

## Issue No. 19 : Fall/Winter 2006 : The Music of It All Theme PDF Version.

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## Guest Editorial

by Jay Walljasper : Senior Fellow, Project for Public Spaces

### *Sweet Home Chicago (and Memphis, Motown, and Vienna)*

I started my career as a music critic, cranking out reviews of rock, blues, jazz, and folk bands in Iowa City, Minneapolis, and Chicago. That was a long time ago and seems a far cry from my current projects, many of which focus on chronicling the power of place to improve communities around the world. Few things seem more distant or irrelevant from the nitty gritty grassroots work of the New York-based group [Project for Public Spaces](http://www.projectforpublicspaces.org), where I am a senior fellow, than tunes being heard today in clubs, on the radio, and downloaded onto iPods. I mean: What do rappers, rock stars, and country singers have to do with restoring the civic spirit and bringing life back to cities and towns?

Well, maybe more than appears at first listen.

Rap pioneer Chuck D of Public Enemy famously described rap as CNN for Black America, noting it was not just the dominant soundtrack of inner-city life but an illuminating document of what underprivileged African-Americans were thinking, feeling, hoping for, and raging against. It may not sound pretty to many people, but it's an authentic depiction of what's happening in those very real places in the "real world." No one can pretend to understand the life of South Central L.A., the South Bronx, the South Side of Chicago or, for that matter, North Minneapolis in my own hometown, without engaging with this music. And certainly no efforts to make a difference in these places can be launched in ignorance of what rappers are shouting and rhyming.

Rock represents an equally open-and-shut case for the melodic interplay of music and place. The sound and fury of rock 'n' roll through the decades has really been a story of local music explosions making enough noise to be heard around the world. Born out of an orgy of musical influences, although Mississippi blues and hillbilly country signed the birth certificate as parents, rock spent its nursery years around Memphis in the care of Sun Studios. But soon came time to hit the road, Jack, and rock was drawing attention in Cleveland (where it got its name) and then on to Surf City, Liverpool and Swingin'

London, Motown, L.A. for folk rock, San Francisco for the summer of love, a few years lost wandering in the '70s, down to Georgia (Macon to be precise) for Southern rock, back to London and New York for punk, Seattle for grunge, and on and on.



Sun Studios in Memphis, Tennessee.  
Photo courtesy SoulofAmerica.com.

But these were only the most famous stops. Dozens of other local scenes bubbled over with enough raw energy to draw the attention of the music world for a few moments and leave their mark on the progress of the genre. Philadelphia (doo-woppers). The Pacific Northwest (the Ventures, the Kingsmen of “Louie, Louie” fame, Paul Revere and the Raiders). Memphis again (Booker T & the MGs, the Box Tops, Stax Records). Jersey (Springsteen, Southside Johnny, Little Steven). Akron (Devo, Chrissie Hynde in the beginning). Athens, Georgia (B-52s and REM). Minneapolis (Prince, the Replacements, Husker Du, Soul Asylum). What about the ongoing rock ‘n’ roll circus up in Detroit (Mitch Ryder, ? and the Mysterians, MC5, Bob Seger, Iggy Pop, Eminem, the White Stripes)? And most recently, Omaha (Bright Eyes, Beep Beep).

And country? Well, the name certainly speaks for itself as a musical style deeply rooted in a particular sets of places. Not to mention its other alias: the Nashville scene, Austin City Limits and the Bakersfield sound.

Music, more than any other American art form or entertainment industry, truly reflects the rich geographic diversity of our country. It’s never been dominated by New York or Hollywood like theater, movies, TV, art, dance, and publishing. Jazz is strongly associated with New Orleans and New York, with crucial side trips to Chicago, Kansas City, and the West Coast. The blues came growling out of Mississippi and Chicago. Cambridge and Greenwich Village were legendary for their folk music scenes, with Old Town in Chicago and the Troubadour club in L.A. not far behind. Memphis (once again) for R&B and rockabilly. Even disco, seemingly the most artificially concocted musical brew, can be traced to Philly, where it started life as the Philadelphia Soft Soul Revolution. Go-go, the short lived and grossly underrated mid-’80s dance groove, sprang out of Washington D.C. House music’s techno-charged roots are in Chicago, while Techno was born in Detroit although it spent a lot of time in Germany growing up.



Open-air concert held in front of the Vienna, Austria city hall.  
Photo courtesy Aviom Technologies Group.

Looking around the world, it’s the same song. Even a lot of the classical repertoire, often touted as the most universal form of music, is inseparable from Vienna. The opening of Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony is a beautiful evocation of the countryside just outside Vienna. You can take a streetcar to the village suburb of Heiligenstadt and still see the sort of setting that inspired him. Many other lands proudly trumpet their national composer: Poland (Chopin), Finland (Sibelius), Norway (Grieg), Czech Republic (Dvorak, Smetana), Hungary (Bartok).

Music is interwoven so thoroughly with geography that just a few notes often serve as all the introduction we need to understand that the action in a movie or TV show has shifted to a new spot on the globe. Plucking on the mandolin or strains of an opera aria clue us in that we’re going to Italy. A tinkling, discordant sound, perhaps with some wailing, means we’ve arrived in Asia since that’s our stereotype of the continent’s music. The opening bars from “La Marseillaise” establishes France as the setting for the next scene, just as mariachi music

does for Mexico, and banjo picking for the rural American south.

While the power and meaning of music certainly travel well, there's still something rich in hearing favorite styles on their home turf. I have enjoyed few aural experiences that match the pleasure of hearing blues bands blast in smoky little joints on Chicago's South Side; Cajun musicians letting it rip at Mulat's bar in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana; or reggae bands under the palms in Jamaica. Perhaps, best of all, was finding my way to non-descript tavern on the west side of San Antonio, which had been recommended to me as the Fillmore West, the Preservation Hall, the CBGBs, the Ryman Auditorium, the Carnegie Hall of norteno music. I was literally the only "Anglo" in the place—although truth be told I don't have a drop of English blood and the polka-inflection of Tex Mex music reminded me a lot of Oktoberfests celebrated with fellow German-Americans back home in the Midwest. Two stages were set up on opposite sides of the hall, so dancers need never take a break until overcome by thirst or exhaustion. I was even invited over to join a woman's birthday party even though my progress in Spanish stopped dead after failing the subject in 10th grade.

This summer I got another surprising lesson in musical geography. I have never cared much for the pop music I hear non-stop in Greek restaurants and groceries around Minneapolis and elsewhere., even though I do greatly admire how Greeks and their American cousins have not succumbed the homogenizing tide of American pop pap that you hear almost everywhere else across Europe (although France puts up some resistance). From my days covering ethnic nightclub beat for Chicago magazine, I know the heights Greek music is capable of scaling. But, as with most American music, what I generally hear coming out of random boom boxes and sound systems seldom sparks much interest.

But coming back from several weeks in Greece, I've had a change of heart. As I hoped, I heard some very good bouzouki and accordion music played in the streets and tavernas, but I also came back humming some of the pop tunes I once regarded as unredeemable schlock. I've even bought a few CDs of the stuff, starting yet one more obscure sub-category in an overflowing record collection. It may have been the wine, the intense sun or the casually seductive soul of Greece but this music now stirs something in my soul. The most likely explanation is that now I have a distinct and beguiling place with which to associate it.

Why is a sense of place usually an ingredient in the best music? That's because great musicians—from Louis Armstrong in New Orleans to the Beatles in Liverpool to Edith Piaf in Paris to Grandmaster Flash in the Bronx—generally get their start by performing for hometown audiences, where they develop their skills and gain a following. Some start right on the sidewalks, busking for change from passers-by, and then graduate to the clubs. When not on stage they are out on the town, hanging out in coffee houses and record shops and bars, listening to



Standing room only at the Chicago Blues Festival, in the shadow of downtown.  
Photo courtesy ChicagoFestivals.com.

other players, exchanging ideas and songs, jamming, making the connections that lead to new musical breakthroughs.

But all of this depends on a vital public realm—a particular part of town where musicians can bump into each other with a minimum of planning and effort. That's why the East Village in New York, 6th Street in Austin, Capitol Hill in Seattle, Wicker Park in Chicago, and Sunset Blvd. in L.A. have turned out so many bands. You don't take classes to become a pop star. Lively neighborhoods are your university. The more concentrated social activity and nightlife in a place, the more opportunities for talented performers. And the more fun for music fans. That's why you rarely hear of hot music scenes in auto-dominated suburbs.

So from this perspective, it makes perfect sense that my current passion for promoting lively and vital neighborhoods began way back in the smoky bars of the Midwest, in the wee hours of the morning, as I happily pursued my passion for musical authenticity.

[Jay Walljasper](#) is a senior fellow at [Project for Public Spaces](#) and Executive Editor of [Ode](#), an international magazine of news and ideas published from Rotterdam, Netherlands. He lives in Minneapolis and writes widely about the power of place. His book, *The Great Neighborhood Book*, written in conjunction with PPS, will appear June 2007 from New Society Publishers.

## Column: The Literal Landscape

by Simmons B. Buntin, Editor/Publisher, *Terrain.org*

### *Ben's Bells*

In Tucson, the sprawling urban landscape is glittering quite unexpectedly today with the faint shimmer of metallic bells, a thousand tiny chalices swaying on strings of brightly painted beads that drift from velvet mesquite and desert willow, Arizona ash and palo verde. The bells are laced among chainlink fence and wrought iron bench, looped delicately around door handles and mailbox flags, nearly floating from bike racks and lamp posts.



These are [Ben's Bells](#)—a project Jeannette Maré-Packard and her husband Dean initiated less than a year after the death of their son Ben, just shy of his third birthday, on Good Friday. Ben died that morning of croup, after he turned blue, when his airway swelled shut, even as his mother performed rescue breathing and CPR.

In the devastating aftermath, when “more than anything” his parents wished they too could die, they turned their grief into action by converting their backyard pottery studio into a place where, joined by close friends, they created bells. Strung together by thin straps of brown leather, containing hand-painted ceramic beads of their own crafting—balls and cylinders, hearts and stars, flowers and moons—the bells resemble the colorful tails of kites, flowing from the single copper device with its subtle chime. The purpose? To reciprocate the kindness of strangers after Ben's death, to “find a way to pass on that kindness and to help others in the process,” says Jeannette.



On the first anniversary of Ben's death, in March 2003, the Packards and friends and family—including their older son Matthew, who more than anyone else gave them hope in this difficult time—first distributed the bells throughout the Tucson valley, placing them delicately in random locations: along the branches of yellow-flowering acacias at the Rillito River park, for instance, or in the parking lot of mid-town's Tucson Medical Center. And each included a paper note with a simple message: “Take this bell home, hang it up, pass on the kindness.”

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I first learned about Ben's Bells three months ago when I escorted my daughters to its studio, now

located in an Italianate courtyard of white-barked sycamores just west of the University of Arizona. Here, volunteers gather individually or in groups to help create the bells—by forming clay into acorn-sized beads limited in shape only by their imaginations (and the constraints of the clay itself), or painting the flat and deceptive glaze that gleams after the kiln, or assembling the bells with the laced leather strings.

The studio is nearly as brightly colored inside as the beads are outside, and throughout the converted home are photos of little Ben, his white-blond hair and toothy grin, the shining blue eyes: the constant reminder that these bells are his work, that in their creation—by the time the bells are assembled, at least ten people have worked on them—a whole community is remembering not only the child, but the kindness of the child, of a child.



On that mild winter day, a row of tables rested outside, and my daughters and their friends took their instructions and set to work on painting beads, the small wooden brushes touching the paint's tense surface before sweeping lightly onto the hard, off-white clay. For some it was simply a fun arts-and-crafts project, but for others in our group, the older girls who had seen the photos and knew the story and in one case knew Ben before he died, this was an important and uplifting project. Glazing the beads in red and yellow and green, there was a visceral connectedness—not to the individual who would by chance or fate find the bell when distributed three months later, but rather to the spirit of community and as much the spirit of grieving.

It didn't take long to fill my camera with the radiant images of the hanging bells, the yet-to-be-fired beads, the girls with their golden hair pulled back, the sun on their concentrating faces, the adults whose eyes grew watery because we have children and in our nightmares our children are taken from us, swiftly, maybe painlessly and maybe not. This is a compassion and fear that only parents can truly know, but by sharing in the making of these bells, all can begin to understand.

Today is the end of March, and the thousand new bells around Tucson—most since discovered—chime in the day's slight wind. The stories of those who found bells are pouring into the news stations, are being posted on the BensBells.org website. Without exception, the discovery of a bell ordained with colorful beads in an ordinary place like a school parking lot or a community garden is a significant finding for the recipient. "What a moving and unexpected delight to find a Ben's Bell," says one person who shared her story. "I am a preschool teacher and brought the bell in to share with my class of four- and five-year-olds. It created an opportunity to talk about loss and sorrow and how to channel one's feelings creatively; as well as talking about kindness and how often the best gifts are not objects, but rather what we give from our hearts. I will be quietly hanging it in a family's

yard today that knows of Ben's Bells and has recently had a loss of a young person in their extended family."

As I listen closely, I can hear the wind's song echoed in the thousand colorful chimes across our community. It is a song of grief and recovery, of strength and support—ultimately of beauty. I hope its chorus carries through the golden day and far into night, rising softly like the fluttering of silver moths, like the glowing souls of children.

[Simmons B. Buntin](#) is the founding editor of Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments. With a master's degree in urban and regional planning, he is—logically—a web program manager for the University of Arizona. His first book of poetry, [Riverfall](#), was published in May 2005 by Ireland's Salmon Publishing. He has work forthcoming in *The Manhattan Review* and *Orion*, and is a recipient of the Colorado Artist's Fellowship for Poetry.

**Column: Bull Hill**

by David Rothenberg, *Terra Nova* Editor

***White Whale Music in the White Sea***

View online gallery at

[www.terrain.org/columns/19/bullhill.htm](http://www.terrain.org/columns/19/bullhill.htm).

You might wonder why I traveled all the way to the Republic of Karelia to try to make music with whales. For one, it's illegal to jam with a whale in the United States. According to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, it would constitute a form of harassment. True, a scientist could get a permit to shoot a diagnostic dart into a whale's back, but music, no, that would be too frivolous. I would never make the grade.

But I really wasn't worried about breaking the law. The sheer alliteration of the journey also beckoned me: See the white whales of the White Sea.

There are seven specific spots on the shore of this little-known sea, in a country you've probably never heard of. We were going to Cape Beluga on the island of Myagostrov, a spot from which no one had ever tried to observe the whales in any rigorous way. True, they used to kill them by the dozens and feed them to the fox farms, but all that is buried in the sort of Soviet history that no one wants to remember. After all, the other place famous for beluga whales in the White Sea is the Solovetsky Islands, made famous by Solzhenytsin as the Gulag Archipelago. That is only one hundred kilometers north of the uninhabited island where we would listen to the whales and hope they might listen to us.

The Republic of Karelia, directly east of and once part of Finland, is one of the least known members of the Russian Federation. Less than a million people, quite a lot of moose, miles of forests and questionable roads. It's illegal to kill beluga whales there but no one is worried about playing music to a few whales. Not even Aleksandr Agafonov and his delegation of assistants from Moscow's Shirshov Institute of Oceanology, who were spending the summer observing the behavior of these belugas over a month of continuous observation. They were situated on top of the open, rocky hill overlooking Cape Beluga, and we musical interlopers, three Finns, one Russian, and one American, were right next to the shore.

Twice every day when the tide was high the whales would appear, their white backs glistening in the gray-green sea. Belugas have been known as canaries of the sea for centuries because they make all manner of sounds, some within the range of human hearing, others far beyond the limits of the ears of people or even dogs, almost higher than any recording device could register.



David Rothenberg plays to beluga whales. [Click to see additional images.](#)

Photo courtesy David Rothenberg.

Sometimes they leap above the water and squeal, as they are often trained to do in aquariums, but the most interesting sounds can only be heard underwater.



Beluga whale in the White Sea.  
[Click to see additional images.](#)  
Photo courtesy David Rothenberg.

How to make music with a whale? I didn't need to play a saxophone underwater. Sit on the shore, play into a microphone, broadcast the horn under the sea, and listen. Leave space for the curious, white beasts. They echolocate with clicks, identify themselves and gather with ranges of whistles. An underwater microphone, called a hydrophone, picks up those sounds along with the underwater sax or clarinet, which has a more resonant, bell-like tone because of the way overtones carry underwater. The sounds of whales and humans can carry much further beneath the surface, in this range as far as a mile. With deep blue whale booms as far as a thousand miles, a distance of communication almost impossible to believe.

I heard the whales much more clearly than I could see them. White rounded dots, moving alone, in groups of two, often mother and calf, the young ones more gray than white. Agafanov showed me a remarkable video clip of two groups of four white whales approaching from opposite directions, meeting each other, and heading off together all in a line. We didn't see anything quite like that.

But we heard glimpses into an amazing world of sound. First the background, thumping, burbling waves splashing on rocks. Keep headphones on for hours and hours over several days and you will soon find yourself in a trance, hearing new senses of rhythm and order, new beauties in tone and kick. It's a wash of underwater noise. Rauno Lauhakangas, the Finnish physicist who invited me on this journey, says it's a bit like trying to find new particles in the printouts from linear accelerators. "Although in physics," he smiles, "there is a lot more noise than this."

In the midst of all the white sea noise there are glimmers of intention—the noises of whales. Is there really anything musical about them at all? Easy to say no: they're clicking to make sense of the things they encounter in a dark, invisible environment. Belugas can hardly see, but they can clearly detect the outlines of an object behind an underwater wall. The military knows these whales have amazing detection abilities, perhaps more advanced than dolphins', but they have yet to figure them out. Or if they have figured it out, they don't want to tell us. Clicks to find their way, and whistles to signal. Some are signature whistles, identifying each individual whale. Others are social signs, gathering the pod.

What's musical about that? I really don't know. Having just spent several years trying to make music with birds for my book and CD *Why Birds Sing*, I was eager to move on to other musical creatures. Humpback whales sing long, musical inventions whose purpose is not well understood. But belugas? Is not their sound much more like a kind of language?

