

CHANGING SKIES

CREATIVE NONFICTION

2024



UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC and MISSION ZERO

HINDSIGHT PRESENTS VOL. III
CHANGING SKIES
WRITING THROUGH THE CLIMATE CRISIS



FOREWORD BY
HILLARY ROSNER

HINDSIGHT PRESENTS
CHANGING SKIES
creative nonfiction

2024
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FROM THE STAFF

The third edition of CHANGING SKIES confronts the intertwined cycles of life and death that shape our world, acknowledging that the pulse of life often depends on what has passed. In these troubling times, when humanity's destruction seems endless, our mission is to spotlight those whose stories uplift integrity and selflessness. Our species is not without hope. Humanity suffers, we crack, we break, but we also heal, mend, and build. In CHANGING SKIES, we challenge writers to explore every angle of the inevitable social, economic, political, and personal changes we face as a species. We encourage them to not only present well-researched insights but also to embody the change they wish to see, telling the story of our world as if it were their own.

EDITORIAL STAFF

HINDSIGHT's Art Direction team strives to pair astounding art with beautiful prose and poetry throughout the journal. Selected from years of submissions, our choices range from artists residing in Belarus to photographers capturing the forests of Michigan. The frightening, rapid, and often overlooked effects of climate change around the world are voiced thunderously in the depictions artists and photographers alike choose to capture. Each piece is matched with its written counterpart with the content of both in mind, ensuring a symbolic balance.

ART DIRECTION

The HINDSIGHT Marketing team works to promote our journal and expand our audience. We campaign through our social media platforms, newsletter, website, and marketing events. We are especially proud of our partnership with Radio 1190 which we have cultivated over the past year. We hope that, through our efforts, we will become a larger part of the Colorado writing community. We are able to do all of this thanks to our dedicated staff, who have put in great work to make the journal what it is.

MARKETING

We in the Online department are dedicated to giving the work of our contributors a worldwide stage. The third volume of CHANGING SKIES represents our goal of looking outward to an international base of authors, artists, and readers. Through the publication of online exclusive pieces, featured pieces from past issues of both HINDSIGHT and CHANGING SKIES, and full PDFs of all print titles, we hope to reach readers, writers, and artists from every corner of the world.

ONLINE

As my short time with HINDSIGHT draws to a close, I'm incredibly grateful and proud of the work that has gone into publishing CHANGING SKIES. This journal would not have been possible without the dedicated work of our team, the incredible writing and art pieces from our contributors, and the generous funding we have received from The Nature Conservancy in Colorado, as well as Scott King's Mission Zero, which helped launch this title in 2022. Thank you to everyone who continues to support us and I look forward to seeing many more years of HINDSIGHT.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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FOREWORD

By Hillary Rosner

As a kid growing up in New York City, I never gave nature or its processes much thought. I never wondered, for instance, about the origins of the water that flowed from our taps, or what course it might have followed had it not been diverted to my apartment building. I lived in a land paved end to end with asphalt and concrete, and I never pondered what Manhattan was like before all that—before Dutch settlers arrived, when the island’s residents were Lenape people living in a landscape of forests, streams, and grassy hills teeming with bears and frogs, giant whales exploring its bays.

But on weekend trips outside the city, or in summers spent at camp in the Adirondacks—once I crossed the highways that separated the island from its own shores—my connection to nature sparked, evolved, solidified. I learned to look closely at the intricate forms of lichen affixed to boulders, learned to hear the sounds of nocturnal creatures moving about on quiet nights. And as an adult, I became increasingly drawn to quieter, wilder, greener places—and to questions about how the natural world worked, and how we were altering it. Spending time in nature changed me.

I was struck by this recurring theme as I read the contents of the publication you hold in your hands. Yes, of course, the Earth is changing—well, we are changing it, let’s be clear about that. Here you’ll find stories that tell of wildfire, ocean plastic, melting glaciers, altered timelines of seasonal phenomena, wild places being tamed. But while we are transforming nature, nature can still alter us. “My soul stretched its wings to the swelling tides where there was no sight of concrete jungles that would inhibit me from gazing at the far horizon,” writes You Lin in the essay “Nature Person,” which is about just such a metamorphosis.

That we can still, in our screen-focused, car-based, anxiety-ridden lives, be awed by nature and changed by it is a beacon of hope. And hope is another theme that runs throughout this collection. Sometimes it’s explicit: “All around me,” writes Nicholas Crane Moore in the essay “Returning to the Glacier,” there are people who have chosen neither to succumb nor turn away.”

And sometimes it’s there without the writer having even realized it. This may be in part because the mere act of telling stories, of putting words to the page, is a hopeful endeavor—even when the stories contain bleak details. Daring to communicate our own experiences with the natural world to other humans is a signal that we can see possibility, imagine a better future, venture to care.

Hope can be a difficult place to dwell these days, especially when it comes to the environment. As someone who has spent two decades writing about environmental issues, I know this feeling; I wrestle against it daily. Without hope, we dwell as cynics in a land of futility. But hope is radical, as Elyse Cabrera suggests in “The Outdoorsman’s Footprint,” where “silence and meandering paths” remind her of her humanity: “how I am as much of an organism as the trees. Life is full of cathedrals, places which stand in solemn reverence of older values, the unknown, and stories lost to time.”

In the pages ahead, you’ll read tales about powerful experiences in the presence of nature. I hope they inspire you to go out into the world, dwell in nature as long and as well as you possibly can—drink in its smells, sounds, sights, marvels—and do what you can to care for it, protect it, and fight for it. ♡



HILLARY ROSNER is an award-winning science journalist and editor, and assistant director of the Center for Environmental Journalism at CU Boulder. Her features about the environment have appeared in National Geographic, The New York Times, The Atlantic, Wired, Audubon, High Country News, Yale E360, Undark, Nautilus, and dozens of other publications. Her first book, about re-connecting the planet so non-human species can move freely, will be published in 2025 by Patagonia Books. ♡

A watercolor illustration of a mountain range. The sky is a mix of light and dark orange, suggesting a sunset or fire. The mountains are rendered in shades of brown and orange, with some darker, smoky areas. The foreground is a solid teal color.

MOUNTAIN FIRE BREATH

By Karin Hedetniemi

art by Travis Weaver

The mountain road to Miette Hot Springs in Jasper National Park is shoulder-less and unlit. As it winds us away from the main highway—deeper into the backcountry—I have unsettled fears: bears, ongoing burning wildfires, the remote wilderness far from safety. Many cars hurry past, exiting. Why aren’t any following behind us?

Pulling into the gravel parking lot, my anxieties ease. The historic craftsman bungalows are enchanting—Canadian Group of Seven, Tom Thomson-esque. Single-pane windows with wrought-iron latches. Hand-hammered doorknobs. A bell jar for the porch light, glowing a welcome.

The heart of our cabin is a fieldstone fireplace with a wood slab mantle. Beside it, a box brimming with firewood, stocked from the outside by removing an exterior panel, like old-fashioned milk delivery.

A small herd of bighorn sheep parade through the site, nibbling on grasses before slipping into the twilight forest. Gary gets to work chopping kindling. Soon, the fire snaps, warming the stones.



Sometime in the night, the poodle woofs with her low, concerned tone. I tune in from my half-sleep, disoriented by rumbles overhead on the metal roof. A bear? Hail? No—I smile to myself—it’s the bighorn sheep.



Morning appears less smoky. We take our swimsuits and venture up the road to the steaming pool house. There are four outdoor pools, each a different temperature. After an exhilarating round of plunges, I offer them more relatable names. The two coldest ones, Ice Cubes and Mountain Morning. The two warmest, Summer Rain and Après-ski.

Afterward, we hang our swimsuits to dry on the cabin’s Adirondack chairs, then begin a slow amble toward the trailhead.

We encounter a strange apparition: a woman in a billowing black and turquoise silk robe, playing a violin. The music is mournful and haunting. It assigns a minor chord and undercurrent to the wildfires. An omen, perhaps, for two days from now when fires will advance closer to Jasper townsite. Government officials will acknowledge the dry conditions and unpredictable wind, urging tourists to bypass the area¹, and so we’ll cancel our plans and keep driving west on the Yellowhead Highway through an ash-laden world.

Two years from now, Jasper will burn.²

¹ “Jasper National Park Wildfire 2022,” timeline for September 6, 2022, HikeJasper.com. <https://www.hikejasper.com/Jasper-National-Park-Wildfire-2022.html>
² “Wildfire Timeline,” Municipality of Jasper, <https://www.jasper-alberta.ca/p/wildfireupdate>.

In this moment, however, that tragic event remains unknown. We hike the boardwalk trail, beyond the crumbling ruins of the original pool house to the source of the hot springs. Mineralized water flows out the side of the mountain within sulphurous fumes, coating boulders over time in a luminous, pearl green.

I lean over the rocks and dip my hand in geothermal groundwater that has traveled two miles³ upward, flowing through interior passages no human hands have touched. Now it brushes my fingertips at nearly one hundred twenty-two degrees Fahrenheit—the same unbearable air temperature we recorded on our south-facing deck last summer on Vancouver Island, during the deadly heat dome.⁴

I am a slightly different version of myself now, anointed by the mountain’s fire breath, more alive and recharged by this brief encounter with primordial heat.



By late afternoon, the trees are still. There’s a golden filter on the world from wildfire smoke. The chalky stone face of Sulphur Ridge—hazy in the distance—provides a painted backdrop for the grassy tableau before me: Gary reading a book, both pups at his feet.

I settle at the picnic table, open my journal, and lay ink across the page. A comma butterfly alights, gleaming like fossilized amber. Its delicate paper-torn wings close and open.

We soak up the mid-September sun, listening. An hour passes slowly. Pink seeps into the sky. Leaves on mountain trees imperceptibly graduate to autumn hues. Inside this golden snapshot, nothing happens. Yet, everything is happening in geological time, as it has for millions of years.

We wait—hope—for the bighorn sheep to return. 

*I am a slightly
different
version of
myself now . . .*

³ Chris Yorath and Ben Gadd, *Of Rocks, Mountains and Jasper: A Visitor’s Guide to the Geology of Jasper National Park* (Dundurn Press, 1995), 76-78.
⁴ “Surviving the Heat: The Impacts of the 2021 Western Heat Dome in Canada,” Government of Canada, June 6, 2022. <https://science.gc.ca/site/science/en/blogs/science-health/surviving-heat-impacts-2021-western-heat-dome-canada>



SEASON CALENDAR

By Ava Rotman

Younger me recalls the seasons differently.

First grade, sitting on the color-squared rug, staring at the horizontal strip that wrapped around the front of my classroom. Labeled by the months in white bubbly bold letters, ordering January to December. Within that “calendar” were designs for the seasons. November through February glowed blue with snowflakes, snowmen, and kids in snow gear; March and April greenly alight with flowers and rain; June through August, bright green with a huge yellow sun, sunglasses, kids in tank tops; and September and October were orange and red, with piles of pumpkins and leaves turning orange.

The calendar is different now. It doesn’t really start snowing until December—I believe the last white Christmas was two years ago in 2022, before that, 2015.¹ If we’re unlucky, it snows until April. Spring feels like only a couple weeks and we only see rain toward the very end of it. The summer heat drags on from June until October. For the last month and half it’s pretty—filled orange hues and pumpkin spice—but they don’t last nearly long enough.

I witness more orange in the peaks of the summer heat, Colorado burning all around me. The Marshall Fire of 2021-2022 engulfed my peers’ homes. This is not the orange we want to see. In New York and Canada, the sky blazed orange from the smoke—the air was not safe to breathe in. Recess time is spent inside, hiding from the ashy snow layering the world around us, instead of outside. What happened to getting an escape from the classroom setting?

I wonder if current first graders stare at that same calendar rugs as I did twelve years ago. Have they changed? Or are kids instead irritated by the facade presented to them, winding around the front of their classroom rug? ∞

¹ “Christmas Climatology and Weather.” National Weather Service, December 30, 2023. <https://www.weather.gov/bou/ChristmasClimatology>.

WHEN JET STREAMS GUIDE

By Neall Calvert

I'm driving across Oak Street Bridge, emblem of the city's southern boundary, wondering where I will find peace of mind today. Having overworked and over-worried yet again, been tense and unhappy for a week, I must find a way to unwind. The vibrant cobalt blue filling the top half of the world, contrasting with the heavy rain that has bombarded Vancouver for days, is already an uplift.

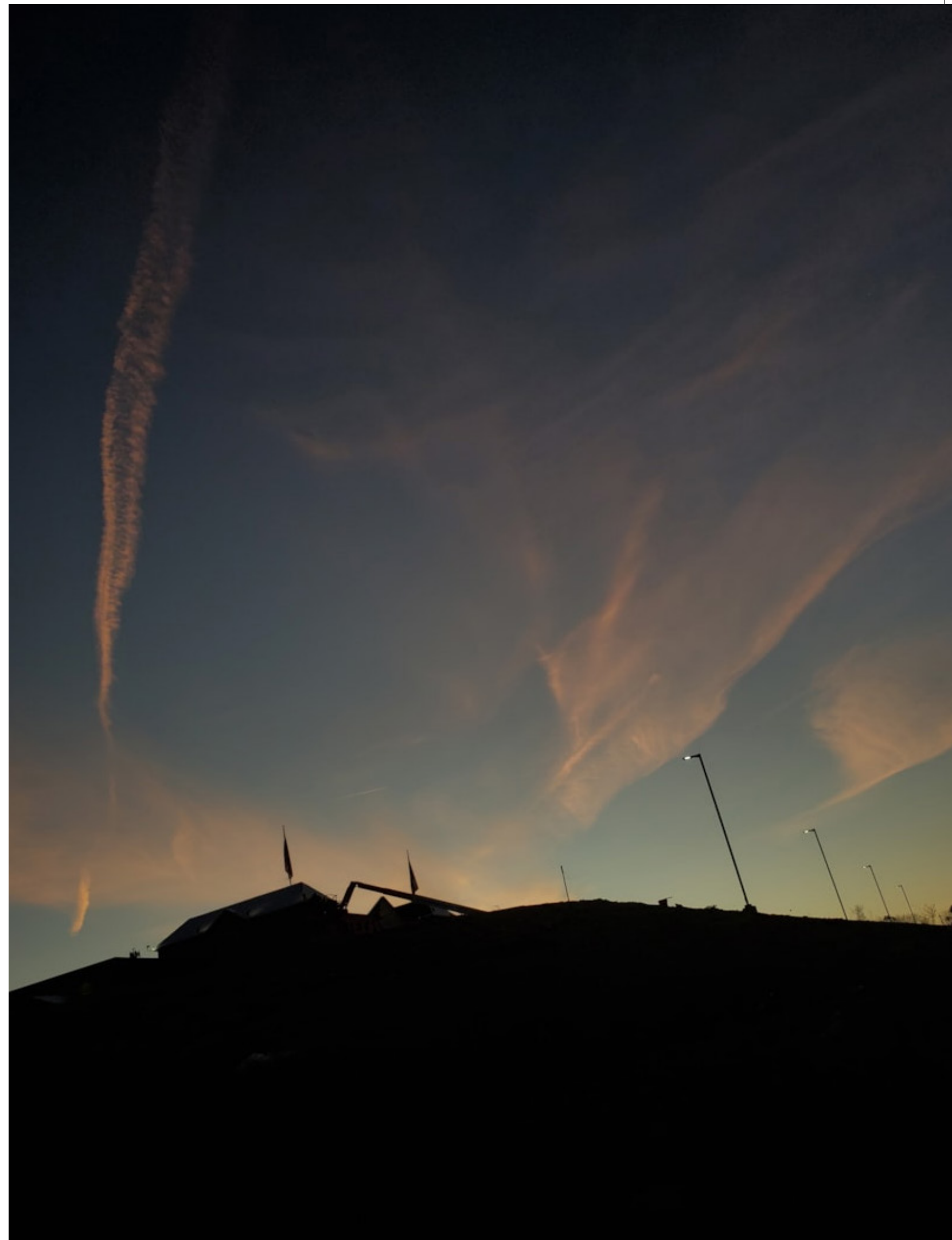
On this Sunday morning I'm thinking of farm country forty-three miles to the east when through the windshield I notice, gradually extending across the sky, a bright-white jet contrail. The track acts like a living pointer, so I head instead for Crescent Beach, thirty-one miles to the south.

