed. "Besides, it's not like his day was wasted. He threw out all those empty boxes in the basement for you."

"I was going to recycle them."

Joy threw up her arms. "Well, Sam, you weren't doing anything with them." She looked defeatedly at Nicholas, who took the hint and left. Samson returned to the fridge and pulled out what he needed to make a turkey sandwich. He built it at the counter, then stood there to eat it.

"How's Dad?" Joy asked gently.

"Fine."

"Did you talk to him about a nurse?"

"He doesn't want strangers in the house."

"I guess we could start sending Nicholas."

"Nick doesn't need to get sucked into this."

"Well, he needs somebody. When I was there on Tuesday, he had all the remote controls in the silverware drawer."

"You checked on him?"

"He's my father, Sam."

Samson took a large bite of sandwich, hoping it would shut him up. It didn't. "You need to leave him alone. It's what he wants."

Joy got up from the table, angry and in search of something to do with her hands. "I know you're his pal, but I'm his daughter." She picked up the lettuce and threw it in the crisper drawer. "I just lost Mom. I can't stand the thought of losing my dad."

"He's going to die eventually."

Joy was not a woman who responded well to pragmatism. She left without another word, heaving the fridge door shut.

S

The next morning Samson found his wife sitting up in bed. She had not slept well, distraught. He came short of apologizing for his brusqueness but said he was sorry for the circumstances they couldn't control. The kind words softened her, and she gave in when he kissed her, touched her. When they left the bedroom, they were already deep into the worst of the day's heat. Samson had meant to get an earlier start on the lawn. The salsola was winning. It had been a wet spring, and herbicides had been useless.

Samson made negligible progress, retreating frequently to the shade. It was too hot. He sought out Nicholas, who was inside helping Joy digitize photos of her mom.

"I'm not scheduled today," Nicholas said reflexively.

"I need your help."

"Yes, sir."

Samson equipped his son with a pair of thick gloves and a hoe and instructed him to dig. "Get all of it. Like a tumor." Nicholas worked without complaint, only stopping for breaks when Samson reminded him to. "Don't get dehydrated now." They filled the back of the truck with uprooted Russian thistle and marveled at the haul.

"What do you do with them?" Nicholas asked.

"Take 'em to the dump."

"Seems like a shame."

"It's a weed."

Before they left, Samson sprayed the yard one more time. It was pointless, but he had to try. On the drive to the dump, they were quiet.

"You know," Samson finally said. "You can wait tables anywhere. Isn't there anywhere else you'd like to be?"

Nicholas shrugged, leaning into the passenger door. "I don't mind it here." He could tell this wasn't the answer his father wanted. "But I don't know. Maybe Colorado?"

Samson nodded. "I haven't been to Colorado. Would be nice to have an excuse to visit."

When they returned, both men took cold showers. Samson finished his just in time to spy Nicholas, in the driveway, ducking into the compact car of a girl he didn't recognize.

"Who's that?"

"Holly," Joy answered, not looking up from her photographs.

"Are they dating?"

"Seems so. I like her."

Samson watched the two kiss and drive off. She was pretty.

S

Samson did not romanticize the desert one bit. He hated the dry heat, hated the smell of deer grass, hated the lifeless dirt palette that colored everything. When he graduated high school in the summer of '86, he told Joy he was getting out. "You can come with me," he offered. He'd meant it. But she wasn't ready to leave her family or the small town of Clovis.

Samson took a job at a Jewel Osco outside of Chicago where his cousin had an in. Retail was hardly glamourous, but it was a way out—now and forever. There would always be shelves to stock. The day Joy called, he had let it ring. He'd been working nights. The message she left was anxious. He was suspicious, after calling her back, when she said she just wanted to talk. He wondered if she wasn't already calling to tell him she'd gotten engaged.

"Do you like it there?" she asked.

He said he did. The hours were long, but he was making good money. And he liked living near a big city. "There are lots of people. Lake Michigan is nice."

"I'm so happy for you," Joy said. Then she started to cry.

"You can still visit."

"Listen," she said. And Samson's heart stopped because nothing good ever came after that word. "You're gonna be a daddy."

Samson counted back. For the child to be his, she must be far along. He put in a request for time off—days he'd been looking forward to spending on a road trip to Michigan—and went home. Joy was swollen and relieved when Samson arrived. "I don't want to take Chicago away from you," she said. But her eyes begged him to stay.

"Are you keeping it?" He hated to ask.

"I have to." She couldn't stand to bear a child she would not keep, and the other choice was too late to make. She had waited to tell him, letting the secret germinate, until the decision had already been made for him.

Samson returned to Illinois feeling that no matter what he did, he would be letting someone down. In a week, he put in his notice. He did the honorable thing and married Joy in the courthouse, promising her a proper ring once he could afford one. She, in turn, promised that one day she would get him back to the city. One of those promises was kept.

S

Samson took to lighting the salsola with a propane torch. It didn't seem to be any more effective, but it was a hell of a lot more satisfying. When he finished, he drove across town to visit Larry. The bird feeder out front was empty. Samson knocked out of courtesy as he let himself in, calling for his father-in-law. The house was quiet. Larry was somewhere unseen. No piles were waiting, just a careful arrangement of juice glasses on the bookshelf.

"Larry?"

Samson found him in the bedroom watching for the birds. The feeder outside his window was empty, too. Larry turned and said something Samson couldn't understand.

"Can't find the bird seed," he repeated, struggling to form the words. Larry's face hung loose as he tried to speak.

Samson knelt beside him. "Dad, can you do me a favor and smile?"

Larry tried to smile. Only half his face obeyed.

"Stay right here."

Samson stepped into the hallway and called 911, then his wife.

S

No one slept. The night was hot and thick with fear. Joy had braved the hospital and sobbed at her father's side until they sent her away. It was late. Larry had been asleep for hours. When he was released, Samson and Joy took turns staying home from work to be with him. They were instructed to task him with simple math—ask the time, make change—and not to leave him alone. Joy's sister came. There was talk of what to do.

It was weeks before Samson gave thought to the weeds again, by which time they'd grown several feet, taking shameless advantage of the distraction. It was dark—the others were resting without sleeping—when a tentacle of Russian thistle snagged the trash bag Samson carried outside. It began to leak. Samson spit on the plant. What a despicable flora, brambly and knotted in life and merciless in death. The little flowers it sprouted only mocked him. He had seen what this pest could do.

Samson disposed of the trash and wiped its juices from his leg. He was so tired. He could fight the salsola all summer. He could fight it every summer. Or he could admit that it had already won.

S

Samson stayed behind on the pretense of keeping house. So much attention had been paid to Larry, no one had taken care of themselves. While the others were out, he set to work on Nicholas's room. He started with his clothes, folding the nicer pieces into suitcases and the rest into plastic tubs. He unplugged the Xbox, swaddled it in a towel. The games and DVDs he boxed. He checked the drawers under the bed, packing anything foreign, then changed the sheets. Then he hung an old bird feeder outside the window.

He threw a tangle of bungee chords into his truck and headed across town, where Joy and her sister and Nicholas were playing Parcheesi with Larry. They made Larry add all the dice.

The house had been childproofed and smelled of lemon disinfectant. Pictures were everywhere. The fridge door had been cleared of everything except a sheet of emergency numbers in large print. Samson found all of it patronizing, particularly the bulky Life Alert necklace hanging from Larry's neck.

"That can't be comfortable," Samson said.

Larry grinned. "A leash."

Joy scowled.

"Listen," Samson said, and everybody looked up. "I've done what I could." He instructed Joy to pack up her father's clothes and Nicholas to load them in the truck. Larry was coming home. When they asked where Larry was going to stay, Samson said in the guest room. When they asked where Nicholas would stay, he said he didn't care. Samson would let the tumbleweeds bury him alive, but they would not bury his son.



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Mark Jenkins

Boots on the Ground



Pulling into a handicap parking space, Jake clicked off the windshield wipers and turned the key. His pickup rumbled once, then died. Snowflakes were melting on the windshield. He stepped out into two inches of fresh snow and sauntered into the Ranch & Feed.