Foreign languages are inscrutable, objects to decode and figure out. But foreign music? Simply new rhythms and patterns to meet in the field, to find a sensitive way in.

A whale sings, a clarinet rings. The sounds overlap and connect. I smile, listen, and play again. I imagine the whale is responding to me, yet another human conceit. What care could the white whales really have for us? They hardly know we are there, near the arctic circle, where the temperature in summer is nearly 95 degrees.

Agafonov comes running down from the hilltop. “Yes, we have been listening. The belugas are definitely responding.”

Excited muttering all around. The tapes will be sent to Moscow. The great whale scientist Belkovich will listen to them, and analyze. We will find out what’s going on, we will get to the bottom of this. The music has just begun.

**[View more images](#) of from "White Whales in the White Sea," or [listen to the whales sing and the clarinet ring](#) at [www.terrain.org/columns/19/bullhill.htm](http://www.terrain.org/columns/19/bullhill.htm).**

[David Rothenberg](#) is the author of [Sudden Music: Improvisation, Sound, Nature, Hand's End: Technology and the Limits of Nature](#), and [Always the Mountains](#). His latest book, [Why Birds Sing](#), will be published in five languages. The paperback includes a CD of his own music.

## Column: View from the Summit

by Catherine Cunningham, *Terrain.org* Editor

### *Perfect Sights, Perfect Sounds: Redrock in Review*

It was a night hardly suited to an outdoor concert. The sky was the color of jagged slate and the air sluggish with a bone-chilling coldness. Rain came down in alternating protests of rain and spit. I swore under my breath, attempting over and over to zip my rain jacket with numbed hands. I'd been to this place once before, not a concert night but just to check it out, having just moved to the area. [Red Rocks Amphitheatre](#) is a musical legend and a geologic wonder.



The area now known as Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre is thought to have begun forming some 70 to 80 million years ago, well before Creation, through a phenomenon called “orogeny” or “mountain building.” Apparently, when Mother Earth built mountains in the olden days, one technique she used was to push giant slabs of dirt and rock (or entire continents) together. Since both slabs couldn't occupy the same space, something had to give, which meant one slab had to buckle up or slip over top of the other. This makes perfect sense when one considers the physical effects of pushing the edges of a completed puzzle or two stacks of playing cards together hard enough to see them buckle.

The result in most locations is remarkable, often awe-inspiring. At Red Rocks, the deep red-brown sandstone monoliths jut from the earth at magnificent angles. These formations rise 300 feet, making the perfect goalposts for a Superbowl of giants.



The vision for an amphitheater was borne of the entrepreneurial spirit of John Brisben Walker. Among an extensive list of pursuits, successes, and failures, Walker served in the military, ran for Congress, made and lost fortunes in real estate, entertainment, media, and automobile manufacturing. In 1905, he reportedly sold *Cosmopolitan* magazine to the Hearst Corporation for \$1 million.

In the early 1900s, he developed the Red Rocks area and produced a number of concerts on a platform stage. The Town of Morrison historic website notes

that he built roads to Red Rocks, as well as a teahouse, trails, and even a cog railway to the top of Morrison Mountain, the longest in the world for its day. To get it started, “the famed opera diva Mary Garden, accompanied by Ethel on the violin, sang in the Red Rocks natural amphitheater and pronounced it ‘acoustically perfect.’” Many other concerts by the day's famous musicians and performers have since followed.

According to Colorado Mountain City and Mountain Views, Walker joined forces with other prominent leaders in the Denver area to promote tourism through the proposed “Denver Mountain Parks” system in Jefferson and Clear Creek Counties. Their plan included a well-organized, state-of-the-art campaign to approve a one-half mil levy to finance the parks. Denver voters approved the tax in May 1912. The City and County acquired Red Rocks Park under the Denver Mountain Parks system in 1927 for \$54,133.



Denver architect Burnham Hoyt designed a new amphitheater. After his plans were completed, Denver Mountain Parks built the venue with the labors of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Work Progress Administration (WPA). Both programs were part of the “New Deal” under President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide economic support and reform to the United States during the Great Depression. The WPA workers were primarily heads of households, including women whose average age was 40 years. The CCC tapped into young, unemployed men to work on conservation projects in mostly rural areas. The amphitheater took about 12 years to complete. Since then, some of the world’s most noteworthy performers and performances have taken the stage.

One of the recommendations for attending concerts at Red Rocks is to come prepared for all types of weather, as the show must go on. My dark and stormy night fit well into this guideline; despite my own aversion to the cold and rain. At the same time, however, I was excited to see the artist, Neil Young.

It was the late 1980s and I’d only been to a handful of concerts. At the time I had little money for such big-ticket performers, and even littler respect for the up-and-coming Ticketmaster. But for Neil Young, I would sacrifice. It was worth it.

One feature of the evening’s rain was that it deterred some from attending the show, giving a more intimate feel. The audience was giddy with anticipation. Young’s acoustic sets were flawless, beautiful—even with their pauses for him to warm his fingers at the heater. It was one of the most inspired concerts I’ve seen, perhaps due to the enchantment of the location. The setting and the artist made magic together.

It has now been years since enjoying a concert at such a large venue. If I were not a curmudgeon about crowds and Ticketmaster, I would surely spend more of my time and money at the

amphitheater. In the meantime, I happily support my local, unknown artists at my local, unknown venues. I figure I'm grooming them for bigger and better days—and perhaps a performance at the amazing Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre.

[Catherine Cunningham](#) is an environmental specialist with the U.S. Department of Energy's Western Area Power Administration, a federal agency responsible for marketing hydroelectricity produced at large dams throughout the West. She is also a planning commissioner for her mountain town.

## Interview



Terrain.org interviews

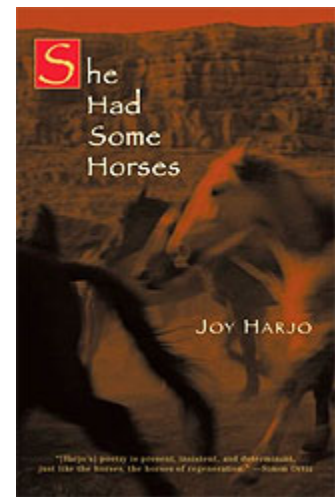
**Joy Harjo**  
Mvskoke poet & musician

### About Joy Harjo



Joy Harjo is a multi-talented artist of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation. She is an internationally known poet, performer, writer and musician. She has published seven books of acclaimed poetry. They include [She Had Some Horses](#), [In Mad Love and War](#), [The Woman Who Fell From the Sky](#), and her most recent [How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975-2001](#) from W.W. Norton. Her poetry awards include the Arrell Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award, Oklahoma Book Awards, 2003; The American Indian Festival of Words Author Award from the Tulsa City County Library; the 2000 Western Literature Association Distinguished Achievement Award, 1998 Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award, the 1997 New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts; the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers Circle of the Americas;

the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America. She co-edited an anthology of contemporary Native women's writing: [Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Native Women's Writing of North America](#). It was pronounced one of the London Observer's Best Books of 1997; and wrote the award-winning children's book from Harcourt, [The Good Luck Cat](#). She also contributed poetic prose to photographs by Stephen Strom in [Secrets from the Center of the World](#). Forthcoming is a book of stories from W.W. Norton.



Harjo's first music CD, [Letter from the End of the 20th Century](#) was released by Silver Wave Records in 1997. Harjo co-produced the album and is featured as poet and saxophone player. The album was honored by the First Americans in the Arts for Outstanding Musical Achievement and called by Pulse Magazine the "best dub poetry album recorded in North America." Her recently released second CD of original songs, [Native Joy for Real](#), crosses over many genres and has been praised for its daring brilliance. Harjo has performed internationally, from the Arctic Circle in Norway at the Riddu Riddu Festival, to Madras, India, to the Ford Theater in Los Angeles. She has been featured on Bill Moyers, The Power of the Word series, and will be featured this spring on a new Garrison Keillor show. Harjo was also the narrator for the Turner The Native Americans series and the narrator for the Emmy award-winning show, Navajo Codetalkers, for National Geographic.

Harjo's other accomplishments include co-producer and talent of the music video "Eagle Song," nominated for best music video at the American Indian Film Festival 2002. The American Indian Film Festival awarded her the Eagle Spirit Achievement Award that year. She has served on the National Council on the Arts. She is the Joseph M. Russo Professor of Creative Writing at the University of New Mexico, and when not teaching and performing she lives in Honolulu, Hawai'i, where she is a member of the Hui Nalu Canoe Club.

## Interview

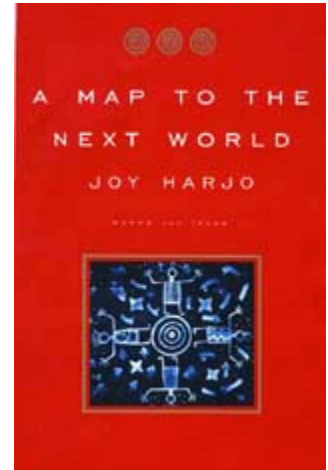
**Terrain.org:** Barry Lopez recently said that critics, academics, and the media ask “questions about what I intended to do, to say, to achieve in my writing, as though the writing is intentional or purposive. They think that you sit down to write down what it is that you think about something. Writing does not work like this at all. I sit and write, and in the writing I am simply present—with the thought, the place, the idea. It arrives.” Does your writing work in the same way, or do you approach writing as a particular project, with something particularly to say? As an American Indian, a woman, a global citizen, is there a continuous message you must relay?

**Joy Harjo:** I am in agreement with Barry. I am part of a larger process. I don't have control over it. I do have control (mostly) about being prepared, ready, and am willing to put in the time and commitment to crafting what is given. If I am going to give a message then I don't do it as a writer, poet, or songwriter. Doesn't mean that some message or sense isn't made of it all. I am driven to explore the depths of creation and the depths of meaning. Being native, female, a global citizen in these times is the root, even the palette. I mean, look at the context: human spirit versus the spirits of the earth, sky, and universe. We are part of a much larger force of sense and knowledge. Western society is human-centric. We're paying the price of foolish arrogance, of forgetfulness.

**Terrain.org:** While acknowledging that you have learned to respect various artistic genres and “those who have mastered them and brought them to another level of accomplishment,” you have also said that “the creative stream isn't strictly bound by genres or expression.” Books like [A Map to the Next World: Poems and Tales](#), provide an excellent example—alternating poems and tales to create a four-part story. When you were writing the poems and tales of this book, were they created in largely the same order as they appear in the book, or were the poems written separately—grouped—from the tales? Or perhaps differently altogether? Is there a difference in the construction of a mixed-genre collection versus a single genre? Should writing programs encourage more mixed

or cross-genre writing, promoting or at least accounting for the ebb and flow of the creative stream?

**Joy Harjo:** The poems were created separately and not in the order as they appear. The tales: some were created separately and most after I pulled together the shape of the book. What moved me to venture in that direction was to try for some kind of sense of orality in a written text. Written text is, to me, fixed orality. I tried this first in *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*. Of course the poems can exist by themselves. They do not need explanations. The prose accompaniments are part of the overall performance. I expanded it in *Map....* I am always aware of several voices and each has their own root of impulse and quality. The poetry voice exists in timelessness. When I try to force it to a contemporary arch tone—it fails me, though I did recently write a hip-hop type poem, still, the voice had the same overarching tone and voice, a voice that is wiser than me. Then there's the more narrative voice—and it's more contemporary. Often my poetry voice is like a voice coming from stones.... And so on. Each book is a different experiment or expression.



"Mudhills, Beautiful Valley," a photograph by Stephen Strom appearing in *Secrets from the Center for the World*. Photo by [Stephen E. Strom](#).

*Secrets from the Center of the World* was my first mixed-genre book. Photographs by Stephen Strom and my poetic prose pieces were together in response to the landscape near the Four Corners area.

As far as writing programs teaching cross-genre—some encourage experimentation and some discourage any leaning past the middle line of form. It's up to each writer to find and follow his or her own direction. You will either have support, or you won't have support. And your vision might coincide with taste and it might not. Taste and movements come and go.

**Terrain.org:** In the "classics" of modern American poetry, and often in the teaching of poetry, poetry as literature is separate from music, both lyrics and composition. While there is a certain music to poetry, and poetry derives from the spoken word, the general conclusion has been: poetry is not

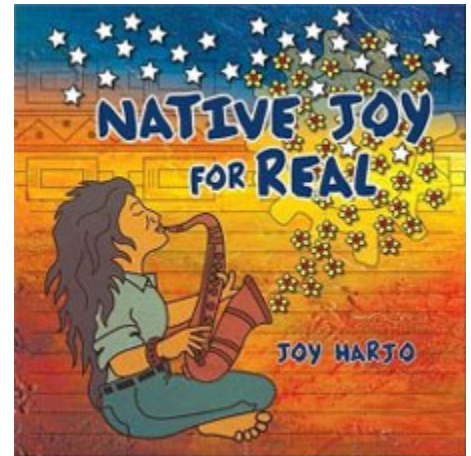
music and music is not poetry. Your work with your band Poetic Justice, where you bring your poetry to music or alternatively music to your poetry, suggests otherwise (for example, "She Had Some Horses" in the book of the same name is also a song on the album *Letter from the End of the Twentieth Century*.) What is the relationship

between music and poetry, generally and in your work? Does the heritage of music in American Indian culture provide for a bridge between the two genres in your work, as opposed to the historical separation of music and poetry in modern Western verse?

**Joy Harjo:** The roots of poetry lead to music. Music will often be found yearning for singers. Poetry is a sound art. I happened on the direct relationship between poetry and music when I realized that most of the poetry in my tribe, and with most peoples of the world isn't found in books, it's oral. Then I began to consider how to make that bridge—I didn't do so with a direct plan—it was a natural outgrowth of being a contemporary Mvskoke poet who had picked up a saxophone.

Poetic Justice was just a start. I collaborated first with Susan M. Williams on the music for "For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash." Then we added her brother John to the band, a bass player, to round it out. Then it developed from there. For that configuration I read my poems, performed sax and helped create the songs. We had to find a crossing between song structures and my poems. My poems don't usually behave and conform to known structures—many are conscious hybrids. The same goes with music.

Then after Poetic Justice (I disbanded Poetic Justice to go out on my own with a band), I began singing and this demanded a different shape to the poem. Some of my poems lend themselves to singing, like "Grace" (featured on my last music album, *Native Joy for Real*), and others to a mix of singing, speaking and even a form of chant-singing. I have written some songs as lyrics. There is a difference. I've transformed some poems to lyrics. The singing voice demands a difference in rhythm, pacing, beginning and end sounds. Right now I am working on translating some of my poems into the Mvskoke language, then into songs for singing. This is an ongoing process of discovery.



**Terrain.org:** You have said, and many artists have echoed, that we are "within a dominant culture that doesn't value the artist." Indeed, public funding for art of all types continues to come under fire on a regular basis. Is it the artist's responsibility to work to change our culture so it does value the artist? Is the artist responsible for more even than that: for bearing witness, making public, and demanding action to resolve the inequalities of our world: social, economic, environmental, and otherwise? How do artists engender compassion, or even overarching compassion, as in the Mvskoke word, *onvkckv*?

**Joy Harjo:** In this current political climate, the individual, or the artist, is looked upon with suspicion. If you don't fit squarely into "Christian", "family" or any other certified "safe" category (that is not white, not identifiably male, female, married, straight, and so on) then you are in danger and you can be subject

to great scrutiny and judgment. As I re-read what I have written I ask myself if I have exaggerated, but I don't believe I have—Suspicion and fear has grown in direct correspondence with the atrocities and human rights violations inflicted by those in apparent power in the government, a government hand-in-hand with Christian fundamentalists. I am often in Oklahoma, my birthplace, for family and tribal events. I have noticed a definite spike in the climate of fear, marked by fundamentalist Christians who believe their way is the only way. They've always believed this way but are increasingly self-righteous and secure in their power.

So how do we engender compassion in the middle of all this? Compassion doesn't depend on the reaction or response of others. It is, in its own right. I believe compassion gives the most overarching vision. Then, everything can fit, somehow. I'm trying to figure it out like everyone else. Art is a way to contribute to the figuring out. The artist bears witness, and can bring fresh vision into the world through art, to regenerate culture, to demand an accounting. I think of the recent [exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Arts by Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun](#). Her installation *Nau Ka Wae*, or *The Choice Belongs to You*, was a groundbreaking and award-winning meditation on compassion—native stones, which are living and considered to have their own voices in Hawaiian (and other native traditions) and appeared in the installation as a sort of conscious.



*Nau Ka Wae* or *The Choice Belongs to You* by Hawaiian artist Kaili Chun.  
Photo courtesy [Honolulu Academy of Arts](#).

**Terrain.org:** You migrate back and forth between New Mexico and Hawai'i. As residences and as havens, what does each mean to you? Is there sustenance or power in the migration itself?

**Joy Harjo:** There has to be power or sustenance in migration or the world would be without humans, most plants and animals. I have to find meaning in whatever I do—or even make meaning of meaninglessness. Not everything fits. Most things or ideas in this place don't fit seamlessly.

Both New Mexico and Hawai'i were and are havens for me. I fled Oklahoma as a teenager. New



Mexico gave me back my voice and continues to provide ongoing vision. My great-aunt Lois Harjo, who I was especially close to, also spent much time there as a painter, inspired by the New Mexico Indian art scene. I followed behind her in this, and in my love for the arts. Hawai'i has given me the gift of water and I am continually inspired and challenged by the spirit of the Hawaiian people and land. We are painfully witnessing the destruction of this paradise. Actually, the Hawaiians and Mvskoke people are related. We each have stories that link us with each other.

**Terrain.org:** You have stated that as an American Indian it is your responsibility—and indeed any American Indian's responsibility—to “pass on culture and to pass on hope.” You have also noted that your primary audience is Indian country. Yet you also have a large non-Native following. Have you found resistance to you or your work from other American Indians because of its wide readership beyond those in Indian country? Alternatively, does resistance come from non-Natives because of your origins or your primary audience? If so, how do you respond—or is a response appropriate?