A half hour later I'm parked at Blackie Spit, observing the worry-free, self-sufficient ducks, gulls, and shorebirds that feed near this small, sandy point. The view across Boundary Bay through my windshield extends for several miles northwest to the snow-capped North Shore mountains, southwest to the Southern Gulf Islands, and west to the much larger peninsula whose southern tip is American territory: Point Roberts, Washington State.

The smell of my fresh, hot, potato-egg-cheese wrap announces breakfast to the local crows, who assemble hopefully nearby. Soon I'm throwing blue-corn chips from my stash out the driver's window. And then one of the brainy birds perches on my outside mirror, just a foot-and-a-half from my face.

As it bends forward to take a chip from my hand, its impossibly delicate, wrinkled black trident claws struggle to keep their grasp on the chrome mirror frame, producing faint, precious scraping sounds new to my ears. Then, a morsel firmly in its beak, it heads down to the ground. Setting the chip on the grass, it jabs at it till it breaks, swallows the bits—and then returns for more. The rest of the tribe is content to feed on whatever I toss out the window.

I walk to the narrow point where the tide comes in from two sides, just three feet apart. I feel like a giant as I stand quietly, soaking my shoes in the incoming surf, soaking my mind in tranquil early sunshine. Then I head to the main beach area to sit on one of the varnished wood-slab benches that adorn the promenade for which Crescent Beach is known.



Listening to the waves easily rolling in, I examine the five-mile expanse of water that separates me from Point Roberts. Besides me, the bay is owned today only by seagulls, still blue air, and one distant motoring sailboat. But I am mildly surprised when a contrail begins forming in the western sky. It points slightly downwards, toward the treed cape of Point Roberts. I say to myself: if jet contrails are guiding me today, then Point Roberts, WA is my next destination.

Traveling across farmland, I stop to photograph reflections in small lakes left from the week's rains. Once through U.S. Customs, where a birth certificate proves Canadian citizenship, I advance down the community's main road and then pull off into a more rural area. The track turns from west to south, and after the bend I am astonished to spy yet another contrail, this one growing southward. What, I wonder, will greet me south of here? Soon I'll run out of Point and be in the ocean.

The pavement takes me to Lighthouse Marine Park, occupying the southwest tip of the cape. Millions of fist-sized rocks, polished smooth from eons of wave action, make it hard to walk on the beach so I climb the two flights of steep wooden steps of the observation tower. From here, as this day advances, I can appreciate the Strait of Georgia (also known as the Salish Sea), almost calm, with its occasional cabin cruiser, and a few feathered flyers in the air.

As I gaze up at the various birds, I notice several flocks of mallards maneuvering, attempting to link up. Next, in a constantly shifting scenario, several hundred of them form a raggedy long line. Then, adjusting back and forth in moves beginning to hint of magic, they arrange themselves neatly, wingtip to wingtip. And then, with a rushing sound, a precise, straight formation of about three hundred ducks sweeps overhead, the nearest ones just six feet away!

Something in me changes in those moments. I feel connected to the entire, very large, living natural world. I wonder: Has this show been just for me? . . . it doesn't matter. Standing calmly twenty-three feet above the beach in afternoon sunshine, I begin to understand that the peace I am seeking is available.

But I realize this peace will only come from accepting the world exactly as it is—the wonderful parts and the horrifying parts equally. All comprise this reality: stories of human altruism,

overcoming, and the magnificence of the natural world, as well as the stories of violence, greed, and tragic suffering that fill newspapers and TV newscasts. (I had always been a regular newspaper reader; a big-city news journalist for five years. "If it bleeds, it leads," declared the newsroom's resident cynics.)

But I see now that endless concern about human evil or ignorance brings only disempowerment and feelings of helplessness. And that situation will only change when I discover how to become peaceful and empowered within—as I am doing today—and am then able to teach others; it will come from me becoming the agent for the change I wish to see.

Elated, I walk back to my car and, after a nap, wake up to the sun setting over the Gulf Islands. I feel once again the particular bright stillness that occurs just at sunrise and sunset, and mentally thank and say goodnight to Sol. The ocean has become a vast, pale-blue radiance, seemingly illuminated from within.

In fading light, I motor slowly eastward across the tip of Point Roberts. At the end of the road, I turn the car around, and then spot, near the western horizon, a tiny contrail. It had been heading upwards, but now it arcs to the right, northwards—the direction of my home. A deep part of me silently thrills.



Materialistic science says we are mere observers in the universe, and that consciousness must fit into the brain inside our heads. Mysticism declares that we are all part of the universe—co-creators connected to everything, including aircraft vapor trails. That we are hardwired for esoteric experience; that there is no limit to consciousness. The mystic's path—the Big Picture view—provides meaning and brings with it the possibility of body-mind peace. ✨





THE OUTDOORSMAN'S FOOTPRINT

By Elyse Cabrera

Guanella Pass clings, in snaking barely-paved switchbacks, to the face of Mount Bierstadt over Georgetown, Colorado. It's a hazy dream, a half-light, a stillness. For me, the essence of Guanella Pass is contained in images: the biting air, crunching leaves, and overgrown railroad tracks leading to abandoned mineshafts. Its visitors are—as a rusted roadside sign noted—hikers, climbers, and adventurers.

"I can't wait to get my hands on some granite," Emily said, my ride for the Alpine Club's fall bouldering trip.

"Yeah, me too!" I responded, peering out from the window of her teal sedan at our passing scenery. They stood in such stark contrast to the sterile white floors and MATLAB code and thermodynamics equations that filled my time. The wind danced through the leaves as the trees and foliage curled sleepily around the edges of Georgetown. Even in the cool light of morning and the distinct absence of human activity, the whole place teemed with life: the dog in someone's front yard and the hawks wheeling overhead.

But, in some places, I could see the wild being chipped away, the tendrils of telephone wiring, rough skid marks on the highway, and trickling runoff into the creek. There was an undercurrent of tension between Guanella and its visitors. Slow down! One sign read. Do NOT disturb the residents, another blared. In a roundabout way, the very people who erected these notices probably disrupted the environment most. They forced their roads and squat dwellings into this landscape, providing passages for others like me to invade as well. Never again will this region of the Rockies be truly pure, with unsullied air and water and an ecosystem free of human interference. We—who choose to live and adventure in Guanella and find it so special—are the very contamination which creeps at its corners.

Georgetown itself exists in opposition to its natural environment and as a direct result of the uniquely human desire for wealth. According to the Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Strategy document (Guanella CMS), Georgetown's formation is due to the discovery of gold in 1864 at the confluence

of two nearby streams.¹ Naturally, news spread rapidly, and the town boomed. During my visit, I could picture the wagons thundering over Guanella Pass filled with prospectors who had hoped to sink their iron claws into the landscape. Though the gold supply had soon proved sparse, miners discovered rich silver veins in the surrounding mountains.² The silver was so abundant that, by the end of the 1860s, Georgetown's silver production was among the highest in the world, having gained the moniker, "Silver Queen of the Rockies." As we drove through town, I noticed that Georgetown remains a monument to this bygone era even now, with streets lined by over 200 Victorian structures and the decaying bones of old mining facilities rotting between the trees. The heyday of mining and other resource harvesting might be over, but Guanella is still exploited, now to different ends.

As we pulled up to the side of the road, the first warm rays of daylight had begun to burst through the cloud cover. I could see the other club members standing a little way off with crash pads slung over their shoulders and chalk bags in hand. I soon learned that outdoor climbing is much more informal than its indoor counterpart, especially bouldering, where individual problems don't even have bolts drilled into the rock for clipping. The experience felt so much more natural, much more sustainable. We simply walked through the trees until we found a cluster of naturally occurring boulders to scale. I could picture humans, from every rung of our evolutionary ladder, going out in groups to do the same thing. However, upon closer inspection, the effect of our presence was certainly known to the environment. The walking paths were well-trodden and defined, the ground littered with crushed leaves and broken twigs. The faces of the rocks themselves were dusted with chalk. There was no true wild here anymore, for we had long since tamed it.

The environmental effects of rock climbing are often overlooked. However, since rock climbing made its Olympic debut during the summer of 2020, its growing popularity has made its impact on various ecosystems more noticeable. According to a recent study referenced in Jackie Snow's National Geographic article, "Rock climbing is getting more popular—and that concerns conservationists," climbing chalk has been shown to negatively affect certain species of rock-dwelling ferns and it alters the rock's pH balance. "That matters because some climbing spots, such as erratic boulders (the study's focus), host unique ecosystems. These erratic boulders—rocks scattered across the globe by glaciers at the end of the Ice Age—are islands of vegetation, different from the land they sit on."³ The boulders near Guanella Pass fit this description, once being home to vibrant micro-ecosystems of plants and insects different from the environments around them. Now though, the increasing amount of climbers like me have already caused irreparable damage to the boulders and the delicate life

*There was no true
wild here anymore,
for we had long
since tamed it.*

¹ The Guanella Pass Scenic Byway Committee, "Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Strategy," The U.S. Forest Service (Colorado, 2001), 13.

² Ibid. 13.

³ Snow, Jackie. "Rock Climbing Is Getting More Popular—and That Concerns Conservationists." *National Geographic*, July 23, 2021.

they support. It's difficult for us to reconcile that this outdoor activity might be a detriment to our beloved rocks. Oftentimes, climbers are people who consider themselves "sustainable" or even "conservationists," loving our outdoor spaces intensely. However, we are blind to our blunders, however small they may be, in favor of focusing on larger sustainability issues like air pollution or fossil fuel usage. We neglect to realize that every small action has an impact and that ours can potentially erase ancient ecological history.

The Guanella Pass byway itself has similar unseen impacts on the environment. In a letter to the editor of the Colorado Daily in August of 1999, Professor Al Bartlett writes regarding the recent proposal to pave Guanella Pass' gravel road, dubbing it the impending "conquest of Guanella." Though a paved road would increase the safety of the byway and provide convenience to the local residents, it would inevitably lead to an increase in traffic.⁴

*... silence and
meandering
paths
reminded me
of my own
humanity ...*

He compares this "conquest" to the unjust theft of land from Native Americans during westward expansion and claims, "Just as it has been in the past, roadbuilding is the principal tool of conquest."⁵ And, though his metaphor may seem extreme, he was right. Now, Guanella Pass is paved. Just as Bartlett predicted, "The needs of this new traffic will have to be met by urbanization, which calls for the construction of filling stations, stores, homes, schools, and resort hotels, along with water systems, sewer systems, police and fire protection, etc." Although the residents of the towns near Guanella don't mine or do things directly harmful to the environment anymore, their very presence is deeply impactful. I think paving the byway was the wrong choice, leading to the increase of unnecessary human traffic and petty conveniences.

Personally, I believe that human impact on the natural world as a whole is unavoidable. Conquest is an intrinsic part of our nature. Human technology and explorations are so widespread, that no ecosystem can be fully safe or unaffected. As a result, we each now carry the responsibility to make decisions on how to minimize that impact. The overall intent of the Guanella CMS is to suggest certain management strategies that could be implemented to further preserve the ecological and historical significance of the region. Specifically, it suggests a variety of societal and legislative changes that could be made: adding some sort of fee for passage as a way to mitigate the number of visitors, limiting speeds on the roadway, and restricting camping and hiking to only certain areas which have less sensitive ecosystems.⁶ As I continued to research for this paper though, I found myself inundated with a crushing guilt. The more information I found on how humanity has already impacted Guanella, the more I desperately searched for solutions. I didn't want to be the conqueror, the polluter. Unfortunately, I was able to find only small fragments, like how climbers can opt to use naturally occurring sap or pollen to dust our hands instead of chalk.⁷ I eventually realized

⁴ Bartlett, Al. Letter to The Editor of the Colorado Daily, August 1999.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Guanella Pass Scenic Byway Committee, "Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway Corridor Management Strategy," 13.

⁷ Snow, Jackie. "Rock Climbing Is Getting More Popular—and That Concerns Conservationists."



that there is no comprehensive solution to my perceived tensions between us and the wild Guanella. Though nothing can alleviate my guilt, the small changes travelers, hikers, and climbers can make will be beneficial to the environment, even if it’s only a little bit.

As Emily’s car wound back down through the switchbacks of Guanella Pass, I looked back at the wilderness we had left. I was reminded of how much being in nature means to me, how I feel when I’m in a place that I deem “untamed.” Even though the area is far from actually being untamed, silence and meandering paths reminded me of my own humanity, how I am as much of an organism as the trees. Life is full of cathedrals, places which stand in solemn reverence of older values, the unknown, and stories lost to time. Guanella is certainly one of them, with its rich history, both human and otherwise, and its stunning beauty. Like a real cathedral, an ornate construction that took years to create, Guanella is still being built by our every decision and footprint. We must all do what we can to preserve its majesty for all future life on Earth to enjoy. 🐉



**CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest
Second Place Winner**

“The Time of the Snails”
by Megan Muthupandiyen

Pieces were selected from nearly one hundred submissions to the CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest, entered between 2023 and 2024. All submissions were judged through the old-school process of blind review, where authors are asked to remove all identifying information before formal review. This ensures accessibility, equity, and honest critique in our review process.

Thank you to The Nature Conservancy in Colorado for funding this contest.

“We are proud to present ‘The Time of the Snail’ by Megan Muthupandiyen as our second-place pick in the CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest. Muthupandiyen’s piece considers the behaviors of European garden snails in Fisterra. Through this examination, an engrossing metaphor for taking life slowly as a conservational practice emerges. I was immersed in the landscape of Fisterra and felt an appreciation for poppies, wheat, and snails while reading this piece. Even in the face of slow progress of conservation efforts, ‘The Time of the Snails’ reminds us to live slowly.”

Cade Yoshioka, Editor-in-Chief

A wide-angle photograph of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, a large, dark, moss-covered rock formation juts out into the water. A small evergreen tree grows on top of it. A person is sitting on the edge of this rock, looking out at the sea. The water is a pale, milky blue-green color. In the background, several other large rock formations are visible, some with trees growing on them. The sky is overcast and grey.

THE TIME OF THE SNAILS

By Megan Muthupandiyar

art by Daniel Workman

The Way wends west toward Fisterra, a place named for what the ancient Celts believed was the end of the world. The sunrise is never witnessed except by those pilgrims who, like Orpheus, turn backward.¹ The snails' rise, however, can be witnessed every morning, and it is a sight.

As the steel sky blanches into tin, the nocturnal kingdom of the European garden snail (*Helix aspersa*) reveals itself. In the darkness they have held their congress within the forests and fields bracing the path or roadside, but they are creatures of earth and water, not wind and fire. Their soft feet and antennae slowly undulate beneath their tiger eye shells as, guided by a remarkable homing instinct, they cross the road, finding their way back to their cool burrows before the sun regains its command.

For as far as the eye can see, these tiny caravans punctuate the Way. So does the fine lace of their mucus trails, which glisten like the quicksilver stripes of a zebrafish darting through a coral reef. Pilgrims will transect hundreds and thousands of these translucent trails for miles without realizing the kinship they possess with these tiny mollusks. They have entered the time of the snails.

For one, over the next thirty days or more they will feel a shift in how they perceive and speak of distance. How far something is will be felt and articulated by landmark, or by time of day—not in arbitrary measurement units such as miles or kilometers.