"What can I do you for, Jake?" said a man at the cash register.

"Larry, need a pair of boots."

Larry looked down over his belly, held in place by a large rodeo belt buckle. "What's wrong with what you got?"

Two weeks earlier Jake had bought a pair of black, buckle-up rubbers for his cowboy boots, which he was wearing. But since then the rain had turned to snow.

"Don't keep my feet warm," replied Jake.

Larry led him to the back of the store, past shovels and tack and stiff loops of wrangling rope, to shelves stocked with felt-insulated snow boots. They were heavy and well-built, with leather uppers and lugged soles. He pulled down a pair of size 12s and handed them to Jake.

"These should do the trick."

Jake sat down, set his cowboy hat on the bench beside him and yanked off his boots encased in the rubbers.

"Take them cotton socks off while you're at it," said Larry, handing him a pair of wool ones.

Jake put on the new socks and insulated boots, stood up and walked around. He was a stick of a man—wore 30 x 36 boot-cut Wranglers—so the snow boots looked big on him even though they fit. "Don't feel like my boots," he said.

"Be a problem if they did. But they'll keep your feet toasty," said Larry.

Jake was a regular at the Ranch & Feed. He had a small spread west of town. Sometimes he was friendly enough, usually he was sour, and he was always tight.

Jake sat back down on the bench, bent over and looked at the price tag on the boots. "I don't need the socks."

"Suit yourself," said Larry.

Jake put his own socks back on, which were damp and cold and made him decide to wear the snow boots after all.

Driving home he felt how warm and comfortable the boots were and allowed himself to briefly wonder why he wore cold, slippery-soled cowboy boots in the winter. Made no sense. It was still snowing when he rolled up to his ranch house.

"Elk'll be moving down," Jake said to himself, dropping his cowboy boots in the entryway and then stepping out of his snow boots, his socks pulling down to his toes. He hung up his cowboy hat and passed into the house to the kitchen.

Above the stove was a wooden sign, the letters branded into the wood: "A Man Afoot Ain't No Man At All." The house had cowboy kitsch that his Mom had collected. In the living room there were a few thinned horseshoes on the walls, the names of their former long-maned owners written on a piece of tape. There was a photo of Jake's great-great-grandfather standing over a bear he'd shot, and another of the same frontiersman standing between two wolves that had been strung up. He looked determined and mean. In the hallway there was a metal plaque with a photo of John Wayne at the top and a quote from the Duke imprinted below: "Life's hard. It's even harder when you're stupid."

Jake had stopped noticing all of this decades ago. He opened the old refrigerator and took out a block of bacon and some eggs. He lifted a frying pan off the hook, filled it with strips of bacon, and switched on the gas. He stood there thoughtlessly staring out the window at the falling snow until the bacon started popping. When there was enough grease, he slid the strips to one side and cracked three eggs into the pan. He reheated the coffee in the coffee pot and sat down.

Jake had grown up in this small ranch house, left it for four years when he went into the service, then came back. The guy in the photos, his great-great-grandfather on his mom's side, had homesteaded the land. According to family lore he'd even murdered a couple of Indians to keep it. If he'd been anything like his mom, Jake could believe it. She was a woman without mercy, for animals, for the land, for her husband when she had him, and for her son. Some ranch women were gruff on the outside, but sweet on the inside. Jake's mother was as rough and weathered as barn wood inside and out. Her mercilessness extended even toward herself. After her first heart attack she refused to stay in the hospital and kept smoking like a chimney. Her second heart attack killed her.

When his mom died Jake inherited the place. The actual property wasn't much, 160 acres of sagebrush, but the ranch abutted a vast chunk of prime national forest which his family leased from the federal government. Several

large meadows fed by mountain springs, aspen in the lowlands, conifer forests in the higher elevations. Jake and his family had always felt this land was rightfully theirs and fenced it accordingly.

Wolfing his lunch, Jake started thinking about the elk again. He could see the large but unexpectedly nimble animals picking their way down the mountain side, single-file, the naive cows going first, the bulls hanging back, ready to vanish at the first gunshot.

After lunch he went into his bedroom and put his cotton long johns on under his jeans. He took his rifle, a bolt-action Remington 30.06, off the gun rack and grabbed a box of shells from the top of his dresser. In the entryway he tucked his jeans into his snow boots, tugged on his insulated leather work gloves, rammed on his cowboy hat, and left the house cursing himself.

A month earlier, herding cattle with his 4-wheeler, he'd hit a boulder hidden inside the sagebrush. Luckily his truck wasn't far away and he'd dragged the four-wheeler across the prairie and into the barn. He'd worked on it for a day, thinking he knew how to fix it, believing he could rig it back together with a few tractor parts, but that didn't work, so he just left it there half-gutted. He'd planned to haul the 4-wheeler into town and get it fixed, but he never did. He couldn't bear the idea of paying someone to do something he knew he could do himself.

Now he was stuck with the pickup, which even with four-wheel drive and bales of alfalfa in the bed, couldn't go where a four-wheeler could go. There was nothing better than hunting with a four-wheeler, really. When he was a boy, before his dad left, every autumn they had taken a whole week to hunt on horseback. Jake remembered it being a shitload of work. You had to be so careful with horses, feed them, take care of them. They were skittish beasts. His dad had loved the horses, which confounded and annoyed Jake. When his dad left, he took the horses with him. He'd tried to get Jake to go with him, but Jake refused. Even then he realized he'd get the ranch when his mom passed. Why would he go off with his dad, working his ass off as some itinerant ranch hand? Jake later convinced his skinflint mom to get two four-wheelers. He wrecked one right away, along with his left shoulder.

Jake hung the rifle on the gun rack in the cab and threw the box of shells on the bench seat. It had snowed three more inches but he had chains in the toolbox if he needed them. Jake drove across the snow-swept plains of his ranch toward the national forest, bouncing along the two-track, sliding in and out of the ruts. Closer to the mountains the snow was deeper and he eventually stopped, got out, and locked in the hubs on his front wheels.

There wasn't a fence that separated Jake's property from forest service land. Made it easier for his cattle to move around. Jake never allowed anyone to cross his land to get to the public land. Why would he? He believed he owned any land he ran his cattle on. He owned every blade of grass and every tree and every critter. He owned the water too. Which meant he owned the snow as well, since it was the source of the water.



papapishu

Jake drove as deep as he could into the national forest, but still had to stop well before the first meadow. The snow was almost a foot deep and there were places where the trees were just too tight to maneuver through. His four-wheeler could've handled it, Jake thought with bitterness. He'd have to walk from here and there wasn't much he hated more than walking.

"Damn it all," Jake said, shoving the box of shells into the pocket of his Carhartt jacket and slinging his rifle over his shoulder, which involuntarily sent his mind back to Iraq.

He'd joined the Army because the ragheads had attacked America. He'd mostly driven around in the Green Zone following orders. Easy duty because his sergeant happened to be from Wyoming as well.

Jake had actually gone out on patrol only twice, and nothing eventful had happened. The first time they'd intentionally run over a goat with their Humvee and some women in head scarves had raised their hands and started wailing. That made him feel ashamed but he didn't say anything. The second time it was blazing hot and they had handed out cups of ice cream to kids. He'd enjoyed that. The kids were so grateful.

One of his bunk mates did lose a foot though. Jimmy Sanchez. IED sent his Humvee flipping into the dirt and mangled his leg. They'd been able to save everything but his foot.

Jake had talked up his ranch so much that after they both got home, Jimmy drove out to see him. He had a prosthetic foot that he said didn't bother him much. He refused to park in handicap parking when they went into town. "I don't need any special breaks," said Jimmy. They got drunk together and Jake almost got into a fight, but back on the ranch they found they didn't have that much in common other than their righteous hatred. Still, they had a good time together. Jake brought out the .22 he'd gotten from his mother on his 10th birthday and they spent the afternoon blasting beer cans set on the fence.