**Joy Harjo:** My audience does crossover.

There is always resistance to anyone who is out there doing anything that crosses boundaries: of genre, culture, country, language, etc. That's just how it is. And there are always those who embrace you. I trust the work will find its way, just as I have to trust the process.

Most of the resistance has come from those who find me not Indian enough...or too Indian. Or those who dislike women who speak out. Or those who find anyone carrying a saxophone and dirtying the precious water of verse dangerous.

Is any response necessary?

**Terrain.org:** Have you had the opportunity to perform or work with native peoples in other regions—Central or South America, for example? Is there an increasing global context to the preservation of indigenous peoples and places—manifested either in literature and music and other arts, or in other contexts altogether?

**Joy Harjo:** Last year I performed in Argentina. That experience was mixed, except for the meeting with native people in the village Amaicha. There were and are many points of connection.

**Terrain.org:** At the Association of Writers and Writing Programs Austin conference's Joy Harjo tribute in March 2006, you read poetry, played saxophone, chanted, and sang. Do you have a favorite "genre" of performance? Reading/singing against live music, as with Poetic Justice, for example? Or, like much of your work, is the total of these performance types together greater than the sum of their individual parts? Do you envision incorporating filmed scenes into your live performances, given your film-making experience, as well?



The Amaicha del Valle, Tucumán, Argentina.  
Photo by Jose Lazarte.

**Joy Harjo:** I prefer a live band behind me. (And again, for the record, I no longer perform with Poetic Justice, though I might revive the name again for my new configuration.) There's also something fulfilling in the solo, naked performance. Yes, actually, I'm working on intersecting film and image with music and performance... right now.

**Terrain.org:** [You have maintained a blog](#) for three years now—a fairly long time for the medium. What made you decide to start blogging, and is the impetus the same three years later? Has your other writing, or who you read, changed because of your blog? Do you sense any change in literature overall because of blogging, or perhaps/rather because of the expansion of the Internet in general?



**Joy Harjo:** I have kept an ongoing journal over the years. The blog is an expansion of it—with some editing. I don't know that my writing has changed because of it—it's what I've always done. The difference is that I am more aware of an audience, of readers—

Overall there's an expanded awareness of the global.

Before I went to school my world was vast because I lived for the most part in my imagination. It was a live thing, with as much texture and viability as what is called "real". My spirit traveled all over the world. Songs and stories happened in the home, via humans,

and sometimes books.

Then my world became the school classroom and the discipline and rules, the path from the school to my home, then after that a job, or a family. Anything that happened anywhere else happened in books, and sometimes in the news. My imagination then was bound in books, in reading.

Then movies ushered in the next level of reality, of expressive art. Videos followed.

Then computers and the internet, which came with an expanded awareness of the global. And with all this: less reading, fewer readers. Is this attributable to the internet? Or, to the lack of ability to hear or believe the spoken voice? Or to engage the human voice and person intimately?

**Terrain.org:** What's next Joy Harjo?

**Joy Harjo:** More poetry, more music, a book of stories, performance—and some wisdom, knowledge and peace for all of us.

## UnSprawl Case Study



### Just the Facts

Second Street District  
Austin, Texas

- 6-block development (5 blocks owned by City of Austin)
- Mixed uses: primarily street-level retail, upper-level office space, and residential
- Hotel and children's museum planned
- New Austin City Hall and Public Plaza
- 168,000 square feet of retail at buildout
- Extensive streetscape planning and implementation
- 2 percent construction budget for public art associated with City's Capital Improvement Program
- An additional \$200,000 toward public art committed by developers so far
- Sustainability goals and implementations
- Developers include City of Austin, AMLI Residential Properties, Computer Sciences Corporation, AMLI Austin Retail, UP Schneider, and other, individual project developers
- Designers include ROMA Design Group, Black & Vernooy + Kinney Joint Venture, Copley Wolff Design Group, and other, individual project designers

### Overview

Austin's [Second Street District](#) is a six-block infill and redevelopment project located north of Town Lake and along the south edge of downtown Austin, Texas. The city's vision for the project is broad: "to enhance the identity and image of downtown Austin as a civic and cultural destination for residents, visitors, and businesses while preserving and enlivening Austin's sense of place." More

specifically, the [Second Street District Streetscape Improvement Project \(SSDSIP\)](#) calls for “the inclusion of a critical mass of retail (and other pedestrian-oriented uses) linked by a coherent and uniquely identified, pedestrian environment... linking two important civic destinations—the new City Hall and the Convention Center Complex—along what will become downtown’s key shopping or ‘pedestrian-dominant’ spine: Second Street.”



Second Street District is located between Town Lake (the Colorado River) on the south and Austin's Market and Warehouse Districts, as well as downtown Austin, on the north. Click site plan for full-size image.  
Graphic courtesy City of Austin.

With a goal of over 168,000 square feet of retail space mixed with office, hotel, civic, and mostly high-end, high-rise condo and apartment developments, the Second Street District is being positioned as Austin’s core downtown retail area. Taking into account adjacent projects and the city’s goal of making a contiguous, pedestrian-oriented connection between the Convention Center on the east and Lamar Boulevard on the west, the District’s impacts and influence are considerably larger than its official six-block footprint. The city owns five of the six blocks, also enabling the implementation of its vision without the haste that often arises from market forces.

While its architecture has been defined as “eclectic modern urban style,” it also has a distinctly Austin flavor, in part because of a series of sustainability goals—including principles of urban forestry and the use of locally available materials in construction—outlined in guiding documents.

So far, four full city block streetscapes have been completed—two Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) office buildings on Blocks 2 and 4, Austin’s new City Hall and Public Plaza on Block 3, and the seven-story AMLI apartment building on Block 20.



AMLI Downtown apartment building on Block 20: Shop, wine, and dine in the 2nd Street District.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

Development of Block 22 is currently underway and Block 21 is expected to begin in 2007. The SSDSIP scope, discussed below, will extend the Second Street District streetscape improvements four additional block lengths eastward (beyond the 6-block district), from Colorado to Trinity, and will include two block lengths along Brazos and Colorado north and south of Second Street. According to City of Austin project sponsor Pollyanne Melton, Phase 2 of the SSDSIP will begin construction in June 2007, with most of those improvements complete by the following June.



Looking from the vacant Block 21—being developed by AMLI Residential as an 18-story tower—northeast toward downtown.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

## Project History

The Second Street District results from both linear and sequential city visioning and planning processes that brought together local and national experts with the public at large to craft a series of policies and plans first addressing Austin’s livability, then its downtown design, and finally the Second Street District itself.

In 1989, Austin’s Downtown Commission received approval from City Council to invite a [Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team](#) (R/UDAT) of the American

Institute of Architects (AIA) to Austin. Since 1967, the AIA’s R/UDAT program has used volunteer technical experts like architects and urban planners to demonstrate the importance of urban and regional planning, stimulate local public action, and improve physical design throughout the nation and in specific locales.

Less than two years later, a three-day R/UDAT planning charrette was conducted with more than 800 Austinites that “assessed conditions and community interest in Downtown Austin and provided a framework for implementing actions to revitalize Austin’s vital central core.” The resulting report, RUDAT \* Austin, spawned a set of implementation actions outlined in [R/UDAT Austin Implementation: A Call to Action](#), published in May 1992.



Looking east on Second Street, with the AMLI Downtown building on the left and a CSC mixed-use office building on the right.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

Approved by the Austin City Council as a “guide for implementing downtown Austin revitalization,” A Call to Action provided detailed recommendations in the areas of urban design, the natural environment, community issues, cultural arts, transportation, economic development, and the creation of a downtown management organization.



Austin's old firetower, tucked between Town Lake park and Second Street District, with downtown Austin in the distance.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

The [Downtown Austin Alliance](#)—“a partnership of individuals and businesses devoted to promoting and maintaining a safe, clean, attractive, accessible, and fun Downtown environment, making Downtown the destination for Austinites and visitors”—was subsequently born of the 1993 creation of a [Downtown Austin Public Improvement District](#). Funding for the Alliance comes from a special assessment on privately owned large properties within the District.

In 1996, the Alliance adopted the idea of “great streets,” and began a Great Streets program with the goal of improving “the

quality of downtown streets and sidewalks, aiming ultimately to transform the public right-of-ways into great public spaces.” Later that year, Austin voters approved dedicating \$5 million in bonds to the new Austin Great Streets Program.

In 1997, an Austin R/UDAT conference was held that further provided a short list of downtown revitalization projects, and in 2000 the R/UDAT held another conference, in which then-Mayor Kirk Watson said, “The city’s waterfront site is no longer the most forlorn patch of Downtown. This six block area will include a new City Hall, three CSC buildings with 3,500 new downtown employees, two blocks of residential development, street-level retail, and nearby, the new Austin Museum of Art and an Intel software research facility. Austin gets an A for creating, in a very short time period, a Downtown Digital District with all the elements of a Great Downtown.”

While the “Digital” (and Intel) portion of the District has not quite lived up to expectations, Austin’s initiatives to redevelop downtown continued in two ways: through the adoption of [Downtown Austin Design Guidelines](#) in May 2000, and through the city’s ongoing Great Streets Program.

Mayor Watson’s comments were predicated on City Council’s 1999 passage of a resolution “intended to ensure that the West 2nd Street area support pedestrian and retail-oriented businesses that could complement the proposed City Hall as a major public destination.” Because of the resolution, the two planned, six-story CSC buildings were reconfigured to provide street-level retail, and the city retained AMLI



The Austin Children’s Museum is one of the first entertainment venues in Second Street District.  
Photo by S. Buntin.



Retail streetscape along a CSC office building.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

Austin Retail, in collaboration with HSM Urban Partners, as its retail developer for Blocks 2 and 4. The retail consulting firm of HSM Urban Partners has been retained to create a strategic retail program for the new Second Street Retail District overall, under contracts with various project developers. The City’s Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office was at the forefront of the implementation efforts associated with the Council’s 1999 resolution.

That same year, ROMA Design Group was hired by AMLI Residential to develop a retail and streetscape concept plan, which proposed converting Second Street to a two-lane (one lane each way) shopping street, with parallel parking located on the north side, adjacent to a 32-foot-wide sidewalk with a double-row of street trees. The resulting Austin Second Street Retail District –

District Streetscape Plan was published in early 2000.

## Great Streets

After extending the District Streetscape Plan boundaries eastward to the Convention Center in July 2001, the Second Street Retail District Plan was subsequently incorporated into the Downtown Austin [Great Streets Master Plan](#), which was completed in December 2001 by urban design consultant Black & Vernooy + Kinney Joint Venture. ROMA Design Group's concept plan was further detailed, and specific siting criteria within the public right of way, such as street and pedestrian lighting, were established.

The Great Streets Master Plan is based on the Downtown Austin Design Guidelines adopted the previous year, including:

- Sense of history
- Unique character
- Authenticity
- Safety
- Diversity
- Humane character
- Density
- Economic vitality
- Civic art

Based on Second Street Retail District work, the design consultants suggested six guiding principles for the Great Streets Program, identified in the Master Plan itself:

- Manage congestion
- Balanced/active streets
- Streets as places
- Interactive streets
- Pride of place
- Public art

Additionally, a number of "Principles and Elements" were included, ranging from pedestrian orientation to sidewalks, roadway lane width to bike lanes, street furniture to street trees, and public art to enhanced key

### Great Streets Urban Design Guiding Principles



#### Principle 1: Manage Congestion

Congestion is a fact of life in successful urban places. By definition, a place that supports a great concentration of economic and social activities within a pedestrian-scaled environment is going to be congested.

#### Principle 2: Balanced/Active Streets

Downtown streets must balance the needs of pedestrians, bicycles, transit and the automobile in creating an attractive and viable urban core. Downtown streets are for people first, commercial second, parking third and through traffic fourth.

#### Principle 3: Streets as Places

The Great Streets Program envisions downtown as a vital focus of city life, and as a primary destination. Our downtown streets are our most important and pervasive public space and common ground.

#### Principle 4: Interactive Streets

Urban Streets are the stages on which the public life of the community is acted out.

#### Principle 5: Pride of Place

Visible, caring and upkeep are critical to the vitality of urban street life.

#### Principle 6: Public Art

Art in the public environment can help to establish a stronger sense of place and a continuity between the past, present and future.

*Source: Austin Downtown Great Streets Master Plan. Graphic courtesy Copley Wolff Design Group.*

transit stops.



Looking west along Second Street at its intersection with Congress Avenue.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

Of three street typologies identified in the Master Plan, the “Pedestrian Dominant Street” was not only based on the concepts already created for the Second Street Retail District, but by referencing Second Street specifically, it guided that the District be developed as such:

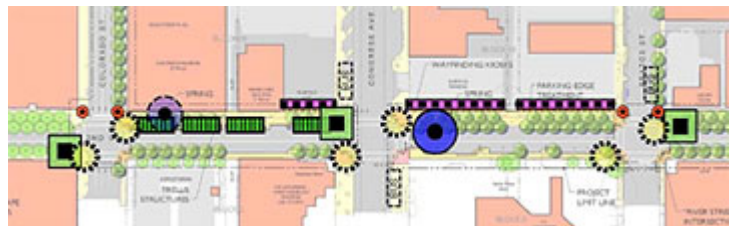
Pedestrian Dominant Streets generate high volumes of pedestrian traffic due to active retail uses at street level. City Council has demonstrated their commitment to creating Second Street as the new retail spine of downtown Austin. The north sidewalk... extends thirty-two feet wide, allowing for a

double row of trees, sidewalk cafes, generous seating areas, and impromptu street life. The vision of a premier retail district is particularly powerful when one imagines the sun-filled wide sidewalk stretching from Shoal Creek on the west to the door of the Austin Convention Center to the east.

Over the next three years, the city conducted engineering, archaeological, and historical studies. The former resulted in the creation of prototypical design solutions for handicap access and intersection geometry, resolved utility and tree conflicts, and prepared plans for grading, drainage, utility relocation, traffic management, construction phasing, and cost estimates. The latter explored the history of the corridor, which includes 19th and 20th century railroad and industrial uses, a red light district, underground vaults, and a large Hispanic population up to the 1920s.

### **Second Street District Streetscape Improvement Project**

The Pedestrian Dominant Street typology of the Great Streets Master Plan is being implemented in the Second Street District through the Second Street District Streetscape Improvement Project, which began in July 2003 when the city selected a design team led by Copley Wolff Design Group of Boston. The SSDSIP differs, however, from the Great Streets Master Plan:



The Second Street District Streetscape Plan.  
Graphic courtesy Copley Wolff Design Group.

The SSDSIP will also serve as a model for sustainable development of city streetscapes. While the

Downtown Great Streets Master Plan provides guidance on many common streetscape elements, the SSDSIP is conducting further research and technical and design investigation into cutting-edge technology and best practices. Some of the topics which the SSDSIP will address include a strategy and mechanism for the ongoing management of maintenance and services to the District, urban forestry, urban heat island reduction, storm drainage/water quality, reclaimed water usage, recyclables and construction waste management, historic interpretation, and the seamless integration of civic art into streetscape development.

The project's Request for Design Consultant Qualifications clearly set forth the streetscapes' intent in five areas:

- Urban design, reiterating the city's vision of a sense of place for the Second Street District
- Sustainability, in such areas as heat island effect, storm drainage and water quality, reclaimed water, renewable energy, light trespass, recyclables, and public transit
- Context-sensitive design, so that the District integrates "the ideas and work of central Texas historians, artists and/or artisans to impart a distinct Austin sense of place and cultural identity through revealing its forms, meanings, values and history"
- Public involvement, led by the Downtown Austin Alliance's District Stakeholder Group with city oversight, to "be informed by a high level of stakeholder input"
- District maintenance, calling for a strategy and mechanism for the ongoing management of maintenance and services



Corner restaurant and shops at AMLI Downtown's seven-story, mixed-use apartment building. Photo by S. Buntin.

The project is being implemented in two phases:

- Phase 1: Roadway reconstruction, from San Antonio Street to Colorado Street, which was completed in October 2004
- Phase 2: Great Streets sidewalks and roadway construction, Colorado Street to Trinity Street



Another view of the AMLI Downtown building.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

The first phase resulted in transitioning Second Street from one-way, westbound traffic from Brazos Street east to its end at San Antonio, to two-way traffic from Brazos Street west to Colorado, spanning the major Congress Avenue / Second Street intersection. It was completed just prior to the opening of the new City Hall in November 2004.

The second phase design is now nearly complete, with 32-foot-wide sidewalks and a double row of street trees on the north side of the street, providing “ample, shaded space for sidewalk cafes next to store fronts. Between the double row of trees, a path of large-size pavers, used to enhance walkability and wheelchair user comfort, meanders like a dry stream bed, inviting a leisurely stroll through the retail district.” The District has also implemented the Great Streets light pole, “uniquely designed for Austin’s downtown... [that] elegantly reduce[s] clutter in the streetscape by consolidating into one system roadway and pedestrian lighting as well as traffic and pedestrian signals, street signs/wayfinding systems and special events banners.” The Street’s south side takes advantage of similar

streetscaping, but at an 18-foot width.

Improvements along Cesar Chavez Boulevard from Brazos to San Antonio include widening of the street and creation of an esplanade with an alley of trees along the southern curb line, forming a transition from the Second Street District's built fabric to Town Lake Park. Cesar Chavez will be rebuilt first, with Second now following in January 2008. Second Street improvements are projected to be completed in 15 months.

Streetscape, plaza, and other public infrastructure maintenance around City Hall is funded by a tax-increment financing reinvestment zone that encompasses four blocks in the Second Street District.

## The Role of Public Art

“Rivers, Streams and Springs” is the Second Street District streetscape project’s theme, and ties into the city’s [Art in Public Places](#) program. Accordingly, where Second Street intersects the north/south streets—which are named for Texas rivers like the Brazos and Colorado—special paving treatments with medallions that interpret the social history and ecology of each river’s watershed are being created and installed by local artists.