"How far are you going today?" one pilgrim asks.

The other replies, "Logrono," or "I'll see how I feel after I stop for lunch." Even those who possess a guidebook, who regularly pull out its maps and possess a well-planned itinerary designed with daily mileage in mind . . . even they begin to conceptualize distance from the vantage point of the position of the sun, of bodies in space.

And this remarkable time of the snails is not merely characterized by slowness, but by a return to navigating by instinct. Like his snail brother, the pilgrim possesses an acute ability to find clean water. He will enter an unfamiliar city or village and find his way to a fountain or community water source with no more effort than it takes to arrive. Therein he will fill his bottle and rest, rest and rise and walk again, as if he too possesses the snail's extraordinary capacity for finding his way home to a place he has never been.

The time of the snails, however, does not preclude seasons. No matter when they begin, thirty or more days of walking the Camino means that the pilgrim will witness the land in its element, blooming, greening, fruiting, falling, dying, budding again. Summer pilgrims begin when June's blood-red corn poppies are bursting through allées of green wheat; they will complete their journey as the last of the flowers blow out, the spent fireworks of their stems littering the landscape of early July. Those who have started their pilgrimage even a week later will take their first steps when the fig and almond trees bear big glossy leaves and hard, stunted drupes; they can glean fist-sized fruits from the trees by the time they reach Santiago at the beginning of August. The golden-white wheat that has grown fat by early August courts the attention of the peregrine falcon and griffon vulture in the weeks before harvest time.

¹ Some pilgrims are indeed haunted by what came before, and others, perhaps, seek to shepherd what they've left behind.



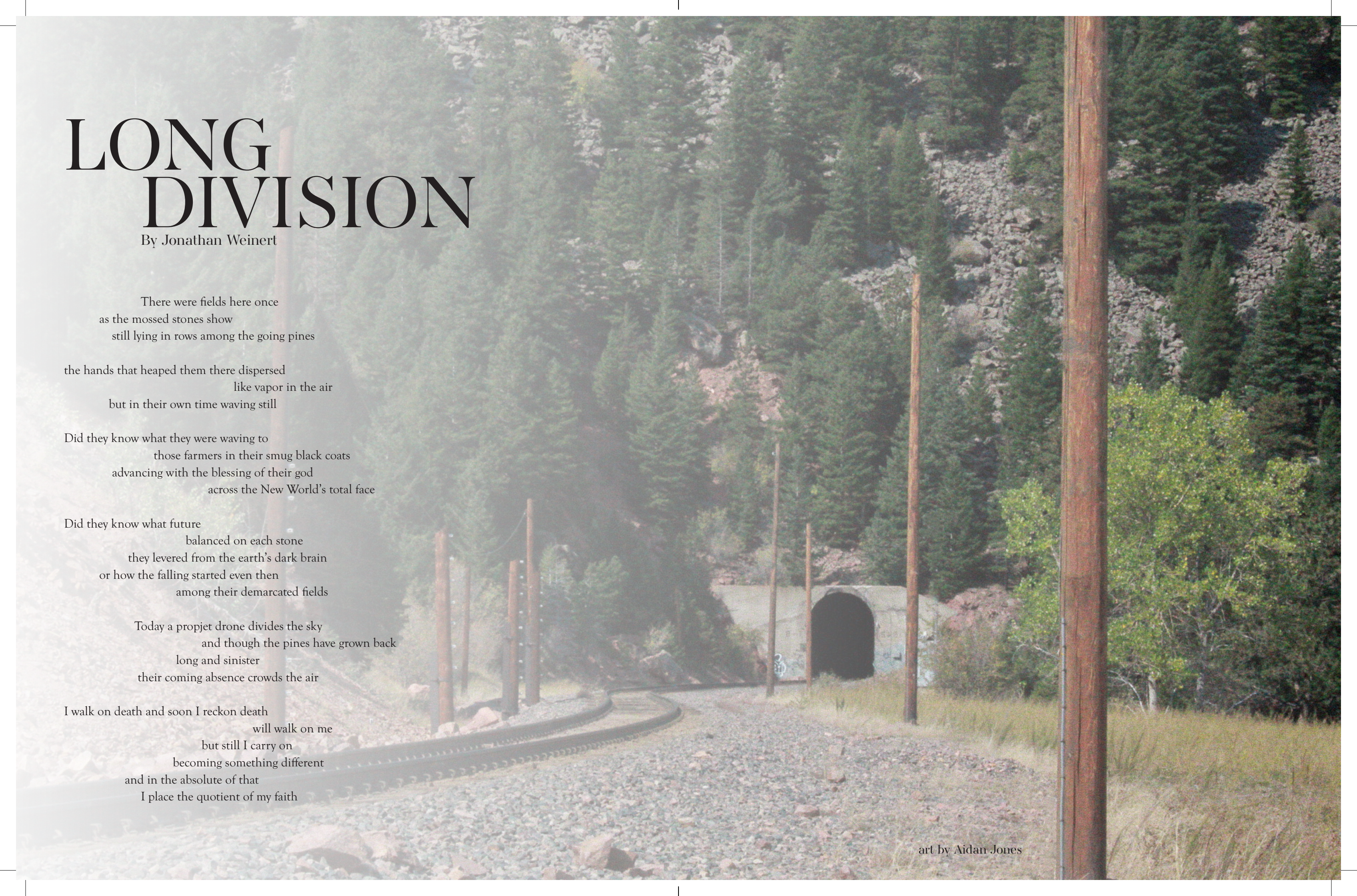
At the end of their journey, many pilgrims will walk on to Fisterra to watch the sun set at the edge of the world. Although the blazes will guide them for the fifty miles it will take to walk to the small village that bears the name *Finis terrae*—they will use that acute ability to find life-giving water in order to navigate the way four additional miles to the cape which, jutting out into the sea, marks the most western point in Europe. Through the night they will hold their congress, feast amid the flora and fauna, these creatures of earth and water . . . and then they will discover that the time of the snails is not easily left.

The next morning, before the sun rises and regains its command, nearly all will take a bus back to Santiago—the first motorized transportation they have been in for a month or more. They are shocked to discover what, at least at a conceptual level, they already knew: what would take an hour in a vehicle on the interstate takes three or more days by foot. Just as the person who has eradicated sugar from their diet begins to sweat or feels heart palpitations when they have a glass of wine or a rich cream dessert, so too does the pilgrim feel the effects of the vehicle's sounds, smell, speed. They suffer acute symptoms, physically feeling that which studies have already revealed: speed, automation, the false value that we place on it in our lives lived elsewhere, is a violence to our systems.

In *The Land Ethic*, Aldo Leopold remarked, "Conservation is a state of harmony between man and land. Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace."² Of course, in saying this he is decrying the slow, laborious level of human investment in conservation initiatives, yet had any of the variables in his life led him to walk the Way and enter the time of the snails, he might have been more optimistic. As the pilgrim knows, a snail's pace has much to teach us about living harmoniously with the land. 

² Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 207.





LONG DIVISION

By Jonathan Weinert

There were fields here once
as the mossed stones show
still lying in rows among the going pines

the hands that heaped them there dispersed
like vapor in the air
but in their own time waving still

Did they know what they were waving to
those farmers in their smug black coats
advancing with the blessing of their god
across the New World's total face

Did they know what future
balanced on each stone
they levered from the earth's dark brain
or how the falling started even then
among their demarcated fields

Today a propjet drone divides the sky
and though the pines have grown back
long and sinister
their coming absence crowds the air

I walk on death and soon I reckon death
will walk on me
but still I carry on
becoming something different
and in the absolute of that
I place the quotient of my faith

art by Aidan Jones

NATURE PERSON

By You Lin

1. For as long as I can remember, the back of my house has always been green.

We live in an apartment with yellowed walls, the age-old paint splattered and worn paper-thin, allowing raucous cries to echo through the night. Sometimes, at midnight, my brother and I would hear the clattering of marbles—curious, since the unit above ours had always been empty. Other times, it was the lament of a wooden chair dragged across the floor, its shrieks reverberating through the concrete.

But I suppose the most noteworthy of all was the thumping of objects being tossed about by the long-tailed monkeys patrolling beneath us. Their home was a stretch of lush greenery sprawling across acres of uninhabited land—a chain of mountains that rippled and snaked its way to the edge of Penang Island.

My brother and I had none of the appreciation for nature that I now possess. We were young and guileless, the world a playground splayed beneath our feet. Our egos were large, and we quickly disregarded Mother Nature’s wondrous creations. Having grown up thirteen floors above an endlessly rich spread of greenery, one could only expect to tire of the same old sight glaring back as they threw the balcony doors open and sighed at its mundanity.

The cows lowed a mournful tune, their ribs stark beneath the blinding sunlight. The monkeys—those miserable fools with their overly bright eyes—rummaged through the trash cans all day long.

Unlike what others might expect, hardly any serenity was found living so close to nature. Instead, horns blared, and the screams of sirens mercilessly awakened the residents, triggered by the monkeys’ nightly march through the barely sheltered parking lots.

But aside from that, the forests behind our apartment thrived, and so did we. The days were long, and we would sneak out at midnight for some much-needed relief.

The clatter of marbles overhead hid the distinct thump of the fridge and the crinkling of wrappers amid our clandestine feast. Hidden in the shadows, my brother and I swiped candies from the overflowing pile in the kitchen as our parents slumbered in their room.

The evidence of the mysterious candy disappearances was easy to hide—the wrappers, not so much. Every night, the pile wedged under our mattresses grew with our voracious



appetite for those sickeningly sweet guilty pleasures. We knew we'd have to face our mound of trash someday, but the thought of taking responsibility for it wasn't enough to stop us from shuffling quietly into the kitchen the next night, and the next.

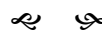
Eventually, our midnight activities were unearthed; we hadn't been as furtive as we imagined. My brother and I were a pair of stubborn mules—a few slaps and hours of kneeling on the cold marble floor could hardly stop us from trying again, though it did limit our mischief for a few nights.

But after that, having recovered from the limp we seemed to have inherited at the same time, we forged ahead with renewed fervor, determined to get rid of the incriminating evidence that would, once again, land us in similar, if not graver, trouble. It took us a while to finalize our master plan, but one morning, armed with our growing stack of shiny plastic wrappers, my brother and I shared a glance before turning toward the balcony and the dreadful view ahead.

Below, the same monkeys swung from coconut trees, the leaves trembling under the unwilling weight slung across their frames.

As if lured by some unknown force, our feet scuttled across the same marble floor we had knelt on just hours earlier, our focus broken only by a quick glance at our parents' closed door.

"Do it," I hissed, earning a solemn nod from my partner-in-crime. Then, the wrappers that had once seen nothing but the bottoms of our beds fluttered in the wind, their sight both terrifying and mesmerizing. "It's raining plastic!" my brother giggled. "Well," I blanched. "Fuck me."



2. We were plagued by the guilt of littering, our immoral act keeping us up all night. We had been taught to dispose of our waste properly in school, but the convenience of our balcony and our dismissive perception of the trees below was enough to tide us over.

Eventually, our wrappers turned into uneaten lunches, and lunches turned into test papers, workbooks, and plastic bottles—all of which we deemed too troublesome to dispose of in the communal garbage bin a few doors down. Our guilt, too, dissipated as we watched more and more trash disappear from our comfortable perch while the land below suffered.

Sometimes, my brother would turn to me with wide eyes and ask if we were contributing to the world's demise as we aimed yet another plastic wrapper into the depths of the forest.

"I've never liked nature anyway" was always my answer—a deflection, perhaps born from my unresolved guilt and the dormant part of me I would soon have to face.

Be that as it may, I've never quite mustered the courage to tell anyone about my habit, secretly too ashamed to speak of this disgusting, littering character I'd harbored into existence.

*. . . the bare bones of
nature's pride and joy,
reduced to a shell of
its former glory—*

By the time I realized what a fucking hypocrite I was, I forced myself to confess to a close friend, armed with false bravado and an inflated sense of righteousness.

Fortunately for me, that friend of mine took the "coolness" I tried to paint over my littering in stride, sparing me the exhausting task of embellishing its true nature.

"You're contributing to climate change," she joked. Climate change—what a big idea. It was a phrase so astronomical I could hardly comprehend my role in its exacerbation. Fuck that; out of 8.1 billion people on this decaying planet, I refused to believe my waste could push the Earth into the abyss of destruction. It simply wasn't possible.

And so, I replied with a dismissive shrug. "I simply do not care." In my defense, I wasn't really lying. I didn't care about many things back then. Conservation can only be inspired by love, and I was someone deprived of it. "How would you feel if the world ended tomorrow?" she asked me. "I'd welcome it with open arms," I said, knowing full well that the end of the world would never be tomorrow anyway.



3. It wasn't until a decade later that my burning hatred for everything and everyone reached an all-time high. Seized by the perpetual need to leave this haunted building of memories, I booked an impromptu trip to Perak, where I signed on as a volunteer with an NGO that prides itself on conducting research surveys in the coastal waters around Malaysia. The survey I became part of was an effort to document the dolphin population in the seas of Pangkor and Matang, along with a venture to study various methods of mitigating bycatch.

By then, I was no longer the child I once was but a fully-fledged adult, hovering on the cusp of maturity. Still, I was the youngest on the team, accompanied by two postdoctoral researchers and two other volunteers, whose love of nature was abundant and overflowing. I, on the other hand, struggled to express even the most basic emotions.

Regardless, I would always remember the first time our boat left the harbor as if it had happened just hours ago. The sea was a glittering blue, a stark break from the brown that had surrounded us moments earlier. Our boat cruised easily through the narrow ravine, where neat columns of stilt houses stood guard like solemn sentinels. Even the slightest disturbance sent ripples across the surface, shock waves toppling our boat sideways and eliciting a moan from an already-seasick volunteer.

The break itself was so stunning it took my breath away. Our boat picked up speed, the salty breeze whipping past my cheeks, and sea spray drenching us just minutes into our journey. My hat flapped dangerously as I scrambled to secure the sheets of effort logs I'd be meticulously filling in throughout the day, identifying boats speeding past us and fishing nets drifting lazily by, with the clumsiness of an eager toddler.

A shout broke through my trance. It was a sighting.



“What did you see?” I asked our lead researcher, Dr. K. I could feel the thrum of her excitement shimmering in the air around us.

“Sousa chinensis,” she replied. Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins. “We spent our last survey searching for them, but to no avail. They’re here! I knew they had to be here somewhere!”

I followed her finger to a dorsal fin rising from the water’s surface, pigments of color scattered loosely across its elegant body. I turned to Dr. K once more.

“That’s an adult. They turn progressively pinker as they grow. Here, look—that’s a mother and calf pair.”

The DSLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex Camera) she held swiveled almost instinctively toward the next splash. A series of rapid-fire clicks later, she rested the camera on one arm and delivered her orders with cutting precision.

“You, help deploy the aqua feelers and the sound trap. You, get on data. I want you to follow the dolphins and record their dive times. If you have any questions at all, shout for help. And if you’re gonna be seasick, it’s better to let it out instead of forcing it in. Everyone clear?”

We nodded in unison.

Between scribbling on my clipboard and anxiously glancing at the GPS clasped between my palms, my heart stopped every time a fin broke through the surface: a smatter of glossy gray fusing with the perennially blue backdrop. The sea’s surface glistened—there was no other way to put it. Everything around me shimmered with an enigmatic veil I itched to pull back, the world subtly intensifying as I stood, surrounded by the vastness of what nature had to offer. It was as if someone had finally brought the scene into focus, the pixelated image before my eyes sharpening at long last.

I breathed in the rush of clean air, my lungs contracting, demanding more.

Just as I allowed myself to soak in the intricacies of marine biology rattled off by the researchers accompanying our survey.

I allowed it.

