

THE
WAYFAREER

Vol. 5 Issue 2

Reimagining the Possible • Charting the Way for Change

Widening the Circle: An In-depth Profile of L.M. Browning by Eric D. Lehman • *Living the Landscape* by Cindy Carlson
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Andrea Janelle Dickens, Shawn Fisher, Carol Hamilton, Joan Howard, J.K. McDowell, Cameron Morse,
Molly Murray, Wendy Pfrenger, Bobbi Sinha-Morey, Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad



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Wayfarers Featured in this Issue



Connor Bjotvedt is a Graduate student at Spalding University. He was awarded the Charles E. Bull award for Poetry by Northern Arizona University in the Spring of 2015 for his invented form *The Bridging Haiku*. His work has appeared in *Rain Taxi*, *Straylight Literary Magazine*, *Haiku Journal*, and *Haikuniverse*.



Cindy Carlson grew up in the snowbelt of western New York, and, when not traveling and birding with her husband, has spent most of her adult life along the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia. After a long career in youth development, publishing in numerous professional journals, she is spending retirement with her first love—creative nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *Birding*, *The Quotable*, *Litro NY*, *damsel fly press*, *Lowestoft Chronicle* and *Eclectica*.



Andrea Janelle Dickens lives in the Sonoran Desert where she handles snakes for desert flashlight tours, makes pottery, and teaches. Her work has recently been published in *White Stag*, *New South*, and *Of Zoos*, among other places.



Shawn Fisher was raised on the south shore of Long Island, New York and now lives on the north shore of Massachusetts. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Gordon College and a Master's degree from North Dakota State University. A longtime supporter of public education, she works full time at a community college in Boston, helping students make the transition into higher education. In her in-between hours, she writes.



Carol Hamilton has recent and upcoming publications in *Pontiac Review*, *Sanskrit Literary-Arts Magazine*, *Poet Lore*, *Limestone*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Off The Coast*, *Palaver*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Hubbub*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Abbey*, *Main Street Rag*, *Two Cities Review*, *Poem*, *Tipton Poetry Review*, *November Bees* and others. She has published 17 books, most recently, *Such Deaths* from the Visual Arts Cooperative Press in Chicago. She is a former Poet Laureate of Oklahoma and has been nominated six times for a Pushcart Prize.

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Joan Howard's poetry has been published in the *Aurorean*, *Poem*, *Vox Poetica*, *The Road Not Taken: The Journal of Formal Poetry*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *The Deronda Review*, *Victorian Violet* and other journals. She is a member of North Carolina Writers Network and North Carolina Writers Network West. She enjoys kayaking and birding on beautiful Lake Chatuge in Georgia and is especially fortunate to have this neighbor described next door.



Karen Levy is an Israeli-American writer. Born in Israel, Levy spent most of her childhood traveling between her native land and the United States, creating a keen eye for observation and the sense of belonging everywhere and nowhere. Following her military service Levy pursued her studies in the U.S. where she earned a B.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of California at Davis, and an M.A. in English, Creative Writing from Sacramento State University where she teaches composition. Her work focuses on themes of allegiance and the search for home, and has appeared in *So To Speak*, *The Meadow*, *The Blue Moon*, and *Welter Magazine* among other places. Her memoir, *My Father's Gardens* was a 2014 Pushcart prize nominee.



Wendy Pfrenger grew up in a number of east-coast cities, spending just enough time in each to fall in love with it before moving on. She completed her Bachelor's degree in English and Anthropology at Florida State University, then served in the Peace Corps in the Russian Far East. After returning to the U.S., she earned a Master's degree in English at the University of Connecticut. For the moment, she has put down roots in northeast Ohio and teaches at Kent State University. Her passion for place informs her writing as well as her work developing pathways to college for rural students.



J. K. McDowell is an artist, poet and mystic, an Ohioan expat living in Cajun country. Always immersed in poetry, raised in Buckeye country by a mother who told of Sam I Am, Danny Deaver and Annabel Lee and a father who quoted Shakespeare and Omar Khayyam. In the last decade a deepened study of poetry and shamanism and nature has inspired a regular practice of writing poetry that blossomed into the works presented in this collection. Lately, mixing Lorca and Lovecraft, McDowell lives twenty miles north of the Gulf Coast with his soul mate who also happens to be his wife and their two beautiful companion parrots. He is the author of *Night*, *Mystery & Light*.



Cameron Morse taught and studied in China. He is currently an MFA candidate at UMKC and lives with his wife, Lili, in Blue Springs, Missouri. His poems have been or will be published in *Plainsongs*, *I-70 Review*, *TYPO*, *Otis Nebula*, *Sleet*, *Steam Ticket*, *Referential Magazine*, *The Bombay Review*, *The Blackstone Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Rufous City Review*, *Small Print Magazine*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, *First Class Literary Magazine*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Cha*, *District Lit* and *velvet-tail*. Visit his Facebook page for more information.

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Molly Murray is the author of *Today, She Is* (Wipf and Stock, 2014), editor of *The Atelier Project* (2015), an exploration of the creative process, and founder and Editor-in-Chief of the blog *Paper Mill*. She holds an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow; her stories and poetry have appeared in anthologies and publications including *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *From Glasgow to Saturn*, and *Quailbellmagazine.com*. She loves northwest coastlines, and now lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband Gordon and their son, Jack.



Bobbi Sinha-Morey lives in the peaceful city of Brookings, Oregon. There she writes poetry in the morning and at night, always at her leisure. Her work has appeared in a variety of places such as *Plainsongs*, *The Path*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *The Laughing Dog*, *Page & Spine*, and *Black Fox Literary Magazine*. Her books of poetry *White Tail*, *The Glass Swan*, and others are available at www.writewordsinc.com. In addition, her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and her website is located at www.bobbisinhamorey.wordpress.com. She loves aerobics, knitting, rock hounding, and taking walks on the beach with her husband.



Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad was born and raised in New York. Her poetry has appeared in *The Missing Slate*, *Passages North*, *Quail Bell magazine*, *Chiron Review*, and is forthcoming in *HEArt Journal*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Pinch Journal*. She currently lives in New York and practice matrimonial law.



Francesca G. Varela was raised in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Her dream of becoming an author began in third grade, and her writing career had an early start; she had a poem published in the 2002 edition of *The Anthology of Poetry by Young Americans*. Her debut novel, *Call of the Sun Child*, won the Bronze Medal in the 2014 Moonbeam Children's Book Awards and also was named a Finalist in the 2015 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. She recently graduated from the University of Oregon with degrees in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing. When not writing, she spends her time practicing piano and violin, figure skating, walking her dog, Ginger, and exploring Oregon's wild places. Look for Francesca's latest book, *Listen*.

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My Peaceful Night in the Middle-East

by Karen Levy, author of *My Father's Gardens*

The door clicked shut softly behind me and I was alone in the small room for the night. My surroundings were unfamiliar yet I had a history of sorts in this house, in this city where I was the only Jew among approximately 32,500 Muslims residing in the Arab city of Tamra, tucked into the North district of Israel located in the lower Galilee.

Darkness had already fallen and I tried to get my bearings as I stood by the shuttered window, imagining myself from above.

One individual in a corner room of a small apartment shared by three generations of women belonging to the Dawahde family. It was in the eighty year old grandmother's bed that I would spend the night, despite my protests and insistence that I sleep on the sofa where she was now lightly snoring. She would have no such thing she said, patting the seat next to her, an invitation to come sit earlier that evening. She'd reached for my hand, lifting it out of my lap, encircling my wrist between her wrinkled fingers, smiling and pulling up her own sleeve, exposing her wrist and comparing the narrowness. She seemed to take simple pleasure in discovering this shared feature. She was comfortable with my presence, going about her evening prayer as I watched, explaining that she could not kneel on the tile floor

because her knee ached. She pulled up her long robe to show me which knee was giving her trouble and I nodded in understanding, agreeing that she shouldn't strain it and do more damage. She faced Mecca as well as the television in the living room, praying and occasionally glancing at the program which happened to be National Geographic Abu Dhabi. I watched gazelle being chased across the screen as the sacred ritual was performed, marveling at the ease with which she allowed me to intrude upon what I considered a private moment. From afar I'd heard the Muezzin calling the faithful to prayer when I stayed with my father who lived less than an hour away, surrounded by Bedouin villages. Yet the sound had remained mysterious and distant, while now I felt somewhat included. Earlier that morning her daughter Iman had declared that she was my sister, that her mother was my mother, and that we were now family. It

matter what side of the world they could be found.

I sat on the bed so carefully prepared for me, grateful for the quiet (Israel is a noisy place and I hadn't been sleeping well), and for the internet Iman's nephew had been forbidden to use. It was thanks to technology and the help of a local artist that I'd found my friend after not having seen her for forty years, not since we were ten year old girls when my mother had worked as a nurse in Tamra when it was still a village. Occasionally I'd gone to work with my mother, befriending the daughter of the Arab woman who cleaned the nurses' station and made hot tea in amber colored glasses. The same woman who had given up her bed for me tonight. I'd sat in this very house in which I was about to spend the night, sharing freshly baked pita with a little girl who didn't care that I was Jewish, or that we didn't share a language. At some point in our friendship she spent

At the end of the day when the head coverings came off, they weren't Muslims, they were women. What a loss not to allow ourselves to know them. If we don't make it our business to learn about each other's lives those walls will never come down.

was a simple statement she made as she drove us to her home through narrow streets that wound their way uphill, past colorful storefronts whose owners she appeared to know, waving and calling greetings through the open car window.

One floor below me lived Iman's younger brother with his wife and teenage son. I'd sat with them that afternoon as they watched a Turkish television series, the coffee table laden with fruit they insisted I eat and small cups of thick sweet coffee, the kind that had to be patiently cooked over a small flame in a finjan. The scent of cardamom filled the room as the dark liquid rose and fell in its traditional pot, Iman's sister-in-law slowly stirring it, her modestly covered head bowed over the rising steam. Iman's brother made sure I was up to speed, explaining what he felt I needed to know about the plot unfolding on the screen. Their son sat with us sullenly, upset over losing his computer privileges as I was later told. Teenagers were the same, no

a night in my home as well, half an hour and a world away, bathing in a tub the likes of which she'd never seen, wearing one of my swim suits to the beach where she stood mesmerized by the Mediterranean in which she had never swum. At dinner she'd had to be told to place her plate back on the table rather than in her lap, awed at the tiny corn on the cob holders my mother taught her to use so she wouldn't burn her fingers. Before she left I gave her one of my Barbies and forty years later she could still recall the doll's red boots and the fact that her mother gave her away to an even less fortunate child. We had fallen asleep giggling like little girls do, oblivious to the forces that would soon tear us apart.

I leaned back against the pillows and reveled in the silence. No dogs barked incessantly as in my father's neighborhood where people talked loudly under windows till late into the night. No gunshots rang out despite it being wedding season

(the Bedouin had been partying for days, celebratory gunfire setting off the dogs). Earlier that day I'd heard music emanating from a building across the street, and within moments of my asking about it I was hurried across the road to watch as a bride's husband arrived to take her to his home. I hesitated before climbing the last steps into the large room where the ceremony took place, not having been directly invited and clearly an outsider in what I thought was every respect. And while the large group of women, most of whose heads were covered in colorful scarves did turn almost in unison to look at the foreigner among them, they made sure the box of sweet *baclava* made its way to me, and another of Iman's sisters in law pushed me forward so I could be in a better position to take photos. And what I saw moved me. The bride, her sister and their mother were weeping, their heartbreak intensifying with the beat of the drums which brought everyone to their feet. And it didn't matter anymore that I wasn't one of them, that I wasn't Muslim, that I didn't know who these women were. I was a mother too, one whose daughter would also one day leave, and the emotion filling that room was universal. No one seemed to notice that my eyes were welling up too and if they did they understood.

I stretched out on the bed, thinking about the warnings I'd been given and the incredulity with which I'd been met when I told other Israelis that I was headed to Tamra for the next couple days. "You're staying there for the night?" was my best friend's reaction, her eyes wide. "It's not safe or smart. You have no business there," was a family member's angry comment. Forty years of anger in fact, for the uprising that took place in 1976, a peaceful protest according to the residents who'd gathered in Iman's living room at my request that morning, to tell me their version of events that caused my mother to resign and my friendship with Iman to end. A protest over losing lands and homes that turned ugly when Israeli tanks rolled in, and villagers started throwing rocks, and soldiers began shooting. Balkees, the Arab nurse I had known when I was a child, clapped her hands to demonstrate how the village children had followed the tanks, her gold bracelets jingling as she recalled that day. "It wasn't on purpose!" she insisted, referring to the rocks thrown at the nurses' station, the nurses huddled behind a file cabinet herself among them. "It was our mayor they wanted! He was in the adjacent building and things got out of hand" she explained, and the handful of people seated around me began talking over each other, concerned that I get the story right. Two days later I'd hear a similar account from an Israeli man who as a 21 year old soldier that day in 1976, was dismayed at "how much hate there was," watching fellow soldiers and thinking "they're not part of my country," his pleas that they get out of there ignored by his commanding officer.

In the apartment above me resided Iman's oldest brother and his wife, who drove me to the fields where they proudly showed off their crops, filling a bag with warm cucumbers and peppers for my father before taking me to a hummus breakfast and treating me as if they'd known me all their lives. Standing on the rooftop that evening, explaining where his family members lived as he pointed to surrounding buildings like a monarch surveying his kingdom, Iman's brother turned to me and said that I shouldn't be afraid of him despite his beard, that he doesn't kill, "I don't burn babies." I was astounded and dismayed. This is what he believed Jews thought of him? I assured him that he didn't frighten me. All I could think about was the kindness and hospitality shown me in the last few hours. The lavish meal I'd been invited to by Balkees whom I was so lucky to find again. Her son and his family welcomed me in no questions asked. I'd watched their young daughter stand at her father's side, reading from the book she'd brought from school, excitement in her voice as she tasted new words, pride in her father's eyes. I'd sat with a group of women as they prepared *tabbouleh* for the evening meal, wishing I'd learned Arabic and not French so I could understand what was being said. When I asked, they'd been gossiping about the weddings they'd attended, what was served, what was worn, no different from women anywhere else in the world. Minutes later commotion in the stairwell sent all of us running to find one of their sons experimenting with Mentos and a soda bottle, the result a sticky mess across the stairs and frustration at what he was learning from watching You Tube. I didn't need to understand Arabic to see these parents' love for their children, their concern for the future, their pride in the small plots of land they tended, Balkees standing joyfully in front of her newly planted olive trees. I'd seen the same pride on my father's face as he showed me around his garden not even an hour away. Two cultures with such love for the same land. What a great reason to get along.

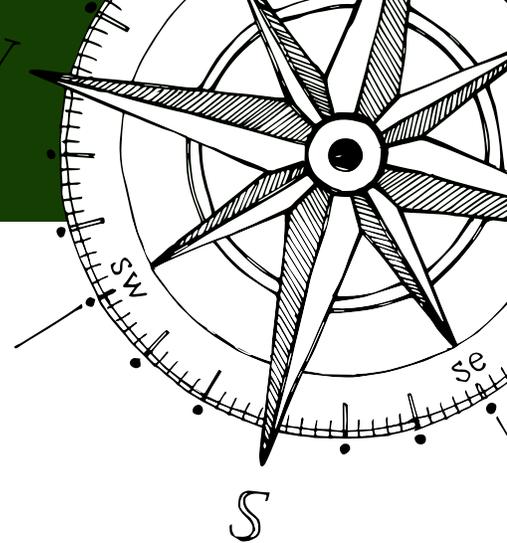
I tucked myself in, the night's blessed silence resounding around me. How easy it had been to step into another culture when fear and hate were left outside the door. How obvious it was that at our core we are all human. At the end of the day when the head coverings came off, they weren't Muslims, they were women. What a loss not to allow ourselves to know them. If we don't make it our business to learn about each other's lives those walls will never come down. Before Iman bade me good night she'd said that in the morning when I woke "Inshalla," god willing, her mother would make me a cup of coffee. In the Quran, Muslims are told that they should never say they will do anything in the future without the hopeful *Inshalla*. Whether I believed or not, it was going to be my most peaceful night in the Middle-East.





The Farming Revolution & The New Spirituality

by Staff Writer Theodore Richards | Featuring excerpts from the forthcoming book,
The Great Re-imagining: Spirituality in an Age of Apocalypse



JUST AS WE ARE ALL NATURE, WE ARE ALL, essentially, farmers. Very few of us would survive for very long without farms. Our lives and, indeed, civilization itself, are completely dependent upon the existence of farms. But one of the deep paradoxes of Modernity is that, at the same time, none of us is a farmer, either—or at least very few of us. We are completely alienated from the one process that we all depend on more than any other, the growing of food. Because it is so integral to human culture, we cannot entirely separate our consciousness from farming. For example, methods we use in farming today influence and are influenced by our culture. Specifically, I would suggest that one cannot

I lived, once, on a Zimbabwean dairy farm. I heard the lowing cows each morning as they were milked, listened to their cries as they were weaned. My work was beyond the farm, in a rural area that was entirely made up of subsistence farms. Each day, I would walk to our lessons through the parched countryside, through the dry and overworked and depleted soils, cracking under our feet. These were the lands where the poor Zimbabweans were forced to live and sustain themselves, while the white farmers had come to claim the good lands for their commercial farms.