Additionally, a “Spring” sculptural zone including a functioning drinking fountain will be located between San Jacinto and Brazos Streets, and a larger-scale “Spring” is being implemented in partnership with Austin Water Utility, at the intersection with Congress Avenue.



A path winds from Town Lake up to the Congress Avenue bridge, as well as to the Second Street District, shown here with the fire tower and CSC buildings.

Photo by S. Buntin.



Wide, bricked sidewalks and street furniture along Second Street.

Photo by S. Buntin.

Two percent of

the SSDSIP construction budget has been set aside for the “design and implementation of such context-appropriate civic art.” Other “public/private partners” are being pursued for additional “water-related art opportunities” along Second Street, with \$200,000 in developer pledges already obtained.

## Implementing the Plans

While the plans and projects establish a coherent vision for the Second Street District, according to Austin redevelopment project manager Fred Evins, they do not set any requirements for sustainability measures such as energy efficiency and renewable energy use, or specific percentages for retail or residential uses. “Block-by-block the city has negotiated with developers to include project elements that further the city’s vision,” said Evins.

As owners of five of six blocks, Austin was able to use an array of funding and other civic mechanisms

to support development under the Great Streets Program and Streetscape Implement Project

guidelines. For example, the city was able to provide expedited permitting, development fee waivers, project-area design standards, and funding for streetscaping, landscaping, and parking on the two CSC buildings on either side of City Hall completed in 2001 (Blocks 2 and 4). The city also constructed a connecting tunnel and funded improvements to city property and rights-of-way.

During negotiations with Computer Sciences Corporation on its development of Blocks 2 and 4, the city seized the opportunity to further its vision for the district and paid CSC \$9.3 million towards the design, construction, and sub-leasing of retail shell spaces on these blocks. AMLI Austin Retail, in collaboration with HSM Urban Partners, has been selected as the retail developer, and the retail sub-leases have been assigned to the developer, which is responsible for funding the development costs associated with leasing and finishing out the Block 2 and 4 retail spaces, according to Evins.

On Blocks 21 and 22, however, the developers will be responsible for the construction, leasing, and management of the retail spaces in their mixed-use projects. The city did, though, agree to lease terms “that made AMLI’s mixed-use development financially viable” on Block 22. HSM Urban Partners is under contract to provide retail consulting services on Blocks 20, 21, and 22 (as well as Blocks 2 and 4), to ensure a coherent retail mix and produce a viable destination retail center. “We believe a strong retail presence is just as important as the streetscape improvements in making the district successful,” says Evins.



A Second Street intersection with a CSC office building in the background.

Photo by S. Buntin.

### **Mixed Uses: Current and Proposed**

Austin’s goal for Second Street District is 168,000 square feet of ground-level “destination” retail. Blocks 2 and 4—the retail uses in the [CSC buildings](#)—also have a goal of 30 percent local business inclusion. Combined, the two six-story buildings have 350,000 square feet of office space, serving both CSC and Silicon Laboratories, which subsequently purchased CSC’s interest in Block 2.

Block 20, [AMLI Downtown](#), features a 220-unit apartment project above 43,000 square feet of retail and restaurants. [AMLI Residential](#) has broken ground on an 18-story high-rise residential project two blocks west of AMLI Downtown (Block 22). It will have 231 units with 35,000 square feet of street-level retail and above-ground parking. Five percent of these units will be designated as affordable to households whose income is equal to or less than 80 percent of the median income.



Looking east on Second Street, east of Congress Avenue, toward the Austin Convention Center.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

The new 101 Colorado project, now called [Altavida](#), is being developed by MetLife, Inc., and designed by HKS, Inc., of Dallas. It has recently broken ground on Second Street and Congress Avenue. The 36-story tower will include 258 rental units and a five-level parking garage with a ground-floor lobby and retail space. Six three-story townhomes will front Cesar Chavez Street.

The [200 Congress](#) project—at the northwest corner of the 2nd Street / Congress Avenue intersection—will be

a mixed-use tower developed by Benchmark Land Development and designed by Ziegler Cooper Architects. The 700-foot building will have 250 luxury condominiums above retail space at the Congress Avenue / Second Street corner.

In early 2007, construction is expected to begin on [Block 21](#)—the vacant lot across from the new City Hall. It is anticipated that this project will be a 32-floor high-rise featuring a 225-room luxury hotel, 125 condominiums, a 1,000-seat “Austin City Limits” venue, and an expanded Austin Children’s Museum. In total, it will encompass more than 780,000 square feet.

Other new projects adjacent to Second Street District include revitalization of the historic [Republic Square](#) park and a new [Federal Courthouse](#) two streets north; redevelopment of the 1950s-era, Art Deco [Seaholm Power Plant](#) into a “high quality, mixed-use cultural attraction” across Shoal Creek to the west; the 44-story “360,” a 432-unit high-rise residential tower above 15,000 square feet of ground-floor retail and restaurant space, overlooking Shoal Creek from Third Street and Nueces; construction of a new [Austin Museum of Art](#); renovations to the [Austin Music Hall](#); and development of the [Ballet Austin Butler Dance Education Center](#), all within a few blocks of the District. [View all downtown Austin emerging projects.](#)

### **Austin City Hall**

The new [Austin City Hall and Public Plaza](#)—four stories and 115,000 square feet, and featuring a distinctive design by architect Antoine Predock in which there are few 90-



Austin’s Seaholm Power Plant is ready for redevelopment.  
Photo by S. Buntin.

degree angles—opened in November 2004 to local applause. With the goal of being Austin’s civic landmark for generations, the \$56 million building also received a “gold” rating in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system sponsored by the [U.S. Green Building Council](#). It is truly a building fitting of Austin’s eclectic nature, sense of place, and spirit of sustainability.

Energy and environmental features include:

- High degree of recycled content in construction materials, including 99% of the reinforcing steel, 90% of the sheetrock, 82% of the copper material (66,000 square feet of copper used is in the building), and 45% of the concrete masonry
- Condensation from the air-conditioning system, at an average of 486 gallons per day, provides the water source for a multi-level waterfall
- More than 80% of the construction debris was recycled, primarily provided to artists and schools
- During excavation, workers hit a water source which had to be pumped to protect the foundation—that water was saved and is being used to irrigate the landscaping
- All landscaping is native to Texas, and large trees have been planted in the plaza to provide shading and reduce heat gain
- Photovoltaic cells on the building’s awning above the stairs on the south-side plaza generate an average of 9 kW of electricity daily
- The building is part of [Austin Energy’s](#) downtown district cooling system—a larger thermal energy storage system produces ice during the night when electricity is cheapest, and the ice creates chilled water used to cool buildings the next day
- Interior materials such as paints, carpets, and adhesives have low to no volatile organic compounds, increasing indoor air quality
- Bicycle storage, showers, and lockers encourage alternative transportation



Austin City hall and Public Plaza viewed from the south, above, and from the east along Second Street, below.  
Photo by S. Buntin.



City Hall is not the only building tied into Austin Energy’s district cooling system—most of the Second Street blocks, at least the retail and commercial portions, also take advantage of the energy-efficient system.



New mixed-use development in Market District, just west of the Second Street District. Photo by S. Buntin.

## Measuring Success

One measure of success this early in project development is the initial response to retail, especially local shops. Recent articles in the Austin American-Statesman point to the risks paying off: “It’s the best business decision I’ve ever made,” said Jane Vanisko McCano, owner of [Shiki](#), a women’s clothing store, in a December 2005 article. Cami Cobb, owner of the apparel store [Estilo](#), is more cautious but still optimistic: “I think we’re just at the beginning. The district definitely has a ways to go, but the area has a lot of momentum.”

According to the article, local residents have been highly loyal to their nearby shops and restaurants, and hotels “have been great about sending shoppers their way.” That equates to a healthy mix of locals and tourists.

Elizabeth Serrato, owner of the jewelry and accessories boutique [Eliza Page](#), concludes, “We know that it’s going to take a while until everything is complete. And there’s always a risk involved in staring anything new. But the

response has been wonderful.”

Given that city leaders hope to draw as many as 20,000 new residents to downtown Austin in the next ten years—though there are some concerns about the feasibility of housing that many new residents—and provided the growth of nearby hotels, conferences, and entertainment venues, the future for retail looks promising.

Occupancy rates for residences and commercial office space—another measure of success—are not readily available, but the current demand across downtown for new spaces of both types denotes that they are likely to be successful, as well.

Austin’s Second Street District is a powerful example of how community vision and collaboration can help redefine a place, and then the places beyond. By incorporating principles of sustainability,



Street-level retail flanks the main residential entrance to AMLI Downtown. Photo by S. Buntin.

building from the spirit of the place itself, and taking an active part in project design and buildout, the city has ensured that its goal of creating a premier, mixed-use retail spine in downtown will succeed.

### **[Austin's Sustainable Communities Initiative](#)**

#### *Mission*

The City of Austin's Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) exists to help the greater Austin region achieve economic prosperity, social justice, and ecological health—the highest possible quality of life in the best possible environment. SCI programs and policies will respond effectively to the real limits of ecological systems while fostering the unprecedented opportunities of a democratic society in which all people are able to develop to their fullest potential. To these ends, the SCI should become a valuable resource for city staff and for area residents by advocating, creating tools, and providing expertise concerning sustainability—from the global to the local perspective.

[Learn more at the SCI website.](#)

### **Austin Sustainability Initiatives and Resources**

Austin is a city in which sustainability is more than talk. Visit these local resources for additional information:

#### *Building, Construction, and Energy Use*

- [Austin RE-store](#)
- [Austin Energy's Green Building Program](#)
- [Austin Energy's GreenChoice](#)

#### *Food*

- [Austin Organic Gardens](#)
- [Austin Local Growers and Farmers' Markets](#)
- [Sustainable Food Center / Austin Community Gardens](#)

#### *Neighborhood and Regional Involvement*

- [Austin Free-Net Neighborhood Network](#)
- [Austin League of Women Voters](#)
- [City of Austin Neighborhood Planning Program](#)

*Landscape*

- [City of Austin Water Conservation Division](#)
- [City of Austin Grow Green Program](#)

*Transportation*

- [Austin Bicycling Coalition](#)
- [City of Austin Bicycle/ Pedestrian Program](#)
- [Capital Metro](#)

*Waste Reduction*

- [City of Austin Recycling](#)
- [City of Austin Composting Information](#)

**For more information, visit Second Street District at [www.2ndStreetDistrict.com](http://www.2ndStreetDistrict.com).**

## ARTerrain Gallery

### Eleven abstract and digital compositions by Jaanika Peerna

Jaanika Peerna is an Estonian artist and art educator now living in New York.

For the past several years, she has worked at the Dia Art Foundation's renowned [Dia:Beacon](#) museum in New York as teaching artist, introducing its collection to elementary and high school students.

When still living in Estonia she ran the art program at the Vanalinna Hariduskollegium (Old Town School), and she worked with the Visual Thinking Strategies program of the Soros Foundation. She has also served as adjunct faculty in drawing, video, and design at the State University of New York (SUNY) in New Paltz, where she completed the Master of Fine Arts program in the Visual Research Laboratory in May 2005.

This program stresses a blend of art, design, and technology with a focus on new media. Her own artwork blends digital photography, drawing, and video art into a multifaceted approach.

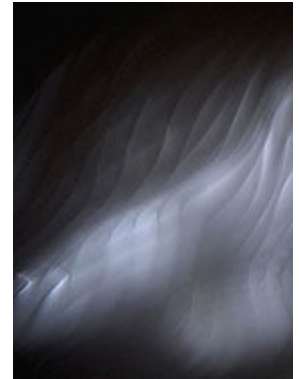


"Art does not progress over time the way technology does," says Ms. Peerna. "Rather, the significance of an artwork depends more on whether or not it changes the way we see."

She has had solo exhibitions in Beacon, N.Y., New York City, the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art in New Paltz, and in her native country of Estonia, where she received an MA in art education from Tallinn Pedagogical University in 1995.

Jaanika Peerna's approach in teaching art has always been interdisciplinary. Her current special interest is using movement in the process of learning about visual art. She has led workshops on this approach in Lisbon, Helsinki, and Riga.

For more information, visit Jaanika Peerna's website at [www.jaanikapeerna.net](http://www.jaanikapeerna.net).



Enter the ARTerrain Gallery at [www.terrain.org/artterrain/19](http://www.terrain.org/artterrain/19)

## Poetry by Michael J. Vaughn

### Daughters of Cecilia

#### Antonina Milyukova

No, no, I'll not on this earth give my love to another. Whatever part fate may decree, I am yours!  
— Tatiana, Eugene Onegin

Terrified, man-mad Tchaikovsky. You send him a crush note as he composes Onegin. He instructs you to quell your feelings.

He writes Tatiana's world-lifting Letter Scene, followed by Onegin's cruel dismissal, and feels guilty. So he marries you.

The honeymoon inspires Tchaikovsky to throw himself into the Moscow River. The desired pneumonia fails to arrive.

He pays you off, at 6,000 rubles a year. You bear three children by another man. Still, you refuse a divorce.

Sixteen years later, Tchaikovsky flirts with a duke's nephew. A court of colleagues orders him to kill himself. He does so.

You outlive him by twenty-four years, condemned by a court of your own to hold on to the ancient tether, as it pulls you from one asylum to the next.

I picture your face at the barred window, tracking the silversnail path of the moon. Listening to the Pathetique, over and over.

#### Doria Manfredi

Continue to work at your picture till nightfall, and you must promise that no pious lady, no fair or dusky beauty, shall be admitted here on any pretext!  
— Tosca

Summers in Torre del Lago, you wait to do your ironing in the cool of night. This is also when the Maestro works, his cowboy opera ringing through the villa.

At break time, you find him in the garden, puffing on a cigar, and share a brief talk. The Maestro is elegant, soft-spoken. It could be that you look on him as a father (how you long for a father).

Elvira Puccini hears the voices beneath her window. Doria stays late to be near my husband. She meets him in the garden for lovemaking. She fires you, spends the autumn denouncing you as a slut. What's worse, everyone believes her.

The Maestro sends a note, lamenting his wife's behavior, but seems incapable of stopping her. She finds you at Christmas Day mass, and threatens to kill you.

Haunted and sick, you purchase a bottle of mercuric chloride, a corrosive disinfectant, and swallow three tablets. The stomach cramps begin immediately, followed by five days of riveting pain.

In your note, you ask for revenge on Elvira, and clemency for Puccini, who has done nothing.

The gossips conclude that Doria has died of a botched abortion. The authorities order an autopsy, to be conducted in the presence of witnesses. The autopsy reveals that Doria was a virgin.

### **Renata Tebaldi**

I'll go alone and far as the echo from the churchbell. There, amid the white snow; there, amid the clouds of gold—there where the earth appears as but a recollection.

— La Wally

I drive the length of Oregon. The radio slaps me with a four-word sentence. I stop at the Shakespeare festival, trekking the Christmas-lit streets for a latte, rubbing a jigsaw piece between my fingers.

This grieving makes no sense. I don't know you. Everything you've given me is locked away on vinyl and aluminum. My loss is precisely nothing.

But once, you took hold of my tangled hearing, and untied the knots.

Jenny sits at the kitchen table, her eyes growing wide. You've never heard Tebaldi? She reaches for the stereo: an impossibly broad soprano voice, constructed of butter, an aircraft carrier tracing cadenzas like a speedboat.

She tells me you're alive, residing in Italy. This does not seem possible.

I have made no secret of my fixation. My friends will send condolences, as if I have lost a favorite aunt. I will read reports of you at San Marino, breathing your last, one eye on the hills.

On the night of four words, I scale the Siskiyou, strangely energized, the roadsides patching with snow. My head fills with Catalani, Renata loosing her dovish triplets as she climbs the white mountains, untethered.

[Michael J. Vaughn](#) is the West Coast correspondent for [theoperacritic.com](http://theoperacritic.com), and author of the opera novel Gabriella's Voice ([deadendstreet.com](http://deadendstreet.com)). He is a regular contributor to Writer's Digest. View his website at [www.geocities.com/michaeljvaughn](http://www.geocities.com/michaeljvaughn).

## Poetry by Tara Bray

### Theology

Not in the quiet, but in what alludes to a softer sound,  
I run the roads that mark my father's land,  
hardwoods and failed fields let go, now green and satisfied.  
I startle a herd of deer. White tails disperse  
into a leaping of barbed wire. The group hurtles for the trees,  
all but one. The half-fawn with faded spots, doomed to fail, fails,  
its torso lodged between two rusty wires.  
I don't mean to stop, watch its thin legs flail, nor the body writhe,  
but its scream is like a small bird screeching for its life,  
as if torn flesh were given voice, a bird within a beast.  
I try to run, tumble to my knees. At last the fawn slips through  
and flees, leaves me trembling in our common fear.

### Silenced

Never mind the beetle in my mouth, it's gentle.  
Never mind this morning, the first sighting  
of a lazuli bunting on a branch. I tracked back  
to the canyon three days so I might set eyes  
on the maker of the song and name it.  
I stood there hushed before its blue-laced dip and swift  
unsettling into brush, clean blue-white delight,  
the tiny neck marked by red nearly that of my home dirt.  
Never mind this quiet scoured by sun. I've been muted  
more than once by lesser things: fashion, cleverness  
peppering its tricks, fugue, scrim and rivulets of mind,  
brilliant cross and savviness. Savagely alone, today I am  
voluptuous with bird and air, plain-witted prayer,  
Sierra canyon shade, unheard and never mind.