Our search was tiresome, but the world around us was alive with activity. In the occasional lulls, I found myself leaning against the railings, my neck stretched by an unconscious urge to throw myself into the sea of blue and meld my soul with the waves. I hadn’t even realized I was smiling until my lead researcher turned to end our pursuit of the group, just one hour into our search.

“What’s with you?” she asked, though she could already tell by the look on my face.

“What do you mean?” I replied, brought back to earth by the clatter of equipment being hauled into the safety of our boat.

Admittedly, my nonchalance was feigned. I was terrified of the magnetic pull I felt toward the body of water splayed so unapologetically in front of me. I knew perfectly well what Dr. K meant, but that didn’t mean I had come to terms with it myself.

It would take a few more days for me to accept this growing love within me, and the inevitable heartbreak that would soon follow. Allowing myself to love also meant opening



myself up to the possibility of being hurt in return—and I never really fared well with being on the receiving end of that kind of vulnerability.



4. At lunch, I was painfully reminded of the bold declaration I had made several days earlier.

We had retreated to a sheltered cove along with the purse seine boats returning from their midmorning hauls, their crisp white tops and colorful triangular flags creating a garish contrast against the tranquil backdrop. I allowed my eyeline to rest on the looming island a few miles away.

“Is that Pangkor?” I asked.
“You sound disappointed,” Dr. K replied.
“Well, it’s just not what I expected.”

Indeed, stretches of barren land seemed to have overtaken the island that was once magical, highways crisscrossing the terrain where harrowing cliffs, and the raging ocean once reigned. I saw spires of dark smoke rising from balding forests, decades of construction littering the sandy grounds. Buildings stood tall and proud, while a rogue motorcycle casually zipped along those ugly, man-made roads, its engine a piercing noise in the air.

I saw Pangkor Island, but what I perceived were the bare bones of nature’s pride and joy, reduced to a shell of its former glory—an empire whose soul had shriveled under humanity’s greed, despite the layers of enchantment it still tried to heap upon itself.

After riding the waves all morning, this was still the first sign of development we had stumbled upon. It was peculiar, really, how a few hours of throwing oneself fully into nature’s embrace could transform something as mundane as bricks and cement into a sight so repugnant I couldn’t help but avert my eyes.

It was a horrifying sight—a portrait both terrifying and beautiful.

My uncomfortable realization of how affected I was by the island swarmed with tourism was not lost on my teammates.

“Oh, I can’t wait to bring you to Pulau Sembilan,” Dr. K exclaimed. Pulau Sembilan was a marine park, protected by law and therefore shielded from the reckless abandon of irresponsible tourists. It was a cluster of nine islands, as its name suggests (‘sembilan’ means nine in Malay, and ‘pulau’ means island).

I wondered what she meant by her sudden declaration.

“If you hate this, you would love those islands,” Dr. K continued. “I always knew you were a nature person deep down, despite your claims.”

“But I’m not.” I shook my head. “I hate everything on land: trees, mud, insects... Maybe I’m beginning to realize I don’t particularly mind being out at sea where nothing else exists but the waves and the sky, but . . .”

“More than 70% of the Earth is made up of the sea anyway,” Dr. K chuckled.
“I’m not a nature person,” I insisted, though my argument sounded weak, even to myself.
“Not yet, then,” Dr. K sighed.



5. The influx of trash slowly became more apparent as our surveys grew longer and our search more widespread. At first, it was just a few tangled driftnets, maybe some bits and scraps of plastic. Later on, however, large patches of garbage floated around the periphery of our speeding vessel, the plastic wrappers I was all too familiar with mocking me in all their glory.

“Do we pick these up?” I asked tentatively one day.
My mentor shook her head.
“We could try, but there’s always gonna be more.”

In the distance, a finless porpoise surfaced, barely meters away from a floating yellow bottle. I could hardly make out the lettering printed on its sides, but I knew it was some kind of lemon-flavored soda, probably chucked by a careless owner, intent on getting rid of that sticky plastic.

I imagined them as a chubby kid, waddling to the edge of a river, leaning down and gazing at the currents. Perhaps there had been little debate in their mind about the consequences as they watched the bottle spin in the water, its graceful dance proportional to the harm the oceans would bear for the next 450 years. I could only imagine, though part of me understood the owner of the plastic bottle better than I cared to admit.

I, too, had once watched those plastic wrappers flutter in the wind; and I, too, had once stared indifferently, turning my back as the world burned beneath my feet.

The difference—it took me more than a decade to witness the consequences of my actions, now floating in the vast ocean I had grown to love and care for.

Still, the worst had yet to come.



6. It was 5:31 p.m. on the 8th of August when we decided to call it a day. By then, the tides were already against us, and the canal we depended on to reach the harbor had grown dangerously shallow. Our boat inched across the muddy plains, its hull centimeters away from scraping the loose bottom. Only the skill and experience of our boatman kept us safe and moving, albeit at a snail’s pace.

That day, the sky was a magnificent shade of blue, and the mangroves were unusually calm. The surface of the water was a perfect mirror, undisturbed even by the ripples of our boat. All around us, seabirds perched on clumps of fallen branches, islands of leaves and debris providing them with the perfect hunting ground, rich with mudskippers,

shrimp, and insects. Above us, kites soared, occasionally joined by a lesser adjutant taking flight.

Then, our boat halted.

Our boatman turned, a perplexed frown on his sun-kissed face. His bronzed skin was slick with sweat, but there was no mistaking the sadness in his features as he bent down to retrieve a plastic bag tangled in his engine.

On board, we stared at the tattered remains, its vermilion shade a stark contrast against the natural hues of our surroundings. Slowly, the gravity of the situation dawned on us, and we turned to see the largest wave of garbage yet cruising toward us, heading out into the seas beyond.

It was a horrifying sight—a portrait both terrifying and beautiful. Terrifying because of how deeply rooted it was in reality, yet beautiful because of the sheer power of the image.

As it was, destruction often gave way to masterpieces of art; this was no different.

Our boatman told us they had opened the dam's floodgates to aid the fishermen returning against the tides, and in doing so, allowed every last piece of garbage from the shores to wash into the deeper waters.

There must have been at least a ton of waste in those currents, for there wasn't a spot left unblemished within our line of sight. If we squinted, we could almost imagine the water alight with a thousand colors, all of them illustrating an ungrateful civilization, ruined by ignorance.

The horror that followed was the inexplicable kind, one that could never be properly conveyed through words. One by one, we watched helplessly as rotten diapers, plastic bottles, and hundreds of variations of plastic wrappers joined the currents, their sheer magnitude too overwhelming to comprehend.

We were silent—how could we not imagine the marine life that would suffer as a result of our irresponsible littering, the pangs our earth would inevitably feel? For every piece of trash that slipped from our grubby hands, the earth would repay us with rising sea levels, haunting flash floods, hulking tsunamis, and the steep incline of global temperatures. Now, sitting amid the uninterrupted stream of waste, I could only mourn the fate of our planet and scorn the egoistic individuals we continued to be.

I didn't know it at the time, but my heart broke for what could have been had we left our oceans and lands in the rightful hands of Mother Nature. I grieved and yearned for what I had seen out there, miles away from the harsh reality of humanity and development—where blue was free to spread and touch everything in its vicinity, where the deep, dark, rich Prussian seemed to well up from every corner. My soul stretched its wings toward the swelling tides, where no concrete jungles blocked my view of the far horizon, and where sometimes, lulled by the waves into a haze of delirium, I would see the world collapse onto itself like the flap of a box, burdened by a weight it did not choose.

Sometimes, I could've sworn the sea weaved a tale of its own; a warning, a tolling bell, a cautionary fable of armies flattened by avalanches and ships swallowed by the ocean, never

to be seen again. Sometimes, out of the corner of my eye, I'd almost make out villages consumed by tongues of fire, stilted houses torn from their foundations by the ferocity of floods caused by none other than our heedless behavior.

I didn't know many things then. I didn't know how deeply every fiber of my being gravitated toward my surroundings; I didn't know I was, in fact, as Dr. K so aptly put it, a nature person. I didn't know that one day I'd glimpse the image of a flying fish on an LED advertisement board in the bustling streets of Kuala Lumpur and break down sobbing, for I had once been inches away from a school of those quaint beauties, soaring gracefully through the silver arc of a rainbow, called forth by a spray of sea foam.

I didn't know how much I would miss our rocking boat and the animals who graced us with their presence until I left the picturesque state of Perak and returned to the city. The city where clouds of smoke and smog clogged my lungs, the air too congested for anyone to breathe. The city where everyone, regardless of age, pranced through the streets with a cigarette or vape clutched between purpled fingers.

The city of dreams, of human fucking pollution, the very source of climate change itself—the monster whose inky venom was already beginning to seep through the cracks and infect my seas, the one place on this planet I could confidently call home.

Then, one morning, I woke to the sound of construction behind my apartment, the thumping of concrete against the earth a far cry from the monkeys' usual frolics.

There was a notice outside my door, bolded words informing us of the construction of a new highway to ease the city's growing traffic.

I threw the balcony doors open, the same old sight unfolding beneath my lashes. Only this time, instead of green, I saw the bare crimson of exposed rock, its reddish hue reminiscent of a fallen warrior's blood. I saw flashing orange lights and yellow cranes, their merciless arms punching a hole through the mountain itself. Sparks of blue and white chipped away at the century-old trees I had once grown to hate, and now, appreciated again.

Finally, in the last hour, I saw a tree fall, its tremendous weight sending a tremor through the valley itself. All around it, flocks of birds scattered, the beating of their wings signaling nature's futile struggle. Alas, humans had won again, and the great branches tilted landward, meeting their ultimate demise. A lone crow cawed; even the monkeys were unusually silent. Perhaps they, too, were mourning the loss of a great ancestor.

As for me, I felt the last of my resolve shatter along with the ancient trunk, its remnants dissolving into a million pieces and beyond. 🐉



AUBADE WITH LOSS

By Fasasi Ridwan

Isn't it the truth that we are heading toward oblivion? That our playground is now a battleground? Once, I watched a man commuting with the smoke of a cigarette to ascend to the sky. The sky, ravaged by the dark spot, watches, as if to descend on Earth its wrath. History watches from behind, mocking our becoming ruins. The future opens like a window, revealing graveyards carving each city into a memory of rust. Nothing is evanescence. But how do we preserve, if we have lost the guilt of leaving? In my room, I painted an image of what the Earth should be in the next decade: the sky blending into the edges of mountains, the forest covered with green as evidence of life, the chattering of birds in the lushness of the early morning sun. In the image, I could see the pretense unfurl into reality: the canvas bending into a nightmare—shadows dancing amidst dim lights; red sun burning bones into cracks; each line grieving alongside something dying. Do you see how everything only leaves the footprints of their extinction? How the water keeps getting darker—the rivers retracing their steps in reversal. & this is how a song is thrust out of me; my body, a choir of my ancestors dirge from my throat. I'm witnessing a becoming—the next decade will resemble every dead thing hiding in my strange mouth.



RETURNING TO THE GLACIER

By Nicholas Crane Moore

art by Richard Hanus

Along its outermost edge, the glacier had a polished feel. I ran my hands across its frigid surface, caressing the grooves and contours like admiring a finely sculpted piece of marble. The ice was smooth to the touch, slippery with meltwater. It melted beneath my fingers.

To reach the glacier, I had traveled alone through the yellowing fall, threading mountain passes turning crimson in the chilly air. I looked for bears but did not see any in the meadows beside the highway. I did not yet know to scan the higher slopes, where they gorge on late season berries amid the tundra.

Hiking to the edge of the ice was not arduous. From the icefield high above—a perpetually frozen plateau, seven hundred square miles—the glacier hung into the canyon, terminating less than a mile from the Park Service parking lot.¹ I followed the main trail to a designated viewpoint then scrambled beyond it over dark talus scraped loose by the retreating glacier. Signs warned of danger from falling ice, but the temptation was too great. I had never touched a glacier before.

Now I'm returning to the glacier, this time with my wife. As we leave Anchorage, I tell her I am anxious to see how much it has changed over the past five years—years that have brought transformation to my own life. Five years during which the world has pursued reducing carbon in the atmosphere without urgency, and one summer, Anchorage suffered the discomfort and confusion of 90-degree heat. I'm scared to see how little of the ice is left.

Small black signs begin to appear along the road as we approach the glacier, still miles away, displaying only four digits in white lettering: 1815, 1889, 1894. As I learned during my prior trip, they mark the glacier's approximate terminus in each of those years. By the time we arrive at the parking lot, the sign reads 1917.

CC and I do not head straight for the glacier—not yet. First, we are climbing to the icefield, whose edge, from the trailhead three thousand feet below, appears as a pale sliver against the purer blue of the sky. As the hike begins, we observe that the forest around us is saturated with color, radiant with life. Leafy alders, wet from overnight rains, shimmer in the sunlight. Ripening berries dangle like string lights from an unbroken tangle of green. My wife's enthusiasm for the features of this subarctic jungle—each wildflower, each flitting songbird—magnifies and enriches my own. We are lucky, so lucky, to be here on this glorious day, together.

We emerge from the trees after an hour or two to find that the glacier's terminus is far below. Now in an open landscape, we follow butterflies as they flit from flower to flower and watch a pair of small falcons, merlins, scour the tundra for prey. Their cries ring out across the mountainside and evaporate into silence. Then they are gone. Without the enclosure of foliage, we can fully appreciate the vastness of this land; no matter how high one climbs, there are still mountains above you.

*Their cries ring
out across the
mountainside
and evaporate
into silence.*

Though it's the only one we can see, the glacier is just one of dozens of frozen tentacles unfurling from the vast ice field into the surrounding valleys, canyons, and, on the Pacific side, fjords and bays. This great bulk of ice, believed to have been formed more than twenty-three thousand years ago by the compression of snowfall upon snowfall, is continually shrinking and expanding with the seasons.² Like outlet rivers draining a massive lake, glaciers slide down the valleys, stretching away from the icefield. When their toe ends melt in the summer heat, they seem to retract—always in a state of flux.

We hike on, eventually crossing from the familiar tundra into a barren moonscape strewn with gray rocks of various dimensions—fragments of mountains born at the bottom of the ocean. We climb a final promontory and the icefield appears—a sheet of gleaming ice stretching to the horizon. Its sprawling immensity is interrupted only by the uppermost portions of mountains, otherwise submerged, which float like volcanic islands above a frozen sea. It is the kind of sight that leaves one grasping for the words to describe it. Ultimately, none can.

It is difficult to tell how far the glacier, whose upper length we now see flowing down from the icefield below us, has receded since my first visit. What is clear is that the naked earth on which we stand was recently clothed in ice. This melting, I remind myself, is not a recent phenomenon. For somewhere in the range of twenty thousand years, since the last glacial maximum of the Pleistocene, ice like this has generally been losing mass.³ What the land has surrendered in ice, it has largely acquired in meadow, forest, and tundra. Even now, we notice tiny plants invading this lunar surface, setting the first roots of the tundra to come. There are no endings in nature, these pioneers remind us. Only change, transition.

Wind sweeps across the icefield, delivering repeated doses of midwinter on this late summer afternoon. We huddle in the shelter of an outcropping and devour sandwiches packed in anticipation of a more leisurely picnic. Apparently, the wind was unaware of our plans. We steal one last glimpse across the ice and head back down the trail. Despite our fatigue, we are propelled onward by the many sources of our sudden exhilaration: lingering

*... the more
deeply we commit
our hearts to
others, the more
pain we will
eventually endure.*

awe at the icefield, the strong wind at our backs, the surreal magnitude of our surroundings, our sense of accomplishment, and thoughts of what the rest of our adventure will bring. We ponder aloud what we might eat for dinner, savoring the thought of a well-earned meal in the town of Seward, where we plan to camp by the ocean and watch for sea otters, and perhaps even humpbacks, cresting the blue swells of Resurrection Bay. But there is still one thing left to do. Finally reaching the bottom, we turn toward the toe of the glacier.