Zimbabwe was in a state of upheaval when I arrived. The currency had collapsed. In the years that followed, groups of armed men would begin to take over the wealthy white farms.

Just as the farm itself can only be understood as an interconnected whole through space—no separation between humans, beans and corn, animals—the process of food production is a single thread—a sutra, to borrow a term from the East—connected temporally from seed to table.

have a factory farm system without also having a factory school system. They co-create one another; they co-arise. In the past, as we shall see, the way that human beings farmed and fed themselves was integrated inextricably with human culture and spirituality.

What cannot be avoided, however, is the apocalyptic nature of industrial agriculture. It has, for all its productivity, led us to the very edge of planetary capacity—to such a degree that a crash seems imminent. There is no way forward without a radical change in farming methods, which cannot happen without a re-imagined spirituality.

This happened with the ruling government's full support; but it was not because those in power were interested in justice for the rural poor. It happened because Zimbabwe was on the edge. The rural areas were overcrowded; the soils dry and pushed to their limit; deforestation, in a land in which wood was the primary fuel, was rampant. Urban shantytowns were overflowing with migrants.

While in Zimbabwe, as in any other example, there were many factors—the global economy, the legacy of colonialism, the injustice of land distribution, the incompetence and brutality of the Mugabe regime—when a people loses the ability to





sustain itself on the land, unraveling follows. In Syria, it has seldom been mentioned that its civil war, among the most brutal in recent memory, is partly rooted in a drought linked to climate change.

Communities unravel and cultures disintegrate when the land no longer produces food. There is no faster road to apocalypse. We like to think that we are different, those of us who live in wealthy, peaceful places, for whom wars are fought thousands of miles away with drones. We do not get involved in the messy, dirty, bloody business of war in the way that that we hear about on the television—genocides and ethnic cleansing, mass rape and mass execution. But the truth is that we are only a few failed crops away from such brutality. The truth is that we fool our selves into thinking we are any different from the people who commit atrocities. Of course, many would not—just as many resisted the Nazis and the interahamwe—but many, too many, would descend into madness when they fear they cannot feed their children.

In the coming years, water will be central in many of our wars. Climate change and the depletion of soils due to industrial agriculture will lead to crisis after crisis, conflict after conflict. There will be two options: the shock doctrine of crisis capitalism—using crisis to benefit the few at the expense of the poor masses, which is essentially a more extreme application of the current worldview—or the great re-imagining. A new way of farming and of life.

Agriculture evolved in the context of human ecological relationships. The primordial human culture was one of embeddedness in nature and interrelatedness. The corresponding spirituality was one of enchantment. The cosmos—defined by the ecological community—was alive and sacred. Human identity was inextricable from this web. The relationship between human and our sources of food was a sacred one—and in a world in which none of the false guarantees of the supermarket exist, there would have been nothing more central or important than this relationship. In time, slowly, the relationship between human settlement and food would have given rise to evolutionary changes: animals that once were followed or chased by humans began to live among them; the seeds that grow from human waste were now planted intentionally. All this is evolution; it is relationship. There is no absolute dualism as in industrial farming.

An increasingly settled relationship and a more intentional relationship between humans and food gave rise to an evolution in spirituality. The farmer began to see the world in terms of the balance between mother and father gods, the earth's fertility being paramount. At the same time, the pastoralist, still a nomad, developed a more patriarchal form of spirituality. God, already gendered, became exclusively male. These two forms of spirituality remained embedded in the axial religions that would later become our primary world religions. The monotheists would look to the sky for their father god; the Taoists, for example, would add layers of philosophical complexity and interiorization to the dialectic of mother and father gods. In Hinduism these elements were integrated—the Aryans bringing with them their father god in the Vedas, but the indigenous Great Mother remaining part of the complex and pluralistic world that gave rise, in the axial age, to Vedanta.

The axial religions arose in the context of Empire—complex, hierarchical, pluralistic, and militarized civilizations. The old gods were first coopted for the purposes of empire: the sacred mountain or tree was moved to the temple of the emperor. It must be understood that such a civilization could only exist with large-scale agriculture, which allows for a military class and

other elites. And the structure of such civilizations dictates the structure of consciousness.

Farming remained, however, central to human culture for millennia. Those who were able to remove themselves from the process of food production had always, even after the agricultural revolution and the advent of imperial societies, been the minority. Most people were farmers, and pre-Modern religion, even the more dualistic and patriarchal versions, remained rooted in agricultural metaphors and symbolism.

This began to change, however, as the Modern era ushered in a separation of science—the physical world and Nature—from religion—the internal, immaterial, psychic world. The Protestant Reformation represented the first completely Modern religious movement, in that religion became a personal, interior endeavor, rather than a cosmic and communal one. A rejection of matter and of the physical body was part and parcel of this movement. People were still farmers, but farming was not, for the Protestant, a labor of love. It was an act of conquest. Colonialism expanded rapidly as it was now seen as God's work, taming the wild and the wilderness—making it holy by making it more human, more sterile, more cultivated.

The patterns of alienation from the land begun through Capitalism, colonialism, and Protestantism were completed with industrial revolution. This impacted the culture and consciousness of farming in two ways. First, it brought people increasingly into cities in which they sold their labor to work in factories rather than grow their food. Second, it brought about an industrialization of the farm itself.

Industrial capitalism, applied to the farm, has alienated farmer and eco-system, and the effects have been devastating. No longer a means for fostering relationship, the farm has become, like industrial civilization as a whole, a destructive force on the planet. Chemical fertilizer that had been developed during the world wars for weaponry has been applied in such a way that soils are depleted and pollution from farming is nearly as bad as from factories. And while initially leading to a huge increase in outputs—the so-called “green revolution”—factory farms are putting our ability to feed our selves increasingly at risk as soils are depleted and water sources are toxified.

The farm, once a place where humans danced at the edge of

civilization and the wild, a controlled but diverse ecology, has become sterile. It now limits genetic and biological diversity rather than preserving it as it once did. A trip to farm country in the United States is to encounter mile after mile of corn and soy, corn and soy, as far as the eye can see. The reasons for this have nothing to do with efficiency, as agribusiness would claim. Animals contained in filthy, disease-ridden spaces, with no room to roam, with diets largely derived from the heavily-subsidized grains of monoculture—you guessed it, soy and corn.

Our entire food production and consumption process has become mechanized, toxified, and perhaps most significantly, desacralized. Indigenous peoples have always understood the sacred act of growing food and sharing a meal. In the rituals of the world's religions, sharing a meal is a recurrent theme. In Christianity, the Communion celebration is a core ritual—but how sacred is the body of Christ when the bread is grown without the loving care of the farmer?

There is, however, another kind of revolution happening on the planet today, akin to the great upheavals of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. It is largely unnamed and, because so few of us are in any way involved in farming or food production, largely unnoticed. It is a movement that involves a variety of organic and holistic farming practices, including the permaculture and bio-dynamic farming movements. Collectively, I will refer to the as Agro-Ecology, because I believe that the key philosophical shift that must occur is to see farming as an integral part of ecology rather than an industrial process.

Understanding the relational evolutionary nature of ecology is essential in order to create sustainable farming practices. We have based our current farming on the industrial worldview. That worldview—and, indeed, the world it feeds—is falling apart. Soils are depleted; pollution from farms is worse than most cities. Soon, the massive production made possible by fossil fuels will crash. A deep ecological sensibility requires that the human not only understand ecology as it relates to other organisms, but also recognize—and not just recognize, but actually feel—that the human is another organism in this web.

Photos: Blueberries by veeterzy | Fiddleheads by Leslie M. Browning | Tall Grass by Lukas Schweizer



Theodore Richards is a philosopher, poet and novelist. As the founder of The Chicago Wisdom Project, editor of the online magazine *Reimagining: Education, Culture, World*, and a board member of Homebound Publications and the Fox Institute, his work is dedicated to reimagining education and creating new narratives about our place in the world. He is the author of five books and numerous literary awards, including two, Independent Publisher Awards and a Nautilus Book Award. His next book, *The Great Reimagining: Spirituality in an Age of Apocalypse*, is scheduled for release in 2017. He lives in Chicago with his wife and daughters.

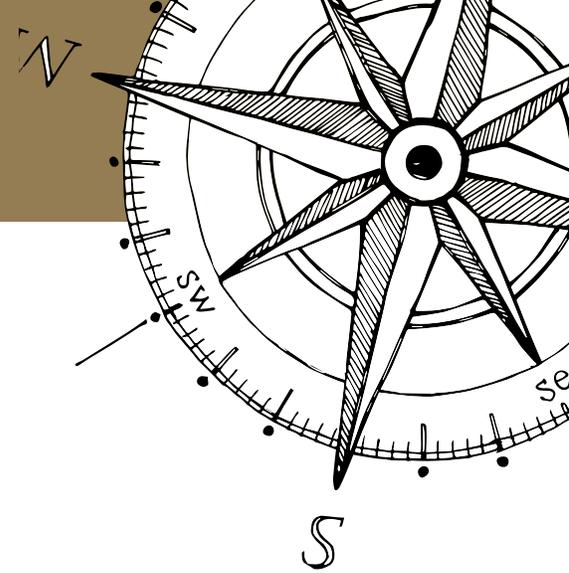
Just as the farm itself can only be understood as an interconnected whole through space—no separation between humans, beans and corn, animals—the process of food production is a single thread—a sutra, to borrow a term from the East—connected temporally from seed to table. When we grow our food and process our food and prepare our food, we become healthier spiritually and physically. “There is, then, a politics of food that, like any politics, involves our freedom,” writes Wendell Berry. “We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free if our food and its sources are controlled by someone else... One reason to eat responsibly is to live free.” Eating is political and spiritual. All the information about new diets and healthy lifestyles seem to go hand and hand with an increasingly unhealthy population. We know more about health and diet, but eat less healthy. The so-called “first world diseases” of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer ravish the United States, the home of “health food”. The problem lies not with our nutritional knowledge but in the decoupling of food and culture, and culture is rooted in ecology. We shouldn’t think about what we eat; we should work the land, grow healthy food and share it.

The Agro-ecology revolution will change human consciousness just as the Agricultural Revolution and the Industrial Revolution did. It will re-introduce us to the sacredness of nature and the wild. Moreover, human communities—Earth communities—will emerge as part of ecological community. Indeed, the notion of spirituality as an individual pursuit rather than a communal one is undermined by the recognition that the food we eat is community, too.

These are apocalyptic changes. Today’s worldview is completely shaped by the factory farm and its alienations. Its loneliness. Its brutality. We consume it every day. It is in our bodies. Indeed, it is in our souls.







Birds of a Feather

An Interview with Illustrator Jada Fitch

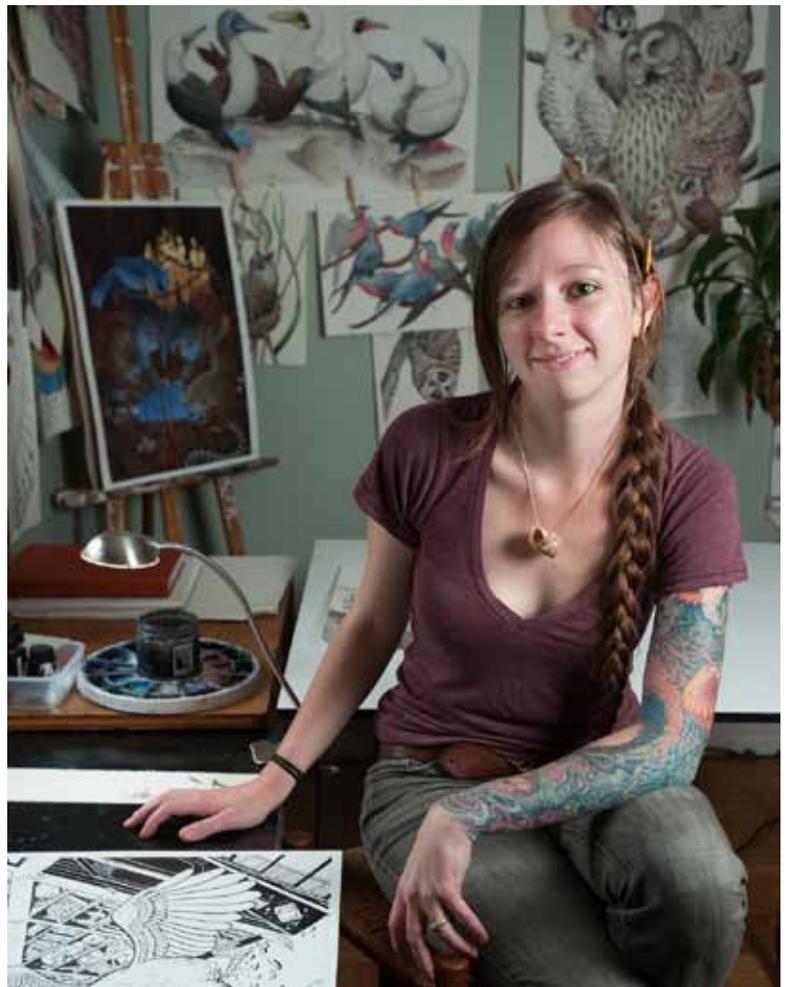
BY STAFF WRITER L.M. BROWNING

Jada Fitch WAS BORN IN 1984, AND GREW UP IN A FAMILY-BUILT LOG CABIN IN SEBAGO, MAINE, just up the road from her grandparents' general store. Much of her childhood was spent at Fitch's Store, building box forts in the garage, and pranking customers with her brother and cousin. Her mother is a lifelong stained glass artist, who spent her spare time driving Jada to various arts and crafts classes. To earn a little money during summer breaks, she helped her father build log cabins; laying hardwood, stuffing insulation, and wielding a nail gun on roofs.

After graduating from Lake Region High School in 2002, she majored in illustration at the Maine College of Art. While attending MECA, she worked at Portland's Whole Grocer, where she met her husband, Philip Willey. After MECA, Philip got offered a scholarship to attend school in Los Angeles for animation. So the couple packed a tiny pickup truck with everything they could fit, and drove cross country. After two years in North Hollywood, and the acquisition of a 130 pound street dog named Daisy, they decided Maine was where they belonged.

After moving back to Portland, Jada worked part-time at a shop on Commercial Street, while doing freelance illustration the rest of the time. In 2013 she decided she might enjoy birdwatching on top of her other hobby, knitting. She started by attempting to draw every bird species in North America, she didn't get very far before getting bird art related job offers. That winter a customer came into the shop where she worked, and told her there was a snowy owl in the abandoned building on India Street. She put up the "be back in 10 minutes" sign and went to check it out. She took some photos through her binoculars of the bird sitting in the window, and sent them to Maine Audubon's Facebook page. Shortly after, they approached her to collaborate on a series of kids' books, the first being *A Snowy Owl Story*, which depicted that day's owl visit.

She now has three books published in partnership with Melissa Kim, Maine Audubon and Islandport Press, and a fourth in the works, under the series title "Wildlife on the Move." She now freelances from home full time, mainly doing wildlife related art, and a little birdwatching and volunteer birdbanding on the side .





Leslie: You grew up in a family built log cabin in Sebago, Maine and spent much of your childhood drawing, crafting, and building forts at your grandparent's general store. How much do those early days shape your artistic direction?

Jada: Sebago, Maine was a nice place to grow up. My parents, built a small log cabin when they were 18 and 19 years old, and kept adding onto it over the years. By the time I was born, the house had acquired a lot of unique characteristics. Round slices of trees made up the kitchen floor, and peeled and varnished hemlock branches were used as railings and balusters. A lot of the features my dad puts into our house often find their way into the buildings I draw.

My grandparents store, Fitch's General, was right down the street. It feels like I spent half the time there. The store from basement to attic had been collecting stuff since 1920, the year the original store across the street burned down. So every inch of the place was filled with something. Groceries, beach accessories, hardware, candy, kerosene, and always kitty the black cat asleep on the newspapers on the counter. As a result, much of my work is very detailed.

My mother is a stained glass artist, so when she was working on a project, to keep me busy she would give me a craft project to work on too, or sign me up for an art class nearby. My folks were and are very supportive, they even let me paint and collage every inch of my bedroom.

The land around Sebago is very woody. When I was a kid, it wasn't unusual to see deer, or sometimes a moose or an owl. I didn't appreciate all the different animals, and the little details in nature as much as I do now. Living in "the city" for almost 15 years now makes me really appreciate the time I do spend in the woods. I've really been enjoying just observing nature, trying to identify plants, insects, bird songs, etc. Things I grew up with but never noticed the beauty in before. That's what's really become the focus of my work.