Marching up the logging road in the snow, Jake was wondering what Jimmy might be doing now. He should have invited him to come out elk hunting. Jimmy would have liked that. Even if they didn't see any elk they could still shoot things. Jake would have actually gotten licenses then. He didn't bother getting one when it was just him hunting on his own land. The government couldn't tell him what he could and couldn't do on his property.

It was still snowing and Jake was surprised by his new boots. They satisfied him. Sometimes going over a drift, snow would fall inside, but he didn't worry about it.

He thought he might start cutting track pretty soon, and he did, but instead of sending hot adrenaline through him, that distinctive, primal thrill of the hunt, the tracks turned him cold.

"You gotta be shittin' me," Jake said.

They weren't the punched holes of long-legged elk. They were the tracks of cross-country skiers, two parallel grooves flowing easily through the forest. Jake immediately veered off and started following the tracks, tromping angrily through the snow. He could tell there were three of them by the

holes made by the ski poles.

Sure enough, he caught up to them in a small glade where they had stopped. Just to make an impression, Jake dropped his rifle off his shoulder and carried it in his hands.

"You know you're trespassing," shouted Jake as he approached.

The skiers, two guys and a girl, were wearing outdoor clothes. Bright jackets and black synthetic pants and nylon gaiters. Jake didn't have fancy gear and didn't need it. He couldn't believe they were just standing there out in the open, like dumbass deer. They had even waved when they first saw him.

As Jake moved in the girl instinctively turned toward her companions but she couldn't take her eyes off the rifle.

"We're sorry. Really, we're so sorry," she said. She had a thick black braid coming out from under her wool cap and her cheeks were red.

"Yeah," said the guy beside her, who had poured a cup of hot chocolate for the stranger when they first saw him, and was still holding it out to Jake. "We didn't know. Sorry." This long-haired guy smiled acquiescently and was apparently the girl's boyfriend because he put his mittened hand on her shoulder.

Jake didn't acknowledge the steaming cup of hot chocolate. Instead he leveled his eyes on the other guy who had not apologized.

This guy tilted his head at Jake, then bent over and unzipped a pocket on a backpack lying in the snow. His red jacket had a few patches on it and he wore a bomber cap, the earflaps attached under his bearded chin. Pulling a map from the pack pocket, he spread it out on the snow and knelt down beside it.

"Actually, I think we're on the national forest," he said.

"The hell you are," said Jake.

Jake didn't like being contradicted, especially by facts.

The girl turned to the guy with the map. "It doesn't matter. It's been a beautiful tour," there was a hitch in her voice. "Let's just go, Adam."

But Adam seemed unmoved by Jake's malevolence. "You want to show us where we are on this map?" Adam asked Jake.

"I don't give a shit about your map," barked Jake. "You're on my goddamn property and I expect you to turn your asses around and get the hell off it."

Adam squinted, cocked his head again, then reached into his pocket and pulled out a GPS. He pressed a couple buttons on the device and set it on the map.

"It will take a minute to lock onto the satellites," said Adam.

Jake knew what a GPS was and knew what it would show. "You don't have a minute," spit Jake, "I want you off of my property now!"

The girl and her boyfriend had already put their half-eaten sandwiches back into their Tupperware, drank the cup of hot chocolate, screwed the lid back onto the thermos and were shoving it all back into their backpacks.

Adam looked down at the GPS, produced a pencil and wrote the coordinates from the little screen onto the map. He then quickly traced one line up

from the bottom of the map, and another from the right-hand edge. Where the lines met he made an X.

"This is where we are," Adam said, kneeling beside the map but looking hard up at Jake. "On forest service property, about a mile and a quarter from the boundary."

"You really think you're something, don't you," Jake growled menacingly. "Well how 'bout this." Jake jacked a bullet into the chamber, raised his rifle, swung sideways away from the skiers, and shot a tree. The bark exploded and the deafening report made the girl jump and scream at the same time.

"Adam. Adam. It's not worth it," she said, her eyes wide but her voice stern. "Let's just go."

"You want to give me your name?" Adam asked Jake.

"Fuck you," said Jake, "That's my name. Fuck you!"

"I'll give you mine," said Adam. "My name is Adam Russell. I grew up in Wheatland thirty-five miles east of here."

"You're fucking pissing me off," said Jake.

Adam nodded, almost to himself. He glanced at his watch and then pushed the GPS and map back into the pocket of his pack. His friends were already sliding away in their old tracks. Adam took his time loading his backpack. Jake stood there fuming and holding his rifle pointing toward Adam's feet. Adam clipped into his bindings, put his poles on his hands, and skied away.

"Move out asshole," said Jake.

The three skiers glided silently into the forest, the girl looking back. Jake thought about shooting off another round just to see her jump again. He watched them disappear into the trees, then sat on the downed tree where the skiers had been sitting.

It took a long time for him to simmer down. He sat there on the log thinking retributional thoughts. Eventually he remembered why he was out there in the first place. "Won't be any elk around here now," Jake grumbled to himself.

It was getting late. He got up and started plunging indignantly through the snow. He thought he might still be able to loop back up to the first meadow. With each step he sunk almost up to his knees, the snow filling in the tops of his snow boots. After a while his toes began to feel cold, but he disregarded the sensation. The boots damn well better keep his toes warm or Larry'd hear about it. Having to lift each foot so high to make progress, his thighs quickly became tired. And his jeans were now soaked from the falling snow, the wet cold going straight through his long johns.

He trudged only a short distance before deciding to turn around. His elk hunt was over, spoiled by the cross-country skiers.

Lumbering back through the falling snow following his own tracks, back through the glade and on down through the forest, Jake gradually became encased in ice. His cowboy hat mounded with snow and his ears lost all feeling. His leather work gloves froze solid and the tops of his thighs went numb. The shoulders of his Carhartt jacket became stiff as armor.

As it began to grow dark, Jake began to grow numb all over. Numb to his own body, numb to the world around him. At some point a spark of fear suddenly leapt up inside Jake. For a moment his mind was lucid and he realized that he might be in danger. He had nothing with him. No lighter, no matches, no headlamp, no water, no spare mittens, nothing but his rifle and a box of heavy, cold shells.

The idea that he could actually be in danger on his own property peeved Jake. He forced himself to pick up the pace, plowing through the snow. This made him sweat. He concentrated on staying on the faint, snow-filled tracks, otherwise he sunk even deeper. He started counting his steps out loud.

When he finally reached the pickup it was long past dark. The truck was buried. It had snowed so much that he knew he wouldn't get out without putting on his chains, but first he had to warm up. The pickup wouldn't start and in his frustration, he flooded it. He knew he would have to let the engine set for a while, but he couldn't just sit there or he'd freeze.

He got a flashlight and shovel out of the toolbox in the bed of his pickup, laid the flashlight in the snow and began furiously digging out a space behind each wheel. He would have to back up onto the chains.

Shoveling warmed him up and the next time he turned the key, he was gentler on the gas and the truck started. Jake cranked the heat on full-blast and sat there for almost half an hour getting warm. Fatigue overwhelmed him. He switched on the radio and listened to country music. The songs slowly enveloped him and melted his anger. Jake wasn't a man afflicted with self-reflection, but in the back of his mind he knew he'd been a jerk to the skiers.

He put the thought out of his head by putting on the chains. He could only do one wheel at a time before getting back in the cab to warm up. It was miserable and by the time he was done, he could feel nothing in his fingers.

On the drive back down to the ranch his fingers started burning and throbbing. The pain was unbelievable. It was as if someone was slowly passing his fingers back and forth over a campfire. When it was actually hot inside the cab, he finally got the courage to pull off his leather gloves. The tips of all his fingers were as white as candles. Bouncing across the black prairie, the headlights searching through the whirling snow, he debated whether he should go to the emergency room. He didn't have health insurance, didn't believe in it, so it was going to be costly. "Maybe I just won't pay," thought Jake. That's what poor people do. They go and get help and then never pay a penny.

It was a small county hospital and the ER took him in immediately. The doctor, a tall, lean woman, surprised him by sharing that she too had grown up on a ranch. She tenderly examined his fingers and assured him that he would not lose them.