As we trudge along the trail, I prepare myself for the unease I expect to feel at the sight of a half decade's shrinking. It is not the melting itself, but the cause of its accelerating pace

² National Park Service. "The Harding Icefield." Kenai Fjords National Park. Last modified July 1, 2023. Accessed October 2, 2024.

³ Jason P. Briner, Joseph P. Tulenko, and Nicolas E. Young, "Clues from Glacier Debris: Dating and Mapping Glacial Deposits Since the Last Ice Age in the Western Alaska Range," *Alaska Park Science* 20, 1 (2021): 10-19.



and the immense suffering it portends that disturbs me. This fear of a destabilizing climate is especially acute now that I am married to a woman I love, with whom I may someday raise a child. The thought of their suffering induces anxiety verging on panic. But it would be a mistake, an act of cowardice, to avoid the truth revealed by the vanishing ice. The melting glacier reflects more than just a warming atmosphere—it suggests other inevitable changes that seem beyond what I am prepared to handle. These, too, I am beginning to accept, as they are challenges we must all eventually confront.

A week ago, CC and I visited an elderly man, a family friend and neighbor, who recently lost his wife to cancer. The two of them were inseparable until the end, sharing a light-filled home on a bluff overlooking the Kenai River. Now he lives there alone, trying to orient his life without its guiding star. As brutal as it is to imagine, CC and I acknowledge that his reality is something one of us will one day experience. Whenever we talk about this, we struggle to make sense of it. It is not that death is difficult to understand. What we find hard to accept is the realization that the more we invest in the act of living, and the more deeply we commit our hearts to others, the more pain we will eventually endure. There is no reconciling this cruel irony—no resolving its sobering implications. All we can do, we’ve concluded, is love one another as well as we can, and make the most of the time that we have.

When we reach the viewpoint, even my low expectations of the glacier’s condition prove optimistic. The ice has retreated so far up the mountain, deep into the canyon it helped carve, that it is impossible to safely approach. I recall, with a jolt of distress, how easily I accessed it only five years ago. There would be no chance of touching the ice now. I try describing to CC, who is seeing the glacier for the first time, the extent of its deterioration. I find it difficult to express how jarring it is to see the change. But she does not need to have seen it before. She already understands.

The glacier tells us that all things will change. Even those that once seemed permanent—beloved forests, species, and entire ecosystems, like life itself, revealed to be fleeting. The immediacy

*... there are
people who have
chosen neither
to succumb nor
turn away.*

of this knowledge is the added burden of my generation, and of those to come. In time, we will see the glaciers melt. We will watch the forests burn. And we will say goodbye to the people we cannot fathom living without. Under these circumstances, it seems to me that to love—a spouse, a parent, a friend, a community, a place, even the Earth itself—is an act of great courage, knowing the pain that awaits.

Standing at the glacier with my wife, I cannot help but wonder how I will find the strength to deal with all that I will eventually face. There are infinite grounds to be pessimistic, and the state of the world warrants deep concern. Yet all around me, there are people who have chosen neither to succumb nor turn away. I’m thinking of the climate activist seeking a better future for life on Earth, or the doctor treating patients with terminal cancer. The biologist studying the decline of Arctic whales. The parents preparing their children for an unjust world. The old man caring for his ill wife. In a troubling time, these are the people who show me the way—who chart a middle course between naivete and cynicism, between obliviousness and despair. They are people who march forward, despite their fear, into the coming storm. People, in other words, who show the courage to love.

CC and I do not linger for long beside the other visitors. We are tired from the hike, and the comforts of a meal and a campsite beckon. As we walk back to the parking lot, we see dark clouds drifting in from the east, grazing the peaks of the Kenai Mountains. It may rain in Seward, but we don’t mind. We intend to make the most of the time we have. ♪





THE END OF THE GREATEST SHOAL ON EARTH

By Nancy Whitecross

I can feel the autumn sun shining through the car window as I meander from Johannesburg through the Free State, heading towards KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, on my annual journey to see the greatest shoal on Earth, a phenological event. A few Red Bull energy drinks and some egg mayonnaise sandwiches for sustenance will ease my seven-hour journey through three provinces. The gentle wind blows the leaves to the ground, displaying a colorful blanket of yellows and browns, like the ones my grandmother made.

Fall, known as Autumn elsewhere on our blue planet, is in full swing. The day is warmer than average, and I fear my trip will be fruitless, as the event depends on the ocean's temperature. I drive past a sea of beautiful pink, white and lilac cosmos flowers—an essential autumn feature warning us of a change of season. These non-indigenous flowers, introduced during the Anglo-Boer War from Argentinian horse feed,¹ have found a home in South Africa and now line the roads, their delicate blooms adding a touch of charm to the landscape. I have tried, over the years, to pick them, thinking they would brighten up my bedroom; alas, they always die before I reached home. Nature intended them to be wild and wondrous. As climate change accelerates, I wonder how long it will be before this beauty is no longer.

*I watch
gannets dive
into the water
for a hearty
lunch.*

Having reached my destination, I am excited, hopeful; will I witness the sardine run? I settle on the pool deck of my holiday home and watch for a dark patch in the water. This is evidence of a shoal of sardines—which indicates the beginning of the greatest shoal on Earth—known locally as the annual sardine run. My view of the ocean stretches one hundred eighty degrees, and the deck, elevated from the road, is a perfect lookout spot.

¹ "Cosmos flowers in bloom are a common sight along roads in the Fr", South Africa Gateway, April 20, 2018, <https://southafrica-info.com/land/gallery-free-state-province-south-africa/attachment/cosmos-flowers-in-bloom-are-a-common-sight-along-roads-in-the-fr-2/>.

Unfortunately, one cannot predict the certainty of the event’s date and time, which can happen anytime from May in autumn to July in winter. But when it comes, millions of sardines migrate to the cooler waters of the Agulhas Bank and then up to Mozambique to spawn, creating a feeding frenzy as they move north along the east coast of southern Africa. The migration attracts seabirds, seals, dolphins, sharks and whales all there to round up pockets of fish into a Bait ball. The shoals are approximately four miles long, less than a mile wide and nearly a hundred feet deep.² In preparation for this event in Durban, the shark’s board staff have removed the shark nets along the coast so sardines and predators do not get caught up in the nets.

Sardines prefer inshore waters to the warmer, fast-flowing Agulhas current, which is strongest off the continental shelf. Sardines move closer to shore as they move north, but no one knows why.³ This is when the sardines beach, and local fishermen scoop them by hand and put them into crates to sell. In the Cape, once a sighting has been broadcast, one can guess the arrival time of the sardines in Durban KwaZulu Natal. This phenological event is all about timing. The sardine run, a crucial indicator of climate change, is a phenomenon that we must understand and protect. Little is known about this phenomenon. Data indicates the sardines joining in the run originate from South Africa’s cool temperate Atlantic Ocean. They are cold water sardines attracted to the temporary cold water upwelling off the southeastern coast. It is believed that the temperature of the water has to drop below seventy degrees Fahrenheit for the sardine run to occur.³

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the sardines have failed to run several times.⁴ One reason is that the water temperature has been too high, so they run in colder waters deep out to sea on the continental shelf, where we cannot observe them. I feel that this year, 2005, could be another disaster for the local people who rely on the sardines beaching to sustain their livelihood.

My friends call me they anticipate the arrival of a shoal within minutes; some dark patches have been spotted a few miles south. I don my wetsuit and launch my jet ski into the Umkomaas River mouth to look closer at the shoal as it moves north. The sun is warm, the sea is calm. The conditions are perfect for me to ski. Once launched, I navigate over the saddle of the last small wave and head south. I watch gannets dive into the water for a hearty lunch. I stop my ski suddenly, realizing that the birds can no longer fly, making them easy pickings.

Dolphins swim close to my jet ski, and one jumps over me, clicking and whistling as though opening up a conversation. Birds, sardines, and dolphins surround me. However, I

*The sea boiled
with activity, the
noise almost
deafening.*

² Wikipedia contributors. “Sardine Run.” Wikipedia, October 21, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardine_run.
³ Latham, Katherine. “How South Africa’s Sardine Run Is Changing,” June 10, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240520-how-south-africas-sardine-run-is-changing>.
⁴ The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. “2019-07 - We Tracked South Africa’s Sardine Run Over 66 Years: Here’s What We Found - Wits University,” July 30, 2019. <https://www.wits.ac.za/news/latest-news/opinion/2019/2019-07/we-tracked-south-africas-sardine-run-over-66-years-heres-what-we-found.html>.

never gave sharks a second thought. I observe the magnificence of our planet first-hand, a feeding frenzy of such magnitude that I had never seen before dancing in front of me. The sea boiled with activity, the noise almost deafening. As I turn to look at shore, sardines beached in thousands—fishermen were laughing as they filled their crates. I felt for those poor sardines caught, the birds that couldn’t fly and were eaten. Nature was doing its job, ensuring the food chain worked as it should—providing all its creatures, including man, with its bounty. This was the best sardine run I had experienced.

I return to shore and greet the fishermen, congratulating them on their incredible catch.

Our country’s scientists have recorded advances in the timing of the flowering of Jacaranda trees in Johannesburg, apple and pear flowering in the Cape, and the increase in the Indian Ocean temperatures, which have delayed the sardine run. These shifts in timing cannot continue as they significantly impact agriculture and tourism here in South Africa.

Visible from space, the sardine run is the largest migratory event on our planet.³

Few people have experienced such an incredible sight that will eventually be lost and forgotten due to climate change, the end of the greatest shoal on Earth. ☞



PRESCRIBED BURN

By Amy Mäki

fire sparked fur; the cave collapsed with trees
“crash” glasses matched liquid and cheered
a body thinly cursed, yearned
house burned with zazor lights, the patio looked beautiful
he tumbled toward the river—with smoking brown fat
the hors d’oeuvres were ready!
water pulled him past the red flames, and real estate signs
a couple enjoyed cigarettes resting backs on wooden decks
his head dripped, swayed, and collapsed on the grey bank
she adjusted her bra and popped a pill while admiring the tile
no fish in an early spring river
headlights reached 20 feet into pines
human laughter and the smell of seared flesh
salt was the last thing he heard

art by Colin Turner

YOUNG^{ENOUGH} TO WATCH THE WORLD BURN

By Phia Elsass

I had already woken up on the wrong side of the bed that day. I was having trouble sleeping all week, and it's not like waking up at 8:30 AM should be hard because of my job, but when the sun comes up it's like a personal attack. I dragged myself through every step of my morning routine, and as I looked at myself in the mirror, a ghostly reflection stared back at me. Sunken eyes, porous skin, devoid of color, and I hadn't even washed my work shirt from the day before. It's always now in this ungodly early hour in the morning that my mind tells me everything I hate about this world, and my mind likes to prophesize too. After I slapped myself with cold water and covered my greasy hair with a baseball cap, I looked into my eyes and told myself, "Someone is going to be really pissed at you today."

It was a crisp July afternoon in the Breckenridge Welcome Center. When I looked out the window, the sun was nearly blinding, and I wished I was out there instead. Outside people were out hiking and biking and enjoying the mountain air, while I sat inside watching people flood in and out to use our restrooms. The monstrous sounds of hand dryers and the squeaking door created white noise. Perfect conditions for me to stare intently at the open space in front of me, blinking one eye at a time. I was thinking about when I wanted to take lunch. I was wishing that my plain bagel with plain cream cheese would magically taste okay and mentally choosing what river rock I wanted to sit on during my break. That's when she charged up to me, like a wild-fire. Unexpected, hot-headed, fists flexing, smoke blazing. Those dark wide framed bejeweled sunglasses hid something fierce. She knew what she was after. It wasn't information. It wasn't directions. It wasn't any burning questions. She came to argue.

She paced around the desk in front of me. Her breath hitched as she opened her mouth and closed it. Then finally, she made up her mind to shout.

"You don't have *any* brochures?"

I gave a tired smile. "Well," I said, folding my arms on the desk. "We're trying to go as paperless as we can, but I can send you off with this handy dandy town map with some QR codes on the back." I've learned to just smile when I get these questions. Don't waver. Just smile. "Keep smiling. Don't stop smiling." I have to tell



myself. I leaned closer into the desk and pointed. “We are right here at this yellow star in the center and—”

“How am I supposed to know what to do with a map? I need brochures! I need to sit down and read brochures.”

I smiled wider. “Ma’am, that’s what I’m here for,” I replied, my voice pitching higher. “So if you have any questions you can just ask.”

“You have all this space,” she shouted. “All this space you have to put brochures, and it’s empty!” She gestured behind her to the lobby. Bright green infographics line the walls about the town’s sustainability campaign, with messages about keeping our trails clean and the impact of litter on our environment. “How am I supposed to know when the restaurants close? How am I supposed to know what to do on my vacation? And look at this—” She stormed over to the small book rack in the corner. “So you’re trying to sell me stuff?” She scoffed at the books the non-profit history society sells.

“If you have a question or need suggestions for your trip. I’m happy to help.” My eye twitched. Just a little bit. And I tapped my head and said, “All of the information is in my head.”

And that was snarky, apparently. She told me so right then and there that it was snarky because you know what, I am snarky. Because I am a walking brochure. Because my job replaces a brochure. Because who needs brochures when you have a snarky ass, smiling smart aleck, know-it-all, welcome center worker, who has grown up in this town and worked in this welcome center for two whole years. Whose job is to tell you what to do on your vacation, whose job is to tell you everything and more that a brochure can. And you know what, “It’s fine!” I said, “The world is changing,” “and all our information is moving electronically now, so paper is on its way out!” I said. All with a smile.

She huffed and stomped her feet. And she wound up her gears so tight they had nothing more to do than pop. I saw a small puff of smoke wisp out of those dazzling dark sunglasses of hers. “And you know what?” She took a step closer. “This world is going up in flames and this town is going to be the one that starts it. And it’s okay!” she exclaimed. “Because I won’t be the one to

*I am snarky.
Because I
am a walking
brochure.*

see it though. Because I’m going to be long gone by the time that this town, this country, this world goes up in flames, but you will still be here to watch this hell fire shit show through. Because you didn’t have any brochures. Because you are young enough to watch the world burn.”

And you know what I should’ve yelled back: “I’m sorry!” I should have replied. “I’m sorry. I’m so very sorry. I’m so so sorry that you are taking a vacation in the most beautiful place in the world. I’m sorry you have to navigate around this incredibly safe and walkable town all with a damn map and the damn suggestions from a local. I’m sorry my job, my income, has replaced your beloved paper brochures. And you know what: I am afraid of watching the world burn. Every night I dream about smoke, debris, fire, the AI controlled robots who force you to get information from them so that they can indoctrinate you with what rafting companies you should book with and what restaurants you should eat at tonight. Ugh! Doesn’t that sound horrific! You know what. I have an idea! I think I can save the world from burning fires. I will take on the burden and make a change. I will give you a brochure. I will douse those flames.”

And if I said all that she would take off her sunglasses, revealing her stunning green eyes that shimmer and reflect sun rays shining through a forest canopy, and she would say back to me, “You are so brave. And so intellectual for deviating from the zeitgeist of your generation. I’m so glad you came to your senses. And I would love a brochure.”

And I would say back, “Let me go make a brochure for you. You see that tree out there? That big pine? That big pine there in the town plaza? How about I go take an ax and go cut that one down? Just for you, my lady, my queen bee, my customer. I’ll grind it up, make it into glossy paper, and write a little information on it. What’s your question? Oh yeah when the restaurants close? Okay. Well all the restaurants change hours about every week, but for you my lady, I’ll write it down. How about horseback riding? No? You’re afraid of horses. Okay. What else? Oh rafting? Yes, of course! I’ll write down all ten companies in the area and their rates, and all five experiences they individually offer. I’ll even throw in my personal reviews for each company and why they’re better than the others and even give suggestions for my favorite rafting guides.”