[Tara Bray](#) has published work in The Southern Review, Crab Orchard Review, Shenandoah, Verse Daily, and others. She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

## Poetry by Paul Hostovsky

### Birdsong

The hands of the deaf  
flitting  
from sleeve to sleeve  
this evening  
happy  
to be among  
themselves  
free  
of the heavy  
silence  
of the trees  
which are everywhere  
the same  
lack of movement  
which is  
what silence is  
to the eyes  
darting  
hungrily  
day after day  
seeing  
in the least leaf-  
tremble  
a sign  
of sympathy  
a same  
song repeating  
itself  
to itself  
all day in the huge  
buildings  
of the trees  
waiting  
listening  
for the first  
sweet  
singing  
response

## A Christmas Song

A deaf mother  
gives to her daughter  
who is not deaf  
a telephone  
for Christmas  
and watches  
as the dilating vowel of happiness  
rings out  
from the daughter's open mouth  
and it looks to the mother  
like singing  
the eyes widening  
the mouth opening  
the hands signing  
thank you  
thank you  
from the mouth  
which is holding the note  
which is ringing out  
all across  
the neighborhood

## After Milton

When I consider how I played trombone  
in grade school band, how I couldn't smile and play  
at the same time, yet couldn't keep from smiling  
as the band squeaked and sawed our one out of tune  
tune, how my pucker split, then splayed,  
how my lips and ears swam up to the ceiling,  
how my smile blew down that perfect house of air  
that housed the music, and the music ran off, and there

I sat, making no sound but going through all  
the motions, sliding slide, bobbing bell,  
head and feet moving to the music, all  
but the music, and none who saw could tell--  
then I think my contribution was no less equal:  
They also sing who only sit and smile.

[Paul Hostovsky](#) has poems in Poet Lore, New Delta Review, Shenandoah, Carolina Quarterly, and others. He has two poetry chapbooks, Bird in the Hand ([Grayson Books](#), 2006), and Dusk Outside the Braille Press (Riverstone Press, 2006). He works in Boston as an interpreter for the deaf.

## Poetry by Brendan Galvin

### The March Observances

We come down the path  
a few evenings after equinox  
to a thin strip of pines  
between the road and river,  
a place where words have been  
known to blessedly fail us,  
and lean on a tree  
at roadside, well we know why.

Often enough, in the quiet of the sun's  
bloodline detailing hogsback hills  
west of us, among lean-tos  
the deadfall makes, a woodcock  
may begin his overture,  
as though a fly fisherman were  
stripping line from his reel nearby.

It is all for the female whose eye  
is a glitter lost on us among husks of bark  
and leafmould in there, and now  
her dumpy suitor who has flown  
his lovesickness up the continent  
leaps into a gyre, climbing  
so the air seems all atwitter  
about his newfound  
shape and destiny, a hundred feet,  
two hundred up the twilight, more—

and we ask this year as last  
if we saw it, or if those sounds  
we can't approximate  
created the illusion that we saw it,  
the synesthesia for a dance  
at once ludic, absurd, and holy—  
as he drops in a ragged chattering  
zigzag back among those trees.

[Brendan Galvin's \*Habitat: New and Selected Poems 1965-2005\*](#) (LSU Press) was a National Book Award finalist.

## Poetry by Melissa Tuckey

### The Last Time We Took a Family Vacation

The other night when my drunk aunt  
flashed her tits at the whole family

we were horrified and when her daughter  
yelled you're stupid mom it broke our hearts

but tonight at the bar across from our condo  
we find ourselves clapping along

The bar is full of sober people on vacation  
lonely in their new clothes

and no one can take their eyes off Aunt Celeste  
in her beach shorts and bowling shirt

rocking back and forth clapping her hands  
yelling oh yeah oh yeah oh yeah

### Oh Piano

*After John Cage*

I've lassoed the enormous  
weight of you  
shipped you across  
the continent  
carried you up three flights of stairs

but still I do not know  
what you eat

## Whose Woods These Are

The noise of the bee was delight. Before Burning Forest Lane.  
Before Wild Ginger Court. The meadow before the complex.  
Humming its wheels or mowing its Sunday. What passes for  
religion. Before trillium and despair.

Narcissists preening the hedgerow

An exhibition of windows

His house is in the village though

[Melissa Tuckey's](#) poems have been published in Beltway Poetry Journal, Poet Lore, Southeast Review, and others. She's a recipient of an Ohio Arts Council Award and Blue Mountain Center residency. She lives and works in Washington, D.C.

## Poetry by Allan Peterson

### Hawk is Talking

Whether the passing hawk is talking  
about the unquenchability of need,  
or complaining its short wings unbecoming,  
or announcing how this time the mouse  
will stay put to hope it so, it must anticipate  
early, almost before it launches, or the trees  
will flash by before it arrives and its perfect  
gold feet will clutch on nothing.

### Announcing the Unspeakable

When the caravel unloaded no one  
protested the farfetched  
story of the armored ox horn on its forehead  
lace horse or the squirrel  
with furled sails they knew strangeness  
how a even a single flower  
could become named and famous  
but when the captain slandered nature  
by recounting the notorious  
strangler fig that transgressed the garden  
with long and deliberate crimes  
it was so human as to be too close to home  
and life and death suddenly intersected  
like the woman appearing from nowhere  
handing out funeral lilies at Whole Foods

## Precarious

Winds and the half-winds and half that charted.  
Heart and the half-hearted notched and noticed.  
Still it's precarious to set out from Carthage  
with just love and a lodestone, wet rope for ballast.  
If the stutterer sings, it's smooth sailing.  
If the whistler sits in the bowsprit, there's trouble.  
The sentence will not complete, nor the voyage.  
Always something more, another noun.  
Now songbirds find the owl and scold the oaks.  
Imagine the terror of jaws before the compass,  
shoals as the premeditated curseworks of heaven.

[Allan Peterson](#) is the author of two books: [All the Lavish in Common](#) (2005 Juniper Prize) and *Anonymous Or (Defined Providence Press)* and four chapbooks. Recent print and online appearances include *Prairie Schooner*, *Blackbird*, *Bellingham Review*, *Perihelion*, *Stickman Review*, *Marlboro Review*, and *Massachusetts Review*. A free downloadable chapbook, *Any Given Moment*, is available at [www.righthandpointing.com](http://www.righthandpointing.com).

## Poetry by Shann Palmer

### Moirae

#### 1. Clotho

The shortest distance between breaths  
blinks on and off at the end of the pier.

At first you were shadow, then accordion  
music played in one key, or a banjo.

Sometimes I want to be surrounded  
by water, silence bobbing in my wake.

I lose track of myself  
when the night lasts too long.

#### 2. Lachesis

To reckon a single step,  
each footfall is what it is,  
over as soon as set.

Right hand before your left,  
legs in motion, no penalty, keep moving.

Into the end-run of age  
where fancy-dancing is discouraged,  
not like when I rode  
my brand new red Schwinn,  
bold and callow, no hands,  
spinning down Telephone Road  
so long ago the sky  
must have been bluer then.  
I was light, simple, and  
had no idea of the measure  
being taken away as quickly  
as it was being given.

### 3. Atropos

I eat my heart out three times a day,  
Wallenda balanced, giddy with rosin,

poised to tangle, to tango. I want to dance  
nose to nose with you, before I die

chin to chin with your bawdy double,  
in the wind, strung out and forgetful.

There is a world to consider, my straw companion  
who waits for the opportunity to cut loose.

## Sabino Canyon, Arizona

Songs as quiet as ancient sighs  
lie down deep, tie a thought to rock,  
find the cracks fatigue has made,  
open rifts where long dead roots  
have choked life left from other times

Color comes unexpected, cached in  
red around a bend, beneath a gray cholla  
where one trail ends, another turns  
and starts again, this sacred ground  
has voice, takes the melody where it will.

Here, water leaves a shape, winds wail,  
then whisper to a passing javelina,  
as scree binds cliff to canyon floor  
a melancholy traveler rests on green serape  
to listen, still beneath the hard blue sky.

[Shann Palmer](#) lives in Virginia, serves as Poetry in the Schools State Rep, hosts readings, workshops, and maintains a web-based events calendar. Her CDs and hand-made chapbooks are available from her website [FlashPaperPoetry](#).

## Poetry by DB Cox

### bones

two-room  
roadside attraction—  
a peepshow  
for three ceramic angels  
casting pallid eyes on  
a weed-covered yard  
of wrecked cars  
& a one-eyed cat

lying under  
a front-porch swing  
that dangles  
from a single chain  
like a hanged man  
long past  
the last-second call  
that never came—

a derelict mockingbird  
rests on the rusty frame  
of a '64 mustang  
& sings songs  
stolen from  
an unknown bluesman—

one-time resident  
composer  
of minor works  
concerning:  
old times  
old people  
& things disowned

[DB Cox](#) is a blues musician/writer from South Carolina. His writing has appeared in *Underground Voices*, *Thunder Sandwich*, *Dublin Quarterly*, *Aesthetica*, *Bonfire*, *Gator Springs Gazette*, *Heat City Review*, *Snow Monkey*, *Southern Hum*, *Southern Gothic*, and others. He has had three chapbooks of poetry published: *Passing For Blue* (published by Rank Stranger Press), *Lowdown*, and *Ordinary Sorrows* (published by Pudding House Publications). Main Street Rag Publishing will publish his first full-length poetry collection, *Empty Frames*, in October 2006.

## Poetry by Hazel Hutchinson

### by any other name

not from her womb did i emerge  
but in loco parentis was i born  
from a deeper place  
into this sage woman's embrace  
of rock-a-bye and rock-'n'-roll and the  
sweetest blues you've ever known.

*Originally published in Flint Hills Review.*

Grateful for imagination and solitude, [Hazel Hutchinson](#) enjoys a cozy nest with her husband in the openness of Kansas. She has recently published in Animus and online at Sage of Consciousness and The New Verse News.

## Poetry by Richard O'Connell

### Perils of Conservation

"We find them broken, bleeding on the sand,"  
The girl sighed, scooping up sea turtle eggs  
Like so many golf balls from the pit  
She'd dug up with her bare hands, moving back  
The turtle nest from the encroaching tide.  
"The foxes come at night and dig them up.  
What can we do?" She turned her scarlet face,  
"The foxes are endangered species too."

[Richard O'Connell](#) lives in Hillsboro Beach, Florida. Collections of his poetry include *RetroWorlds*, *Simulations*, *Voyages*, and *The Bright Tower*, all published by the University of Salzburg Press (now Poetry Salzburg). His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Margie*, *National Review*, *The Texas Review*, *Acumen*, *The Formalist*, *Light*, and others. His most recent collections are *American Obits*, *Fractals*, and *Dawn Crossing*.

## Poetry by Peter Huggins

### Beethoven's Hat

In this version of the story,  
Beethoven meets the Empress and her family  
Near the Teplitz spa.

Instead of moving aside and taking off  
His hat, as Goethe supposedly did,  
Beethoven strides

Down the avenue and forces  
The Empress to yield, to address him  
With the respect his genius demands.

The drums beat in this version:  
The trumpets blow and the cymbals crash.  
That must be why V.I. Lenin  
Admired Beethoven's Appassionata so much:

He heard the music of the revolution,  
Responded absolutely, and played Russia  
His variations on the truth.

I doubt the hat. I doubt whether Beethoven  
Would confine himself to a hat.  
A hat's too restrictive, like the symphony

Whose boundaries Beethoven expanded  
To push the music outward, out there,  
Toward the pure tones of joy  
I listen to and praise.

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## Poetry by Robert Lietz

Doowop Diner

*To the memories of David Antrel and Ray Green of the Eldaros, and for Bobby Green*

A signal starts then darkened-down  
construction. And near  
to the heart of it / to the songs  
kids made hearts on  
and promises : I'm ( earlier ) out --  
in rain -- about  
as heavy as rain gets -- bringing  
some branches  
down / blades down  
on  
one man's rolling  
meditation.

And -- if it's 1958 -- if I believe  
there's more  
in tunes than schooling -- in hoops  
/ lined floors  
and Kiwanis-sponsored hardball --  
there will be stools  
to spin -- tables and booths  
/ pinball and chrome  
where the kids are  
/ and  
kids commit  
to listen

with formica to tap / booth jukes  
till the taps locate  
a knowledge to prepare for : sneaking  
to fames some nights --  
from homework traded away  
imagining -- creating  
some other place -- where moonlight  
spills on spiral-bound  
and loose-leaf scribbles -- taking  
a kid toward dreams --  
and taking dreams away  
from Latin --

to Sheaffer's on Court  
or Uncle Jim's  
on North Kirkpatrick  
/ to five-  
for-a-quarter plays  
on  
chrome-accented  
lurid  
Wurlitzers.

\*

If there's darkness yet -- and voices  
call me out -- there's  
music -- pleased as love -- finding its way  
till smokes and pills  
have lost their power. I think how  
we missed sixteen / how  
light would inflect the ways we looked  
and stood and counted --  
examining / profane -- attracted  
by lines of sax  
and by abstractions of desire --  
/ and amused  
maybe -- when an arm  
and gears  
laid wax down  
as boys  
counted.

\*

But who would have thought the lusts  
and more ecstatic solitudes  
/ the surprise could last well into the next century?  
And who is it doubts that now --  
mornings the songs and light displace  
the early thunder -- how  
all that the kids -- made glad by stages --  
knew of contracts -- could be

changed by distances / by this humor say  
/ by this diner and mixed crowd  
who could picture in the Fifties? -- finally  
simplified -- kids on their ways  
to grades -- amused by some old cats'  
memories -- and by the bravado now --  
as timeless still as bills -- as roadsters  
and recordings -- as this music  
played through half a century of breakfasts --  
striking them comically at first -- and  
again ( on second-thought ) as comedy --  
bringing these black and brown  
and paler cats together -- in touch let's say  
/ in places they had not ever  
dreamt to be -- when tunes like these  
were cues to their first dreaming --  
and dreamlives spent themselves --  
with adventures ahead -- ever  
and ever ahead -- in '57 / '58 --  
2020 may be -- at the edge  
of space / and at the ends  
of missile crises.

\*

Antrel's : cash impetus show  
and storytime --  
two sets or three as friends  
come by  
and take direction -- parents  
of children now  
and even older statesmen  
/ playing  
themselves the flux  
and ( always )  
shifting con-  
stants.

\*

Love and bells. Wheels and the music.  
Once upon a time. We're  
part of the loveliness / the conscripted  
or galactic tours of duty --  
lifted from Chi or say from southern  
California -- from  
Cleveland or "da Burgh" -- where  
regional counts -- and regional's  
the source of our good humor -- source  
of these sounds  
they match to moods in their own corners --  
1956 / 2002 --  
when Harlem The Bronx and Huff  
and Syracuse / when  
Cortland Avenue and North Salina  
run together  
/ Power Memorial  
/ Assumption  
Catholic / North Hills  
and  
El Monte.

\*

Blind -- or legally -- and opening  
the womb before  
you'd heard pinballs or Wurlitzers --  
doesn't he love  
the sounds -- the pause when  
arms and gears  
go at their business -- and the voices  
begin -- the odysseys  
refiguring space until he's seeing --  
as old as he is  
when asked -- older and patient  
as he tells it --  
thinking how one young doc  
and he  
had prayed he'd keep his vision  
and -- more  
than he maybe -- enjoyed  
the light  
/ street songs -- and

the  
hours listening  
kept two  
occupied.

\*

"No wonder the two jukes -- one  
stacked with 45s --  
and the genius in morning brews / in  
evening booths pondering  
their endgames -- one fitted with CDs --  
bring all of them -- as if  
I could say what life had been -- B.C.  
and earlier -- as if -- blind  
and black -- I'm Ray or Stevie  
/ Lemon Jefferson -- I'm  
anyone to ask -- if days were more  
than ration points --  
stranger to Dave than kids  
with gizmos  
in their pockets / than  
this century their  
layering  
accents mean  
to tell..."

\*

"Remembering the corners and school stoops  
/ the courts where worlds  
could begin to our surprising -- and  
strangers materialize from sounds --  
changed by the camps / transfers -- by  
breakfast plates and one man's  
sense of being many -- by this doctoring  
let's say / these scribbled  
sheets in east Ohio -- condensing  
to notes no one  
conceived in Fifty-Seven -- from which

the kids go on / Antrel  
goes on -- in lines / in feeling  
almost local -- and  
feeling well almost -- some days  
in the late Eighties --  
when nobody thought  
they'd ever write them  
like the old days -- or  
carry lines  
by heart / across  
the cusp  
of  
centuries."

\*

A little like the old days after all --  
invited to mind again  
and several Thanksgivings -- Antrel  
/ Holmes -- and these  
who refuse / will not be fictionalized --  
lip-syncing groups  
and live -- perfecting their work  
for this  
and every other contest -- until it's  
local -- all of it --  
the locations bridged -- and histories  
of travel just to get here --  
a blind man / poet / massive  
veteran -- measured  
by the songs coins called  
and every current sense  
/ and finding  
what race had been  
/ what  
the beginnings  
of light  
and habits  
always  
were.

\*

"Some morning's it's lamp to lamp -- getting  
up and packed  
and dressed for the day's matters --  
from shadows  
to darkness / light -- then up  
three steps -- key  
slipped / turned -- then steps  
into the Diner -- with  
a dime maybe -- three bills --  
and thinking  
joe bean for my sidekick --  
getting to some place  
safe  
/ to breakfast  
listening."

\*

Then Antrel / Holmes -- and somebody  
new ( he thinks )  
a foil for the blind man -- lifetimes  
from blocks  
where all that music started. But  
what should a voice --  
then several voices -- be to them --  
to their ears --  
raised now -- to streets  
where  
witness means  
a costly  
expertise

as the hungry show themselves / the hungry  
/ face up to their breakfasts --  
and the music's enough / too much  
sometimes -- the samplings  
or pastiche -- that might have  
struck us once  
as science-fiction -- preferring  
the head to heart

/ a mind  
to these naifs  
that still  
appeal

relieving hearts made up on love  
and love's corrections --  
speaking for fifty say / sixty  
and more years  
/ maybe twenty -- married for years  
and once -- or blessed  
to be mistaken -- convinced  
or divorced or single  
still -- recalling the first  
or wrong --  
and kids like these  
/ kids  
tugged in  
by  
their mothers  
for first  
meals.

\*

So what would the music  
say to them?  
And what will this orange glow  
be -- burning  
the dark away -- will voices  
like these decide --  
grounded -- and -- head  
over heels -- sure  
with tricks for  
getting them  
to vinyl?