Leslie: As a wildlife artist myself, (who focuses mainly on raptors and songbirds,) I am the first to admit, there is no telling what draws us to focus on a particular subject. You've worked extensively with The Maine Audubon Society. Tell me, what do you think draws you to focus primarily on wildlife?

Jada: The more I learn about plants and animals and how they are connected, the more interesting I find them, and therefore the more ideas I have for illustrations. I am a very visual learner, my favorite books have pictures. By studying photos of animals, and trying to see them in the wild, I learn so much about their behavior and personalities. Then when I draw a particular creature I've observed, I try to exaggerate its behavior and personality. Either with pose, expression or interaction with a plant or other animal. Also "doing research" is a great excuse to go on birdwatching adventures.

Leslie: What are your preferred mediums? Do you do digital work or all by hand?

Jada: The medium I choose to work in depends on the project. For the last couple of years, watercolors have been my preference. Nontoxic, water soluble, and generally inexpensive. Occasionally I'll paint in oils or acrylics for gallery shows, and sometimes a project calls for pen and ink with digital color, or just a finished pencil drawing. For large format prints, logo design, and some T-shirt designs I usually work in vector format.

Leslie: Eugene Ionesco once said, "A work of art is above all an adventure of the mind." The body of your work seems geared towards educating while entertaining. In your book, *A Snowy Owl Story*, you not only provide youngsters with an "adventure of the mind" but you help them grow their minds as you educate them concerning migration, adaptation, and respectful human interaction with nature. Do you consider yourself an artist or an educator or, in your mind, are they one in the same?

Jada: I consider myself an illustrator. I don't feel comfortable calling myself an artist or an educator. The term artist is broad, everybody is an artist in one way or another, illustrator narrows it down a bit. I like to do a bit of research before doing much sketching. Each project is a learning experience for me. Drawing birds is what really got me into bird watching. After sketching different types of sparrows, I was able to tell the different species apart. Recently I painted a

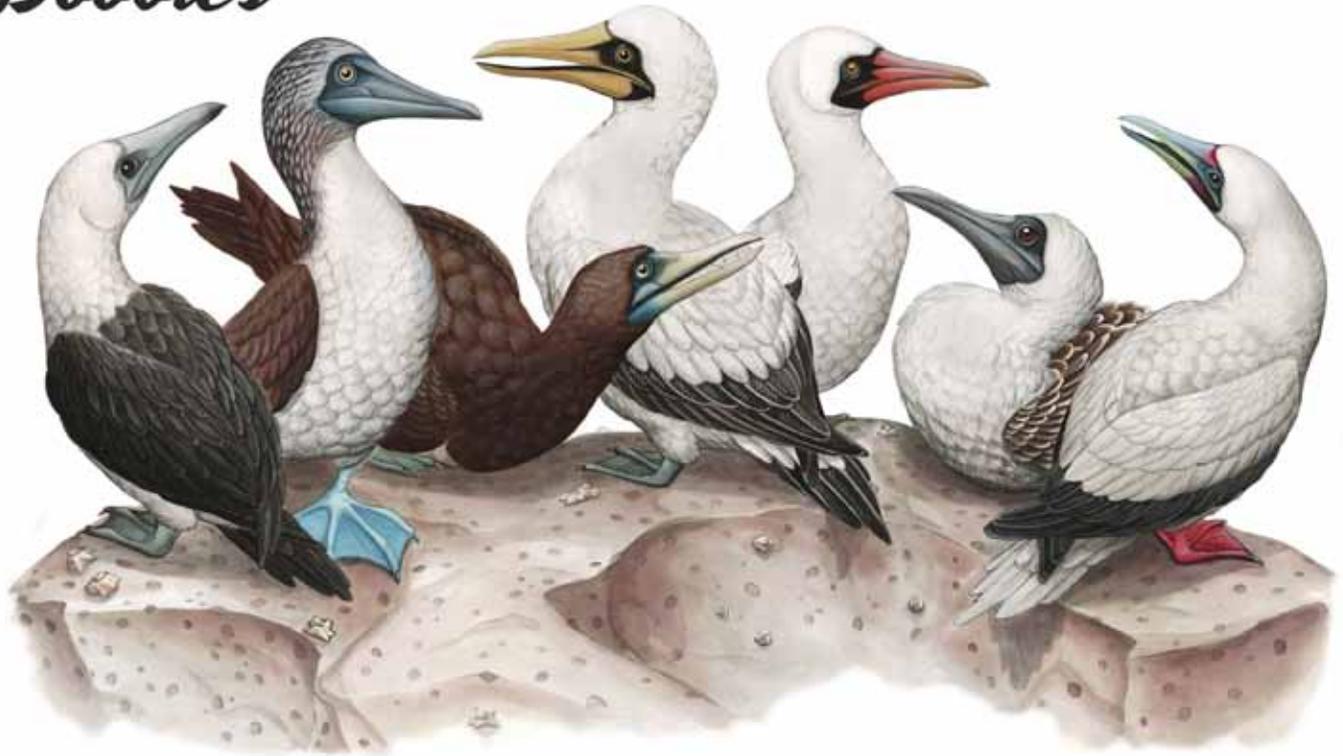
piece called “Butterflies of Maine”. I looked at many photos of each species most commonly seen in Maine, made sure their sizes were all correct relative to one another, and painted them as accurately as I could. The finished painting is rather large, so I had to scan it in at least 6 pieces, (without cutting it apart) put them together in Photoshop, and edit out all the missed pencil outlines and stuck on dog hairs. Then I numbered and labeled each butterfly species. The piece is meant to function as art compositionally, something you’d want to hang on your wall. Who doesn’t love butterflies? The name of each species though is included, so that when you’re out on your walk and you see a butterfly, you can come home and point out which one you saw. It’s the height of butterfly season in Maine right now, and my husband and I spotted a Red Admiral on a walk with Daisy this afternoon. I probably wouldn’t have even noticed it if I hadn’t learned it’s name.

Leslie: You educate/entertain focus extends beyond a preschool age audience to adults in your informational posters. My all-time favorite examples of such wit are “Tits of the World” and “Boobies of the World” (yes, people, we’re still talkin’ birds here, people). With these pieces, you transform those dull educational posters we all saw at nature centers growing up and make them fun and contemporary. Tell us about the reaction you’ve had to such projects and the inspiration behind their creation. Were you approached to do them or did you conceive of them yourself?

Jada: I spend a lot of time collecting reference photos. It took me over a year to gather pictures for every species of bird in the world (close to 10,000 species), and categorize them by order and family. While collecting, I had the idea to create a piece showing an entire family of birds on display as an “art poster,” rather than hidden away in a field guide. It would be a lot of fun to paint, as well as something I would want to hang on my own wall. The tit family (chickadees, titmice, etc.) seemed like the obvious choice. It would have an appeal to the typical birdwatcher’s punny sense of humor, and would hopefully get it noticed on the interwebs. And it did! My husband ran downstairs one day to tell me “Tit’s of the World” was at the top of io9.com, a blog he looks at almost every day. In the comments section, there were a few requests for a “Boobies” poster, so that was my next painting.



Boobies



Albatross Booby
Diomedea albatross

Blue-footed Booby
Sula nebouxi

Brown Booby
Sula leucogaster

Masked Booby
Sula dactylatra

Nazca Booby
Sula granti

Peruvian Booby
Sula variegata

Red-footed Booby
Sula sula

Leslie: National Audubon Society named your book *A Snowy Owl Story* on its list of “12 Best Bird Books of 2015,” declaring *A Snowy Owl Story* isn’t just another cute kids book; it’s full of science and purpose. Based on true events, the story follows a golden-eyed Snowy Owl from the Arctic as it journeys across the continent to an abandoned building in Maine. Beautifully illustrated with easy-to-read text, the book teaches children about the bird’s habitat and diet, and also shows them how to help an avian in need.” From where did the inspiration for your little, snowy owl come? Tell us about that project.

Jada: I have that very owl, that *A Snowy Owl Story* is based on to thank for all the success I’ve had the past couple of years. I worked part time at a shop on Portland’s waterfront for many years, and walked by an abandoned brick building both ways there. In January 2014, a customer came into the shop and told me an owl was stuck in that building. I put the “be back in 10 minutes” sign up, and went to check it out. I got a few photos with my phone, through my binoculars, of the owl sitting in a window. I sent them to Maine Audubon’s facebook page, not knowing they were already on the scene. They then saw some of the illustrations on my facebook page, and asked me to work with them on a kid’s book about the whole thing. Eric Topper, the education director at Maine Audubon contacted Melissa Kim, the children’s book editor at Islandport Press. Who as it turns out worked at Maine Audubon in the past. After a couple meetings Melissa was chosen as the author, and one book turned into four.

Leslie: You’re following the tremendous success of, *A Snowy Owl Story* with *A Little Brown Bat Story* and *The Blanding’s Turtle Story* creating the “Wildlife on the Move” series, which I believe is going to be a total of four titles. So, what is the final critter we’ll be following?

Jada: Book number four will be *A Monarch Butterfly Story*. Very excited to to start working on this one. Haven’t seen the completed story yet, but it will definitely have a message about conservation, and colorful illustrations of butterflies fluttering around Maine’s famous Portland Headlight lighthouse.





Leslie: What do you hope to achieve through your work? If you could have your young readers walk away with one thing after reading your books, what would it be?

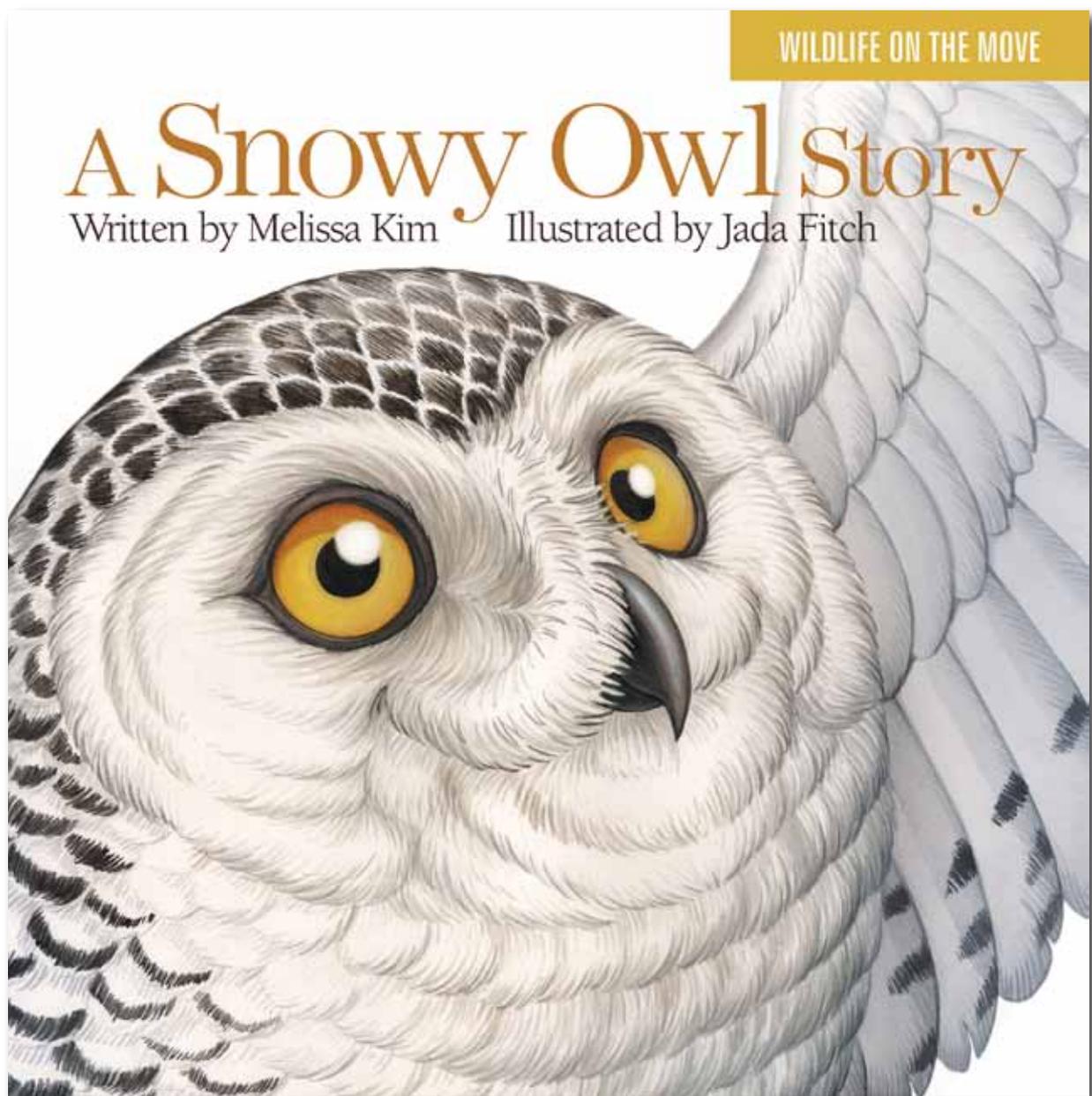
Jada: Hopefully my work will encourage kids to notice and appreciate beauty in nature, and in the future, make choices that will benefit and preserve our environment, and everything that lives in it.

Leslie: What would you say to all those struggling artists trying to make a living with their art?

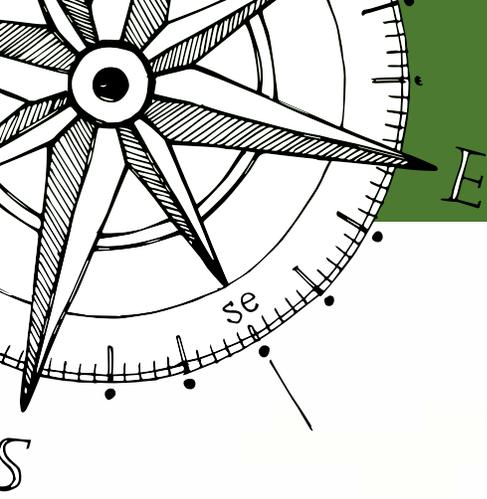
Jada: Draw what you love, draw everyday, and don't stop.

Leslie: Lastly, how can our readers follow your work?

Jada: My website gets updated, but not often enough, best way to see anything and everything new is my blog, or instagram. Website: www.jadafitch.com • Blog/ Tumblr: jadafitch.tumblr.com • Facebook: www.facebook.com/jadafitchillustration • Instagram: @jadafitchillustration • Twitter: @jadafitch







Rachel's Legacy

The Case for Climate Literature

BY STAFF WRITER GAIL COLLINS-RANADIVE

"Come look!" I called to my partner while standing at the window that framed the volunteer maple in his backyard.

On an eye-level branch perched a growing mound of brown where a robin alighted and added a dried stick offering, then left. Immediately, another robin arrived with something mud-dark, deposited it in the center, tapped it down with her body, and then promptly removed her partners' stick.

"Figures!," my partner mumbled over my shoulder.

And thus began a month of anthropomorphizing what we were seeing, which seems to be what we the people are pre-determined to do through our complicated brain structure.

When the nest was finished, the pair disappeared for a spell. Then one day we noticed the majestic profile of today's dinosaur descendent resolutely occupying the snug structure. And there it sat, day after day, enduring the increasing summer heat and the hail and fierce winds of afternoon storms. Often the nest was empty at dawn, but when we looked up later in the day, it was filled with robins, on and off for two weeks.

During one off time, my partner helped me up onto the roof so that we could peer down at three luminous blue eggs nestled

in the sculpted brown mound. Clinging to the sloping edge, I said a silent thank you to Rachel Carson for saving this and other species from the ravages of DDT in my childhood.

Safely back on the ground...with balance rather than height being an issue at age 72...I followed up on that insight: what had made Carson's biological research on pesticides so disastrous for the chemical industry was her literary ability to motivate and mobilize the reading public.

Caught off guard, the pesticide industry viciously attacked her on both personal and professional levels, but was powerless to counteract her effect on public opinion: her life-long love of writing had given her the vital tools she needed to translate the accumulating research into popular understanding.

Writing and publishing since childhood, Carson had majored in English in college, then switched to Biology before her senior year. Yet she agonized over having to choose between these two disciplines, until she came to realize that she could, should, and eventually would, do both.



Suddenly something shifted within my own psyche so that now the robin eggs became symbols of the various aspects of the climate activism I'd been engaged in recent years, trying to inform people and influence public policy.

One egg stood for the *information* about the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on global temperatures that the world's scientists had been documenting for over forty years. Along with my rocket scientist partner, I'd been creating and leading climate change workshops for years. But for some reason, information didn't always (if ever) lead to action.

Another egg stood for *inspiration* as the motivation for action. Yet my climate-awareness sermons didn't appear to produce any resulting action. As a member of a number of inter-faith groups trying to address the morality and ethics of this global crisis, I'd enthusiastically welcomed the Pope's brilliant *Encyclical on The Call of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor*.