And she would thank me. She would practically be on her knees sobbing before me, her brochure hero, as I hand her the twenty page brochure I wrote in exquisite detail.

And just to add the cherry on top I would say, “And while I’m at it let me give you a hundred more brochures. No? You want a thousand? Ten thousand brochures? Definitely! Coming right up! Now make sure after you’re done looking through these ten thousand brochures for your four day vacation to the mountains that you properly dispose of them in our natural land and our clean rivers. You can be the very change you want to see in the world and spread those brochures like seeds across the soil. That way they’re able to return to nature, where they should be, and the cycle can continue. Can you do that for me? Thanks. I knew you wouldn’t let me down.”

But the thing is, you see, I didn’t say any of that. And as she yelled, and as she stomped her feet in her self-induced rage. I looked out the window. Outside was the bustling town full of bustling people enjoying the outdoors. What I didn’t see was the smoke or the flames or the haze or the hell fire that should be looming upon our brochure-less town, waiting to strike down with its first blaze any minute now. But what I did see was the people. I saw the many brochure-less people navigating my town, enjoying it as it should be enjoyed. Children were playing in the river. The elderly were listening to the guitarist in the town plaza. A father and son biked on the pathway to get their groceries. Thriving in the absence of fire was a town of people trying their best to douse the wood and prevent the flame. All of them working in the smallest ways to keep our town as brochure-less as possible, even when they themselves are just passing through.

As she came to the end of her speech, her argument was running thin. Believe it or not, somehow I was still smiling, but only with my front teeth; My eyebrows raised and furrowed.

“I’m–I’m,” she hesitated. “I’m going to write a comment,” was how she finished her grand display.

“A comment?” I asked.

“I’m going to write a comment for how unfriendly my experience was in this welcome center, and your actions will have consequences!”

I took out a pen and wrote my name on the town map in front of her so she could include it in her comment. Because I believe if you’re proud of something, you put your name to it. ♪



CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest Third Place Winner

“Maui‘i is Burning”
by Wendi White

CHANGING SKIES and its parent journal, HINDSIGHT, regularly host creative nonfiction competitions. This semester’s contest is proudly sponsored by The Nature Conservancy in Colorado, who pledged \$1,000.

Thank you to The Nature Conservancy in Colorado for funding this contest.

“We are proud to present ‘Maui‘i is Burning,’ by Wendi White, as our third-place pick in the CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest. WWhite immersed me in a connection between Hawaiian mythology and today’s environmental upheavals. Hina, the goddess who releases storms as punishment for disrespecting the land, draws parallels to the devastating Lahaina fires, aggravated by fierce winds. Reading ancient Hawaiian chants not as relics but as vital, timeless guides, warns that unchecked consumption threatens humanity’s survival. It’s a call to respect the earth before irreversible destruction.”

Angelina Kondrat, Assistant Editor-in-Chief





MAUI' I IS BURNING

By Wendi White

art by Irina Tall (Novikova)

Recently, my spouse was cleaning out his father’s tool room. Behind stacks of forgotten Christmas decorations was a water-stained woodblock print by Dietrich Varez. The print depicts the storied goddess, Hina, mother of Moloka‘i, opening her gourd of winds to unleash a storm upon the island. You can still find this print online along with this description:

From her sacred wind gourd, Wawahonua,
Hina releases a storm when her land is mistreated.
If there is no improvement, the storms worsen
until the final storm; the destroyer of man.
‘Pu‘inokolu a Hina’ (three winds of Hina) is the
chant that speaks of this.¹

Although damaged, we brought the print home—left it unframed and unrepaired beside our windows overlooking the dwindling sands of Waikiki. For months, drinking my morning coffee in view of Hina’s fury has been sobering while reading the news of West Maui’s incineration. Flames fanned by fierce winds erased a community steeped in deep history in less time than it takes the sun to rise and set.

*... Mother Earth
will rid herself
of humans and
life will go on
without us.*

Before Lahaina was a pineapple port, a trading post for sugar, or a stopover for whalers bent on slaughter to keep the lights of New England burning, it was the first seat of Kamehameha kingdom. It was where Captain Cook initially attempted to land when he stumbled upon the Hawaiian Islands, but a fierce wind, yes—the wind—drove him away.

In the Chant of the Three Winds, Hina cautions humanity to treat her beloved child, the land of Moloka‘i, with respect and care. When the people fail to do so, she unleashes a small storm to show them the consequences of ignoring her instructions. This tiny tempest prompts repentance that does not last, so Hina unleashes her wind once more, opening the gourd halfway until

¹ Varez, Dietrich. “L31 Puinokolu a Hina by Hawai‘i Artist Dietrich Varez.” Dietrich Varez. <https://dietrichvarez.com/products/puinokolu-a-hina>

the trees lose their leaves, the villages topple, and lightning strikes the ground. She then promises the people that if they take more than their share of the land’s abundance again, the third wind will remove them from Molokai‘i forever. The chant is a prophecy and I have heard it humming in the air every morning since the fires.

Living on these islands has shown me how the chants of Hawai‘i have been passed down through the generations, not because they are quaint or useful tourist attractions, but because they carry timeless knowledge about surviving here. The wisdom they hold is a net of connections strong enough to gather the world in this perilous time and pull her toward safety.

Let us not forget, there is another storm waiting in the gourd, not just for Hawai‘i, but for all of us if we don’t reject our culture of incessant consumption that sucks the very life from Earth’s ecosystems. If we stand in the smoldering ash of this past summer’s heat waves and continue to extract, exploit, and capitalize on the planet’s finite resources, Mother Earth will rid herself of humans and life will go on without us. Hina hasn’t opened her gourd all the way, not yet. We have one chance left; what will you do to stay her hand? 🌀



O GREENLAND! MY GREENLAND!

By Anne Gruner

Ice thaws—
a shiny shield
that deflects the sun,
protecting you from heat.
Frozen for millennia,
it begins the long farewell.

Your permafrost softens
impregnable for ages
disgorging methane and carbon
into the global greenhouse.

You melt at a pace
unseen for thousands of years,
losing ancient layers
as sleeping microbes—
good and evil—awaken
from glacial captivity.

Your meltwater
newly born, cold, and fresh—
floods the salty sea
like hormonal imbalance
slowing the ocean's circulation.

You shed rain
at your highest peak
for the first time in memory,
weeping.





SALTY BISON

By Sean Stiny

There was a Buffalo Soldier
In the heart of America
Stolen from Africa, brought to America
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival¹

There’s an island in the middle of the Great Salt Lake inhabited by brutish beasts. Snotty drooling belching beasts the size of Volkswagens. Dozens and dozens of them. Right out in the open. Beasts that defined America, their slaughter then defined America again.² Though Bob Marley didn’t wail about them expressly, he certainly sang their name through his foggy haze.

Antelope Island, named after the fastest land animal in North America, sits in the largest pelagic lake in the western hemisphere.³ Pronghorn antelope from the northern end to the southern end, but they go largely unnoticed. The birding can be remarkable too, but the flickers and chickadees aren’t the attraction either.

The American Bison (species *Bison bison*) roam the island like it was theirs from time immemorial.⁴ They bathe in dirt, recycle grass through their gut, and mate until the urge to pass along their hulking lineage is satiated.⁵

A causeway leads out to the island, starting in an indistinguishable Salt Lake suburb. Stretching across the lake for seven paved miles, it is hard to imagine that some seven hundred bison await on the other side of this asphalt levee. In fact, the island is a teeming utopia for canines, ungulates, and raptors. Bobcats, coyotes, mule deer, bighorn sheep, and bald eagles can all be found on this slender stretch of land.

¹ Bob Marley, Buffalo Soldier, from the album Confrontation, Tuff Gong/Island Records, 1983.
² Utah State Parks, “Antelope Island State Park,” Utah Department of Natural Resources, accessed October 15, 2024; Utah State Parks, “Antelope Island State Park Education Packet: History,” Utah Department of Natural Resources, accessed October 15, 2024; Natural History Museum of Utah, “Davis County—Antelope Island State Park,” NHMU Explorer Corps, accessed October 15, 2024.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Utah State Parks, “Antelope Island State Park,” Utah Department of Natural Resources, accessed October 15, 2024.
⁵ Ibid.

The bison are much like those in Yellowstone—churlish and persnickety, yet accustomed to gawkers, vehicles, and photos aimed their way. Similarly, they don’t seem to suffer the foolish bipeds, unless they are stalked too closely for a photo op, at which point they’ll drop the swift hammer of a hind leg down with bone-crushing authority.

We spotted a lone male bison about fifty feet off the road on the north side of the island. We contemplating stopping for a quick photo if he gave us a regal pose, though we didn’t want to break his aloof contentment in that moment. We resolved to brake just past him, careful not to splinter his line of sight or bewilder his peaceful afternoon.

Yet once we had the car in park, we opted to forgo another “bison in landscape” shot. Instead, there was one thing we absolutely had to achieve at that moment, one single thing we could do for Mr. Bison that, throughout his tortured history, his ancestors surely could never have experienced. We could give him this one singular gift right then. And so, we produced our iPod, connected it to the rental, wheeled the circle until we came to Bob Marley, quickly tapped “Buffalo Soldier,” rolled down the windows, and cranked it up to eleven so that Mr. Bison’s twitchy ears could partake. It was our humble tribute to him and his, the most sovereign mammal we’d ever lay eyes on.

On the island though, a slight adjustment is made to the lyrics:

There was a Buffalo Soldier
In the heart of America
Stolen from the prairie, brought to the salty
Grazing on arrival, fighting for survival
Woe yoy yoy, woe yoy yoy yoy⁶

The Antelope Island bison chew the same briny verdure that has grown since their introduction to the island in 1893.⁷ The island remains mostly unchanged, and before humans vanquish it all, it will likely remain that way until the Salt Lake is dried and asunder. The bison are content to cede the island’s name to the antelope. They’ve had enough scrutiny in centuries past. Now they can graze and, on the rarest of occasions, hear a little Bob Marley on their island in the big salty. ♪

⁶ Marley, Bob. “Buffalo Soldier.” Confrontation, Island Records, 1983.
⁷ Utah State Parks, “Antelope Island State Park,” Utah Department of Natural Resources, accessed October 15, 2024.



**CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest
First Place Winner**

“Prayer for the Doe”
by Noah Dunn

Following acceptance into CHANGING SKIES, strong contenders were voted upon by our entire editorial team. These three winners were chosen solely for their articulation of our evolving climate reality. It is our sincere hope, as a publication, that such awards will enable authors to continue confronting climate issues that can sometimes feel all too distant.

Thank you to The Nature Conservancy in Colorado for funding this contest.

“We are proud to present ‘Prayer for the Doe,’ by Noah Dunn, as our first-place pick in the CHANGING SKIES Prose Contest. Noah Dunn’s masterpiece is a deeply gripping and emotional story that captures the central struggle with the inevitability of death, the impact of human life on nature, and the ethical weight of living in a world where survival often demands taking another life. Dunn’s work kept me on the edge of my seat during its climax and left me with a profound sense of reflection, considering my own place in the cycle of life and death.”

Sebastian Melancon, Managing Editor



PRAYER FOR THE DOE

By Noah Dunn

art by Sherry McCarver

The first time I chose to kill an animal, I prayed.

She was a trout, strong and perfect: a silver thread in the river's long braid. When I wrestled her onto the bank, I could hardly believe the colors she taught me to see. A six-year-old's hands are too small to hold on to wonder, so I carried it instead in my wide eyes. Dad said I was old enough. I repeated the motions I'd seen him make: gripping her by the belly, lifting her, and as I swung her head toward a rock, words rose unbidden in my mind—thank you—and she was dead.

It was a prayer, that thanksgiving. A prayer to my father for teaching me to fish, to my hands for holding steady. It was thanks to my God for making such a world: water, I knew then, is no more static than life, and that she and I should share that slim, shining band of river was nothing short of a miracle. Dad handed me the filleting knife—"Scrape out the eggs too"—and we cooked her there over a fire on the stony shore. I will never forget her.

Each time I have killed an animal, I have prayed. I pray because God created a universe of entropy; as near as I can tell, motion, commotion, and even chaos is the bulk of the plan, the mystery in the ways. Praying for an ordered outcome, in my experience, doesn't work. A prayer is simply gratitude for time and for time shared—and faith that you'll make something of it.

I knew all this when I was six, in some instinctive and inarticulate fashion. As with many things, as I got older and smarter, I forgot. It was years later that I started to remember and put words to it.

The San Juan islands are off the Washington coast, at the Canadian border. We fought a largely bloodless war over them with the British, the Pig War, whose only victim was the titular swine, belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company, shot by an American farmer in 1859.¹ Sabre-rattling ensued; hundreds of soldiers occupied opposite ends of San Juan Island for years, but none ever fell to hostile fire. The American commander later returned home to Virginia, throwing in his lot with slavers and secessionists. His military career culminated in his disastrous charge at Gettysburg. No thanks to George Pickett, ownership of the islands was resolved diplomatically in 1872.² In their southeastern reach is an island called Frost. It's small, barely seventy acres, with a steep and fractured coastline that confounds most access, except for a cove on the eastern side. It was cloudless and cold when I first mounted that shore—2:00 A.M. in late October. I was twenty-two years old and had just driven through the night from Walla Walla, the opposite corner of the state, with three friends. We ferried gear to the shore in a crooked human chain until only Liam was left in the boat. He tugged the last rope tight, grabbed his hat and gun, and joined us on Frost.

*To find woods of
this age, let alone to
have the privilege
of stewardship over
them, is a miracle.*

¹ National Parks Service. "The Pig War." Last modified October 2, 2023.

² Ibid.

Back in the sixties, Liam's grandparents put together some money, borrowed a little more from friends, and bought the whole island for twenty grand. Cheap, even for the sixties, because there was no fresh water. They found it—Liam's grandpa, Skip, used a dowsing rod, that old folk practice where the dowser holds a forked stick parallel to the ground and walks about, waiting for the stick to point downward over water. There's no evidence that dowsing actually works—or at least, that it's any more effective than random chance—but Skip made it happen. He let the twitching twigs guide him to the aquifer. They sold off parcels of land and paid back the debt but kept the southern tip for themselves. Liam's dad, Jim, spent his childhood summers there, winching tree trunks up the cliffs by hand and, with his father, mother, and brother, building the family cabin out of driftwood and dreams. That's the thing about Frost. Unlike almost anywhere else in the Pacific Northwest, it's never been logged—or so Liam says, anyway. The entire island is covered in old-growth forest: red madrones whose fractal twists deepen with the years, a squat indigenous cactus that hides in the moss quilts, and wind-blasted firs where bald eagles preen. Uncountable millions of board-feet of lumber poured out of Washington in its early years of statehood, and today, the second-growth forest burns more every year. To find woods of this age, let alone to have the privilege of stewardship over them, is a miracle. Frost is precious, its lives unique. My friend Liam is the latest in three generations of his family hell-bent on keeping it that way.

There are five other lots on the island, though none of the landholders live there full-time. They come most often in the summer to escape Seattle, to "live deliberately" and take a breath on the island, which has no roads, just a dirt track running its length—and no electricity. The man at the north end will spend whole days sitting on his porch, staring at the ocean, feeding the deer. After a bad storm, anyone on the island will check the other cabins for damage. There's a wellhouse by the east cove, with a generator for the pump. Lord help you if you don't set the timer on the generator—the aquifer gets lower every year. Twenty yards from that is an open shed full of communally owned kayaks. Just down the hill toward the cove is the shithouse, which faces out over the water. A decades-old invitation is scrawled on the wall for visitors to leave their missives, and the outhouse compendium is full of short poems, doodles, names, and dates.