"Now. Let's have a look at those feet."

Jake had been so focused on his fingers, he'd completely forgotten about his feet.

His boots were frozen solid and they couldn't get them off. The snow that had dropped into his boots had at first been melted by the warmth of his feet. But then the cold water had soaked through the felt liners and turned to ice.

"I'm afraid we're going to have to cut your boots off," the doctor said.

"They're brand new!" Jake objected.

A nurse wielded a saw with a circular blade, the kind used to cut off casts. She sliced off Jake's boots in pieces. Then she used tape scissors with the flat lower blade to cut off Jake's frozen cotton socks. His feet were whitish blue and hard as stone. They looked like the feet of a marble statue.

The doctor was encouraging even though she knew the truth. She even came to visit him a couple months later in the hospital after they'd amputated both feet and his stumps were hanging in the stirrups.

When she walked into his room there was a pair of new cowboy boots on the table. She touched the polished leather with her fingers. "Nice."

"Jimmy, a buddy of mine, sent them to me," Jake said wrathfully.

There was another person in the room. A young woman, sunburned, her braided hair up in a bun, was delicately changing the dressings at the blunt ends of Jake's legs.

"So. How are you feeling?" asked the doctor.

"How the hell do you think I'm feeling? I'm a goddamn gimp!"

The woman wrapping the snow white gauze around his stumps recognized the rage in his voice and suddenly looked up in fear.

"You can still ride horses," the doctor said cheerily.

Jake was glaring at his missing feet. "I hate horses."



Mark Jenkins is the writer-in-residence at the University of Wyoming and a contributing writer for *National Geographic Magazine*. He covers geopolitics, the environment, and adventure. The author of four books and hundreds of stories, Jenkins has written about landmines in Cambodia, mountain gorillas in Eastern Congo, koalas in Australia, global warming in Greenland, and ethnic cleansing in Burma. His writing has won numerous awards, including the Overseas Press Club Award, a National Magazine Award, five Lowell Thomas Awards, three Best American Travel Writing Awards, the American Alpine Club Literary Award, and the Banff Mountain Adventure Book Award.

Mark B. Hamilton

Through Time, the Joyous Ledges

Where moss and grass brush velvet over moist slate,
where patches of ferns flare and each breath descends
to the water, and below into the jabbering grottos,
those frescos painted by plants in broad strokes,

Cliffs sing the diminishing shade, and flecked edges
that slow quick water into a long descent strengthen
into a distance smoothed by a journey into a new voice.

The copper-gold pours into the basin, a shallow bowl
held by bristles etched by the fringe of sharp branches,
and there is no stopping it, the widening of no shade
along the arm of this flat river.

So sometimes, I envy speedboats shrinking that distance,
their windshields in the breeze, hair flying, sweat cooling,
the hull speeding into space with just a flick of its wheel,

Because rowing is different. At 3 mph I feel the shifting
water lean from place to place, the earth tilting and altering
the river's speed and course.

My eyes see details in dusty leaves, in bottle caps
and bugs, my nose tests the air, my ears the deep hum
of factories, and bird call, or the jet ski high-cycling
over its own wake, each stroke searching the murk,
and sensing the wild adaptations in the energy of flow.

"Use was never the first truth," says Momaday.

A caramel doe arches her neck and watches
from behind a tender pine. Then another, browsing, nibbles
on a low shrub. More heads lift from the hidden creek,
then, an entire herd moves beyond the rise, all their smooth
fur concealed by that single step into the afterglow.

Chrome and Corners

Leisurely campers rouse to feed their fires,
dry maples flashing up in the narrow sky, oars bending
white on the bright mirror of the creek as I exit.

A hidden wind begins to gust and buffet the dory.
Forced toward rocks, waves like puppies crowd the boat,
one jumping in with its bucket of water. It wags its tail
and curls around my feet.

Golden boulders on the weather shore
shoulder into shadow where moist coils of monofilament
tangle in the chunks and bits of cut bait. I crab cross-wind,
edging away, struggling to pass into the lee.

On shaky legs, I land at an old marina
and walk up to rent a motel room with the storm coming.
It's a quick smudge of black sky on the southern horizon.
From inside, it looks tame—just lightening, thunder
and strong sheets of rain.

Pelican tugs at her lines, the air mixing with sulfur
from a paper mill over in Kentucky.

"It smells like this with the storms," the manager says,
worried about the lateness of this year's fishing season.
"I'm usually filled up by now, but it's late, late, late,"
she says, handing me a key and showing me around.

Alone with the walls lined with bunk beds,
I cook and eat, then walk along the river in gusts of rain
and do laundry in a white room full of chrome and corners.

A Truth

I am not a perfect stranger.
I do not even see where they have lived
all of their lives.

Immersed as I am in my own progression, I strut
proudly in my small place of the summer.

The People show me
their disregard at Wolf Point. I land
in my silence past knowing,

A young warrior dragging Gander out of the river.
Everything floats away into the shade of trees.

My give-away is given
without me, a life preserver in the dust,
—a misdirection that works.

With an open heart or not, the ritual of sharing
sweet snacks, a rifle, sunglasses, and bear spray.

Yesterday is lost,
released or abandoned, accepted
in a gathering up of today.

The scattered, unbroken things of the darkness,
discarded items in the shadows of bushes.

Most are recovered
but the 22-410 gets returned much later
by a tribal officer

Who speaks of a teenager, a young mother, and about life
on the Rez. I can only say, "Thank you, Wolf Point!"

The stop revives me.
Kids wave their hands, and my need
finds another way.

An island to camp on, bulls that wallow in the dust
breaking the dried trees into kindling brush.

Camped in their pasture
I'm awkward under the bright moon
brimming with white pelicans.

Wingtip to wingtip, rasping close overhead
they glide in a "V" toward the darkening river.

Plovers and the snorts
of white-tailed deer in the prairie grass,
a silence that evening sways.

Wet sneakers on either side of the tent flaps
hold the night both inside and out.

Asleep in seconds,
I wake to the running of dew and sunlight
on the browsing mule deer.

They twitch, scratch and drink. Pleased to be here
with them, my discoveries are few and rare:

For chores like sewing
a cup of cold tea is a faithful companion
in this dry and rugged country.

The mile-wide reservoir moves with the slightest of wind,
and fresh-caught walleye really are Lakota lobster tails.

All day, the soft murmur
of mud shale along the denuded bank
laps the captured water.

I camp in tall grass, in the rustlings of high weeds
bending beneath the glow of timid moonlight.

And around my tent
coyotes wrestle, yip and roll
amid mustard blossoms.

A bowling, rousing inspection; the grass flattened
by brothers and sisters of river flow and water stone.

Sick in Bright Light

For days in heavy snow the river runs with slushy ice.
In north winds, we stay in huts eating deer and rabbits.
I am very unwell and weak. I take Dr. Rush's physic.

4 degrees above, the branches and bushes gilded with ice.
I remain sick all day with coughing, and did not sleep.
A beautiful morning, and clear, the blue sunshine deep,

The river covered with smoke, mantled in frost and ice.
Gibson kills 2 deer. Others, raccoons and rabbits in quantity.
I have a sleigh built for hauling wood from the country.

A freezing snow accumulates, men break through the ice.
Another sled is built for firewood. Our stores are weighed.
The kegs of pork, flour, whiskey and corn are measured

To stow in the Boat that leans on pries in the shifting ice.
Winser was out all night. I remain unwell. Somewhat better
I send Howard express to Captain Lewis with a letter.

At night, the cracking crunch consumes in shingling ice.
Wiser returns with a turkey and a deer. R. Field, Gibson,
And Collins another. Heat and food become our reason.

Potatoes, Brandy, and Porter

Last night, all the porter froze
And several bottles broke.
The men now stack them exposed,
Thawing the bitter beer that folk
Favor as brewed from charred malt.
Quite good with apples and salt.

Visitors arrive with a warming sky:
3 Frenchmen from Portage des Sioux
With potatoes, fowl, meal and brandy
And women who sell breads, and sew.
The scene widens, the trading slows.
Exchanges become people we know.