\*

---

A music that now distracts or calls to mind

our comforts filters the hours burned  
/ billed away or lost in time and the kids' troubles --  
with overtime / and overtime  
the plant cuts back just when it's needed -- until  
we are far beyond -- and Antrel / Holmes --  
with bells announcing each --have visited -- until  
we are tough or numb and something else  
thereafter -- recalling how tough / how young  
/ how moved we were by Paragons and Jesters --  
and changed : by Beirut / Saigon -- by Seoul  
and peacetime streets -- sages in training --  
by motorpools / classrooms -- nights when  
hits / when newly married seemed  
more strange again than numbers -- 1960  
/'62 -- and just about retired --  
beyond the bothers minds were  
moved for first times by.

\*

And tough? And Paragons? Black  
and Hispanic kids? And  
maybe this Pittsburgh kind of guy --  
here when the day dries out --  
waiting for light he prays to spill down  
on the car show? It's all an Impala  
asks of him -- his since the days  
when Jesters / when Crows  
and Chords and Paragons -- that  
Chedwick kind of stuff  
defined the airways -- called  
up his old man's  
pleas -- some choices  
besides the silence  
/ listening.

\*

But -- in the Diner now -- steady  
or nimble enough -- how tough --

---

if not acquainted with the keyboards --  
these thirty or so -- who take  
their being here for granted -- while  
this blind man / vet  
remember times besides -- when  
kids like these claimed blocks --  
alleys mid-block and display-ways in  
where voices echoed / lamp-posts  
and "turf" we'd said were ours  
and really meant it -- while  
darkest and island accents mixed  
/ and "the turf" was ours --  
so long as codes and cops allowed --  
as gains and losses were  
/ bars emptying -- and blocks --  
underscoring cultures -- and  
everywhere the distances -- lessened  
a little by the music --  
voices that rocked -- and love  
/ love lost / and love --  
as clear as lyrics seemed  
in their unfolding / as  
minds -- so long as coffee  
comes around -- warms  
what's left / or on  
the edge / or just  
beginning.

\*

Poignant / paramount -- carried for years  
in lives drawn from street corners  
to airtimes -- even this ageless Holmes --  
recalling that first scotch --  
that girl group and their lead-singer -- then  
some bad hair rubber-shoed  
rain-mused white kid with his note-pad --  
joining her radiance to start  
a second set with his own lyrics  
/ off-key -- and so -- as  
several voices clarify  
/ cuminate in sweet  
and sweeter still

epiphanies

: iced slopes / plateaus -- that personal  
once -- begun in conversations  
with the music - begun in some thoughts --  
some complications / and the lyrics --  
embellished or dimmed -- as the right story  
indicates -- and so many deaths  
you'd think the songs could not be possible --  
these several voices speaking light  
since there's a juke-box --  
until we applaud ourselves -- we  
pay our homage  
to the rhythms / beating  
that one thing  
sensible.

\*

Five / five-thirty -- dragging some days  
or pumped -- pouring some old stuff  
out -- starting new grounds / then slicing  
the peppers and onion cuts -- setting up  
pies for these -- a half / a quarter hour later  
tipping in -- deciding fortunes  
with some jokes -- egg sandwiches Holmes  
already has in mind -- thinking "Once  
upon a Love" -- when we believed  
ourselves -- and (always)  
in sweet chances -- the ways we do  
when voices count on  
one another -- well enough  
to guess  
the thought another's  
working on.

Then there were detours / round-trip bills  
and babies still to pay on -- cats  
urged to pack -- hurried away / hurried back --  
taking on themselves and crafting  
certain versions -- Gerald and Holmes -- Arlene  
and Lilian -- Earl and Marge and Cleve --  
Vito and Herb since dawn -- among new cats

and regulars -- remembering  
the rifts / the dark / the windows ruined  
by thrown stuff -- worlds splurged on  
and lost -- while the kids snuck out  
to hear the locals charm block dances --  
sharing their old man's pain --  
but only just so much -- since  
there were stars for them  
/ and lyrics -- even  
there -- for them  
to count  
on.

So where should we look besides  
the "Moonlight" for our angels?  
And what should the stories be -- behind  
the chrome and glass and cracks  
protesting breakfasts -- poured out upon  
the urge to concentrate? Whatever  
became of forty-fives / became of the steps  
the Catholic kids called Uncle Willie --  
became of the sought and discovered parts --  
divorced -- and ( three times )  
bitterly -- removed from the kids  
since she could not abide  
his transfer -- as if he had asked  
for all of it -- this  
far from air where figures  
stood -- where  
the walls were once --  
and walls were  
soon  
to follow?

\*

If they had been better listeners -- better  
readers after all! But  
now it's steps and stitch. And voices  
( she thinks ) mean Holmes  
followed by the Gulf vets -- healings  
central to every story  
told -- explaining the pick-ups

/ summer leagues  
/ the third-shift stints  
and  
kids imploding  
on  
narcotics

/ these blackest and brown and paler kids  
in sync -- better  
than riches / risks -- treatment  
in extremes -- the bitter  
and better parts -- when jobs  
and cash -- when  
every breath fell short of homes  
you might believe in  
/ the looks of careers  
( you think )  
ripped short  
and  
clarified.

\*

No wonder the songs engage / occasion  
meditation -- and every  
breath -- when quarters drop --  
when genius colors bloom --  
choreographing breakfasts! And so  
he's ( earlier ) come  
to think of it -- gathering the cups  
the night staff  
left for gathering -- and getting out  
pies in time  
( or just about ) for regulars --  
the earliest voices  
earlier -- arriving with nods  
and moods  
/ day jobs to put behind  
and provocations  
/ bowling and always  
bowling  
scores to count on  
and night

classes!

No wonder then -- as close  
as heart / and near  
as love idealized -- leaving these cups  
to clear away / stories  
of streets he's felt for weeks  
were due  
for changes -- from the first words  
that made  
the awful distance bearable --  
the daybright  
and animated briefs -- nursed  
news / triple shots  
of juice  
( he thinks ) -- minded  
to  
cut the slippery  
back.

\*

Imagine that garden nest -- the rabbit  
young a large dog plundered --  
dying one by one -- as the last May chance  
of frost invited telling : then  
powder blue lost summertimes -- even  
as dreams -- as skills  
( hard-worked ) / the sharpening  
and same discouragements  
haunt some -- who leave  
behind their breakfasts --  
or half-plates  
anyway

/ with futures ahead -- hands full  
of songs and help yourself  
/ riffs the darkness mused by streetlamps  
seemed to sponsor -- proving  
again that what you came through  
left you whole -- whole --  
or close enough -- the way  
you see yourself --

waiting for summer stars  
/ inspecting  
the tailpipes / the under  
-the-hood hardware  
/ and turquoise  
panels and  
interior.

\*

Then it's another quarter joe / another side  
of fries / of century --  
springtime and phlox -- and thoughts  
of summer leagues and improves --  
of this ( green backed ) violet at the edges  
of turned fields -- and hearing  
his old man's voice again -- "nobody sleeping  
( soundly ) -- with all that racket  
at the lamp-posts" -- stuff that was almost  
something once worth taking bets on --  
counted in quarters out -- coaxing a man  
( as old as fathers were ) through dreams --  
another midnight or half-past -- stuff you would  
bet your life on once -- after the laced  
and stupid boots -- and four years anywhere --  
moved by some needs you never thought  
you would come home to -- that leave you  
slobbering some nights -- unable  
to say / explain -- to hear in ticking time --  
unless this is Holmes come in  
from every street where it was heading --  
tapping in from blocks  
/ maps -- from any and every  
place -- where  
blinding walked before  
/ and  
then behind  
you.

\*

"Say that I'm minding mine. But who else  
would own this place -- and  
why? -- observed behind -- as real  
as grease-mapped wrap-arounds  
allow for -- bringing the morning world  
to form -- the mind  
at its loss -- chipped cup -- the news  
from Kandahar -- or steelie  
/ or cat's eye -- quarter plays  
that let omebody  
think he's fixture -- adding  
a breakfast tab -- or  
scripting the May dawn  
and  
late May  
clarity.

No wonder these Penguins Satins  
Saints! And shift-work --  
who'd have thought / thought otherwise --  
or these barrels now -- slowing  
a man in lanes the city's widening --  
Bonnevilles and pools  
/ day-ending balloon rides / barbecues?  
Who would have thought?  
And how? And how would you  
like yours Ray?  
And how shall the breakfasts  
heal -- if you  
find a way to name it -- beyond  
the range  
of innocent / and  
the range of  
doctored  
lines?

Coaching us nonetheless -- through  
blues and mutual celebrations --  
Antrel's the tune-man still -- bringing  
the day / the dark  
its shapes -- as even a few lines will --  
or moving points  
that on their own cooperate -- Antrel --  
Doctor Dave -- self-medicated --

marred by his needs -- when medicine's  
unable -- and Holmes --  
and vets -- these kids -- too young  
and veteran -- agreeing  
to words that meant their parts -- until  
the mind and heart  
/ the schoolgrounds seem altogether  
now -- that  
serious stuff you spent so many  
afternoons on --  
imagining a lifetime's loves --  
while texts  
and classes waned -- to  
sheer  
and ( then! ) more  
sheer  
irrelevance.

[Robert Lietz](#) is the author of eight published collections of poems, including [The Lindbergh Half Century](#), [Storm Service](#), and *After Business in the West*. Recent work has been published in *Istanbul Literature Review*, *The Pittsburgh Quarterly Online*, *Interpoetry*, and *Lily*. Meanwhile, he keeps active writing and exploring his interest in digital photography and image processing and their relationship to the development of his poetry.

## Essay



**Essay by Ted Gostomski**  
**Photos by Geoffrey George**

Isle Royale looms large in northwestern Lake Superior, pointing like an arrow to where the glaciers retreated thousands of years ago. It is the largest island on the largest of the Great Lakes. Through fog and rain, wind and waves, it stands as a sentinel, whispering secrets that can only be heard by those who take the time to stay and listen. Isle Royale is a national park and a part of the federal Wilderness System, but it is not without a history and lingering signs of human use.

During the mid-1800s, the American Fur Company, looking to diversify its interests from the increasingly busy fur market, established commercial fishing camps along the Lake Superior shoreline, including one at Isle Royale. But commercial fishing really took hold in the latter part of



Shorline on Mott Island, Isle Royale National Park.

that century when Scandinavian immigrants arrived in Minnesota and began fishing to earn a living. Many moved their operations out to Isle Royale, just 12 miles east of the Minnesota shore, during the summer months. They prospered there, and the practice continued until the formal establishment of the national park after World War II and the arrival of the non-native sea lamprey in the early 1950s combined to bring commercial fishing on Isle Royale to a close.

More than 40 years later, during a visit to Isle Royale to help with bird surveys, a friend and I engaged in a spirited discussion about

the wilderness character of Isle Royale. We are both scientists and conservationists. He is active with his local land trust and feels strongly about protecting wild places. I have worked for the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy, and I am equally passionate about protecting wild places. My friend's major contentions were that true wilderness does not include the constant sound of boat motors, the regular sound of passenger planes bringing visitors, or the demonstration of a human practice that resulted in the exploitation of a Great Lakes fishery. This demonstration he refers to is the Edisen Fishery, where a restored cabin, net house, and boats are lived in, used, and shown by a former commercial fisherman (working as a Park Service interpreter) to "demonstrate" to the visiting public how the commercial fishing families lived and worked on Isle Royale during the 1930s and 1940s.

For my part, I argued that prohibiting particular uses that seem inappropriate simply because they are (or were) human in nature is to perpetuate the dichotomy of humans and wilderness and the inherent lessons that human history is irrelevant and that we have no place in the natural world. I also pointed out that Isle Royale has a unique Great Lakes maritime history, one that is formally recognized in the park's General Management Plan, so we cannot ignore some elements of the island's significance and importance just because it seems at a glance to contradict the island's wilderness values. In the end, though our views still diverged on the points of what is wilderness and how should it be managed, we agreed that Isle Royale is a beautiful place, worthy of the protection it has, and we were glad to be there.

The [Wilderness Act of 1964](#) in part defines wilderness as being "in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape." This is a fair measure, but how does one quantify "domination of the landscape?" Perhaps that's what the authors had in mind when they went further in their definition:

... an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.

... land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable...

Reading this raises a question in my mind, one that has been raised and debated by many others.



Outer and Inner Hill Islands of Isle Royale National Park, with Canada in the distant background.

For me, though, the issue is not a policy question, but one of perspective and understanding. It is an issue of inclusion. The question is this: How is it that the “earth and its community of life” does not include people?

Do not misinterpret what I am hoping to say. The Wilderness Act has been instrumental in protecting some of the most beautiful places in North America, including Isle Royale. It is a stalwart and necessary piece of legislation despite criticism and attack from those who would exploit the land in the name of “the common good.” My only purpose in bringing up the definition of wilderness is to use it as a jumping-off point for exploring the relationship between people and the land. It is not my intention to explore the meaning of wilderness as many others have (see especially *The Trouble With Wilderness* by William Cronon, and [The Great New Wilderness Debate](#) by J. Baird Callicott). So from here on, I will separate “wilderness” from “relationship.”

In a recent issue of [Orion](#) magazine, Mark Dowie wrote about the displacement of native peoples from their homelands when big conservation groups such as [The Nature Conservancy](#) or [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) buy the land and “set it aside” as a preserve. The native people who have lived on the land for generations are then told they can no longer live there, and they can no longer hunt or gather food there as they have for generations. They are told that their stewardship of the land is no longer sufficient.

As Dowie writes, “It’s no secret that millions of native peoples around the world have been pushed off their land to make room for big oil, big metal, big timber, and big agriculture. But few people realize that the same thing has happened for a much nobler cause: land and wildlife conservation.”

Reading this, I was reminded of the conversation with my friend and the question it raised. I have occasionally posed that question to my peers and colleagues since then: Why do we always refer to natural communities separately from human communities?

Granted, contemporary American society has effectively separated itself from the true human place and role in the ecosystem, but shouldn’t we allow for human interaction with the land when we plan for and implement natural areas, preserves, and parks? Do we not reinforce and subconsciously teach and learn a dichotomy between people and nature when we do otherwise? It goes against the fundamental concept of an ecosystem to separate “natural” from “human” or “biodiversity” from “culture.”

Part of my struggle with this question is that I have looked at (and made) the arguments from both sides. I have worked in the natural resource management field for a little over 10 years, and in my younger days I enjoyed the idea of designating a piece of land as a national park or a conservation reserve and in essence saying, “If you want to come here, you do as the land dictates, not as you would like it to be. You (society) will not ruin this small piece of our heritage.”

As I have gained age and experience, though, I have come to realize that this exclusionary approach is not the best long-term solution. In part, this is because land set aside is not necessarily land protected; air and water pollution, exotic plants and animals, and the impacts of ecotourism and outdoor recreation present constant challenges.



Fishing in Isle Royale's Rock Harbor, with the Ranger III ferry docked.

Another part of my life has been spent as an avid canoeist and an amateur history buff. For the past four years, a friend and I have been retracing the nearly 2,000 mile fur trade canoe route from Grand Portage on Lake Superior north and west to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca in Alberta. Our travels by canoe are enriched by—indeed, they are based upon—the history that surrounds the route we are following and the places we have visited. Knowing the history of this route gives it greater depth and makes the whole experience much more personal. Through personal experiences like these, I have become interested in how people relate to the landscape in which they live, and I realize now that people are shaped by the land as much as the land is shaped by people. The two are inextricably linked.

How do I reconcile these two perspectives? How do I work to protect rare plants and animals and wild landscapes while engaging in activities that are simply part of living in today's world? How do I celebrate the human element in nature while promoting restoration of a landscape that resembles what was here before Euro-American settlement? I think the answer lies in recognizing the human role in the system and practicing restraint when we strive to reach beyond that role.

American society seems to live under the general pretense that “because we can, we should.” In the process, as Paul Gruchow once noted in his essay “Naming What We Love,” there is a growing illiteracy about the natural world that contrasts with a nearly universal anxiety we feel about the state of our environment. At a basic level, we as a society do not know our neighbors. How many people know the names of all the birds in their area or can distinguish the native plants from the non-native sod grass in the yard? How many can find one's home on a map that does not have the human-generated landmarks of roads and intersections? We need to learn where we fit in the landscape because, in Gruchow's words, “we will love the earth more competently, more effectively, by being able to name and know something about the life it sustains.”

How can people even begin to name and know the natural world if they are not allowed to truly live with it? The establishment of conservation reserves and the like may provide the only opportunities people have to interact with their environment and to learn something about it. But in some cases, these same reserves fail to engender any feelings of inclusion or express concern for the people living in and around them, people who have used that land for years (though “use” means many things, not all of them, in conservation-speak, “compatible”). This becomes starkly personal when I read about the creation of [Isle Royale National Park](#).

In the years leading up to and following Isle Royale's designation as a national park, one of the first tasks for National Park Service rangers was to erase all signs of contemporary human use by burning the homes of the commercial fishing families who had lived and worked there for many years. Later, perhaps reflecting on what they had done, the National Park Service established interpretive programs about the island's commercial fishing era, along with its history of copper mining, logging, Native American use, and summer resorts. Though burning cabins and displacing commercial fishermen is a terrible way to establish a park, the National Park Service is right to talk about—in fact celebrate and honor—the human history that is interwoven with the lands under their charge. The land is rich in stories about the positive relationships between people and the land and how those people adapted to and lived with their particular environmental challenges.



Carnivorous pitcher plants on Raspberry Island Bog, Isle Royale National Park.

Howard Sivertson grew up in Grand Marais, Minnesota, on the north shore of Lake Superior.

His family was one whose livelihood depended on commercial fishing on Isle Royale, so Howard spent half his young life on the island. He tells a story about when he started school and realized how island life was part of his identity.

I remember once when I was five years old, I returned to Duluth from Isle Royale to attend kindergarten... The teacher asked the children to introduce themselves and tell what they did during the summer. When my turn came, I had difficulty expressing myself. My terms and place names describing Isle Royale made little sense to outsiders, so the teacher asked me to draw what I was talking about on the blackboard. Two hours later I had filled every board in the room.