In fact I read it online, my computer propped up in my lap on the living room couch, from where I could ironically watch a pair of sparrows build a nest in the never-used bird-house in the aspen beyond the front window. Those eggs never hatched, possibly because this was not within their normal habitat range.

Still, the metaphor was delicious: I could picture the original Francis standing out there in the columbine garden, birds perched on his robed shoulders. But when his modern counterpart confronted the U. S. Congress with the reality of climate change and tried to hold his American Catholic flock accountable for their climate disruptive life-ways, he was criticized for not being a scientist (he's a chemist, but never mind) and told to stick to religion.

Suddenly the second bird reappeared as if in anticipating a status change, and soon enough there were beaks poking up

from the nest! Then the parents began their frantic feeding ritual of taking turns unearthing worms from our backyard, possibly the only one in the neighborhood free of pesticides.

Two beaks grew larger, attached to necks that got longer. But, every so often, we caught sight of a smaller bird vying for its share of the parental food supply.

I began to view this weaker offspring, the one come from the third egg, as a symbol for an aspect of climate work that has been lagging behind: the inner work of *integration, insight, intuition, and imagination*.

For don't information and inspiration need to be *intergrated* into *insight*...to be known in our bones? When we truly *intuit*, are in-tune with the interconnection of all life, past, present, and future speak to and through our human *imagination*, and set forth a roadmap for new possibility.

Literature provides this process.

Rachel Carson knew that, and began her metaphorically titled *Silent Spring* with "a fable for tomorrow" that echoed her readers' own experiences and observations, and drew them into her compelling narrative.

Upon receiving the completed manuscript, her book publisher proclaimed: "I cannot imagine anyone else who possesses the combination of scientific understanding and literary skill to make such a fine book out of such difficult and complicated material."

And her magazine editor assured her, "A brilliant achievement; you have made it literature, full of beauty and loveliness and depth of feeling."

Today's climate crisis is a cumulative expansion of the concerns that Carson set forth over half a century ago. In fact, the parallels between then and now are maddening: profiteering corporations and corrupted politicians misleading the pub-





lic, harassing climate scientists, obstructing regulations, and ignoring nature's immutable reality. And today, when concerned citizens protest, they're arrested, and even jailed.

Nearly a month into our observing the robin family, we noticed that the little ones were becoming too big for the nest, especially when they unfolded their budding wings. After days of jostling for limited space, two disappeared when we turned our heads for just a second. But the third one perched precariously out on the limb, as if reluctant to venture forth.

Perhaps a slight breeze caught the underside of its wings, for suddenly it swooped down towards the base of the building, and landed in a tangle of ivy. Climbing up out of the thicket took time, plus skills it had to learn by itself, as it seemed to have been abandoned by both its parents and siblings.

Google warned us not to try to rescue it, and assured us the mother would return. She finally did. For the rest of the day, she guarded and guided the straggler to places from which it might launch itself, all to no avail. The little bird just hopped down and bobbed across the lawn on its little legs as if that were sufficient. Its mother fed it and tried to get it to fly, fed it and tried again. The last we saw of them, the little one was hole-up in the jungle of bushes deep in the backyard.

While trusting that the struggling one finally made it, I find myself wondering whether it may be time to deliberately nurture climate literature. Homebound authors who are deeply steeped in the metaphor and mystery of Nature are also likely to be acutely aware of the effects of the changing climate and the unintended consequence of species extinction, and thus may be the perfect pool of writers for this challenge.

Having recently been invited to host this space in *The Wayfarer*, I'm hoping that here, together, we can encourage, embrace and explore the emergence of this new genre.

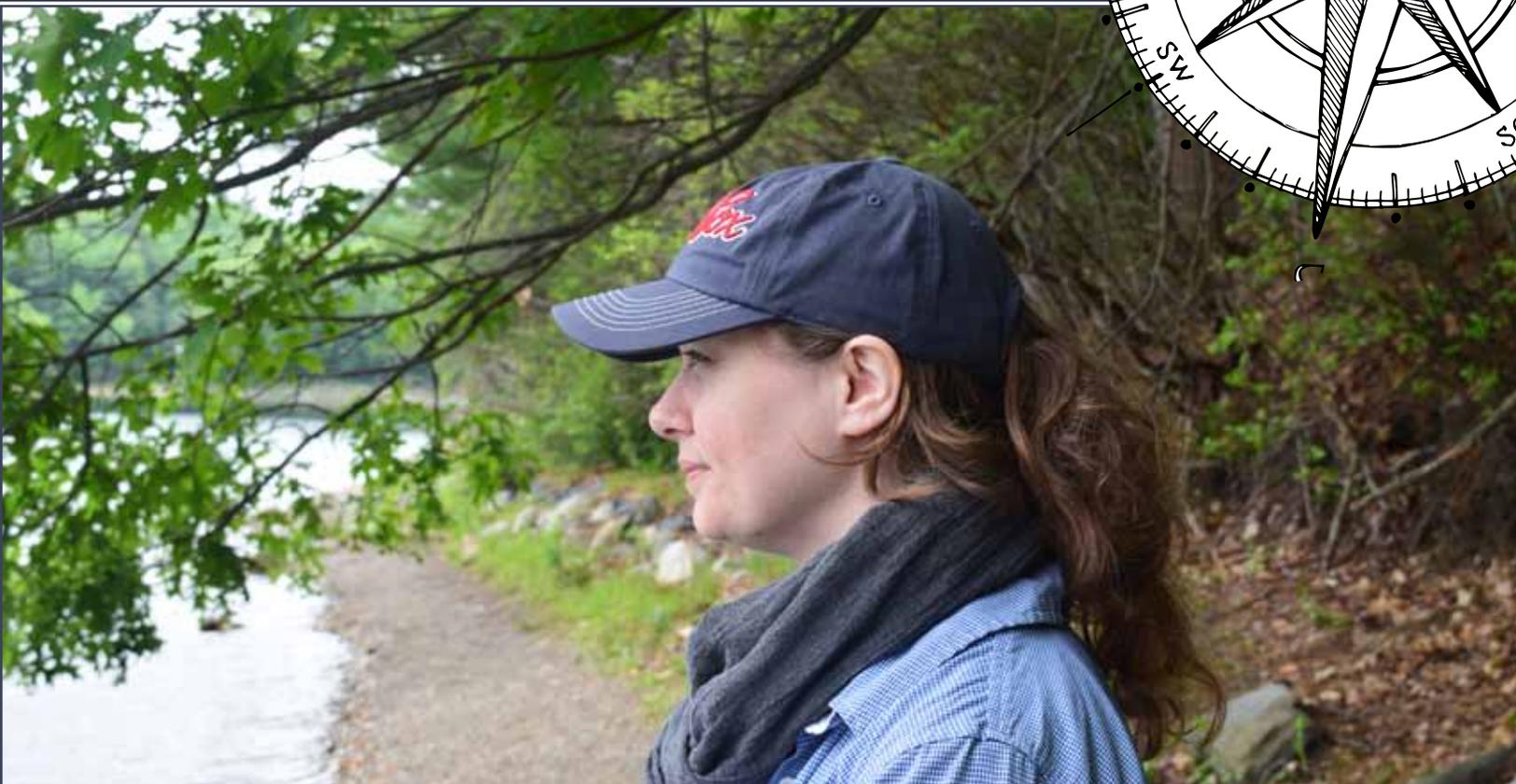
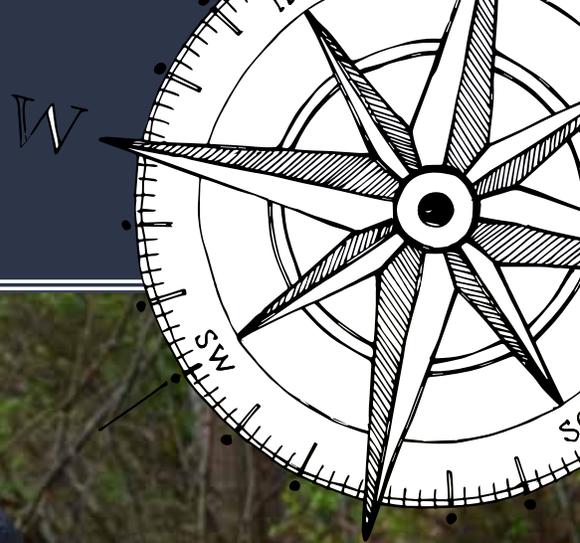
So do let me know if you too feel challenged to take up Rachel's legacy, as expressed in her own words:

"The beauty of the living world I was trying to save has always been uppermost in my mind—that, and anger at the senseless, brutish things that were being done. I have felt bound by a solemn obligation to do what I could—if I didn't at least try I could never again be happy in nature."

All supporting material for this piece comes from Linda Lear's biography, *Rachel Carson*, Henry Holt & CO, New York, 1997. Photo Credits Mountain Horizon by Thomas Kelley and Pine Trees by Samuel Scrimshaw



For **Gail Collins-Ranadive**, writing has always been the best way to stay centered and make sense of life's experiences: from earning a degree in Peace Studies as a military spouse to lobbying for federal funding of the U.S. Institute of Peace; from creating a women's writing workshop as part of an M.F.A. in Creative Writing; to earning an M.Div. to doing ordained interim ministries all across the continent; from growing up the oldest of eight to mothering two daughters to becoming a grandmother of four granddaughters and one grandson. An Easterner by birth, she currently spends winters at her home in Las Vegas, summers in her partner's home in Denver... always writing, writing, writing.



Widening the Circle

A Profile of Award-winning Author and Publisher L.M. Browning

BY STAFF WRITER ERIC D. LEHMAN

I am large, I contain multitudes.
—Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”

The Artists’ Cooperative Gallery of Westerly hums with activity, clusters of buzzing voices gathering around paintings of boats and photographs of trees, chatting and laughing. Rows of chairs and a microphone wait for a poetry reading, generously called the “Poetry of the Earth.” Every one of the authors reading today is published by Leslie Browning’s press, Homebound Publications. At the center of it all is Leslie herself, graceful features hidden behind black rimmed glasses and long, wavy mouse-brown hair that shimmers gold in the harsh light of the art gallery. Finally, the reading commences and she stands up to read, her usual eclectic outfit of a scarf, blazer, jeans, and gray Converse All-Stars lending a whimsical delight to her presence. Her strong hands wave expressively in the air as she

speaks, and her voice is calm and clear.

And yet, this is the first time in over two years that she has read her own work. The demands of being the force and the glue of the cooperative gallery that is a publishing house, naturally sap her strength as a writer. When she was eighteen she had scribbled “Homebound Publications” in a notebook, thinking about opening a press even at that age. “I naively thought opening a publishing house would give me more time to write,” she laughs wryly. Of course this did not happen, and she didn’t write anything new for a long time. “The first few years I let it consume me,” she says.

The tension between writer and publisher is one of many: daughter and businesswoman, healer and sufferer, samurai and monk. Usually, she gives the appearance of a quiet, introverted woman, but I have seen steel in her eyes when she speaks about an injustice or a mistake. “Brilliant and determined,” says

singer-songwriter Kelly Kancyr. “Instigatorial,” laughs Jason Kirkey, who brought Leslie into Hiraeth, and later became a partner in Homebound. Yet in 2008 at her first poetry reading, she “shook like a leaf” according to her mother Marianne. She seems a bundle of contradictions—steel and feathers. “I’ve made many journeys across many lands, over many lives,” she writes in *Fleeting Moments of Fierce Clarity*. She may mean this spiritually or metaphorically, but she also lives those lives right now—as a multi-various rainbow of responsibilities and interests, words and worlds.

Her group of authors gathers at a nearby pub and chats about wild edibles, the nature of art, and when she isn’t listening, about Leslie’s complicated multiple lives, of which we are so often the beneficiaries. At times she seems to live the romantic life of a writer, sitting in a coffee shop or pub, sipping a drink, but instead of writing her own novels or poems, she spends those hours completing the thankless job of copy-editing other authors’ work. She shuttles between Boston, Pawcatuck, New Haven, and New York on the train, watching out the windows as the salt marshes and suburbs *clickclack* by, meeting with authors and distributors, serving on the board of directors at the Independent Booksellers Association. “Being involved in books” was her goal, and she has achieved it. But at what cost? How many lives can one person live?



* * * * *

Leslie was born in West Palm Beach, Florida, where her mother Marianne lived with her first husband until divorcing when Leslie was only three. Marianne moved the two of them back to southeastern Connecticut, where she had grown up and lived. After a few years of relative calm and stability, Marianne abruptly went blind while driving on the highway. Eight-year-old Leslie had to steer the car off the road. Diagnosed with a brain tumor, Marianne thought she was dying and made her will, but when she got a second opinion she found she had Multiple Sclerosis. It was not a death sentence, perhaps, but for a single mother and her daughter it was devastating.

During those years Leslie began to explore her world, always out and about in the woods, paddling down streams, or in the pond across the street. She would spend entire days out of the house; Marianne had to call her in for meals or pack her a lunch for her outings. “I lived a Huckleberry-Finn childhood in the beginning, I was knee deep in mud with frogs and turtles,” she laughs. She paddled along the streams, built shelters in the forest, and cooked on an open fire in a nearby picnic area. In *Oak Wise* she writes to the earth: “Laying upon my back, I rest a flat heavy stone atop my chest—anchoring myself to you.”

On one adventure she and some friends paddled down Anguilla Brook and passed under a large spider web in the vined-canopy above. The sack burst and a rain of baby spiders poured into the inflatable boat. They jumped out and capsized the craft, but a few of the spiders made it back into the Brown-ing house. “Every now and then a big hairy black spider would go scurrying across the living room floor,” Marianne says, laughing.

She listened to her mother read *The Boxcar Children* and *The Secret of Nimh* and later read *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, both books with strong women writers at their center. Following in their footsteps, she began to write, completing a short story about a haunted whaling ship, first feeling her way to the idea that she could be an author. However, she didn’t make writing a habit until she was fifteen, scribbling little poems and meditations. Her mother found scraps of paper and asked “Are these song lyrics?” “No, they’re me.” “Keep doing what you’re doing,” Marianne told her.

She grew up with a large group of friends, mostly boys, many with single parents on drugs, and her triple bunk bed and Marianne’s kitchen often served as welcome havens. She played baseball and full-contact football with the boys, but after watching *The Karate Kid* found her true athleticism in the martial arts, studying *Budō* and *Goju Ryu*. She learned enough to compete



in, and win, tournaments, but more importantly her martial arts gave her the confidence “not to be bullied,” and she was never threatened even though her neighborhood was amongst the worst in eastern Connecticut.

We don’t often think of small-town New England as burdened with “bad neighborhoods,” but Leslie was only one of four of her large group of friends who graduated high school. The others fell into drugs, into gangs, into despair. “I was sixteen and very moral, and took a stand and said that this is wrong,” she says wryly. She had also seen alcoholism and drugs destroy the older generation, and wanted nothing to do with it. So, she stayed “very straight edge” and one by one her former friends deserted her.

And then the real problems began.

* * * * *

Marianne’s multiple sclerosis flared up throughout the 1990s, and in 1999 the summer before Leslie’s senior year she had a big attack, a lesion the size of a fist in her cerebellum. After spending two months in the hospital she was finally sent home, where Leslie took over full care, cleaning and cooking. While performing these duties, she continued to attend high school, ducking out of classes early so she could rush home.

She had focused on art in high school, but applied to and was accepted into a pre-med program in Upstate New York, near a few blood-relations. They promised to take care of Marianne while Leslie attended classes at the university, but couldn’t quite bring themselves to do it properly. Heartbroken and sick with worry, Leslie had to defer college and brought her mother back to Connecticut. In the years to come, the two

women broke ties with these family members over this, and other things.

After a few years, Marianne’s health improved somewhat, and she was able to do housework and take care of herself. Leslie was soon able to visit the Westerly Public Library and take walks into the woods and Wilcox park. But things were still hard. The mother and daughter had to walk two miles to the grocery store, in the heat of August and the snows of February, packing forty pounds of supplies on the way home. They shopped at Thrift stores, mended clothes rather than buying them, and quilted blankets out of old fabric.

In *Seasons of Contemplation* she writes without exaggeration of the “waves of hardship driven by unrelenting gales.” Those were also the years when her novel of a group of orphans surviving in the streets of 1850s Boston, *The Castoff Children*, started to take shape, and “bits and bobs” of the book reflect her own experiences struggling to survive. No one helped the two women, and since they only had each other, they became even closer than they had been, talking for hours at a time, trying to make sense of their world. “She gave me the space to dream,” says Leslie thankfully. Marianne modestly demurs: “It was a period of great contemplation.”