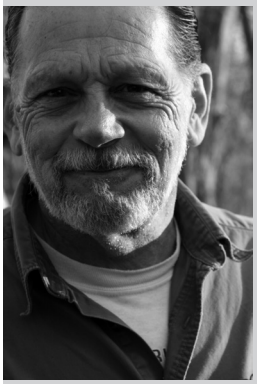
The Captain delivers new canisters
Of powder and flints to the hunters,
Then walks with his sextant to a hill
And swings the sun's image until
Reflected it sits on the mirror's line,
The horizon more precisely defined.

He notes our position. He calculates
From instrument angles, and takes
The time to figure tables from books

In plenty of columns when we look,
Yet do not stay when he commences.
We go outside to replenish our senses.

The sun always shows us where we are
When it rises. We don't measure that far
With finely tuned knobs riding a bobble,
A steed only Captain Clark can hobble.
Later, from Cahokia, the express returns.
In a letter from Captain Lewis, we learn

He will arrive tomorrow. There being
More letters from Kentucky, and 8 cork
Bottles of wine, and files for sharpening,
The Sergeant directs us back to work.
Captain Clark received some soft, tough
Durant, a felted cloth to wrap his cough.



Mark B. Hamilton (MFA, University of Montana) is a poet, teacher, editor, scholar, and environmentalist. He has received numerous state and national poetry awards, grants, fellowships, and an endowment for wilderness studies. Recent poems have appeared in *Frogpond*, *The Listening Eye*, *About Place Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *Wayfarer*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and *Oxford Poetry*, U.K. His chapbook, 100 *Miles of Heat*, is available from Finishing Line Press (2017).

Daniel Edward Moore

In Absentia

1.

The pear tree violently bloomed. Green and white faces a thousand smiles strong gazed down at the woman shading charcoal cups onto paper thin as her thoughts. On the dining room table she managed denial of the house become kennel and curse.

2.

Leave it the way you found it, we asked. Request evaporated into dark expectation. The black and white cup held nothing of promise. Arriving home found justice dried quickly. Blue ink on a check with the name in the middle left the way we found it.

3.

The birds across Main Street in Lake Ornithology did what they could to remind. Mirroring back from an intimate space, the movement of wings and the opening of beaks. Beauty can live in all the world's rooms, even the shallow, wet and neglected.

4.

For them, the most mindful of us being gone, we clapped our way back to the seats in their hearts. Applauding how vulnerable the mindful survive. Their barking became a long lamentation holding us there on tomorrow's dry tongue. We became righteous oases.



GDJ, rejon

Sabbath

Being free of my own observation,
the mind untwisting, releasing me
back to the hands of the world.

Is this the part about waking up slow,
about consciousness coming to town in a tent
with an old man screaming revival?

Is this why Saturday dreams of a body
minus the neon blue of distraction, minus the copy,
cut and paste of everything separate and sad?

Opening my eyes to the essence of rest
over acres of green, waiting for the word good
to be breathed by lungs that held the dark so long

it forgot it was free to go. This is my lover Sabbath.
Notice how she calms the sea that is anything but dead.
Notice my eyes turning black to blue, the luminous shade of Sunday.



Daniel Edward Moore lives in Oak Harbor, Washington, on Whidbey Island. New poems are forthcoming in *Cultural Weekly*, *Tule Review*, *Poetry South*, *January Review*, *Plainsongs*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Gyroscope Review*, *and others*. His chapbook, *Boys*, was recently released from Duck Lake Books, and his first book, *Waxing the Dents*, was a finalist for the Brick Road Poetry Book Prize and will be released in February 2020. Visit him at DanielEdwardMoore.com.

Cheryl Hyde Lewis



Witness

Were I a tree, my cambial
body ringed with drought
and plenty, feather-flicked
and licked with cloud sweat,
I'd want a bloom of lichen
at my base, a nodding
acquaintance with wind,
the violet flight of bird wing
shadowed in my hair.
Leaves veined like laundered linen,
sleeves of clustered fruit,
the heft and height of hardwoods
proof—every toughened fiber bends,
declares a firm intent.

Blackberries

About midday I reach sun glut,
one foot in the shadows, one
in the light. The day's a hollow
burning at my back and flannel
fastened against burdock burrs
intensifies the itch.

I risk the deeper shaded thorns
bringing blood with berry stains
and see my grandmother 40 years ago,
her hat the color of water after rain.

She recites field flowers—
chicory, purple ironweed, wild
bergamot for fevers, lamb's ear,
pale pink soapwort—as she points
the highest fruit I might not see
and some beyond my reach.

On a shelf at home I have a book;
pea-sized crusts of sugar still linger
on the lines. Her penciled measures
loop like mine and bring me back
to berries in my hand.
When winter whittles daylight down
it'll surely seem worthwhile
to recoup a teacup's worth of summer
with licks of beaten cream.



Pearson Scott Foresman



Ashley Garvick

Cheryl Hyde Lewis is retired from Ohio University. Her work has appeared in *Appalachian Heritage*, *Now and Then: The Appalachian Magazine*, *Astropoetica*, *Rock and Sling*, *Saw Palm*, *The Aurorean*, *Blue Collar Review*, and *The Healing Muse*, among others.

George Perreault

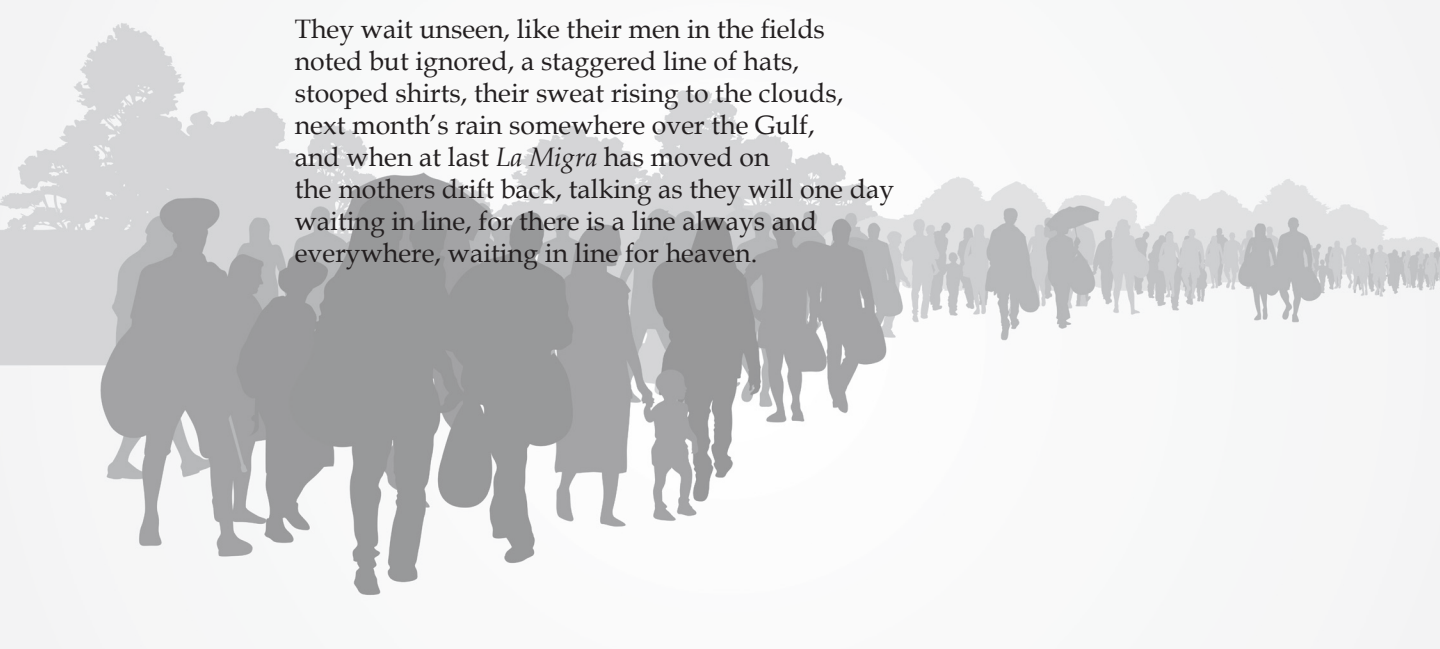
La Migración

Across mid-morning fields, the cinder track
fills with elementary blurs and shrieks
as the children are turned out for the day,
and mothers have gathered on the grass
in what seems a harbor town to witness
the ribbons, the smiles and praise while
between the races there's innocent gossip
in approximately carefree ways, until

under the elms, the pullover for semis
bending east and west along the four-lane,
drivers refill mugs at Allsups, swap stories
and then among them, in a telltale green truck
two men are sitting, glancing over papers:
La Migra hovers with a raptor's shadow and
the mothers, a dusting of snow in morning sun,
are soon but almost unnoticeably gone.