But at first, in the dark, I saw none of that. The four of us made straight for the Voorhees cabin. After too many hours in the car, and too many of those on Seattle highways, we were just glad to be in the woods with friends. The kerosene lamps flickered and winked over our heads as we gathered at the table with a bottle of bourbon and a deck of cards, talking about the things young men talk about—cars, school, sex. Carson curled up on a mattress in front of the woodstove around 4:00. Luke took a final tippie of whiskey and followed suit, and after a piss off the back porch, I was right behind.

Liam was up and off before sunrise, with his inexhaustible aquifer of boyish exuberance. The rest of us were slower to rise, but eventually I stepped outside to get the lay of the land. The spine of Frost rises steeply to the west of the Voorhees cabin, and as I climbed, I began to sweat. A stand of ancient trees welcomed me when I gained the ridgetop. Steep, heathered



cliffs fell away before me, hundreds of feet down to the ocean, while the ridge broadened and climbed into thicker trees to the north. I leaned on a nearby Douglas fir and, following a childhood habit, broke off a plug of hardened sap and popped it into my mouth. I tasted salt. When winter storms whip the Lopez Sound into a frenzy, the waves reach even the clifftop woods, preserving the ancient trees in salt. I walked back to the cabin. Morning sun filled the broad clearings between trees; the grass and springy heather underfoot buoyed me like I was floating in saltwater, and my fingertips brushed the trees as I passed.

And then—not a tree. A thin wire caught my hand’s attention, and closer examination revealed a fence, taller than my head, marking out an area about ten feet square. A trio of saplings stood in the middle, maybe five feet high, with ferns and shrubs crowded around their knobby ankles. Brambles wrapped portions of the wire. I remembered how Liam had described his childhood summers here, scurrying nude and half-feral through underbrush so dense that he could lie down in it five feet away from his searching parents and be perfectly hidden. He’d emerge from his hiding place, soaked and muddy. The dense understory would trap dew and rain, nourishing the trees from the roots up. The lighted avenues between the trees didn’t square with the Frost of those stories, but this wire enclosure, this forest in miniature, did.

Back in the cabin, Carson had put the coffee on, and Luke and I joined him at the table with steaming mugs. We admired aloud how beautiful it all was in the daylight: a tapestry of lives, questions, and hardworking hands. Broad-brimmed straw hats hung on pegs in the entryway, collected by Liam’s grandparents during their travels around the world. Luke tried one on and grinned. “This is the dream, isn’t it?” he asked, gesturing around. “Something real like this, that you can put generations into.”

I laid the shotgun across the table to give its slide a much-needed coat of oil and looked around. Two dozen feathers, gleaned from the bases of nest trees, were woven into a wreath and hung on the wall. A cast iron pan of impractical size, easily three feet across, mirrored it on the opposite wall, above the woodstove. The cabin and its furnishings were hand-hewn and much mended, the way families are. And that’s the thing about families: the old and the new, they need each other. That’s the thing about forests, too; that’s why the old, crooked sages drop their feathers and eager seeds year in and year out, praying for the next green start to tickle their roots. That’s why the white-spotted fawns observe their parents and, like obedient children, follow suit to bow and crush those tender shoots between their teeth. One fact I know for sure: deer grow faster than trees.

Liam came back through the front door, brushing one of the hats with a fond knuckle. I racked the slide. It was a day to kill deer.

It’s hard hunting on Frost. The weather turns on a dime, and the blacktail deer even faster. The flanks of the island conceal dozens of craggy draws where the animals can flee, steep enough that they’re invisible even from the clifftops. You can’t hunt with a rifle on Frost—if a shot were to go awry, the bullet could easily skip to the next island over. You’ve got to get close, then. A crossbow is best, or, as we used, a shotgun with three-inch slugs. We only

had the one gun, so we drew straws and did it like this: two of us stayed in the cabin while the other, armed, ventured out with Liam. He was the only one of us who had hunted deer before, the only one who knew the island. It worked well enough. Within twenty minutes, Luke shot a doe near the cabin. The first shot broke her forelegs, and the second took her life. The two that followed, I think, were because he couldn’t believe he’d killed her. She was young, trusting—just stared at him as he walked up, he said. Carson had a harder time of it. He ranged the island for hours, and it started to rain. Eventually, a clean shot from above and behind dropped a beautiful buck on the north shore. It took all four of us to bear him up the cliff, and we paused to process the meat.

“Okay—so—here?” Luke’s voice shook a little, along with the skinning knife. He knelt before the doe, staring at her shattered legs. I don’t remember how or why, but he had named her Lucy.

“Really grab it,” said Liam. “Like this.” He leaned over, seized a handful of stomach skin, and pulled it taut. “You’re not gonna hurt her.”

After he’d gotten her guts in a plastic bucket, Luke had to go for a walk to breathe. Carson started in on Chad, as he’d named the buck, while I looped a fraying nylon rope through Lucy’s ankles and hoisted her over the crossbar we’d lashed between a pair of trees. In her

*No matter what
you’re thinking
about when you
do it, the deer dies
either way.*

short life, she’d never known a predator. She hadn’t even thought to fear the shape in the black down jacket and double-front pants. Instinct, I thought, isn’t so hard-coded after all—or at least, it doesn’t take long to be forgotten. Had the first shot missed, I’m sure she would have remembered in time to run, but it hadn’t, so she couldn’t, and that’s how I came to be wrapping one of her hind legs in a game bag when a feathered front of snow drifted in off the water and brushed my

neck. I turned and faced the ocean. A single white flake, unique in all the universe, came floating down. It landed in a bright puddle of still-warm blood and lingered for a moment before melting, unrecognizable, into just another thousand million molecules. It was early for snow. I looked at Liam. It was my turn to hunt.

We chased ghosts for hours. The weather worsened, and the light began to wane, a signal to guests who had overstayed their welcome: “All right, folks, you don’t have to go home, but you can’t stay here.” Our legs and lungs were burning from climbing up and down the steep draws, hands bleeding from the sharp rocks. The rest of the herd had gotten smart. They were in no mood to be found, not after smelling the sulfur and iron we’d left on the air. Liam offered a few times to call it quits and come back in the morning, but I insisted we keep at it. I wanted to repay my invitation to the island. I wanted to protect the trees. And most of all, worst of all, I just wanted to kill a deer. We were crouched in a meadow on the east flank of the island when I spied a buck downhill and upwind of us. After ten minutes of creeping, I gained a clear shot at twenty yards, close enough to watch his velvety nose twitch in the heather.





art by Marisa Lange

Rash adrenaline overtook me, a knee-knocking thrill that made my mouth go dry as I realized I had him. Soft, wet moss under my belly masked the sound of the gun as I drew it to my shoulder and aligned my shot. My breath came desperate and ragged, steaming my glasses. I had him. I inhaled. I pulled.

I'm eight years old again, down at the quarry with my dad, staring down a black barrel at a phalanx of aluminum cans. He's telling me to breathe smooth and squeeze gentle. He's telling me never to rush: "Noah," he says, "you have to want to hit it."

The slug went high—I must have jerked in anticipation of the recoil. The buck started and disappeared toward the shore. We were done for the day.

"The timing is so tough," said Liam as we traipsed down the hill. "It's hard to stay cool, but if you wait too long, you miss the moment." I nodded and shifted the gun to the crook of my elbow.

"Yeah, shoulda taken more time," I said. "You know what, though? I think I'm glad I didn't."

"What do you mean?"

And I told him: how, when I got the buck in my sights, I wanted to pull the trigger because I was the only one there who hadn't killed a deer.

"How fucked would that have been? If I'd got him, thinking that?" I asked. "Just an awful reason for him to die." We were on the east flank of the island. The sun hadn't fully set, but the grand old trees blocked all but the last traces of light to make a premature and formless night. "Then again, how would he have known? And it would've been better for the trees, so is that just selfish to think?"

"Hmm."

I turned my head to look at his silhouette. Liam says "Hmm" a lot. He thinks about what you've said before he replies. The silhouette sprouted an arm, pointing at the humped shadow of the pumphouse. "We should get the water going for dinner." We fired up the generator and let its roar fill the thoughtful silence. I set the timer for ten minutes. Liam's grandpa Skip, I knew, had passed away a few years prior. I wondered how he would feel knowing the aquifer was drying out. It's a terrible vulnerability, to love anything unique. From dust we came, and to dust we shall return, and singularity, too, is fleeting.

"It's about you," said the silhouette. It had to speak loudly over the engine. "I don't see any way around that. But that doesn't have to mean it's selfish. No matter what you're thinking about when you do it, the deer dies either way. So, the difference has to be what you make of it—not just why you did it, but what you take away from having done it. What are you learning from the deer, and how do you do better next time?"

"Hmm," I said, pausing. My eyes were adjusting to the dark, and I could see that Liam was looking back at the generator.

"Hey," he asked, "did I ever tell you that Grandpa found the water with a dowsing rod?"

And then it made sense. For a moment, I felt I was seeing Frost through my friend's eyes, and realized in the next that he was seeing it through mine.

Liam didn't join my hunt, or Luke's or Carson's, as a guide or a coach. It had nothing to do with safety and everything to do with propriety: Just as we were grateful for having been invited, he was grateful that we had accepted. The old needs the new, friends need each other, and everything needs to eat. Helping us navigate the island for something as solid and sensible as meat—that was his thanks. That was his prayer. I looked at my friend, sore and spent, slumping against the pumphouse wall. He had spent all day running the cliffs for no better reason than it was the right thing to do, and that can only ever be an exhausting task. I voiced this to him, and over the concussive thrum of the generator, he laughed and said,

"I need a beer."

We had a few.

The weather had eased a little—still cold, but less wet—and the four of us sat out on the back deck with our drinks. We listened to the world and watched the last of the sun set behind it. The evening ferry to Lopez Island churned through the Sound, lowing like some

*Afterwards, we
couldn't bear the
thought of shattering
the morning with
gunfire, so we
kayaked instead.*

monstrous mechanized bovine: a gas-belching monument to the kind of world from which Frost was a beautiful, futile escape. We looked at the blood on our hands and felt the hunger in our stomachs. To live, something else must die. Be it plant or animal, consumption kills. The deer dies either way, so what do you do about it? We grilled backstraps in the dark and gathered again in the kerosene flicker, woodstove roaring, our laughter steaming the windows. We were all

ravenous, and the good meat made us feel strong. We opened a bottle of wine and made a toast: to Lucy and to Chad. There was my prayer. The rain began to fall again, and we fell asleep.

We spent two more days on the island, marveling at the woods and swimming naked in the frigid ocean. No more deer died, though not for lack of trying. Before long, we were bound back to a world with roads and good water pressure. We loaded heavy coolers onto the boat, and I ran up to the outhouse to leave a parting gift in the anthology of shithouse poetry.

The deer are quiet, sleek, and fast.

The deer are hiding in the grass.

We hunt them down, and then, at last,

We pull their insides out their ass.

So long, Frost.

Carson and Luke had decided we'd share the meat. In their minds, it wasn't just the pull of the trigger that earned you a share in the deer, but everything around it: the butchering, the beer, the midnight poker games. When winter fell heavily on Walla Walla, I turned to



the paper-wrapped venison in my freezer. I don't typically say grace when I eat alone, but I did over my Chad pot pie. You can taste the place when you eat game, the earth and trees they feed on. Thank you, Frost and old-growth forest. Thank you, Luke, Liam, and Carson. Thank you, Chad. I ground breakfast sausage, dusting handfuls of white pepper and fennel seed into the muscle-red churn. Thank you, Lucy.

In May, we came back. Carson wasn't with us that time, but our friend Jacob joined us. His last name was Klusmeier, so we called him Klus. We were planning to hunt for a few days before more of our friends—all of whom, like Liam, Luke, and Klus, were graduating from college—came out for a weekend bender. Since our last visit, the Voorheeses had been talking to state Fish and Wildlife, trying to secure a year-round hunting permit for Frost and officially designate the deer as pests. "Wink wink, nudge nudge," Liam said. Fish and Wildlife, like everyone else, knew the deer were overpopulated in the San Juans. "If we wanna hunt out of season, I think we could."

But the days were so beautiful, and the ocean so blue. Our first morning back on the island, Klus and Liam prepared us a Japanese tea ceremony. They were taking a class on it, and Professor Takemoto had loaned them his personal tea set, a beautiful handmade thing of textured clay and mirror-smooth wood. So we started the day with beauty and calm. Afterwards, we couldn't bear the thought of shattering the morning with gunfire, so we kayaked instead.

We drifted up to Doe Island State Park in the late afternoon after a ten-mile paddle. We finished dinner and ran around the island, playing crazy games in the gathering dusk. Despite the name, there wasn't a doe to be seen, nor a buck, or any animal that didn't have wings. Luke and I lost at cards and, as punishment, were chased around the perimeter of the island. We hid in the dense underbrush and waited to ambush our pursuers, and it was only after we'd knocked them into the ocean that I realized the correlation: understory, and no deer. It was a beautiful spring night, so we didn't bother with tents. Sleep came quickly, and rain woke us at 2:00 in the morning. We groaned and laughed as we sat up in our bags. It was nice, a cool patter, so we just pulled the tarp over ourselves. But I couldn't fall asleep. I kept thinking about the deer we didn't chase, about the forest on Frost—the real Doe Island. The trees didn't give a good goddamn about our feelings. They just needed fewer deer. If we were serious about our commitment to that place, should we not have stayed and hunted? It was clear, then, that we weren't hunting for some abstract notion of ecological preservation or population control. We did it because we wanted to; that day, under the spring sun, we didn't want to. It wasn't always about the island—was it always selfish?

I stared at the blurry black sky, glasses off, until it grew light, and the others woke. We left early. We had plenty of time while paddling back to Frost. We talked about tea. Luke and I were still thinking about the ceremony. He, especially, had all kinds of questions: why, exactly, was each movement of the ceremony so precise?

Liam said, "It's called ichi—hang on—ichi i-go. Wait—shit." When he was young, Liam had a severe speech impediment. It was actually in his ears, not his mouth: he heard things

different, a sort of auditory dyslexia, and repeated them back the way they sounded to him. It made other languages tricky. I think that's why he's so willing to say, "Hmm," and why he's such a patient hunter.

Klus spoke up. "Ichi-go ichi-e," he said. "It means something like 'for this time only.' Takemoto-Sensei says it's about the unrepeatable nature of a moment. The idea is that if you're really deliberate with each movement, you're aware of how you shape something that's irreplaceable, and it's even greater if you're preparing something for another person, an act of hospitality."

I could see what he meant. I dipped my paddle into the same ocean at the same angle, pulled with the same muscles, but each stroke was unique. The more attention I paid, the more perfect my motion, the better my stroke, and the bluer the water. Yet the water was always changing—different fish, different particles, a carnival of motion in so grand a pattern as to appear random. Each stroke, then, no matter how uniform I made them, was just as singular as the ever-fluxing ocean.

Too soon, I was leaving. We got back to Frost, puttered around, and as evening began to fall, I said goodbye to Luke and Klus and loaded my things onto the boat. I wasn't graduating with my friends: rather than suffer through pandemic-era online college, I'd taken the year off, and I had to be back in town for work the next day. Liam was tired, so I drove. As we neared the Anacortes harbor, a low-flying trio of gulls cut across our path from the port side, and I nudged the boat toward their stern to give them room. I gave Liam a hug and said a hasty hello and goodbye to our friends who were waiting at the marina to be ferried to the island. Liam enjoyed hosting. I set my crate of hunting gear on the passenger seat like a travel companion and hit the road.