This contemplation led to new kinds of cathartic writing, explorations of her spirituality. She wrote and read her way slowly through all the world religions, looking for answers and meaning. Eventually she found Frank MacEowen’s book *The Mist-Filled Path: Celtic Wisdom for Exiles, Wanderers, and Seekers*, which “saved her” during a period when she felt spiri-

tually outcast. She wrote him a letter, and they became friends. Frank's father LaRue loved *Fleeting Moments of Fierce Clarity* and became a sort of adopted father for Leslie. "You meet people and you know they'll be part of your life," she says. If she ever gets married, he will give her away. Such fated encounters were one of the small wonders of those difficult years.

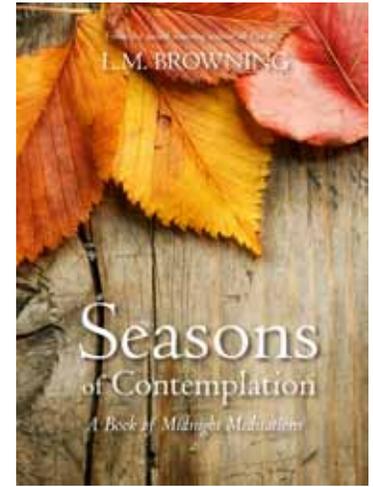
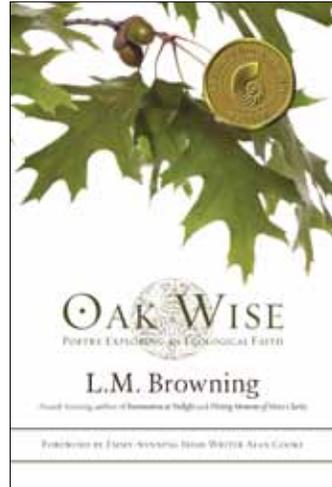
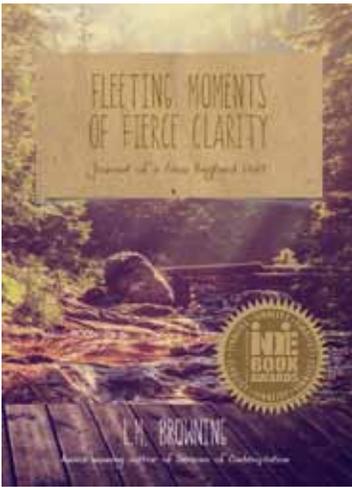
She didn't think about publishing any of her own spiritual writing until she was twenty-six when she wrote *Ruminations at Twilight* in three weeks. A month later she wrote *Oak Wise* in a mere two weeks. "It was kind of an intense summer," she chuckles. Rennie McQuilken, current poet laureate of Connecticut, read her work and told her to "keep going." He even edited the first poem she sent him, and this gave her the courage to continue. At last, *Ruminations* was accepted by a small publisher, who gave her a five book deal based on its strength. With the release of these first books, she toured with other "new age" authors, and was pigeonholed as a sort of spiritual guru by a few readers. But this comes with its own risks. When her novel *The Nameless Man* was released, she was heckled and received hate mail, mostly because she had, as she puts it in *Oak Wise*, "diverged from the mainstream faiths." Of course, as with all true seekers, the spirituality expressed in these books is an "expression of curiosity," an "exploration" rather than the words of a teacher who knows the final truth.

Although the small publisher who accepted her work may have started out with good intentions, he ended by fleecing his various authors and sinking the press. Luckily Leslie talked him down from the original contract to three books, and gave him one she "just cobbled together" to get out of the nightmare. It was a bad first experience with the publishing industry, but instead of giving up as a writer, she decided to start her own press. And in her press, this experience had convinced her, she would "do everything the opposite."

* * * * *

During these years she worked at a commercial bakery, having loved baking since she was a girl, and assuming she would enjoy making a living doing it. However, as with so many expectations, the reality turned out quite different, repetitively making hundreds of pounds of dough each morning. She liked the people she worked with but made barely over minimum wage and didn't get a raise in nearly five years. Of course, being a publisher is a little like being a baker: they both involve chemistry; so maybe this taught her something about her next profession. Instead of merely publishing her, Jason Kirkey offered her a job as Marketing Director for Hiraeth Press. He taught her the first lessons about publishing: distribution, printing, web design, and to think like a big press even if you are small.





She opened an imprint on Hiraeth, but she really wanted to start her own publishing house. She had learned the ins and outs of a multitude of subjects at the Westerly Public Library, traveling there three days a week, and now she went back, struggling up the steep learning curve of tax certificates and business licensing. With \$800 during the recession, she purchased a block of ISBNs and got a distribution deal. She opened a bank account in the business name, learned design programs for the books, and built a website. She re-acquired the rights to her own books, and found her first author, Theodore Richards.

She logged “insane” hours that first year, pushing her mind and body to the limit, taking care of her small family, working two jobs, studying correspondence courses at University of London’s International Program and following her dream at the same time. “The first year you’ll be totally overwhelmed, but after that you’ll be okay,” a friend who was an entrepreneur told her once when she was feeling overwhelmed. She needed a better source of income to finance this dream, so she began teaching special education at her former high school. However, the school wanted to defund the program and mainstream the high-functioning autistic children, and didn’t tell the parents about it. Outraged, she told the parents and was forced out of the job after just a year. Luckily she had saved money and with her mother’s encouragement “went full tilt” at Homebound. It was that year that she picked up my own book, *Afoot in Connecticut*, and began bringing others into the fold.

For two years Leslie took the train from Pawcatuck, Connecticut to Boston, essentially running the business out of the Parker House Hotel, meeting authors and the small part-time staff in the lobby or the bar. She chose the hotel because of its “rich literary history,” but as the press expanded she rented a less romantic but more practical office suite in the growing downtown of Westerly, Rhode Island and later New Haven, Connecticut. She started *The Wayfarer* magazine, without any advertisements except her own, and grew it to a readership of five thousand. Larger now, Homebound Publications merged again with Hiraeth, and Jason once again became her partner.

As with any small press, money is often an issue, but she refuses to compromise when it comes to her authors, meeting

them in California or New York, buying dinners, giving generous royalty packages. Why? Because it feels more human. It creates a family of writers rather than a “stable” or whatever other degrading metaphor fits most publisher-author relationships. Of course, she says that monetary success is obviously desirable, but “I’d rather be the vehicle for a certain circle of people that are doing deep work.”

It’s not always easy to find that “circle,” and with eight hundred to a thousand book submissions a year, she has to make choices. “It’s an X-factor, it’s not just the book,” she says. “It’s the alignment of a good person to work with and a good manuscript that suits the direction I want to take the publishing house.” She usually finds about fifteen or twenty she wants to work with, and then has to cut that down further, currently able to take twelve manuscripts a year, shepherding new authors into the world. As poet Gary Whitehead says, she has become “a gatherer.” She shakes her head at this compliment. “Authors are the number one reason a small press succeeds,” she says. “You carry the word.”

Another thing she is able to do as a publisher is to push the authors she likes. One of her favorites, David Leff, has years of journals and boxes of notes about his amazing experiences. When he told her about an experience canoeing on Maine’s Allagash Waterway that he “hadn’t worked on for ten years,” she told him to “Go work on it!” He did, and that book, and others, have come into the world because of her.

This is a fact she still hasn’t processed, stuck deep in the business aspects of publishing. “You don’t feel the accomplishment,” she says. “I have to keep going on to the next book, the next author.”

* * * * *

One of her many authors, my wife Amy Nawrocki, comments often on Leslie’s “intense” drive, and of the risks involved, saying “I admire the way she handles setbacks, shoulders set and plowing ahead.” And setbacks have continued to plague her, as they have her whole life. Growing up she had trained as a speed skater, and in 2014 tried to do it again as a means to get back

into shape after a year of surgeries and a cancer scare. But on her first day back in the sport she fell, twisted her foot, dislocating it, ripping ligaments off the bones, and breaking her ankle in three places. Reconstructive surgeries followed and months of physical therapy as she learned to walk again. During this time, she had to run the press from her hospital bed instead of cafés. Today she has 60% of the range she used to in that leg. This accident is only one of several health problems that have assaulted her while she struggles to write and to run Homebound Publications.

Her own writing has certainly borne the brunt of her dedication to Homebound. After all, we are only given so many opportunities, only have so much time. “She will sign book deals for others and put their projects before her own,” says Kelly Kancyr. As recently as 2015, her mother and friends told her firmly that she needed to make her own work a priority, prompting her to take one or two days a week to work on her own writing. In this way she finally finished *The Castoff Children*, a novel she started way back in 2004, going through many revisions, moving from darkness to light. Eleven years is a long time to work on a novel.

On the other side, publishing has undoubtedly made her the author she is today. It forces her to rub up against other authors with different styles and forms, to read closely, to think about what works and what doesn’t, to ask questions that authors working in isolation sometimes never consider. “When you’re around other creative minds, it pushes you further in your work,” she agrees. It has also taught her the difficult lesson of leaving earlier work behind; she can look back and say, “I’m not there anymore.” Last year when we sat together at an author signing on Groton Heights under the tower of the Battle Monument, she looked at the row of her published books, and “only wanted to take credit for about a fourth of it.” As an author you have to keep moving forward, even if the early work still resonates with others.

Her next book, *Wild Silence*, is well on the way. But the laptop pulls her back into publishing work, and she struggles to “get away.” It is no exaggeration to say that this tension defines her life. After all, creating a successful publishing house from nothing is the work of many years, and becoming an accomplished writer is the steady, complex work of decades. Can one person do both? If anyone can, she can.

On a spring day at Nomad’s End, the home I share with Amy Nawrocki, Leslie sits on the porch with a blue cast on her left arm, scarf around her neck, Oxford shirt unbuttoned, sleeves rolled up, a borrowed watch on her wrist. As the birds twitter and the wind blows through the beeches, we eat a meal of fresh fiddleheads, fried polenta with a spicy chocolate chutney. We talk about our projects, and as always, she seems a contradiction, awkward, introverted, yet possessed of zen-like confidence. We walk down to the stream, past a mother robin sitting on a nest, cross a stream, walk along an old Indian trail, and inspect the ruin of an early 20th century cabin. She immediately sees it all as a writer does, sees the possibilities. But later her talk runs on the publishing house, on the direction for the future. “I don’t care the awards we’ve racked up, I care about widening the circle.” She references the Concord transcendentalists and the Bloomsbury group, citing the accomplishments that might not have happened in isolation. “What came out of their conversations is amazing, all pushing one another, all inspiring one another.”

As an author I have longed my whole life for those kind of conversations, and now they have become commonplace. Just a month earlier Leslie was at Nomad’s End with singer-songwriter Kelly Kancyr, artist Mary Fletcher, and author David Leff, who said that being one of her authors is like “being part of a family.” Our conversations may have been “literary” at first, but ranged over the whole of life, starting new thoughts, inspiring new work. I actually began putting together a new book the next day. “To have facilitated in some small way that kind of creative group, that is the legacy of the press,” Leslie says.

We think because the act of writing is essentially solitary that being a writer is solitary. But it is not—it is essentially a communal act in both its genesis and its outcome. It is a reaching out, a bringing together. We share literature. And running a publishing house works the same way, but not because it is also “involved in books.” No, they both aspire to do the same things—to connect people, to start conversations, to open doors and build bridges.

Whatever challenges her complicated life brings, we can be sure that Leslie Browning will continue to widen the circle for us all.



Eric D. Lehman is a travel and history writer, with reviews, essays, and stories in dozens of magazines and journals. He is also an award-winning author of many books, including *Afoot in Connecticut*, *The Foundation of Summer*, *A History of Connecticut Wine*, *Insiders’ Guide to Connecticut*, *A History of Connecticut Food*, *Becoming Tom Thumb*, and *Homegrown Terror*. In his spare time, he pursues Henry Miller scholarship and teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Bridgeport, where he directs the school literary magazine, *Groundswell*, and the faculty essay series, *The Commons*. He lives in Hamden with his wife, poet Amy Nawrocki, and his two cats.

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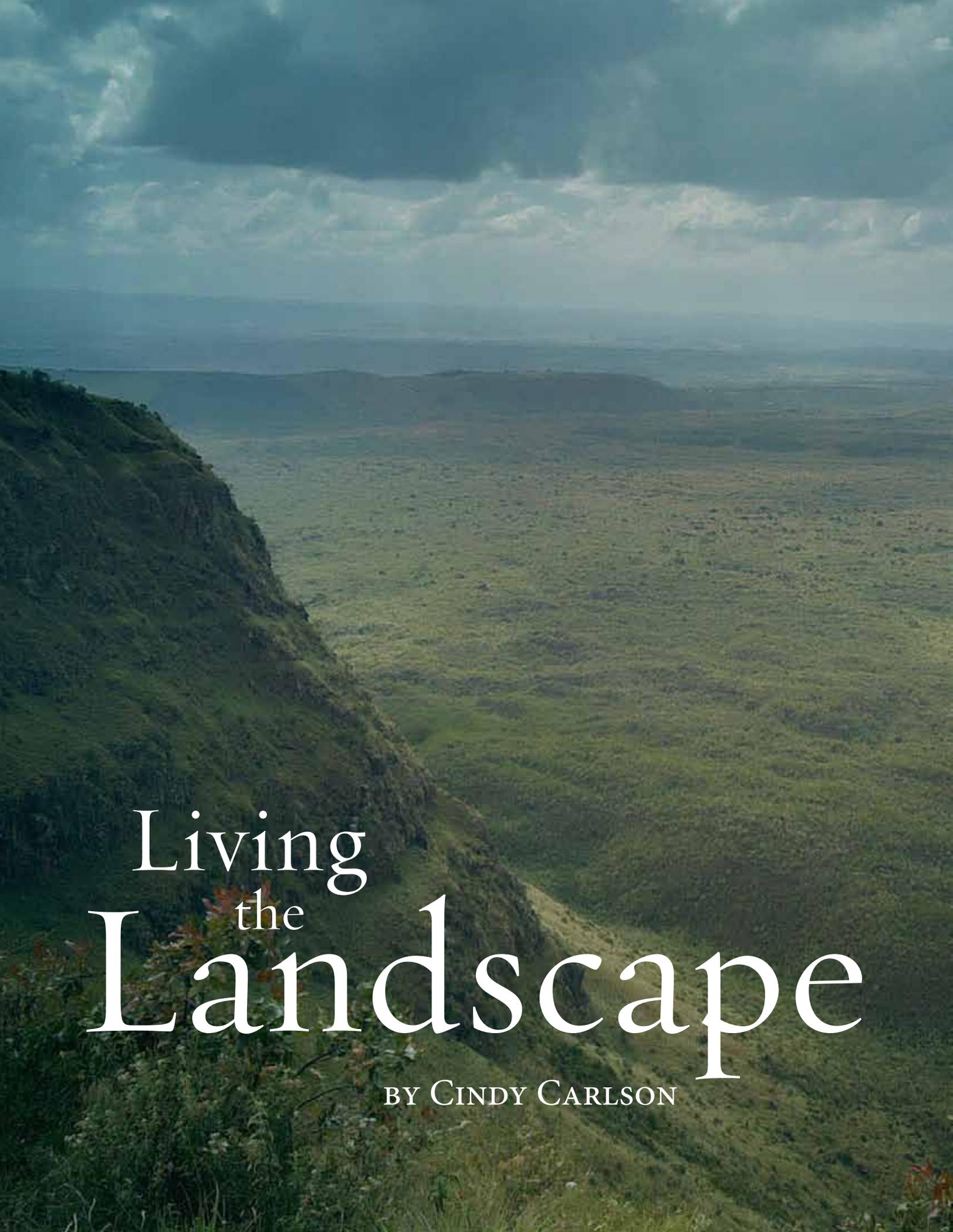


THE
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CHILDREN

"The Castoff Children is a lovely story of hope and the power of dreams and friendship..."

—TOMM MOORE, Writer and Director of the Academy Award nominated films

The Secret of Kells and Song of the Sea



Living
the
Landscape

BY CINDY CARLSON



The weathered Land Rover shuddered to a stop. Our driver, gazing ahead, raised his right hand then lowered it slowly through the stuffy air, a clear signal for quiet.

He had spotted something ahead. I slid my legs up onto the worn vinyl seat, grabbed the back with one hand, hoisted myself into a crouch, then cautiously stretched up through the opening in the roof.

A soft breeze surprised me, sweet with acacia and a distant rain, chilling the tiny halo of sweat beads along my hairline. The Masai Mara spread to the edge of my vision, vast as an ocean, pale green and umber, swaying in the slow undulations of a sea at rest.

Then I spied them—rugged gray boulders the size of small dump trucks, strewn along the rutted road, two hundred yards ahead. I raised my binoculars. The shapes were moving.

“Elephants!” I whispered.

Rich popped up beside me. At 6’3” my husband could peer over the roof without standing on the seat. The other four passengers poked their heads out the side windows, necks elongated, staring ahead, as a dozen African bush elephants advanced on a slow-motion collision course with our vehicle.