They are no longer here, although inside the gym,
outside of view they watch, listen to the feet,
sus niños running the cinders, remember distant
trains squealing in the night, and coyotes, always
the coyotes—*cristo obstinada en la cruz*—
while they ducked under wires whose teeth
carved their backs into strips, traced their
families' names and drank their blood.

They wait unseen, like their men in the fields
noted but ignored, a staggered line of hats,
stooped shirts, their sweat rising to the clouds,
next month's rain somewhere over the Gulf,
and when at last *La Migra* has moved on
the mothers drift back, talking as they will one day
waiting in line, for there is a line always and
everywhere, waiting in line for heaven.



Michael Perry: This Country

Down deep is a big slab of rock topped with caliche
tilted west to east from the Canadian and the Pecos
clear into central Texas, and down under that's old water,
the Ogallala Aquifer, which those farm boys been trying
to suck dry for a century and getting there now.

Coming out of New Mexico, I'll hook off 40 either San Jon
or Tucumcari, the palisades rising up like a frontier stockade,
make my way onto the caprock, quiet two lane blacktops,
cotton floating along the roadside, slide through those
little towns, drier in more ways than you might call.

There's still places you can see it how Coronado did, never
a hill or tree or shrub, just that endless sea of grass that even
spooked the Kiowa, choosing careful paths across it, the early
white men mapping out a desert, though it's far from that if you
follow its rhythms, tamp down the greed, and learn to listen,

just listen to the light, the way it slowly thickens like tree resin
working toward amber, this land so flat the birds have learned
to sing in flight, there being nowhere to perch, browned seed-eaters
you'd have to look twice to even hazard a name, and after you
cried out, there's nothing man-made to sustain an echo.

Bad Billy Boone: Interview

Was telling that other feller, I've worked country stations
all over, and everyone tells me a name like Bill Ackerman
that's okay for a paystub, but it don't do nothing on the air.
So I've gone by a few—they're all on that list, and you call
around under those tags, you'll find I always done the job.

Some names just fit a place, still there's times you gotta huck it.
Plano, see there—Garth Boone? Then Garth Brooks, he just
exploded, so I slid back to Billy. Hafta move on if you were
Whitman in Austin, had a friend named McVeigh up in OKC.
Some names though—Waylon anything—dead from the get go.

Days or nights, it don't matter none—I just need the work. My choice, I'd take nights—something bout those songs sliding out over the dark plains, folks stepping into all them same troubles right there in the music. Air don't feel nearly so cluttered – times in Lubbock I'd get calls coming clear up by Garden City.

Gotta be honest, though—other feller kinda rubbed me wrong – going on about, what'd he call it? That *incident* down in Midland. Like don't I think it's *ironic* that girl come by with a blanket, winking seventeen, with her name being Susan and that patch under the willows just thick with them Black-eyed Susans?

And don't I think it's *ironic* I made time for her racking up that *Shifting Gears* album when I hadda know the lead singer for Cooder Graw was with the D.A. over Gray County? Now don't let him tell you I made an actual threat—just speculated sure be ironic some feller trying radio with his jaw all wired shut.

James Hardesty: Burrito

Was this homeless guy standing outside Taco Bell
trying to stay dry in this welcome rain—well, for us
anyways, raising thirsty crops up on the caprock—
so on the way out I handed him an extra burrito I got,
figuring it might be today's best meal and hot besides.

Kynzie she ast about that and I said for your granddad,
so I hadda tell her bout when he mustered out from Nam
wasn't no real hurry gettin home, hung in LA some time,
gettin work here and there, just feelin out the world, and
one of the jobs was a cafeteria downtown, edge of things.

He took orders, which he was usta doin, though these felt
more like requests, on the graveyard shift, which everone
in Nam was usta doing, more ways than one, and there was
this woman come in regular, real old, just so frail everway
you might think of, penciled eyebrows, thin thin hair

always wearing the same faded red coat, black hat, would
ask a cup of hot water, then use the ketchup packs to make
a kinda tomato soup, eat the crackers from the table, never

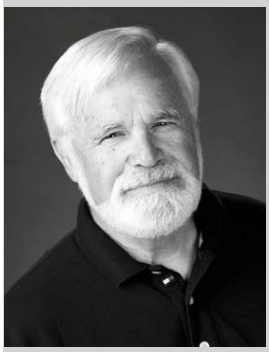
order anything, go back out into the night—maybe she had
three four places on her rounds so they'd get her twice a week.

The cook, your granddad said, he would get all upset, say
throw her out, but he wouldn't and the cook maybe he didn't
dare, so she kept coming back and was part of the night crowd
would come in when clubs closed down, the comics and the
bartenders and such, talkin over their troubles, maybe tryin

difrent routines for each other—no, if you do the Duke you
gotta get that walk, all pigeon-toed, important as the drawl—
demonstratin in the spaces between tables, same same people
ever night, and to your granddad she was part of that, and it got
so he'd whisper a couple of them, make a mistake on the order

and then he'd tell the cook it was a screw-up, maybe had an extra
grilled cheese, and he'd slide it on this lady's table, ask if maybe
she could help out please so he wouldn't get in trouble with that
cook, and she'd nod and not say nothin, eat that sandwich as a
favor to this kid, those rowdy bar-types, being a nice lady and all.

So it's a buck and change, I told Kynzie, not so much for us,
but I look'm in the eye, ask some help with this wrong order
else I'll give it to the hounds and they'll get all squirty-pants.
Way I figure, it's what your granddad would do, extra buck
on the Sunday plate don't mean that much.



George Perreault has worked as a visiting writer in Montana, New Mexico, and Utah. His most recent book, *Bodark County*, is a collection of poems in the voices of characters living on the Llano Estacado in West Texas.

Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb

About Do Not Feed Signs

Okay—they are wildlife,
but they know us so well;
long after the signs have fallen
and humans are not around
in Yellowstone, these ravens
will be here, and their generations
to come with blood-red gapes
beckoning, squawk-screaming,
wings flapping, begging for morsels,
more bits of bread, cookies, crackers,
whatever we all fed them illegally
because their eyes and cries
were irresistible, and our deep
inclination could not be overridden
even when forbidden.

Rising above geysers, engulfed
by fog forming on the lake—
serene and steamy, the dark
and dreamy, sharp gaze
of ravens will still gleam
with intent to glean
as the young continue to follow
from stones that once defined
a now vacant parking area
to the other side of the road,
where they will drift in and out
of holes across in crumbling cliffs
to share with their parents
the eggs of hysterical swallows.



Terril Shorb

Driving in the Down-Drift

The mountains are disappearing
as the wind's white, wispy breath
floats through ghostly trees,
and Idaho flat-land fields, once
green, greet the heated horizon
in the rearview mirror.

We still hope to see blue sky
possibly today somewhere
up there ahead, maybe Utah,
in the widening ash-filled cloak.

Fire fighters are flooding in
from Canada. California,
Montana, and Washington State
have burning problems of their own.

And water—the damn water
in the automatic faucet
at the rest area won't turn on,
the karmic balance favoring
fierce needs over the frivolous.
Boundaries in the West
are hazy, but we should be safe
in the southern highland desert
of Arizona—our home blackened
to nothing two years ago.