Howard's drawings of gas boats, steamships, moose, net reels, and dozens of other images all represented the inextricable link between him and the island and how the island had defined his life and experiences to that point. Is Howard's experience any less traditional? To disregard these types of experiences, adaptations, and uses of the land because they are "post-settlement" or simply because they are human is to ignore a whole other perspective of the land and water conservationists seek to protect. Knowing the history of the land and heeding the lessons of restraint and adaptation learned by humans or moose or a white pine is central to cultural survival. Natural history is human history.

Living and working in a place and depending on it as Howard's family did, for personal sustenance but also for some financial security, creates a strong bond between person and place and a strong

identity as a part of the larger community. How else do the ties between people and places manifest themselves? How else might we feel and express a special passion for a landscape? Among remote communities, and especially among island dwellers, connections to the land are forged through contact with a community of friends and family. When experiences are shared and memories are made, a place—a landscape—becomes the storehouse for those memories. Revisiting those memories happens when going through photo albums, looking at maps, or when playing music. Some music may just be songs that were heard at that time, other music is borne of a certain place and time—bagpipes in the Scottish Highlands, a saxophone in New Orleans or Chicago, a fiddle played by firelight along the shores of an island.

I am not a musician, but I recognize the sounds of Isle Royale and Lake Superior in the way a guitar or fiddle is played, or in the powwow drums that engender the heartbeat of this northern land. In [The Pine Island Paradox](#), Kathleen Dean Moore explores the claim that people are separate from, and superior to, nature. In one chapter, she describes music heard during a ferry ride somewhere in the Pacific Northwest: guitar players on the ferry, thrushes on the islands they pass in the growing dusk, and, on one particular island, an unseen flute player whose recitation of “Amazing Grace” causes the

guitar players to pick up the tune and others on board the ferry to begin singing. Though she does not overtly make the connection, she hints that there is one between the land and people that is made through music.



The clear and jugged shoreline of Isle Royale.

Music is a large part of an islander’s life because it is easy to carry. In [Once Upon An Isle](#), Howard Sivertson recalls “Sanger Fest,” when families on Isle Royale would get together to play music, dance, and sing the songs of their native Scandinavia. When writing about island leisure activities, National Park Service historian Tim Cochrane felt that he had “too little room to discuss Island music and dance.” Still, I have one memory that typifies what I imagine to be a scene that has played out on Isle Royale many times in its long history of human habitation.

“Christmas in July” is an event familiar to almost anyone who has worked at a summer camp. It’s a break from the ordinary routine, a reason to get together for fun and friendship. Isle Royale is no different, except that the name has a distinctly island twist; it’s called “Chrismoose.” On the east end of Isle Royale, Chrismoose was held at the Ralph House, a small cabin on the main island shared by four

park employees and tucked into a rocky ledge of shoreline just down the trail from the Rock Harbor Visitor Center. It's a rustic but comfortable little place with a screened-in porch that overlooks the harbor, and a small living room that is dominated by a stone fireplace on one wall.

Everyone showed up for the Chrismoose festivities. Close to 30 people all came together on this special evening, and we all looked forward to this event with great enthusiasm. Dinner started at 6:00 PM. Two turkeys were prepared, and everyone brought a dish to pass. Lights were hung around the porch, and intertwined with the lights was a garland made of moose droppings. A trio of musicians (plus others who intermittently joined in) played original and traditional tunes on acoustic guitars, a fiddle, harmonica, washboard, and wash tub. They called themselves "Fish Guts and Entrails."

As the sun went down, the band moved from the screen porch into the lighted living room, and that's when the dancing began. The furniture was cleared to one side, and couples danced, while others crowded around the edges of the room to watch and listen, clapping and stomping their feet to the music. The boys were playing a lively tune, and excited shouts and laughter were everywhere. From outside near the trees, the windows glowed in the dim light and the shadows of dancers played across the frames, as the music rose into the air like a thin plume of smoke, spreading out and dissipating into the northern night sky.

Three years later, John Wilson, the fiddle player in "Fish Guts and Entrails" moved to Mott Island where the park headquarters are located. That same year, I was also working for the Park Service and living on Mott. Employee housing on Mott Island consists of barracks-style dorms. Two separate buildings that look like very small apartments contain eight kitchens, each one shared by four people. One night, while walking among the kitchens back to my dorm room, I heard John's fiddle. As I walked past his kitchen, I saw him standing inside, playing a tune in the dim glow of a fluorescent light above the sink. He was alone. His eyes were closed and his foot tapped as he drew his bow back and forth over the strings. I stood there in the growing darkness, captivated by this scene of a man caught up in his music.

Five years after watching John play his fiddle at dusk, I went to see Natalie MacMaster, a fiddle player from Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. The house lights went down as the show began, her band came on stage, and then a recording of ocean waves, rolling along an unseen shore, filled the air. Off-stage, Natalie began to play and then made her entrance. The image of John Wilson in his kitchen came back to me with startling clarity. Like John on that summer evening, Natalie stood in dim light, her eyes closed and her foot tapping in time as her bow drew a beautiful tune from the strings. She was clearly in another place, steeped in her island culture and the heritage of music that is strongly connected to that place. Memories of Isle Royale flooded in, and for a moment, I, too, was in another place and time.

I think the music John and Natalie play comes from a long history of people who feel the ties that bind them to the land, the sea, and to their ancestry. Their music is one voice in the island symphony, a representation of the people who live there, carving out a life that maintains a close connection to their place. Listening to Natalie or John is to listen to all the others who came before

them. Perhaps if each of us took an inventory of how a particular place dwells in our hearts and how we maintain a connection to that place through books or art or music, maybe each of us would find a passion and connection we did not know we had. Maybe we would begin to sense our place in the community of plants and animals, water and air.

People and the land are connected in many ways. Anyone who feels excitement at the approach of deer season or the opening day of trout fishing knows this connection. Anyone who plants a garden and never has to buy vegetables from the grocery store during the summer and may even have enough to can and bring out during the deep cold of winter knows this connection.

People have lived and worked and laughed and died on this planet for centuries. It is not enough to set aside land—to “protect” it. We need to make the unique histories of each place known, find a way to recognize and honor the good things that come from the connections between people and place, and we must find a way to make all of this part of what land conservation and restoration is all about.

If people do not feel that connection, if they are made to believe they were never part of the landscape, than what reason do they have to support the protection of it? What role should they see for themselves? When we learn to see the connections between ourselves and the land, then maybe we will begin to understand our responsibilities as members of that community and become concerned about how to fulfill those commitments.



Gneiss Shoals at Shaw Island, Isle Royale National Park.

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## Essay



by **Evan Eisenberg**

Over the past few centuries, our perception of nature has become narrowly visual. As a result nature has taken on in our minds the frozen perfection of calendar photos, or the streamlined motion of television specials. Living in modern civilization, we see nature as an object to be manipulated or a view to be admired. We hear nature hardly at all. At the same time, we have come to hear music as a privileged language of human emotion, with no reference (except when the words or program say so) to the world outside.

While it may be a modern specialty, the bias toward a visual perception of nature is hardly a modern invention. It is not even a human invention. As primates, we are profoundly visual creatures. Our eyes' precise stereoscopy suits us to size up the world, our hands' precision grip to seize it. We anatomize and butcher, have visions and build.

The eye is attuned to objects, the ear to process. The eye lives in space, the ear in time. It is no wonder that music, of all arts, lends itself most readily to improvisation. While the eye perches dryly at a certain point of view, the ear swims. Since the eye individuates while the ear unites, music has long been thought the art best able to give humans a sense of oneness with each other and with the universe. The word we unfailingly use for the reconciliation of unlike things is a musical word, harmony. Music is perhaps the most social of all arts, and one of the few that admits of group improvisation.

For Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, music was the voice of the cosmos itself. For many traditional peoples it depicts the cycles and moods of nature, and often involves a delicate dialogue with birds and crickets, water and wind. By us it is bricked up in concert halls or living rooms, or blared from speakers that turn the outdoors into a living room. Meanwhile the sounds of nature are bricked out, glazed out, muffled by air conditioners and shredded by lawnmowers.

Both our perception of nature and our action upon it might be improved if we relied a bit less on sight and a bit more on sound. At least, we might use sound as a model. We might use sound in general, and one kind of sound in particular, as a model for our collaboration with nature.



What form should that collaboration take? The deep ecologists want us to sing one faint part among millions in nature's (imagined) harmony. The planet managers want to compose and conduct a planet-symphony of their own devising. Maybe there is a third possibility: a kind of earth jazz.

Its advice for humankind might go something like this: Ditch your notated score—whether ascribed to nature or yourself—and learn to improvise. Respond as flexibly to nature as nature responds to you. Accept nature's freedom as the premise of your own: accept that both are grounded in a deeper necessity. Relax your rigid beat and learn to follow nature's rhythms—in other words, to swing.

A good model for the planet might be a bebop quartet led by a saxophonist. The style of each sideman pervades the whole, since the drummer, bassist, and pianist play almost all the time. Each player, though, also takes solos, stretches of music that he makes his own. During most of these solos the leader "lays out." But during the leader's solos the other musicians keep playing. In other words, they are indispensable and he is not—a sobering lesson for any leader and one that man had better learn soon.

If you translate time into space, the sax player into humankind, and the three sidemen into other taxa—making the piano, say, the nonhuman animals, the bass the plants, the drum set a catch-all for fungi, protocists, and bacteria—you get a lesson in how humans can work with nature. For humans to thrive, even the most humanized spaces must be inoculated with other species. Wildness, like swing, must flow through all things. But for other species to thrive, they must have some spaces to themselves: spaces from which humans discretely withdraw, excuse or recuse themselves, "lay out."

The leader of a jazz group takes a bird's eye view of its music. On some level, he is aware of the sounds each player is making. That awareness shapes his own playing, which in turn nudges the others' in sundry ways. But he does not try to make each note that is played fit some preset scheme.

All life plays variations on the same few chord changes. Each taxon improvises, following certain rules but obeying no predetermined destiny. Each responds to the riffing, comping, noodling and vamping of those around it. Life makes itself up as it goes along. Withal, a certain unity emerges that no one has willed.

Now, it might be objected that jazz is only a small part of the world's music. Since it grew up on a



few small patches of the earth's surface—the Mississippi River valley, the stockyards of Chicago, the steel cliffs of Manhattan Island—how can it claim to shed light on the relations of humans and nature in other places?

Jazz is not just any music, but a mongrel of splendid pedigree. It is an urban music with deep rural roots. Its rhythms arise from the juxtaposition of chicken coops and locomotives, of bayous and steel mills, of tenements and penthouses. Most of all, it springs from the meeting of Africa and

Europe—the tree where man was born, and the the axe that would take it down—on the soil of a new world.

Another reason jazz fits the bill is that it is a music of exile. Born of the African diaspora, it gives voice to our nomadic urges as well as our longing for a home. The bedrock of jazz is the blues—a music of yearning, of anger, of dashed hopes that (like the twelve-bar form itself) always spring back. The blues are born of exile, oppression, and shattered love. While these are the special condition of the African-American, they are also, in a broader sense, the state of all humans outside Eden.

For modern people, maybe for all people, earth jazz begins with earth blues. Until you have felt in your bones what it is to be a species that cannot help but change the world—a species that in making its paradise unmakes Eden—your attempts at a joyful, playful dialogue with nature are bound to ring hollow. Until you have sat down and wept by the rivers of Babylon, you will not discover that they, too, flow from Eden. When you do make that discovery, the Lord's song will rise in your throat unbidden.

### **Jamming with the Goddess**

“It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing”—Ellington's dictum fits earth jazz, too. What is swing? Pedants have gone grey trying to define it. For our purposes, we can think of it as a kind of suppleness, a looseness far more exact than mere exactness. To swing, one must be aware of the rhythms behind the rhythm. In nature, this means the chaos behind apparent order, and the order behind apparent chaos. A rhythm in jazz is like the coastline of Maine: no single measurement is possible: as you look closer, new convolutions appear. A good jazz solo can never be notated: you can get down to the level of dotted hemidemisemiquavers and still know that further layers of complexity lurk just beneath. Biologists trying to describe or model a natural system often get the same feeling. And Ralph Ellison may have had the same feeling about social systems when—using a Louis Armstrong record as his jumping-off point—he said of “invisibility”: “You're never quite on the beat. And you slip into the breaks and look around.”

We do not swing. Our science, our lifestyles are rigid. We deal with nature now as one who carries a mug of coffee in his right hand and a book wedged between his right elbow and his side. The arm is locked rigidly against the body, there is no give, the coffee sloshes wildly with every step. No wonder we lose so much.

Let me come back to a question I raised earlier. How do you collaborate with Gaia if you don't know exactly how she works, or what she wants? You do it, I think, by playing earth jazz. You improvise. You are flexible and responsive. You work on a small scale, and are ready to change direction at the drop of a hat. You encourage diversity, giving each player—human or nonhuman—as much room as possible to stretch out. You trade fours with the goddess: play four bars, listen to her response, respond, listen, respond. True, sometimes her response may not be clear for centuries. But then no one said this would be easy.



At any rate, it may be easier to accept our exile from Eden—and the need to intensify that exile, in a sense, by stepping back and giving Eden more elbow room—if we see it as the premise of a creative give-and-take. The music of Eden may have been gorgeous beyond our fluffiest dreams, but whatever it was it was not earth jazz. In that tangle of world and self, trading fours was not an option. Without difference, without distance, there is no dialogue.

### **Midnight At the Oasis**

Jazzmen trade fours; shepherds in pastoral trade sixes, swapping hexameters in friendly strife. Both practices may go back to the games of real shepherds. While the static ideal of Arcadia may be a mirage, some of its ancient habits—of playful riffing, of shifting boundaries, of discord deftly harmonized—can serve us surprisingly well. Panpipes or saxophones, the basic point is the same.

Let me start giving some examples of missing the point and of getting the point. In the Sonoran Desert of Arizona, there is a place the Papago Indians call A'al Waipia where sweetwater springs trickle into a small pond, inciting a riot of green in a world of grey. For thousands of years, A'al Waipia was the site of Indian settlements. As late as 1957, Papago irrigation ditches fed more than a dozen acres of crops and orchards.

In that year, the National Park Service moved in. As one of the few true desert oases in North America, A'al Waipia had to be protected. With the connivance of an Indian who claimed title to the land, the Park Service summarily condemned the fields and buildings. The oasis was returned to its natural state, so that its full value as a refuge of flora and fauna could be realized.

Things have not turned out quite as planned. Each year, the oasis looks less like an oasis. Each year, it loses plants and animals. When the ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan visited A'al Waipia in the early 1980s, not only had the fruit trees died; so had most of the "wild" trees. Only three cottonwoods remained, and only four willows. Summer annuals, too, were scarce. A survey Nabhan undertook with the help of ornithologists at three different times of year found a total of thirty-two bird species at A'al Waipia. At a similar oasis in the Mexican Sonora, the scientists found over sixty-five.

The Mexican oasis, known to the Papago as Ki:towak, is only thirty miles from A'al Waipia, but its aspect is very different. Resplendent with palms, cottonwoods, willows, elderberry, salt cedar, date, pomegranate, and fig; verdant in summer with squash, watermelon, beans, and other crops, and with wild greens coaxed forth by plowing and irrigation; its ditches rife with Olney's tule, the edible bulrush from which the oasis takes its name, Ki:towak offers plenty of food and shelter for teal, white-faced ibis, and dozens of other birds A'al Waipia no longer sees. For this is a cultivated oasis—cultivated in the thrifty, painstaking Papago way, of which I will say more in the next chapter—just as A'al Waipia was before the Park Service arrived.

Nabhan quotes a Papago farmer: "When people live and work in a place, and plant their seeds and water their trees, the birds go live with them. They like those places, there's plenty to eat and that's when we are friends to them."

Of course, I share the Park Service's presumption that ecologically sensitive places should be left wild or allowed to go wild whenever possible. But when indigenous people have been living in a place for thousands of years, chances are the "wild" things in that place have coevolved with them. Pulling them out of the ecological structure (if indeed we have the right to do so in the first place) may cause its collapse. A parks service schooled in earth jazz would be flexible enough to avoid such an error, or at least to correct it once its effects become clear. Unfortunately, by the time the actual Parks Service concedes this specific error, it may be too late, as there may be very few traditional Papago farmers left.



### **Avoiding the Nantucket Sleighride**

The same kind of flexibility can be applied to broader issues of "resource use." In the past couple of centuries, planet managers have convinced themselves that they know how to manage nature "sustainably." Scientists study a given renewable "resource"—fir, cod, what have you—and arrive at a consensus as to its growth rate, recovery rate, and so on. They determine the "maximum sustained yield"—the harvest that loggers or fishermen should be able to take every year, year after year, for all eternity—and the government sets its limits accordingly.

The only problem with this system is that it almost never works. For all the sophistication of their computer models, scientists have only the vaguest idea of what is going on in the woods and still less of what is going on under the water. The manifold factors that make fisheries, for instance, surge or ebb in cockeyed cycles—prey and predators, climate and currents, toxins and dams and a hundred things not yet identified—ensure that consensus stays slippery. Controlled, reproducible experiments are out of the question. With so much wriggle room, industry can always find scientists who will testify that a higher yield would be just fine, and politicians who will believe them. Even limits set in good faith tend to put too much faith in the compliance of fishing fleets. Worse, they put too much faith in the compliance of the fish themselves. If their population has been stable for several years, it is trusted to stay stable.

You might think that if a maximum sustained yield started to look unsustainable, it would be revised downward. In fact, just the opposite happens. What economists call a "ratchet effect" takes hold. In good years, extra boats go out and extra processing plants get built. But in the lean years that inevitably follow, those boats and plants are not put in drydock or shut down. Instead industry looks to the government, which responds with subsidies of one kind or another. Boats are kept afloat, relentlessly fishing an ever dwindling fishery. More often than not, the net effect—seen in recent years in herring, cod, ocean perch, salmon, lake trout, sardine, anchoveta, and many other stocks—is collapse.