The massive bodies swayed. With each footstep their dense, deeply furrowed coats sagged and trembled. The lead animal, the largest cow, paused three jeep lengths from us. Her giant tent-flap ears, pinned back for movement, fanned out to full size, then slapped back with a leathery *crrrraack* against the columns of her shoulders.

No one breathed.

The elephant raised one front foot and, without another glance toward us, lumbered off the path into the tall grass, the herd slowly easing in line behind her. Only then could we clearly see the three Babar-sized babies carefully wedged among the adults. The silent parade filed past the jeep and on across the plain; only the soft swish of tails and grasses lingered in the air.

Then we breathed.

For me, the natural world in all its evolutionary splendor is a revelation of the divine.

–Alison Hawthorne Deming

For thirty minutes every Sunday evening in our 1960s western New York household there was no disagreement about what to watch on television. Throughout the week, Daddy chose Red Skelton, Lawrence Welk and the Friday night fights; Mom, when she escaped the kitchen, claimed only holiday parades and the symphony; my brother, if he was ever home, watched the occasional sporting event; my little sister was still under the spell of the Huckleberry Hound crew. As a young teen, I was immersed in the lives of the flashy detectives who spilled from the Sunset Strip and Waikiki beach into my fantasies. But Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, the seminal nature documentary, would draw all of us to the living room, fanned out across the floor and couches, while Marlin Perkins, sharp in his pressed khaki jacket, brought the thrill of safari into our tiny space. In his affable style ("Oh look, here comes the mother gorilla . . ."), he made the exploration of ocean, jungle, and savanna seem possible. I dreamed of the day I would be the one whispering behind a long camera lens trained on a pair of rough-housing lion cubs or a snarling gorilla.

My father, a science teacher and an easy-going practical man, held three irrefutable truths: the preciousness of family, the literal interpretation of the Bible, and the sanctity of nature. To ingrain in us his familial and religious principles, he relied on personal example and the teachings of his church. To impart his values about nature, he took us outside.

One cold June morning when I was ten, we huddled in the marshy area at the edge of Red House Lake in Allegheny State Park—sneakers squishing in the muck, dangling a string of thermometers into the frigid water—to learn how living things survive in their own place in an ecosystem. I knew the term ecology before I reached my teens, long before it emerged in the popular parlance.

On a late autumn night, Dad roused my sis and me from our toasty beds for a walk up our country road to witness the Northern Lights, then back down the frosty hill coaxing us to say aurora borealis. There were sunrise field trips to discover birds and backyard feeders to bring them close, hikes through the deep northern woods to identify trees and early spring wildflowers, and compost piles to churn up dark, rich soil that he would hold proudly in his hand while proclaiming one of his favorite laws of physics, "Matter can be neither created nor destroyed." To live out that concept, he recycled everything.

A dutiful student, I soaked up my father's teachings, and when I told him, just a few years before he died, that Rich and I were going to Kenya on a birding and wildlife safari, he was as excited as if the trip were his own.

Our bush plane had lifted us that morning up over the ridge of the Rift Valley—a panorama so wide it can be recognized from outer space—and on across the Masai Mara where we rattled

more than an hour, peering down on sweeping savanna criss-crossed with deep-rut tracks and checkered with roaming animal herds. At the "airport" (a mowed landing strip and a wind sock), a half-dozen jeeps and vans were lined up, like pets at the pound, to bounce us through miles of windswept landscape to Mara River Camp, one of a few private tent camps on the Mara National Reserve. Only the occasional acacia tree and our elephant encounter had interrupted the endless vista.

Don Turner, owner of the jeep and the camp, greeted us at the entrance to the compound. A hefty South African with a shock of red hair and a ruddy face, he studied African wildlife most of his life and was working on a field guide to the 600-plus birds of Kenya. He was reputed to have the ability to glimpse a sparrow-sized blur whizzing past a speeding van and instantly identify it from among 30 or 40 possible tiny brown birds.

First came the warnings: keep food out of the tents; don't walk anywhere on the property at night without an armed guard; and, most importantly, respect the animals in the wild. Then a few stories about death on safaris all around us—a charging water buffalo, a flash flood in a stream-bed, a monkey bite that left a man quarantined for rabies and AIDS.

I shivered. Animals in the wild. I was in Africa.

Alison Hawthorne Deming, exploring her evolution as a nature writer in her memoir *Writing the Sacred Into the Real*, says, ". . . all of my life I have hungered for wild places and all my life wild places have fed me and that is central to who I am . . ."

My favorite haunt growing up was a deciduous woods extending north from my parents' backyard for a half mile on both sides of the road until it merged into farmland. The woods was lush and healthy, dominated by mixed hardwoods with a stand of hemlock where a stream ran through. A small clan of elementary school-aged kids—warriors, explorers, Indians, detectives—roamed its underbrush, through the changing temperatures of its air currents, scuffling through musty, decomposing leaves, stalking squirrels or adventures or mysteries. By age ten, allowed to explore on my own, I would return again and again to a giant red oak towering over a clearing that rolled for a mile down the hillside. A scarlet tanager called above me, rasping like a robin with a sore throat, and I could peer up through the web of leaves to discover his brilliant red breast. We were learning poetry in school and I stood, my back to the trunk, trying to project my tiny fifth-grade voice down the slopes as I recited,

*I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree . . .
then shrunk to the mossy ground from the sudden truth of it.*

Nature, lodged in my soul at an early age, became my touchstone. In college I struggled to identify a major as my heart called me to biology so that I could be outside, but my intuition

questioned my temperament for the time in the lab. Wild, for me, had a personal, fluid definition. I sought the accidental intrusion of nature into urban life, like a peregrine falcon swooping down the concrete canyon of a city block or finches congregating on thistle in a vacant lot. As a young adult I read and re-read *Wild America*—ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher’s 30,000-mile odyssey around the continent—and dreamed of retracing their route, but settled for what William Least-Heat Moon calls the “blue highways” that wander the map toward small towns or promises of a park or a forest. As my sights and resources expanded, wild also became a campfire and pup tent high in the Great Smokies, howler monkeys in the tangled jungle of Belize, dawn atop the ruins of Palenque, and the hissing of beluga whales in the Hudson Bay. Wild places indeed fed me—a rich and nourishing potion that sustained me through indoor times.

Our tent, set on a wooden slab and perched on the bank of the Mara River, had headroom enough for Rich to stand, two steel cots, a small dresser and a walkway down the center leading to an attached bathroom at the rear. The light tan canvas ruffled in the breeze.

“No fear of roughing it here,” I said to Rich as I flopped onto the cot.

Suddenly, a full-nosed snort exploded nearby as though a giant congested beast was announcing his arrival. The echo rippled through the walls. I sprang from the cot, back into the center of the tent. Another snort, closer and almost deafening. Then another.

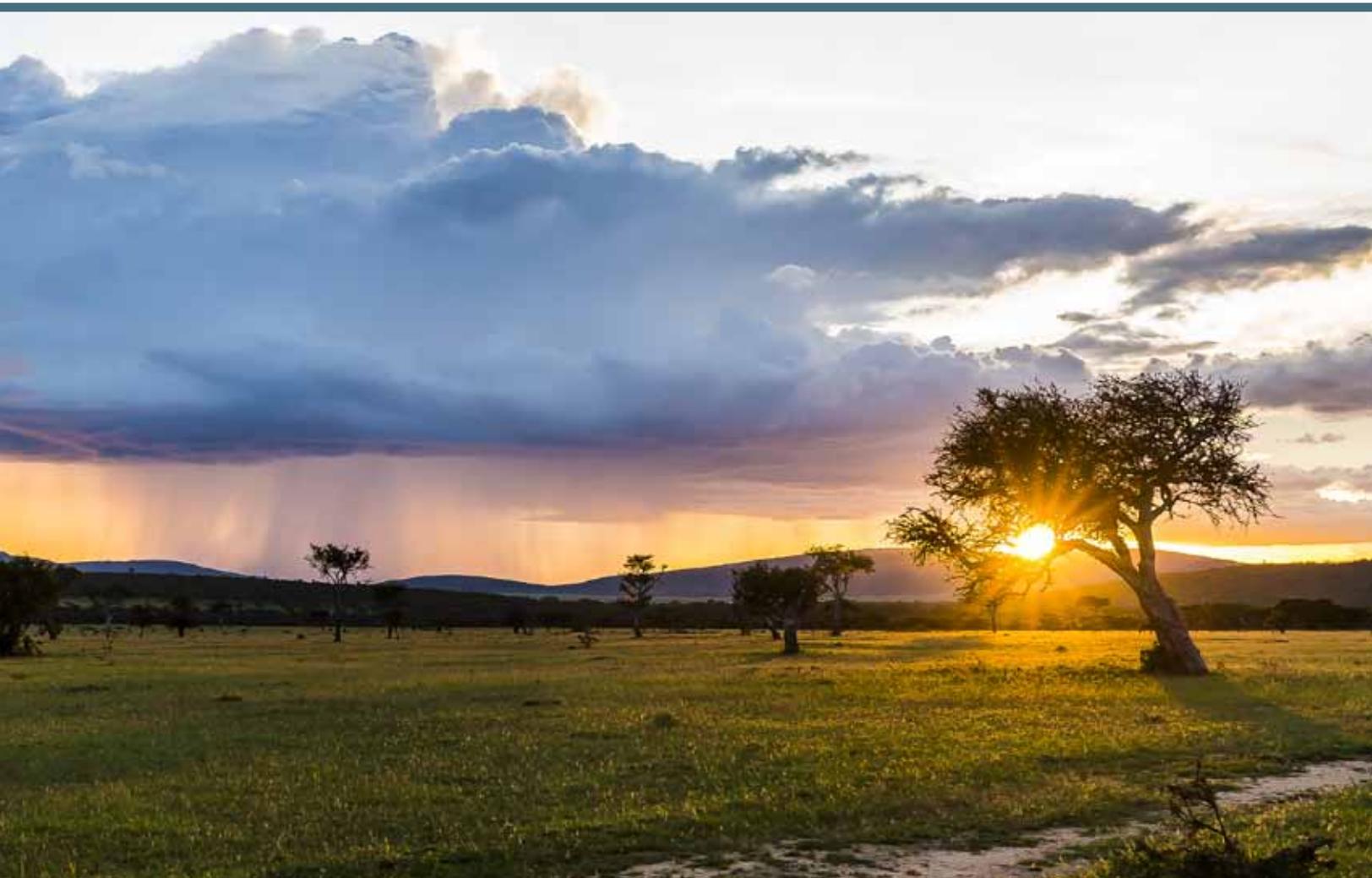
“What the hell!” Rich ran to the front flap.

The river was chock-full of hippos. Massive, blubbery creatures chomping, exhaling, thumped through the water like bumper cars. A camp worker stood on the bank, his long legs skinny as the giant stick he wielded.

“Hippo stick,” he said, glancing at our puzzled expressions and shaking his weapon as a warning. “Very mean, these boys.”

Night fell. The Maasai workers constructed a hippo-sized bonfire of acacia limbs in the round stone pit under the bowl of black sky, and we pulled a small circle of camp chairs tight around the slow-burning blaze. Behind us a chorus of croaking frogs formed an outer ring.

“Bushbaby!” Don whispered, shining his flashlight toward a small, squirrel-like animal slinking up a nearby feeder. The light



caught two flame-red saucers, wild and wide as though frozen in fright. “The only thing more frightening than those eyes is his scream,” he warned. “You’ll probably hear it in the night.”

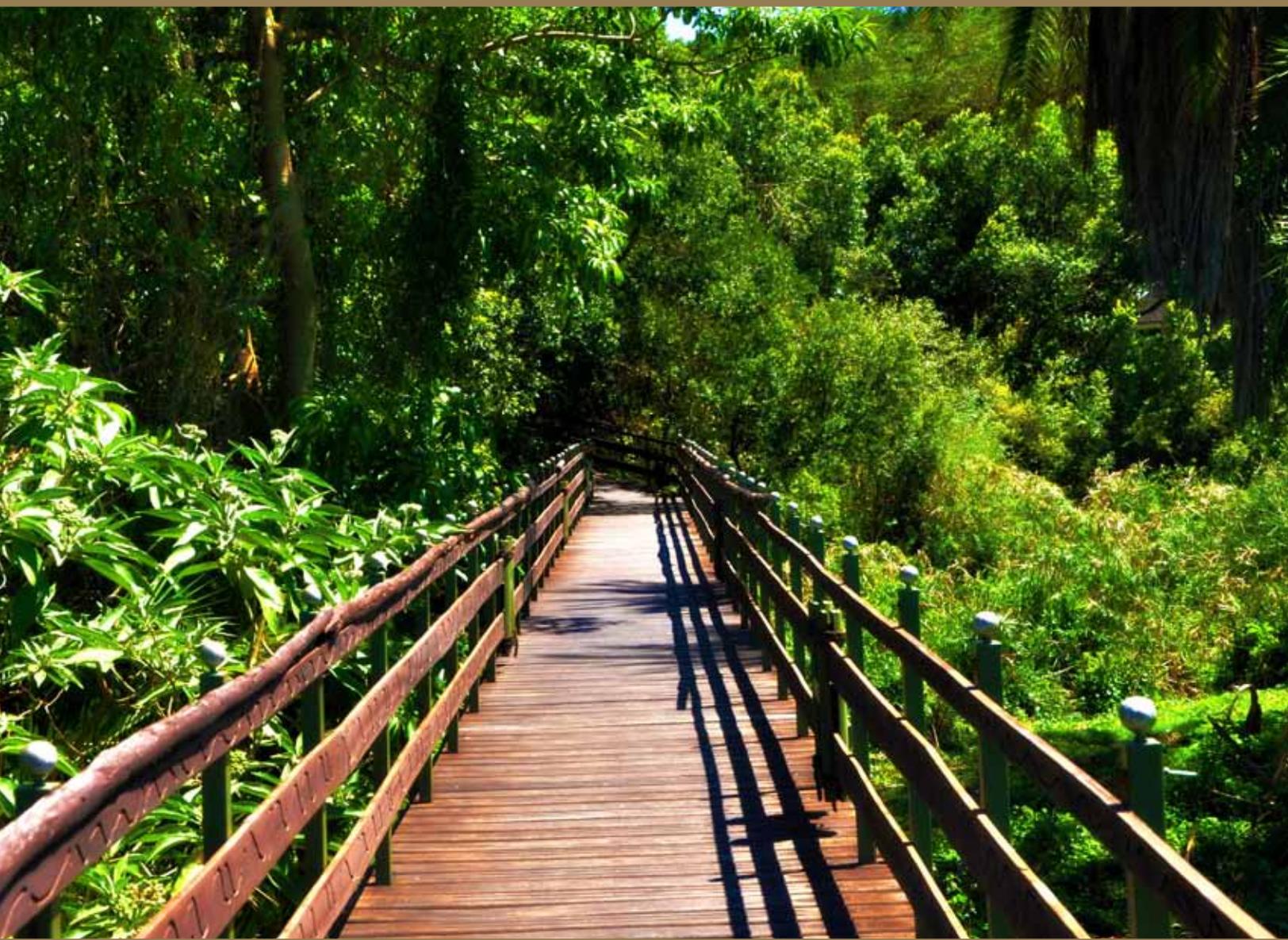
I stepped back from the circle; the sweet acacia smoke followed me. There was no light at all between the fire and the heavens. Only the unnerving sky—the immensity of it humbling, almost painful to look at, or forbidden, like staring into the sun.

I followed the smoke trail back to my childhood when everything in the world, from the sky on down, felt huge and unknown and I stared into the darkness of my bedroom and tried to make sense of the things my father had taught me. The questions dogged me—Why am I here? Where do I go when I am done being here? What about matter being neither created nor destroyed? Why would God be so wasteful as to create all those

people souls and animal souls only to burn them in hell? Surely He had invented recycling. It made little sense not to apply the concept to living creatures.

Rich handed me a beer, and we sipped, long past bedtime, staring into the flames; the Mara was the kind of place, at least that night, for pondering life. Then, slightly numb and ready to face the sky, we stumbled off to the tent, the soft padding of the barefoot guard, armed with bow and arrow, a few paces behind us.

Floating in swirling darkness. A line of babies. They’re lost. And burning. And screaming. An ungodly, hideous scream. I jerked bolt upright on the creaking cot, my heart hammering, and swung my feet toward the floor. In an instant I recognized: I’m in a tent on the Masai Mara in the middle of the night—not a



good idea to put my feet on the floor. I looked over to Rich's cot to see his face pale in the dim light.

"So that's what a bushbaby sounds like," he said. "I wish I had a tape recorder."

The tiny mammal above our tent fell silent. I drifted back into a fitful sleep, separated by a thin canvas from thrashing hippos and, in the distance, a shrieking hyena.

We were out before sunrise for the first game drive. I claimed my spot in the jeep—feet on the seat, elbows on the roof, drinking in the wide, pale dawn. A lone lion strode through the grass, returning from the night's hunt, his powerful body and untamed mane a soft golden brown in the early light. The other animals gave him wide berth. "S-s-s-simba," our driver said with a smile.