With nineteen hotshots sacrificed
back then, the controlled burns
now never seem to end. Hopefully,
God keeps track of the smoke
as it rises dreadfully to heaven
with the withering West's
descent into Hell.

Exercising on the Road

Where beige hills slope
into a subtle V shape,
soft and subtle wheatgrass
almost hides her, an antelope
resting quietly in the brush,
legs tucked under, gold
and white face graced
by deep eyes, dark
and watching the oval,
red cinder track at the edge
of town; I see her
as I kick up dust, running
nowhere over another
meter marker and wonder
if she is as bored as I am.



Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb holds an interdisciplinary MA from Prescott College. In addition to *Weber*, her work has appeared in *Eastern Iowa Review, Watershed Review, Terrain, Sierra Nevada Review, Kudzu House Quarterly, Concho River Review, Midwest Quarterly,* the anthology *Talking Back and Looking Forward* (Rowman & Littlefield), *The Blueline Anthology* (Syracuse University Press), and other journals and anthologies. Her poetry has received both Pushcart Prize and Sundress Best of the Net nominations. She is co-founder of the 501(c)(3) nonprofit Native West Press.

Mark Trechock

The Last Farmer in Freedom Township



Third round of drinks at the Trail's End Lounge
after the Freedom Township annual meeting,
attended by five persons besides themselves and the clerk,
the three duly-elected supervisors fell to debating
who the last farmer in Freedom Township would be.

"My cousin's boy," said Kohlman, "if he can make parole,
then find a way to disguise marijuana as native grasses.
Methamphetamines would cash flow better,
but you can't really call that farming, can you?"

"Hell," Arne said, "it'll have to be Elroy Stubblefield,
he's already farming in three counties anyway
and gets more from the farm program than that ballplayer—
you know, the one they talked about on the radio—
he's doing everything the extension boys say you should,
and he'll buy out your cousin, locoweed and all."

Fjelde took a sip from his bourbon and said
he'd have to put money on his niece,
the one who came back from California,
as long as she didn't marry another movie extra
with a taste for cocaine and Pontiac Trans Ams.
He'd bet on her 600 acres of organic millet and chickpeas,
buckwheat, llamas and God knows what else,

her part-time job at the retirement home,
and the way she worked like work was a solemn vow
taken by Mafiosi on the head of a murdered brother.

They all decided against a fourth round,
and Arne pushed his chair back and tipped back his hat.
"All I know," he said, "is it ain't gonna be me."

Family Album

Skoal circle on the hip of her jeans,
the woman who inherited the farm
with calluses and broken nails
showed me photos from the '20s:
mountain pines; a picnic basket; a Model T;
three women in flapper dresses;
two men with dark suits and straw hats.

She looked up from the album.
I followed her blue-eye-shadowed gaze
past the dust bowl windbreak to her alfalfa field,
and she said, "They look kind of familiar, the way they smile,
like they must be related on my father's side,
but damned if I know who they are."

She found them under the feed receipts
in the mud room where her boots stood
caked with the dirt of the homestead
and waiting for the evening heifer check.

I wonder if her heirs will remember her
when they come home from their jobs
at the nursing home and the fertilizer plant,
and tear open the rent check and the utility bill.
Will they remember the eight-cent hogs,
the LDP payments, and the fields sold off
to the 10,000-acre boys and their air seeders?
What will they say about the quarter section
up at Freedom Township, next to the substation,
and the foreign-sounding names in the family Bible?

Will they recognize her in the wedding picture
tucked into the first page of Genesis?

Wolverine

Driving by the Trail's End Lounge, headed
back from a community improvement
soiree to clean up the oilfield's mess—
slow down the tankers, shut down the brothels,
limit the flaring, none of the remedies
likely to go anywhere—November dark,
cold rain spitting, I spotted Fjelde's
pickup, mud caked on his flaps.

I pulled in. He sat under a twelve-point
deadhead with a couple of Bjelland
cousins and two other fellows I didn't know,
shot glasses, ash trays, cowboy hats
tipped back to about the three-drink level.

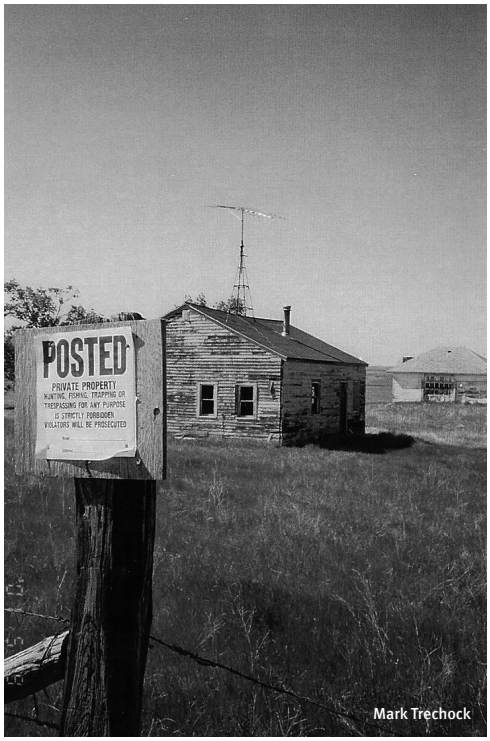
He had the floor, big game the subject,
along with the Game and Fish, which denied
up and down any mountain lions stalked
western North Dakota until a hiker
shot and killed one. Now it sells tags.

The cats were always there, said Fjelde,
but now the oil play has sent them packing
for new hunting grounds—other critters too—
to farms, parks, golf courses.

His words transported me back to April,
the elevated tee at number eight
where I play, the long dogleg left
along the creek, houses on
the hill behind me, a woman
setting out flowering plants, me
behind my ball, judging the wind,
and seeing in the tall, distant grasses
what I thought first was a black lab,
but no, its gait was more catlike,
or wait, it humped along more like
a giant badger. The wolverine.

Wish List

"All I want's the land back," Fjelde said.
"Don't want the royalty checks
with the stubs I can't understand
for the twenty mineral acres Grandpa somehow kept,
don't want the damage payments,
don't want the company pickup
and the guy with the after shave
rolling up into the yard
with the latest goddam excuse
about why my gate was left open,
or my granary smells like diesel,
or they flare off gas after three years
while my heating bill goes up,
or why they had to put their road
down through my best calving grounds,
or why I lost fifteen calves last March,
warm as it was with plenty of feed.
I don't really want nothing else,
excepting my land back."



Mark Trechock



A native of inner city Minneapolis, Mark Trechock has lived in western North Dakota since 1993, where he served as director of a rural community organizing project, Dakota Resource Council, until 2012. Nearly 100 of his poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Limestone* (Pushcart nominee), *Canary*, *Snowy Egret*, *Shark Reef*, *Radius*, *Badlands Literary Journal*, the *Christian Century*, *El Portal*, and in the book *Fracture: Essays, Poems and Stories on Fracking in America*.

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.

REWILDING THE AMERICAN WEST

"Rewilding" is a term coined by environmental activist Dave Foreman, who founded the Rewilding Institute in 2006. The first use of the term in print was, however, in a 1998 article written by biologists Michael Soule and Reed Noss. At its core is the practice of returning areas of land to a "wild" state, including the reintroduction of animals no longer found there. As explained by Soule and Noss:

It is restoring natural processes and species, then stepping back so the land can express its own will. Rewilding often focuses on the apex predators – like wolves, great cats, crocodiles, sharks, and salmon – and other keystone species that tend to need wild space and are lost quickly in domesticated or exploited lands and waters. Rewilding thus aims for restoration at a grand scale, the scale of conservation needed by wide-ranging species.