If you travel east over I-90 in the daytime, you'll see the change as you cross from Western to Eastern Washington. A few miles after you pass the Snoqualmie ski area and muse at how funny chairlifts look without snow, you'll notice the needles on the trees grow longer and spy a little more red in their bark. The air gets drier. You're on the lee side of the Cascades now, and the Douglas firs give way to ponderosa pine. You'll see the signs posted along the fenceline near Ellensburg, spaced every few hundred feet, whip by you: "Cattlemen: . . . Provide food . . . Preserve open spaces . . . Create wildlife habitat." And in those open spaces between the trees, with no clouds or rain to block it, you will watch the sun draw sharper edges around the wheat and amber cheatgrass; you will feel you can trace each limb of the twisting sagebrush from a hundred yards. Here, deer tails are white.

In the dark, though, I don't know in my bones that I'm east of the Cascades until I reach the pulp mill, though it's hundreds of miles from the mountains. It sits where the Walla Walla River spills into the Columbia, where Lewis and Clark crossed at Wallula Gap.³ If it's hot out, the force of the smell is almost physical: cat piss, acetone, and smoldering wet cardboard. Even at night, your eyes may water when Highway 12 passes a mere five hundred feet from the mill's front doors. On the other side of the highway, half-hidden behind a rise, is one of the state's largest feedlots, a charnel house of shit and fear, where moaning cattle

³ Mussulman, Joseph A. "Through Wallula Gap." *Explore the Lewis & Clark Trail*. 1997.



eat and eat until steel bolts—reusable, economical—are shot through their skulls. The stench of the pulp mill is also the stench of animal death, of animal lives lived in one flat, stinking rectangle of mud.

These smells hit me at 2:00 in the morning. I'd been awake for twenty-four hours, and I thought of the rain that woke me up on Doe Island. My headlights illuminated the swath of dust and sage off to the side and, a little farther away, the railroad track and shining Columbia, the river that powered the reactors at Hanford, where they refined the plutonium that detonated a thousand feet in the air above Nagasaki, transfixed every clock, every body, and every atom in the city to a single, awful moment in time.⁴ Ahead of me, to my left, three deer erupted from the brush and bolted across the highway. I dipped into the left lane and let them run past undisturbed. Our synapses are speedy things; unbidden, I recalled the gulls off our bow on the ride from Frost. Funny, I thought, how randomness can repeat itself. Or the universe, like a good musician, makes variations on a theme; repetition, maybe, is just the pattern our brains prefer to recognize. Ichi-go ichi-e. I saw her silhouette out of the corner of my left eye, lithe and brown, and I knew my truck was moving faster than my thoughts. She was louder than I expected, and sharper—a crack, like a gunshot, when my front bumper hit her, followed by the thumps and thuds as she fell under my wheels. I'd just killed my first deer.

For a while, I pretended to be rational. I didn't slam on the brakes but downshifted methodically before pulling into the gravel. Was she still alive? I opened the crate next to me, grabbed my hunting knife, and ran back down the black highway.

The goddamn smell. The air was still and choking, the reek heavy, like my mouth and nose were stuffed with mulch. I realized I was talking—"Please, please, please, please, please"—and I didn't know what I was pleading for. I hadn't grabbed my headlamp, and I groped through the tar-thick night for a hundred yards until an indistinct mass began to emerge, and I turned on my phone light.

She died on impact. I could see where I hit the right side of her head, and the soft grey home of her wild intelligence was visible through the shattered skull. My wheels made a mess of the butchering. From the way her gut was swollen and distended, like an overfull garbage bag, I could tell her ribs were broken, and her stomach had burst. The shockwave of the impact had run through her; slick, dark tubes coiled below her tail, whose white tip drooped in the pool of blood. It is awful, I am alone, and she is dead. I'm so sorry.

Afterward, I dragged her off the highway. Afterward, I laid her in the sage by the railroad tracks and made my way back to my truck to pull on a reflective vest and check the vehicle for damage. I turned on my hazards and grabbed my headlamp. Cosmetic things only: a divot in the bumper, a cracked headlight, and paint scrapes. I remembered my scraped hands and leaden legs on Frost. I remembered Liam's exhausted slump against the wellhouse. On the

⁴ National Parks Service. "Hanford, WA." Explore the Lewis & Clark Trail. 2019.

roadside, my truck was hardly damaged, and I was not at all. I thought that more ought to have happened to me, and I got back on the road. There's one stop sign on that stretch of the highway, and it was there that I started to cry.

Chaos and entropy can be beautiful: the play of the waves, deer in the mist. They're also absolutely fucking horrid. The fact that I'd killed her upset me as much as the fact that it was an accident. It was the fact that, if I had stayed on Frost another day, she'd be alive, or that if I'd left Frost five seconds earlier, I might have hit three gulls with the boat or three deer with my car. Maybe it was fated from the time I woke up on Doe Island, or maybe I was just looking for a pattern and an ordered outcome.

I've always liked the Serenity Prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The deer's dead either way, but I don't have to be the one to kill her. Sometimes, though, it is me, and sometimes it's not on purpose. What to do, then, about other lives and their other deaths? About this bleeding, beautiful ghost? No, not a ghost—ghosts have black tails and melt into the ocean mist—but a corpse that I made. Intent couldn't matter less to her. "For this moment only" must also mean "in this place only," "with this life." This life; this prayer. Serenity takes courage, after all. I'm looking for wisdom.

We can't still the motion around us any more than I can reassemble a snowflake melted in blood. So breathe. Squeeze your trigger; pull your paddle. Have a beer or a cup of tea.

The morning was in full bloom. The sun was shining, but the dawn cold still clung to the air. We sat in the half-built lean-to on top of Frost's western cliffs. I watched Klus prepare Luke's tea. Each movement, I saw, was purposeful: the way he slid his stocking feet across the newly-swept wood floor, the way he held his big, spade-like hands flat against the front of his hips. The bamboo whisk looked tiny in those hands as he whipped the matcha powder into the steaming water, and a gust of wind stirred the froth on top. Luke slurped the tea and closed his eyes.

Liam made mine, the blond hairs on his arms standing upright in the cold. A vein pulsed in his forehead as he scooped up the powder with a flat wooden paddle, and he straightened his spine. The tea was hot. It tasted like earth and herbs, fir sap without salt. I stared at the bowl when I was done and saw a green I'd never seen. Foam bubbles swelled against one another, popped, merged, reformed. I am sure that, like a shuffled deck of cards, no two patterns of foam in a tea bowl are alike.

A prayer is a lean and hopeful thing. All it requires is faith—faith that sometimes you have one hand on the wheel, and faith that sometimes it doesn't matter. Surrender. Gods, or lack thereof, are incidental. That's why most prayers are prayers of gratitude. They needn't be words. Action is often more prayerful, like making tea or venison pie, or lining up your shot. The doe dies either way, and so do trees. So do you. But all of you lived. Be grateful you walked in the woods with her. If you eat her, say whatever grace you will, and if not, tell her she is beautiful. She is an unrepeatable miracle. And if there's something after you die, don't change a thing. Pray for the doe—



—thank you. ∞



CONTRIBUTORS

JACK ASHBAUGH is a student at CU studying writing, minoring in both business and communication. When he is not loafing around, he enjoys reading, drawing, writing, working out, and hiking. Truly a Jack (clever, right?) of all trades, master of none.

ELYSE CABRERA is currently a second-year undergraduate student in the Engineering Honors Program majoring in Aerospace Engineering Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder. She does design engineering work with the CU Sounding Rocket Laboratory, pursuing research into the combined areas of hypersonics and photon physics. In her free time, she enjoys rock climbing, writing creative nonfiction, and reading classical literature.

NEALL CALVERT has 25 years’ experience in journalism, book editing and writing. An associate member of the League of Canadian Poets [LCP], he has had poems appear in the books *Vistas of the West* [Durvile: 2019], *Worth More Standing: Poets and Activists Pay Homage to Trees* [Caitlin: 2022], *Laugh Lines* [Repartee: 2023] and *Splendor of Wings* [LCP: 2024] and in journals out of the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India and the UK. Neall writes from Campbell River, near the quiet and wildness of northern Vancouver Island, BC.

NOAH DUNN is a writer, musician, and avid outdoorsman who lives in the woods outside his hometown of Bellingham, Washington. He holds a BA in Environmental Humanities and German Studies from Whitman College, and his work has previously been published in *The West Trade Review* and *The Mountain Journal*.

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15-year-old **QUILL FISHER** is a starting photographer. They use they/them pronouns and enjoy practicing photography whenever they can. They focus on melancholy themes and mostly photograph skylines, city streets, and local parks.

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RICHARD HANUS had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

KARIN HEDETNIEMI photographs and writes from Vancouver Island, Canada. In a former life, she helped manage an environmental education charity. Karin’s place-inspired creative work is published in *Grain*, *Welter*, *Hinterland*, *Lunch Ticket*, *Reed Magazine*, and other literary journals. Her photographs are published/forthcoming in *CutBank*, *About Place*, and *Orion*. In 2020, Karin won the nonfiction contest from the Royal City Literary Arts Society. Find her at AGoldenHour.com or on socials @karinhedet.

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AIDAN JONES is currently attending CU Boulder as a sophomore, Aidan is majoring in strategic communication with a focus on media design. About six years ago, he enrolled into a digital art & design class which sparked his curiosity for all things design-related. Starting with logos and graphic design pieces for clients, he later fell in love with photography and began incorporating it into his art. More dedicated than ever before, he strives to create a portfolio that displays his photography, videography, graphic design and personal art. Always experimenting with new forms of media, Aidan’s main focus is to capture the world how he sees it.

ANGELINA KONDRAT is a junior at CU Boulder studying political journalism and environmental science.

JENNIFER S. LANGE is a self-taught artist working mostly in the games industry, plus a spoonful of book covers, and prefers fantasy/sci-fi genres—because we know what the so-called real world is like already, so why not expand? Besides painting, she loves creating worlds by writing tiny snippets of stories for her personal works. Love of learning is her strongest drive in life, and in her personal work she experiments with new ways of creating art, changing medium, subject, and goals frequently. Jennifer lives in northern Germany with her partner, and a lot of cats.

MARISA LANGE, formerly a HINDSIGHT staff member, is a senior studying Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Statistics at the Univeristy of Colorado Boulder. She’s currently working in a genetics laboratory, which she hopes to use as a stepping stone towards a career in biomedical research.

YOU LIN is a writer whose pieces explore darker themes consistent with the fragments of her identity. You can find her work at Archer Magazine, A Coup of Owls, NutMag Volume 7: Inheritance, the Southeast Asian Review of English by University Malaya, and on the December 2023 lineup of Kadankai Podcast, among others. Her story, “The Magic Matchbox”, published by The Bitchin’ Kitsch, has also been nominated for the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize for Emerging Writers in 2023. When she’s not writing self-deprecating poetry and fiction, you can find her questioning the purpose of her existence, overworking as usual, and losing faith in humanity.

AMY MÄKI is a writer/producer and mother. Her time working as a special education teacher and environmental activist helps her to write about nature, the human condition, and the connection between the two. She grew up Catholic in a Jewish neighborhood in Omaha, Nebraska, then attended Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri. She holds a MFA in writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts.

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ALLISON MURPHY is a former CU Boulder student.

MEGAN MUTHUPANDIYAN is an essayist, poet, visual artist, and public humanities scholar. As the founding director of Poetry in the Parks (poetryintheparks.org), much of her creative enterprise celebrates how individuals’ participation in their land communities fosters their ecological consciousness. Her chapbook, *Of the Earth and Other Desires*, was awarded the John Rezmerski Manuscript Prize in 2023 and two of her chapbook manuscripts have been semi-finalists for the Wolfson poetry prize. Her poems, illustrations, photographs, and nature essays have appeared in thirty journals and anthologies, and her illuminated poetry volume, *Forty Days in the Wilderness*, was published in 2021.

Since retirement, **RAINER NEUMANN** has devoted his life to writing poetry, songs and pastel drawings. A poetry book “Intersections of Concern” is available on-line as well as three

books of fiction, a lyrics book, and two books of translation—a poetry book by his father and mother’s journal from the second world war. While living in Detroit he taught introductory Humanities courses at Wayne County Community College. During that time he also worked on wood cuts, silk screen prints and began writing songs and was able to bring these into the curriculum.

IRINA TALL (NOVIKOVA) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art and has a bachelor’s degree in design. The first personal exhibition, “My soul is like a wild hawk” (2002), was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology and, in 2005, she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was *The Red Book*, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Irina writes fairy tales and poems and illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: *Gupsophila*, *Harpy Hybrid Review*, *Little Literary Living Room*, and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection “The 50 Best Short Stories,” and her poem was published in the collection of poetry, *The Wonders of Winter*.

ANDREW PATRA is a creative and strategist based out of Boulder, and his work has been featured in projects across the outdoor industry. He is also a cyclist, coffee nerd, and tech enthusiast. More of his work can be found at andrewpatra.com.

PENG QI is an award-winning visual artist and art educator. He works passionately to unlock new ways to create contemporary art that bears the mark of the age. He has been working in the field for over 20 years and has distinguished himself through his unique ability to generate virtual and photoelectric color effects that do not exist in the natural world.

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AVA ROTMAN is a Colorado native currently attending CU Boulder in her first year, switching her major to Journalism and minoring in Business through the School of Leeds. She has long been involved in journalism, since her sophomore year at Legacy high school, where she was the editor-in-chief for two years. The school’s yearbook was awarded “All Colorado” twice from the Colorado Student Media Association—a first for Legacy. She continues journalism through her involvement in *Roam Boulder*, a fashion magazine designed, written, and produced by CU Boulder students.

SEAN STINY has had creative nonfiction published in various pubs, including Catamaran, Los Angeles Review, Grit Magazine, Sacramento Magazine, True Northwest, Kelp Journal, and Wild Roof Journal.

BRANDON TEMPLE feels that humans' connection with nature has become skewed through the false perception of naturality perpetuated by humanity's ever-increasing reliance on technology. Brandon's work aims to give the viewer a space in which they can reflect on their connection with our natural world or the lack of it and how that connection can allow healthy technology to coexist. His work is only meant to serve as a bridge between the viewer and nature, starting a conversation that will lead to a healthier nature-human relationship. He conceives these ideas into form through material and space that set the viewer into questioning utility, health, love, spirituality, and death through the lens of our natural world. Brandon rejects the burden of the modern technological society forcefully placed on us and instead offers an invitation towards a mindset focused on love towards the earth.

Born and raised in Denver, **COLIN TURNER** now lives in Boulder, Colorado. Already a certified CNC machinist, he is finishing up a degree in CAD and is an artist in his free time. His favorite mediums are film photography, drawing, and mixed media.

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WENDI WHITE, raised in the Adirondack mountains, is a poet and educator now musing among the geckoes and ginger-scented ridges of Oʻahu. She earned her MFA from Old Dominion University's Creative Writing Program in Virginia and was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her first collection of poems, *Turtle Island Rising*, is forthcoming. When not at her writing desk, she advises students from across the Asia-Pacific region. @wendy.white.75 (instagram) <https://dammedscribblingwoman.wordpress.com/>

DANIEL WORKMAN is a current Anthropology major who just transferred into CU this semester. He recently finished the Isaacson School Photography Program at CMC, where he focused mainly on photojournalism, but used analog photography as a creative outlet during his time there. Daniel is an alum of the Eddie Adams Workshop XXVIII. He hopes to one day use his skills in photography, through the lens of anthropology, to tell powerful stories around the globe.



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Thank you to Scott King and Mission Zero for funding the launch of this title in 2022, and to The Nature Conservancy in Colorado for funding our prose contest and the first print run of this journal. CHANGING SKIES would not be possible without the help of our sponsors and the CU Boulder Program for Writing and Rhetoric. We look forward to the 2025 AWP conference in Los Angeles, and our upcoming issue of HINDSIGHT.

- Cade Yoshioka

[clmp]
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who we are and what we believe

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