We came upon mixed herds of zebra and antelope. Skittish, they moved together on instinct like schools of fish. The topi stood apart, regal and still, their front legs longer than the rear ones as though pausing from a climb up the non-existent hills. Giraffes loped along the thickets, so close we could watch the oxpeckers working their way up and down the long fuzzy necks. And secretary birds, almost my height if I had joined them, strutted like fussy divas in the open spaces, kicking up miniature dust clouds that glinted in the sun.

Four young Maasai carrying long sticks and wrapped in *shukas*—the mud-red blankets typical of local apparel—trotted through our field of view. Fierce warriors, they live alongside the wild animals of the Serengeti but pose no threat to them; the Maasai people subsist only on their cattle. Like the previous day's elephant herd, these warriors followed a determined course from somewhere to somewhere else, guided by signs in the Mara invisible to us outsiders in the jeep. They disappeared over a slight ridge, seemingly without fear, confident of their place in the local food chain.

With the equatorial sun at its peak, I stared through my camera lens at a cheetah resting motionless in the shade. She was bigger than I expected, her paws the size of my running shoes. Distinctive black lines curved down the sides of her face, ending in a pair of teardrops. If hungry or startled, she could accelerate from that resting position to sixty miles per hour in a couple of seconds. But she lay still, with only the slightest blink of her eyelids, despite the click of my camera.

We discovered a zebra lying on its side, head raised and tail twitching, the skin of its belly ripped away, entrails exposed and releasing an acid stench into the air. I felt queasy at first and turned away, but was drawn back to stare, imagining the jaws of the lion soon to be tearing into the flesh.

By the third day I was living a landscape—feeling its pulse as it played out in multiple dimensions before me, reveling in what Peter Matthiessen called a "glimpse of the earth's morning." An-

imals moved in profound harmony with their environment; I heard them and smelled them and sensed them. If not for the body of the Land Rover, I would have been eaten by them. At some deep place in my gut, I knew their fear. The Mara was a world laid bare, reduced to the essentials of water, food and shade. I slipped into its dreamlike rhythm, unaware of anything but the animals, the rolling plains and the unrelenting sky.

Nights in the tent there was no more pondering the meaning of existence. I tiptoed to Rich's cot, wanting to feel skin and muscle and bone. And to drown out the screams of the African night.

Last morning on the Mara, waiting to board the plane, a woman who had been there a week wandered, camera in hand, down a path for one last picture.

"Stop!" Don shrieked, like someone whose child is heading into traffic. "Do not take another step." His voice was shrill and commanding. Two Maasai drivers, armed with sticks, hurried to escort her, baffled, back onto the plane.

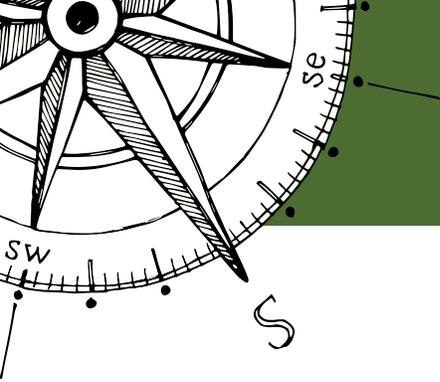
Take-off was effortless; the aircraft banked, allowing us one long last fix on the tiny crowd below. And just beyond, no more than a plane's length from where the woman had strayed, a pride of lions sprawled in the tall grass.

I never challenged my father on his sacred truths. I tried only to redefine them, to cherry-pick the parts that worked for me. He knew I inherited his uncompromising admiration for nature and devotion to family. It was in doctrine that I silently struggled. As a child in that dozing time before sleep, I finally resolved the heaven/hell versus ecology dilemma by "inventing" reincarnation, secretly comforted by a realization that souls would live long after a body was discarded, appearing again and again, throughout time, in all of their recycled iterations.

Growing older, I turned again to nature to understand my role as a conscious being within a giant ecosystem, a thread in the web. Those early *Wild Kingdom* episodes taught me the exquisite balance of nature; wandering the woods taught me humility.

But it was being in the wild in Africa—the land where the first human sojourn began—that completed my anthologized theology. Long before I placed myself in its landscape, I knew it in a holy part of myself where all of life is connected. Long after I visited, when the animals and the vast savanna existed only in my slideshow and my dreams, I knew I had experienced the divine. I came away knowing, more deeply, my place in that living, interconnected organism of life on earth.

Photo Left © Wajahat Mahmood



REIMAGINING THE POSSIBLE

An Interview with Singer Songwriter Kelly Kancyr

BY STAFF WRITER L.M. BROWNING

The first time I saw Kelly Kancyr play was at the Greenwich Art Festival on the lawn of the Bruce Art Museum in Connecticut. It was a crisp October day. I sat off to myself jotting down a few reflections in a moleskin journal as I listened to her strum through covers of Edie Brickell, The Sundays, and a few of her own original offerings. My cellphone went off and signaled me about an urgent business matter. In an instant I was pulled away from the bright autumn afternoon, the melody of the music faded, and I was sucked into the digital vacuum of work. However, as I talked on my phone, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something very special happening and I was pulled back into the present. A little girl who couldn't have been more than 8-years-old pulled a folding chair up along the tent under which Kelly was playing and there—legs swinging back and forth under her chair—sat and listened to the entire set. After which, Kelly stopped and gave the little girl the pearl-finished pick with which she had played the day's tunes. In the weeks and months since this event, I've become friends with Kelly and seen time and time again that children and adults alike gravitate towards her deep warmth and love, music always being at the door through which she enters her community.



At the rebellious age of 8, Kelly Kancyr turned her first instrument—the violin—(her mother’s choice) into a guitar, playing it like a distorted Les Paul. Learning in that moment that musical instruments don’t have to be played in a traditional way; a philosophy that lies at the heart of her style.

After taking a hiatus from music while she attended Quinnipiac College, a chance phone call from a friend inviting her to hang-out and listen to a jam session reignited her passion. Working with a borrowed guitar, Kelly spent the next few months teaching herself chords, scales, and progressions. A year later she joined her first band and never looked back. It wasn’t long before she was writing and recording original music and performing at venues along the East Coast.

Drawn to wide array of genres, Kelly finds she can change musical stylings as easily as she has moved around the world. Johnny Cash, Joni Mitchell and Lucinda Williams, are just some of the influences echoing as undercurrents to her songs. In her vintage folk rhythms and emotionally raw lyrics, you can hear both the wide open spaces of Santa Fe and the rocky beaches of the east coast.

Now 20 years into her career, Kancyr finds herself taking on the role of a mentor. Reflecting, “I find teaching the next generation of young musicians deeply rewarding. I enjoy watching my students begin what I hope will be their lifelong friendship in music.”

Leslie: How did you first get into music?

Kelly: When I was in 3rd grade, we had to pick an instrument. I picked the flute, which was the wrong choice, because I did it for a week and I decided I hated it. So then I picked the violin and I stuck with that through high school. I became pretty good and even went on to all-state. I did classical music for 8 year, but throughout that time I wanted to be a guitar player.

Leslie: Why didn’t you switch then?

Kelly: I didn’t have a guitar and I didn’t know how to play but I would pretend to play guitar. I would put my violin to its side and pluck it like a guitar, and that was all I had for the longest time. Eventually, in college, my friend’s mother let me borrow her guitar. Also, at that time, my friends were all playing guitar so that meant I was able to pick it up easier. They showed me a few chords and I would go home and practice each day. Eventually, I went out and bought my own guitar and taught myself. I used to close myself in my room and play. My dog, Petey, was my first audience member. I would sing very quietly because I was very shy, but Petey loved my music. He listened and that’s how it started. [Laughs]

Leslie: Do you write your own songs?

Kelly: Yes. I write my own music.

Leslie: Where does your inspiration come from? Do you write cathartically or do you write to write a hit?

Kelly: I write cathartically. When I write, I’m not thinking of whether it will be a hit. I try to look at the trends and do the opposite of what that is. I want to be original.

Leslie: Who are your inspirations musically speaking?

Kelly: I really love Lori Carson, Edie Brickell, Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Liz Phair and a lot of obscure people like Julianna Hatfield and Beth Orton.



Leslie: When you play shows such as the Greenwich Art Show, I saw you give out a pick to a little girl. What is the significance behind that gesture?

Kelly: Well, when I see little kids at my shows, especially little girls, listening to me it is important for me to plant a little seed of encouragement in them for later in life. I didn't have a lot of women guitarists to look up to when I was younger. So, when I see a little girl listening to me and interested in what I do, I like to give them a pick as a little seed, and I hope that one Christmas or birthday her mom will buy her the guitar to go with that pick.

Leslie: Has the significance of music changed in your life since you've gotten older?

Kelly: When I was younger I was wrapped up in teenage angst and was strongly moved by the bands I listened to and I think those feelings made me want to be a musician. I wanted to be a role model and connect to others through my lyrics so I became interested in writing and performing. But at this point music's significance changed because you go through life and so many things happen to you and music's place changes. ...I lost my close friend and drummer unexpectedly a few years ago. He took his own life. That certainly made music bittersweet. For a long time I wasn't writing or performing. Now, at this point, I am trying to give back and teach. Music, for me, at this point in my life, is something that I want to pass on.

Leslie: You do a great deal of work with causes suicide prevention, cancer research, animal shelters, playing for group homes for those individuals who suffer from developmental challenges. Doing these charity gigs on top of your full-time job denotes heart and commitment. What compels you to take on all those shows unpaid, atop your other commitments. Where is your passion for doing these shows rooted?

Kelly: At the end of the day, I don't have a lot of money to donate to these causes but I can perform and potentially help raise more money than I'd ever be able to give. My time is all I have. I can donate that. It's nothing for me to go and play for an hour for a cause I believe in. Volunteering, I believe, is part of being a good citizen. We each have to give back.

Leslie: So many artists can't make a living off their passion. In addition to your musical pursuits, you have a full-time job. Tell us a little about what you do.

Kelly: I manage a day program for adults with disabilities for The Kennedy Center in Connecticut. We organize field-trips, volunteer programs, and activities.

Leslie: Are you able to integrate music therapy into the program?

Kelly: I am able to play music for them. I brought in my electric guitar and wah wah pedal and everyone loved it. Even members of the staff were playing it. I also was able to get a famous drummer to donate his time as an intern to the center. With him we had "jam sessions" and drumming circles. So, yes, I am able to integrate a lot of music into my job and I am grateful for that. I love sharing the joy of music with the people I work with.

Leslie: Before you managed the day program, you worked as a teacher for 15 years?

Kelly: I was a teacher for nearly 20 years. I taught in an afterschool program and a music program for preschool-aged children. We would make instruments and it was really fun because I saw so many of the children go on to become musicians and actors and really find a passion for the arts all because of the little music program I lead. I think it is a great way to instill confidence in children who maybe aren't into academics or sports, who don't know what they are good at but they find that they are good at music and you see their confidence grow and carry them into their adult lives.

Leslie: Lastly, how can our readers follow you?

Kelly: I'm on Facebook and I also have a website where you can keep track of my gigs. www.kellykancyr.com. I hope to release my first album in early 2017.



Eric Lehman has written a beautiful book about secrets, doomed love, French literature, food, and the way that life has of showing us just what we need to heal the past. I loved every page. –MADDIE DAWSON, bestselling author of *The Stuff That Never Happened*

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Sky Birds

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Turkey Vulture

The Autumnal Equinox

The sky is not empty. Not yet, but soon.
Wings stroked by clouds, against blue that is steady, or moving, or both;
the swishing silence of deep ocean, where perhaps the turkey vulture escapes the songs
of smaller birds, songs that writhe in his throat with longing.
What might he himself sing? Of the good, long path back to lifeless animals warmed by sun.
Light is caught here in the trees,
and at night the turkey vultures grieve in their dead tree roost,
unbearable cold on the breath of each breeze,
and they ready themselves for the leaving.

The Magnificent Frigate Bird

I am the one who glides; where the air has become cold—that is what I call the sky,
and I stay below it, among the shadow-birds, and at nightfall we slow, so the wind
moves faster than us, a silken pulse that bristles our feathers, that carves away the
shadow-birds until they are the spray of the sea, and when I am alone in something
gray and boundless, I look to the shore, and the sky, and I see the birds again, but this
time they are not shadow, they are light, and I am glad not to be alone again.

Red-Tailed Hawk:

The Sky Birds

Two hawks,
high-pitched, narrow,
sun birds,
sky birds,
hidden in the shade
furrowed together on a maple,
wedged between bars of wind and light,
with fluffed-up legs
like frayed bark
or a clump of sweet
cottonwood flowers
as they cling tightly to the river.

Robin

The Reflection

The robin flies into the window
because glass does not shine like water;
and there is another bird there,
flat and strange and shimmering.
This is the robin's land of
damp creeksides and
there's the nest among the maple towers,
so he sings a song, beautiful and weaved of trills,
and the sun moves along with his notes,
until at long last the other bird has gone.



poetry

FEATURE POETS OF THE ISSUE

CONNOR BJOTVEDT

ANDREA JANELLE DICKENS

SHAWN FISHER

CAROL HAMILTON

JOAN HOWARD

J.K. MCDOWELL

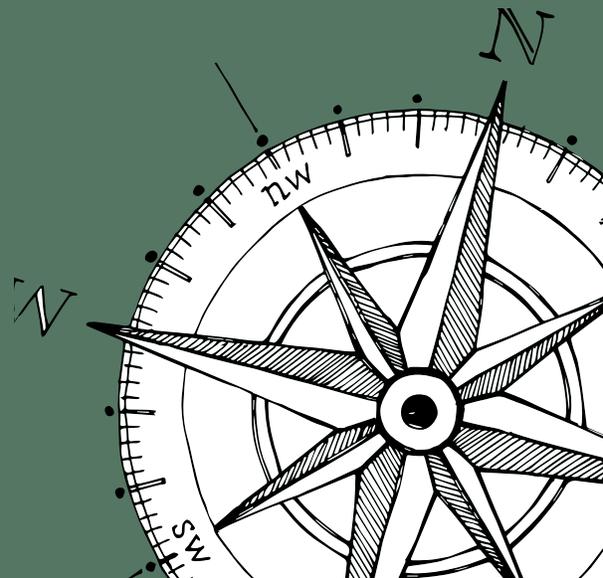
CAMERON MORSE

MOLLY MURRAY

WENDY PFRENGER

BOBBI SINHA-MOREY

MEHRNOOSH TORBATNEJAD



The Coffee Shop, Street Lights, and Make-Out Sessions— like Spring Became Summer

by Connor Bjotvedt

A winter wind in
spring brings bodies to hide here,
away, in corners.

The rustle of trains
passing by this place; moving
window panes like winds.

Parents bring their young
children—lulled to sleep by their
sweet, gentle, rocking.

The coffee steams and
boils over and the tea
kettles sit whistling.

During the night the
bodies of this place leave and
return to their homes.

The street lights that guide
them from here begin to dim
and define shadows.

They are leftover
glints of the morning sun; but
are here now—alone.

Their lights leave no chance
of finding any darkness,
here, along the streets.

On the mountains, their
folks unknowing, young lovers
meeting in darkness.

They fold and unfold
into one another and
christen their new selves.

Beyond the coffee
shop, away from the streetlights,
they're here to be young

Foolish and wild,
waiting for their spring to turn
into a summer.

Leave-taking

by Wendy Pfrenger

Unwind the bean tendrils round the downspouts
the pale, puckered-kiss beanflowers
that will never fruit in my memory.

Unwrap the twining exuberance of
tomatoes sprouting unlooked-for
from the compost, their taut green bodies
smelling of summers already past,
already yellowed and folded away with
the saved toddler clothes in the wooden dresser.

Unlove this ground where I have
planted my feet for seven years of motherhood.

My Neighbor Knows

by Joan Howard

where the song sparrow hides her nestlings,
when the catbird comes and leaves,
how to divide his prize winning dahlia tubers,
sees the need and fertilizes my calcium poor cantaloupe.

He rescued my broken dock in winter
as it floated down the cove,
rescued his wife from drowning
and a morbid bleeding wound.

He is a fisherman
out most mornings before dawn.
Catch is so plentiful his nephew says
the bass jump into Allan's boat.
He ritually prepares those fish
for friends and the large Sunday school
class he teaches.

Strangers come in from the street
to walk his garden. The door is rarely locked.
He tells me he wants to give back,
that: *The only things I owned
which never lost their value
were the things I gave away.*

He grew milkweed, captured larvae
to protect them from spiders,
built a cage for pupae,
freed the butterfly from his hand,
kept a diary of it.
There he is the savior of monarchs.

The Chosen Range

by Joan Howard

Wild winter grasses lift in endless forms,
curled feathers, tassels, rods, towered tops of trees,
as tulip poplar, fir, repeating shapes
to splay the sun, or catch seed-scattering breeze.