Pearson Scott Foresman

Source: Soule, Michael and Reed Noss, "Rewilding and Biodiversity: Complementary Goals for Continental Conservation," *Wild Earth* (Fall 1998): 18-28; https://rewilding.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/RewildingBiod.pdf

REDUCE AGRICULTURAL LAND USES

In a recent article for *The Wildlife News* on the rewilding of Europe, ecologist George Wuerthner reports that, as marginal agricultural land is abandoned, wolves and bears are returning to rural areas. He observes:

Ecologically speaking, Ag [agriculture] is far more destructive to our ecosystems than housing tracts, if for no other reason than the vast area they occupy. Indeed, I can make the case that building a housing tract on a wheat field or hayfield has increased *biodiversity. The typical subdivision with its landscaping offers far more diversity of plants, and thus habitat for wildlife than conventional wheat or hayfield.*

Much of the western landscape occupied by Ag is marginal. Indeed, there are better places to grow wheat than in eastern Montana or raise cattle than arid Nevada. Production by farmers and ranchers in these regions is sold as part of the total US market. As a consequence, Ag production in drier parts of the West directly competes with farmers in other parts of the country trying to survive economically.



Pearson Scott Foresman

Much of the West has a good start [to stop supporting marginal agriculture] in that large percentages of land are in public ownership, which forms a base for rewilding. If marginal lands were abandoned and reabsorbed into the public lands base, we would see a "rewilding of the West as in Europe."

Source: Wuethner, George. "Rewilding the West – reduce Ag land uses," *The Wildlife News.* 31 July 2019; https://www.thewildlifenews.com/2019/07/31/rewilding-the-west-reduce-ag-land-uses/

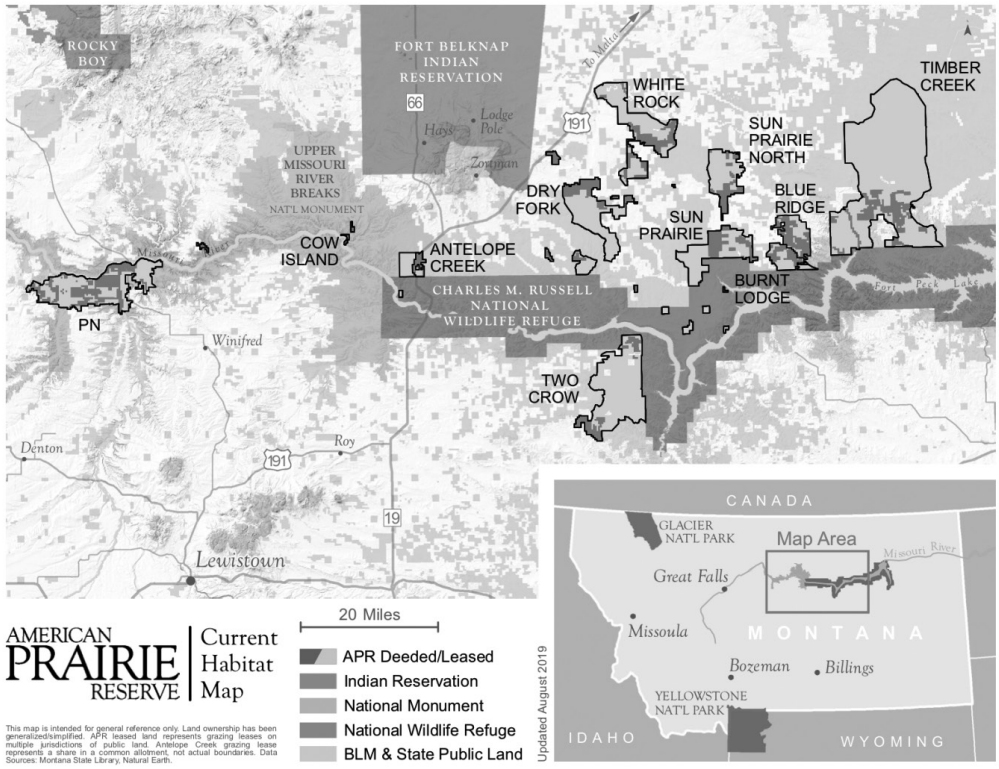
AMERICAN PRAIRIE RESERVE

The American Prairie Reserve (APR) began with the creation of a non-profit organization in 2001, which began to assemble land in 2004. Its mission was to create the largest nature reserve in the country. As Shawn Regan reported last spring in the Bozeman, Montana based *Mountain Journal*:

The reserve, when it's all said and done, would encompass 3.5 million acres of private and public lands along the Missouri River in northeastern Montana, an area larger than Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks combined. The group seeks to remove the livestock that roam much of the landscape today and replace them with bison, elk, pronghorn antelope, prairie dogs, and other wildlife that Lewis and Clark saw when they passed through the region in 1805.

APR is doing so in an ambitious and unique way: by buying up private ranches one by one. While other organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, have long acquired land for conservation purposes, none have done so at the scale proposed by APR, and few have had the goal, as APR does, of retaining ownership and management authority of the land. APR is stitching together a landscape that has been fragmented, fenced, and grazed for more than a century and, along the way, stress-testing an innovative new model of rewilding in America.

Source: Regan, Shawn. "Is American Prairie Reserve Taking The West Back to the Future?" *Mountain Journal*. 25 March 2019; https://mountainjournal.org/the-american-prairie-reserve-and-its-dustup-over-bison-and-property-rights; see also: (https://www.americanprairie.org/



Source: https://www.americanprairie.org/

BISON RESTORATION

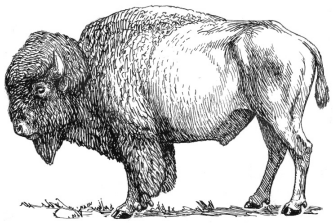
The American Bison Society (ABS) was formed in 1905 by William Hornaday, the director of the Wildlife Conservation Society. This organization and others succeeded in preventing the extinction of bison by distributing the survivors to several sites across the American West. (The herd on Antelope Island, Utah, descends from a group brought to the island in 1893.) In recent years, ABS has been involved in efforts to restore bison to tribal lands. In 1997, the National Wildlife Federation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Intertribal Bison Cooperative to advocate for the return of wild bison. Biologist Matthew Moran explained in January that:

[I]n the 1960s diverse groups began to consider the species' place in the landscape. Native Americans wanted bison back on their ancestral lands. Conservationists wanted to restore parts of the Plains ecosystems. And ranchers started to view bison as an alternative to cattle production.

More ranches began raising bison, and Native American tribes started their own herds. Federal, state, tribal, and private organizations established new conservation areas focusing in part on bison restoration, a process that continues today in locations such as the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Kansas and the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana.

By the early 2000s, the total North American population had expanded to 500,000, with about 90 percent being raised as livestock – often in relatively natural conditions – and the rest in public parks and preserves.

Today some 500,000 bison have been restored in over 6,000 locations, including public lands, private ranches, and Native American lands.



Pearson Scott Foresman

Source: Moran, Matthew D. "Once Doomed, America's Recovering Bison Are Saving US Ecosystems," *The Conversation*, 19 January 2019; https://www.inverse.com/article/52602-bison-are-back-and-that-benefits-many-other-species-on-the-great-plains. See also: https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Wildlife-Conservation/Bison/Tribal-Lands

EDITORIAL MATTER

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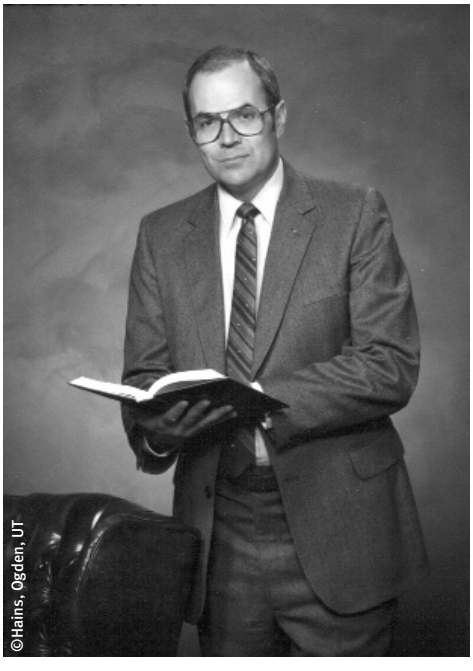
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Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Poetry Award



to

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