Bronze, dry and shining, some still hold their down,
as pearl as any iridescence known
or barren pods of snow stars line a stem,
soft hollowed crystals with cold heavens sown.

Amidst this vibrant death, I see your life:
intense partaking through creation's change,
complexity's pure beauty as the fruit,
and worlds' inclusion as the chosen range.

My passion is love's violence of thought
together through iced silence what is sought.

Canyon Shadows

by Bobbi Sinha-Morey

A droplet of silence is all around me while I traverse the snaky trails of twisting paths and flinty glaze to other canyons etched in fire and the subtle shades of the slowly dying sun's lofty rays. Among the slate blue riffs canyon shadows fall, night birds dance above the lake and lonely eagles call. On the rocky course I go where voyagers are few, round sandstones fjords, between them mauves and grey, and stony walls that circle round me that time has worn away. I'd love to find my way over the coral ridge where sandstone calmness rules, hide in tombs of jade where elusive peace lies still. The respite is heaven that opens up to you.

Windfall of Silver Light

by Bobbi Sinha-Morey

Black against the pearling day a hunting eagle appears, gliding through heavy air where red cliffs sway upon their bases, calling to my flighted heart; and under the junipers, secure from the touch of frost, mosaic patterns in the duff, blueberries and chips of brown bark invite my eye, evoking my animal urge to seek shelter from the cold. Over the river, a windfall of silver light and a skiff of new snow. I gather with the morning wren and finches, breath wrestled from us, but ah! the sanctity of wilderness: somewhere magpies are mewling, and a jay scrawls his words in the air. They whisper of river tales everywhere.

Yellow Cat, Utah

by Bobbi Sinha-Morey

In Yellow Cat the high desert heats the rain falling upon the sand, the cliffs and rock, the broad expanses of red and grey. Natives, trappers and settlers have been here before, and now, with my pack on, I share the desert floor with them, near mesas, time-filled stone, sounds that shook the canyon, that trembled against the wind; drops of wetness upon my soft skin. Elements have carved ages in the pores and creases of the land, the skin of earth peeled; each rock face a wonder. As I move on the darkness slowly swallows the light, but not the tiny flame birthed inside of me.

... always stranger.

by J.K. McDowell

We cross into the season of named storms.
This dreaming dust awaits a baptism by lightning.
Realize that a once familiar shore is now stranger.

A flash of insight is often needed to move
Along the spirals of memory and belonging.
Odds are the face in the mirror is stranger.

A darkness fills wonderland and the hookah burns
With a new blend of herbs. Inhales, curiousier
And curiousier, become even stranger.

Strength and honor, we stand in the danger beyond
The pale. Weaponless at the ready, hands clasped,
“So say we all” in a cadence never stranger.

The steel for vermin. Despite your justified
Atrocities James, the beheading by a friend is
Always preferred to any cut by a stranger.

Duende, so close to death, this poetic pursuit.
There is no choice here, the inexplicable fears
Disappear and what remains is always stranger.

... sea chantey.

by J.K. McDowell

Seeing things in black and white, you can rarely tell
That the blood spiraling down the drain is really
Just chocolate syrup—unless your own is spilled.

What is the safe distance from your darkest secrets?
Delight and sorrow—the fragrant rose and piercing thorns.
What are we to each other? Five paces, turn and fire.

The nib of the pen carves through the emotion,
Setting in place the envisionment. Cold water
Screams rarely provide any satisfying terror.

I reflected on the failed harvest and wonder
Over the defeat and the blame of liberty.
We do not see the blood seeping from the asphalt.

The dervish orbits the column and poetry flows.
This is an inertia that spins me through the
Fatigue that challenges the creative spirit.

There is a storming chorus that reminds you of your
Insignificance. James, I am so pleased to
Finally hear your own voice in this sea chantey.

Sunset with Coyotes

by Andrea Janelle Dickens

The sun hitchhikes the same route each day, a highway we come to know like our own hands straight as a knife scraping spikes off nopales. I want to bite each rusty sunset, blood sweet as orange juice running down my chin. This is the way to make sure I will always remember these evenings: prick the tongue with the sharp beauty so strong it can pierce my lungs, burn its way into every taste bud. Your arm against my back like a scaffold, it feels we can withstand the falling of the sun. Dark leans heavy against our ears, against our skin. The cries of coyotes mingle with the rush of cool desert air, wrap us in its rush of fierce eyes and focused breath waiting for the last light to sink.

Love Song with Insects

by Andrea Janelle Dickens

The days now warmer, I clip a paper bag to the frail asparagus, and check it daily: A praying mantis sac hangs within. A week passes until some near-invisible nymphs begin to crawl across the bottom of the bag. Under my heavy magnifying glass, I watch specks emerge from papery folds: dozens of paratroopers drop on silken cords, suspended in mid-flight until their risers dry, and their fall begins again. I shake them out, and seed them through the garden. They cannot possibly know the voracious world they've entered, its wars: if they make it to next week, they'll make it to adulthood. Meanwhile, their empty nest will look the same until September's heavy rain destroys it.

Today you're adding

by Andrea Janelle Dickens

ochre hues. Against a graphite world, ochre embers into passion. I watch you from the back patio, the solarium framing you: the tendons on your neck catch sunlight, your left foot turns circles on the dropcloth. I watch from across the back garden where mosquitos dart in their breeze-bent world. Although today's an ochre day, your body's not as tense as other ochre days. I wish I could hear the slack tide of your breath from here. Your hand traces studied gestures across the world. I watch as your sketch blushes in the long afternoon light. When you stop drawing and steps back to examine the canvas, everything stops. Your toes dig into the dropcloth, tight roots holding against erosion, against rising passion, against the couple you've drawn, against the way they're walking softly down their street, toes flexed to keep yourself from unmooring even further as you temper a new world.

Pride

by Mehrnoosh Torbatnejad

In the heedful survey of grasslands,
and the prey's glimmer beneath
savanna's cantaloupe sun;
in the sandstone circle
of their eyes, narrowing
in the waiting area
of widely-spaced trees

In the stretched skeleton
of their patient planning,
in the crouched golden coat
fused with the plain's aurous hue;
in the tacit reign with other royals
without foul exchanges, or the promise
of induction to higher positions

In the burst, the switch
from stealth to speed,
in the ambush
of the uncooked meal;
in the acrobatic precision
launched from the soft pads
of their quiet toes

In the paws, blurring
the zebra's stripes,
emptying the giraffe's spots;
in the dewclaw whisking game
without delay or arrow wound;
in the violent beauty
of bloodied teeth rinsed clean

In the dignity of feasting
upon the whole body,
leaving no carcass headless;
in the lion's unashamed stride
where pride
is committing no act
that warrants hiding

The Beachcomber

by Molly Murray

I encounter the deep
in the mirror of sand

where the water
pools like glass

and the shipwreck
of benthic floor reefs—

scraps of crab
shreds of jelly

bedraggled kelp streamers
clamshells picked clean—

We know the deep
best when its dredged

when the broken bits
—shards of shell, visceral strings—

are shattered by current,
washed up on shore,

the way the fragments
of our souls surge to light

when we are
stormwrecked.

Lichen

by Molly Murray

The green nesting
tangled in itself
is a coiled composition
of perfect imperfection;

tangled in itself
lichen grasps its precious spirals
of perfect imperfection
unanchored but unchanged.

Lichen grasps its precious spirals,
each fragile branch
unanchored but unchanged,
invulnerably green.

Each fragile branch
huddling in the storm,
invulnerably green,
pummeled by the squall.

Huddling in the storm
I'm wind-stretched
pummeled by the squall,
bare-boned and battered-flat.

I'm wind-stretched,
word-whipped and steamrolled,
bare-boned and battered-flat—
I miss my shape.

Word-whipped and steamrolled,
I've lost the one I was before the blitz –
I miss my shape,
My wild and carefree shape.

I've lost the one I was before the blitz –
The green-nesting,
wild and carefree shape
tangled in itself,

The green-nesting,
coiled composition
tangled in itself
of perfect imperfection.

Inkfish

Doryteuthis opalescens

by Molly Murray

I saw you—a silky
white scarf of body
striated violet,

strands of indigo,
rusty red peppering—
surging through blackness

of the Pacific Sound;
a scarf cascade
in a festival crowd

can't own the grace
of your delicate
jet propulsion

or the surprise of your
ivory mantle
streaming neon

pink with breath,
tentacles an ethereal
tassel of nervous fringe.

I felt you —a bio—
luminescent thrill
pulsing in me:

you were as drawn
by the square
of light

from our metal box
as we are spellbound,
hypnotized by your

uncharted sphere,
your elusive
map within the bay.

Findings

by Cameron Morse

Maybe I'll find it, whatever
it was, I wanted
to say on the rock bank of the Mississippi

as the tide insinuates itself and sound,
sloshing into me, or maybe
I'll figure out I never had anything

to begin with, trembling human
rabbit that I am, and release
myself to be silent.

At Dragon Bay

by Cameron Morse

The world's largest
seated Buddha sits on a gift
shop and gazes out

across the open plain.
Golf courses, on the one hand,
bask in the sun

and power plants, on the other,
drift into the solid haze
of self-effacement.

Apocalyptic ladybugs
land here and there on the already
tarnished tips of the bronze

lotus blossom.

"...this bottle into the cosmic ocean..."
—Carl Sagan

by Carol Hamilton

The Voyagers, distant capsules,
are they still the colors we launched
or simply night...little trapped sounds
carried with a hope for aliens
equipped with record players.
How lonely, full of trust,
the thought of each traveling
on and on and on.
One is heading for the Dog Star,
and this is the August of Dog Days.
Orion drags us across the sky
every summer night, and he stood
upside down in Bolivia in November
at least once. That is all I can attest to.
For the rest ... is it trapped in something
about the size of my brain?
This is the dream I had.

Morning

by Carol Hamilton

When words do not drift down
from the treetop
one must simply wait
or fill the room
with chatter, letters, consonants
without vowels

And if the Hebrews could do it
why not you
one must simply not wait
for Voices of God
with silvered tones and significance
It is simple not to wait

The Reading Lists

by Shawn Fisher

For Tracy

In the extended summer of twenty years back,
when I was cleaning my way to a semester abroad,
two slips of paper were gifted to me
by women who'd heard I loved to read.

"Here," said one, "you *must* read these authors,"
 their names in script on a spiral pad.
"Here," said another, "you'll *love* these books,"
 their titles in print on a Merry Maids card.

There sat the one, at her desk of success,
 a Rembrandt beside her, her cleaners on call.
There sat the other, on a fence by the beach,
 her uniform fraying, our lunchbreak near ending.

I'd never read books from either one's list,
though from then to now I've sampled from both,
enough to know that one was wrong
and of course the other was right.

It didn't take years to figure that out,
but it's taken me ages to say it.

A Movement of November

by Shawn Fisher

da Vinci discovered the elaborate movement of wings
long before this autumn afternoon called on me
to look above and find
a flock of pigeons rowing across the sky—
drawing a thousand feathers
forward and down, then in and up.
I am not original in my amazement,
nor are they in their rapid changes of course.
Threaded together above a sodden marsh,
they double back to leave a wake for those to come,
catching the shadows they left behind.

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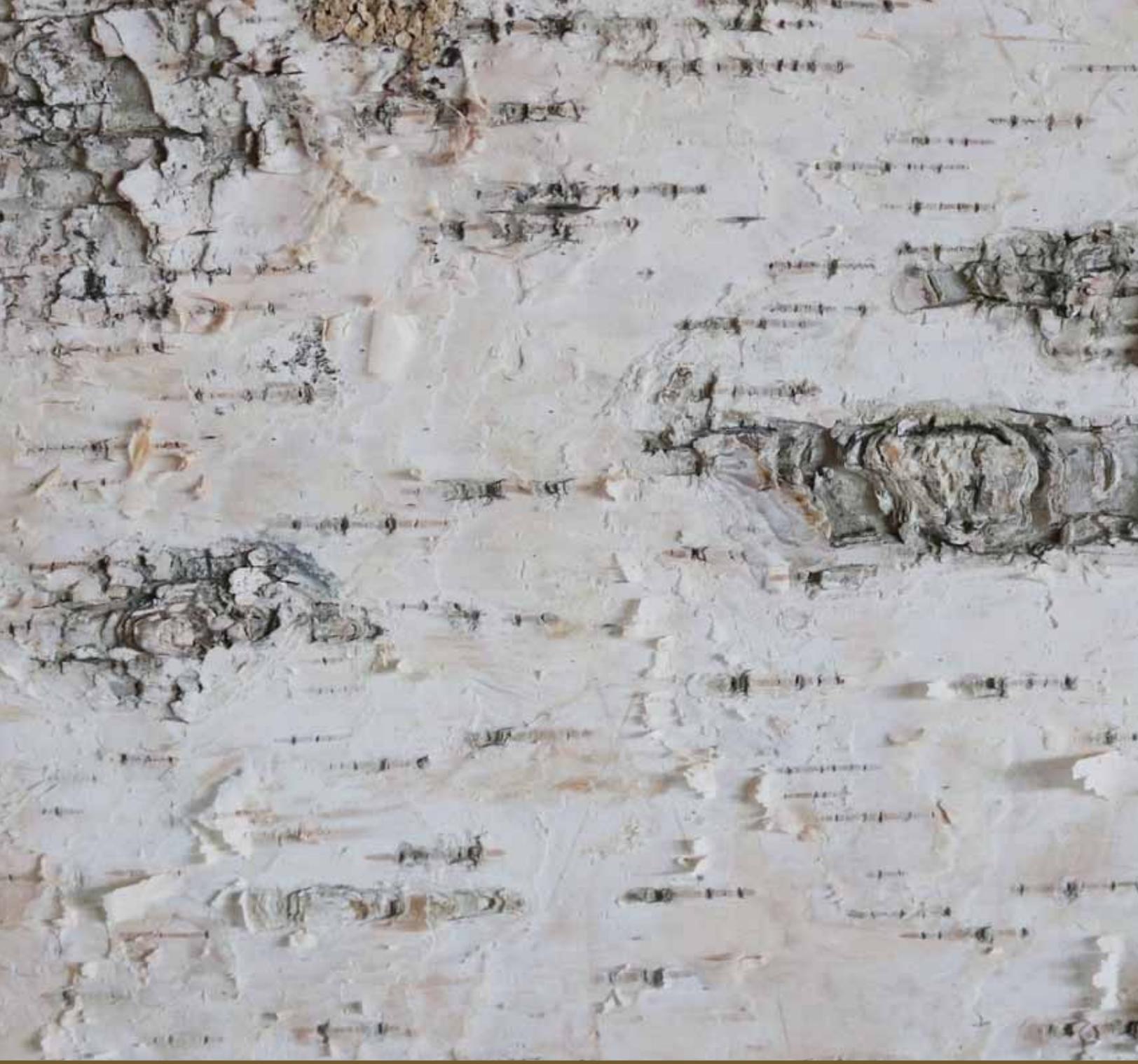
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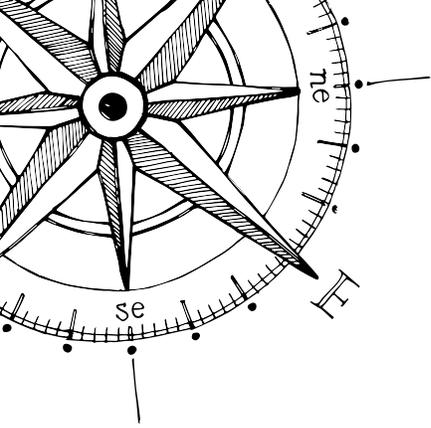
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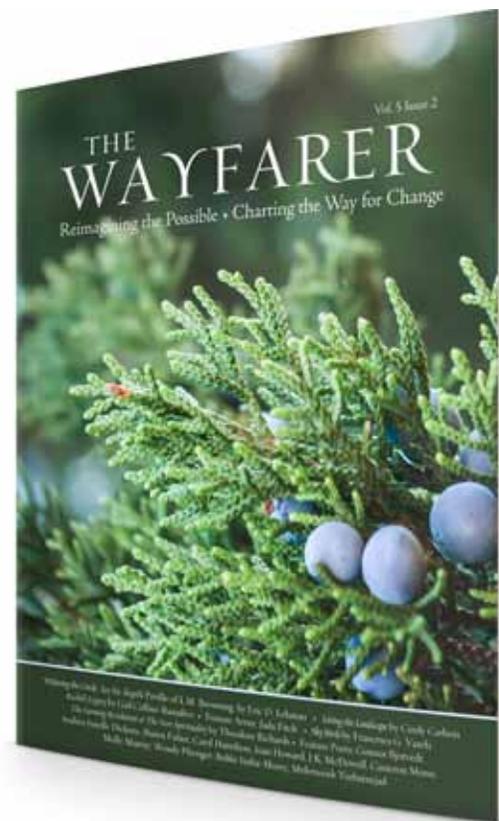
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