A society attuned to earth jazz would not let itself get locked into such patterns. Its scientists, knowing their own fallibility, would recommend limits below those that their computers spat out. They would be ready to revise them downward at the first sign of decline—that is, at the first sign not masked by the froth of natural variation—and would revise them upward only by small degrees. Policy makers, knowing a thing or two about human nature, would assume that the scientists knew even less than they said they knew. Nor would they wait for perfect consensus before taking action. They would hedge their bets and make their policies as supple and reversible as possible. Enlisting the help of business and labor, they would evade the grip of the ratchet effect by diversifying local economies and spreading risk. In such a society, communities would not be hostage to the leaping and diving of a single resource like whalemens on a Nantucket sleighride—a ride that ends in the destruction of one party or both. But the society as a whole would ride the waves of nature's changes, and humankind's.



### **Pick Your Eden**

Whether we like it or not, the world culture of the near future will be, in large part, American. Both the best and the worst in American culture will be represented: the only question is, in what proportions? By speaking of earth jazz, I am trying to apply the greatest product of American culture to the greatest problem the world faces. It is not an answer to the problem, of course. Even to call it a

model is stretching things a bit. When you come right down to the nitty-gritty of farming, industry, and the making of cities and villages, each region needs to work out its own answers. But as each of us hoes our own row (or nonrow, as the case may be), jazz may give us inspiration.

What seems at first glance to be vagueness may prove useful. Most visions of humankind's place in nature fail, I think, because they mark out too specific a place. One visionary likes the medieval city, another the nineteenth-century farming village, a third the desert Pueblo. It might make a good parlor game: "Pick Your Eden." The hunter-gatherer band; the Neolithic village; the putatively matrifocal culture of Old Europe; the "wild gardening" of South and Central American Indians; the "Old Planting Culture" of the South Seas; the elaborate mixed farming of East Asia; the wind-and-water technology of early modern Europe... Each of these has been somebody's pick, and none has been everybody's.

While each Eden may have something to teach us, none can begin to address the wide range of problems we face. Worse, each makes the mistake of being an Eden—a world made whole, once and for all. Better, I think, to accept the exile from Eden, with all the division and instability that is its baggage. Better to take as your model not a thing, time-and-place, or state of affairs, but a process.

Rather than be hostage of my own tastes, I start with the rock-bottom fact that we need wilderness. We need it not only for our psychological well being (at least, this seems likely) but for sheer biological survival. The question then is, What is our proper relation to wilderness? How can we keep it alive, when our natural tendency is to overrun or smother it? Should we live in it, supposing that were logically possible? Should we live like it—use it, that is, as a template for our manmade world? If we cannot live exactly like it—if the manmade world has some rules of its own—how can we continue to enjoy the boons it confers on us and on all other creatures?

In seeking answers to these questions, I have tried to skirt the problems that cling to particular Edens by choosing models that are somewhat abstract, like the Mountain and the Rivers of Eden. And now I have used a model that is not a place or a time or a kind of relation between humans and nature, but something else entirely: a kind of music. Something else entirely—it is, after all, on a different ontological plane—but not something unrelated. For it seems to me that music, of all the arts, has the most to say about the relation of humans and nature. Music describes the workings of nature (including humans) at a level deeper than any particular landscape—deeper, but not more abstract. It works on a different plane than the real world, but on its own plane it is just as specific and just as exact. That is why it can mirror some things in the real world more exactly than language, which is confined to the same plane as the real world and is constantly banging into the wrong things. Music, by contrast, shares the vast sonic plane with a fairly narrow set of natural sounds. It has infinite space for manoeuvre, infinite shades of nuance.

Because of this, and because the vast ocean of the world's music is fed by rivulets from every landscape and every culture, music has something to say about the relation between humans and nature on every inhabited inch of the earth's surface. In this way it avoids the twin perils of vagueness on the one side, and limited applicability on the other, that afflict more literal models.

A model is not worth much unless it can serve, somewhere down the line, as a guide to action. First, though, it may be useful to listen more closely to an idea essential to earth jazz: the idea of learning from nature.



### **Gardening the Amazon**

Anthropology is peculiar among the sciences in that its most out-of-date books are generally its best. The first, stumbling practitioners were the last to get a good look at the objects of study. It is as if the solar system had begun to disintegrate during the lifetimes of Galileo and Kepler and by Einstein's time consisted of the earth, the sun, and a cloud of dust.

Unfortunately, the first anthropologists did not take "primitive" farming very seriously. Its rituals, its "magic," the social roles it involved,

the strange beliefs it seemed to imply—these were intriguing. Its efficacy, though, was presumed to be negligible when compared with that of modern agriculture.

For example, the most common agriculture of the rainforest, swidden or shifting cultivation, was long regarded as crude and wasteful. Its common name, "slash-and-burn," became a synonym for short-sighted mayhem. Only in the fifties and sixties, with the work of Conklin and Rappaport, did ethnographers begin to see just how deft a method swidden could be. New subtleties are even now coming to light, notably in Darryl Posey's studies of the Gorotire Kayapo.

The Kayapo are a fierce and ancient people who once roamed and ruled a portion of the Amazon basin as large as France. Though their lands have been eaten away by ranches and plantations, they now live in a proposed reserve of some five million acres, which includes grassland and savanna as well as rainforest. A few generations ago, the Kayapo were seminomadic; the entire tribe would trek for six to eight months, relying only on wild foods. Though they are now settled in villages, they still go on frequent hunting and foraging trips—including treks of two or three weeks—and spend several months of each year living in Brazil-nut groves.

In clearing a plot of forest for a garden, the men in each family fell the largest trees standing near the center of the plot in such a way that they topple outward, bringing smaller trees down with them. The result is a circle of just under an acre, constellated like a wheel. Great tree trunks radiate from the center: toward the circumference is a tangle of branches and leafage.

While all this biomass is baking in the sun, getting ready for burning, the women find their way through the outer tangle and into the open lanes between the trunks. Here they do something that textbook slash-and-burn gardeners do not do: they plant about a quarter of their root crops before the burn. When the fire does come, the root systems of these yams, sweet potatoes, taro, and manioc will be ready to suck up the flush of nutrients it lets loose. Moreover, they will have a jump on the weed

seeds that will also want a share of that bonanza.

A slow burn is the ideal. Moving from one pile of debris to the next, the Kayapo may take the better part of a day to burn a single plot. This way, the heat is kept low and the roots of the crops already planted are not damaged.

A few days later, when the ashes have cooled, the women plant the rest of the root crops. A week or so after that, the men gather the branches and twigs that have not been thoroughly burned, make piles, and set them alight. In the ashes the women plant beans, squash, melons, and other plants that are particularly hungry for nutrients. The staggered planting helps ensure a staggered harvest: a good thing where food storage is difficult.

Now the plot looks less like a wheel than like an archery target. Allowing for variations that take advantage of the plot's various soil types, the crops are mainly arranged in concentric rings. In the outer ring, which is richest in nutrients because it is where the most of the foliage fell, papaya, bananas, cotton, urucu, tobacco, and beans thrive. The next ring is manioc, the next corn and rice. In the center are sweet potatoes and yams.

After a few seasons, this garden will no longer be planted. But it will not be "abandoned"—not in the textbook sense. True, it will be allowed to revert to forest. But it will remain useful to the Kayapo for decades. Though corn and rice disappear, sweet potatoes and yams keep bearing for four or five years, bananas and urucu for eight to twelve years, kupa for thirty or forty years. The volunteer plants that begin the process of succession include fruit trees, palms, and medicinal herbs. They also include berries that attract birds and other wildlife that the Kayapo like to hunt.

Once they are planted, the gardens will pretty much go of themselves. They have few pest problems, mainly because they are so small and widely scattered—in time and space—that large concentrations of pests can't build up. They can be left alone for months, and at later stages for years, which means they are well suited to a seminomadic (or hemiseminomadic) lifestyle. They can be visited and picked from during treks.

These gardens give high yields for very little work. In the balance sheet of calories invested against calories returned, they are triumphantly in the black: far more so than most modern fields. They also improve the soil of the rainforest. In fact, the "Indian black soil" found in certain places is aptly named, since it may well be an Indian creation. This, too, contradicts the textbooks, which tell us that swidden gardens lose their fertility after a year or two.

But then a question arises. If old plots are still fertile, why don't the Kayapo keep planting them? Why walk three or four hours to new gardens when you can replant old gardens that are just fifteen minutes away? In three or four years, admittedly, the nutrients released by the burn would be used up. But then why not do a new burn in a ten-year old garden, instead of waiting twenty years as the Kayapo do?

The reason has already been hinted at. Old fields that are returning to forest are full of plants directly

useful to the Kayapo, as well as berries, fruits, and browse that attract birds and mammals. The latter factor may be the key. For all its abundance, the rainforest is not rich in meat. (That is why almost no pure hunter-gatherers live there.) The more widely the old gardens are dispersed, the greater the pool of game on which they can draw.



### Resource Islands

The Kayapo have learned to play the forest's own game, and win. Yet the forest does not lose. While parts of the ecosystem are changed to meet the people's needs, the changes are subtle—so subtle that Western eyes can hardly detect them. The structural principles of the forest are respected, and the ecosystem as a whole keeps its integrity.

The contrast with modern agriculture, as practiced in the ranches and plantations that are carved out of the Kayapo's ancient lands, could not be more striking. Instead of an acre, thousands of acres are cleared at once. Deprived of the forest's parasol, the fragile soil is baked by the sun. Organic matter breaks down rapidly and is soon leached or washed away by the heavy rains. The rains also wash away the soil itself, or pound it until it is hard as brick. In the space of a few years, forest has turned to desert.

Subtle as their swidden gardens are, the Kayapo have even subtler ways of playing the forest's game. Along their ancient paths through the forest, often near streamside campsites worn flat and hard with centuries of use, are patches of forest preternaturally rich in food plants. They did not get that way naturally (or rather, they did, if one grants that humans are part of nature). In these places, roots, tubers, stalks, and fruits foraged from the forest nearby have been replanted to form "resource islands." For a Kayapo it is second nature to replant an unfinished bit of food near where he shits.

Nor is it only the forest's game that the Kayapo play. In the campo (grassland) and cerrado (savanna) that are part of their range, and where for reasons of health they like to site their villages, there are islands of forest known as apete. These are much more common near the villages than elsewhere. At first glance, these patches of forest seem natural. Only recently have anthropologists caught on to the fact that some three-quarters of them are manmade. The Kayapo make them by building compost piles from branches and leaves, inoculating the compost with bits of ant and termite nests, planting trees they find especially useful, and then allowing "natural" afforestation to take over. After a few decades, this process can result in an apete as big as ten acres.

When Posey and a colleague collected 140 species of plants from apete near Gorotire, they learned that 138 of them were considered useful by the Kayapo, and 84 had been deliberately planted. Besides serving as supermarkets, the islands are used as shelters in time of war and epidemic, as refuges from the midday sun, as studios for body painting, as playgrounds, and as motels for trysting lovers.



Formerly, it was believed that the only way indigenous peoples managed the savanna was by burning, to keep it open and encourage the growth of fresh grass. The Kayapo do burn the campo, and one reason is to get fresh grass that will draw game. The other reason, though, is not to discourage trees, but to encourage the growth and fruiting of certain fire-loving trees.

Naturally, the Kayapo's ways of playing with nature have stimulated new thought about the beginnings of farming. Most scholars have assumed that people would have to be settled in one place before the domestication of plants could get started. But the Kayapo (and other peoples lately studied) show us forms of semidomestication that mesh deftly with a seminomadic way of life. Indeed, if you could shield your eyes from the slash-and-burn farming on which they have lately come to depend more heavily, and look only at their ways of moving and manipulating "wild" plants, you might

think you had found the missing link between gathering and gardening.

The irony is dense: The Amazon basin, the one place on earth where nature and culture are most fiercely at odds, is also the place where the distinction between them comes to seem a fiction, thin as mist. But many other forms of wild gardening can be found in many other parts of the world.

### **Signposts in the Forest**

To be sure, indigenous farming is not always good farming. Slash-and-burn, for example, is not always done as well as the Kayapo do it. Where population pressures are too great, fallow periods are often too short and patches too close together. In tropical Africa, the forest fallow has been largely abandoned in favor of a much shorter grass fallow. In such cases, the forest is destroyed more slowly but just as surely as it would be destroyed by Western farming. Nor are Western incursions always to blame. Misuse of swidden in Africa seems to have started in prehistory, shortly after the practice was introduced from Asia. Scientists have found that sickle-cell anemia occurs mainly in those parts of Africa where slash-and-burn farming is an ancient practice. The reason is that having a single, recessive gene for sickle cell is a defense against malaria. Where malaria is common, the gene is favored, even though people who have the bad luck to have two of them become anemic. Malaria is common in places where bad swiddening has caused compaction of the soil, creating pools of standing water that are maternity wards for mosquitoes.

Peoples that have lived in the same place for a long time without ruining it are not "natural." They are smart and they are lucky. And because they have lived in the same place for a long time, they have been able to fine-tune their dealings with nature. No primitive people that is still around today can really be primitive. All have thousands of years of trial and error under their belts. In many cases, they have had the same basic technology for centuries, which has allowed them to work out many of the kinks—the places where technology rubbed the wrong way against nature, or against

people, or against itself. From this point of view, it is we who are primitive.

But non-Western societies have not always been models of ecological rectitude. The collapse of the Maya seven centuries before Cortes may have been caused largely by the felling of trees to fuel the fires in which they made lime stucco for their vast monuments. The volcanic highlands of Central Mexico seem to have lost soil at least as rapidly to pre-Columbian farming as they would when the Spaniards brought the plow. An animistic sense of oneness with nature did not prevent the Maoris from deforesting much of New Zealand and clubbing into extinction its flightless moas. The much admired nature religion of the North American Indians did not stop them from overhunting the buffalo as soon as they got horses and rifles. Nor did believing that Buddha-mind was in all things prevent Chinese monks from shaving the mountains to feed their funeral pyres. Asian medicine, with its shamanistic faith in animal powers, has brought the Siberian tiger, the Bengal tiger, the Asian bear, the black rhinoceros, and a host of other noble beasts to the brink of oblivion. Meanwhile the same culture that gave us Zen ink drawings is erasing with quick strokes many of the world's last forests, importing almost four times as much timber as any other country.

Suppose we grant, then, that non-Western peoples are not always perfect. Surely we have much to learn from those who, like the Kayapo, do certain things supremely well. Why not take the wild garden as our model?

We may do so, but with a grain of salt. In its purest forms, the wild garden is well suited to people whose wants are modest, whose tools are simple, and who are thinly scattered across the face of the Mountain. Most of us do not fit that description. The wild garden takes us closer to Eden than we can wisely go.

Our way of learning from nature has to be more abstract; the systems we model on natural systems have to be more concentrated, less mixed up with the extant natural systems themselves. Since we can't trust ourselves to be as smart as the Kayapo—or rather, as much smarter than the Kayapo as our greater numbers and power would require—we had better mess with wilderness as little as possible. Jumping back to our basic metaphor, we might put it this way: Our kind of earth jazz has to have a harder edge. If the Kayapo play a kind of New Orleans shuffle, the parts seamlessly bobbing and weaving, what we have to play is more like hard bop. The ideal would be to use our solo space—farms, gardens, factories—as boldly and economically as Sonny Rollins uses his.

Even so, we have much to learn from the Kayapo and their peers. Their paths are not our paths; but in the green depths of their paths are signs that may point our way.

[Evan Eisenberg](#) is the author of [The Ecology of Eden](#) (Knopf, Vintage) and [The Recording Angel](#), recently issued in an expanded edition by Yale University Press. His writing on nature, culture, politics, and technology has appeared in The New Yorker, The Atlantic, the New York Times, The New Republic, The Nation, Slate, Salon, Natural History, Discover, and numerous other periodicals.

## Essay



by Tom Leskiw

*“If you listen to the thrush and hear a thrush, you’ve not really heard the thrush. But if you listen to a thrush and hear a miracle, then you’ve heard the thrush.”*

— Zen parable

Bird vocalizations—songs and calls that herald their presence—have always mattered and always will.

Long before recorded history, hunters pursued birds for sustenance. The flocks’ ceaseless chatter betrayed their location. The most skilled hunters learned to imitate bird sounds to draw the winged ones toward them. Adding a voice inflection that suggested that “the bird” was wounded or perhaps a fledgling that had become separated from its parents helped hasten the arrival of the flock—or perhaps the birds’ predators in search of an easy meal.



Today, when intrigued by birdsong, our genetic memory may recognize something overlooked by our conscious mind. As Jean-Michael Cousteau writes, “With our eyes closed, we break free of two-dimensional thought, and become aware of nature in depth, to the sides and behind us, over our heads and even beneath our feet. A sound gives us more than a sensation of place—it triggers feelings of excitement or fear, commands our attention, awakens memories, makes us instantly and completely alert. When we listen to the sounds of nature, we are communicating with our aboriginal past on a level we may not entirely understand. It can be exhilarating or disturbing, but it never fails to touch us deeply.”

The ancient Persians based their first calendar on avian comings and goings. Throughout Europe, the distinctive song of the cuckoo—of clock fame—signaled that it had returned from wintering in Africa. The birds’ presence was immortalized in the earliest ballad in the English language: “Sing cucu, nu. Sing cucu, /Summer is i-cumen in.”



Music created by humans did not suddenly spring forth from a soundless void: insects, frogs, birds—even the wind as it passed through a reed-dotted wetland—furnished inspiration. Through intuition, and in some cases, oral histories, we know this to be true. In the 1980s, acoustic engineer Bernie Krause, who has traveled the globe recording natural sounds, documented how the Jivaro—residents of the Amazon rainforest—mimic and incorporate the sounds of insects, frogs, and birds into their music.

The hauntingly beautiful songs of birds—many of which belong to the thrush family—have enchanted poets, naturalists, and composers. Our appreciation for bird songs grew as the wild lands retreated before the advance of the axe and plow and proliferation of smokestacks and cobblestone streets. Naturalist John Burroughs wrote of the hermit thrush’s song: “Listening to this strain on the

lone mountain, with the full moon just rounded on the horizon, the pomp of your cities and the pride of your civilization seemed trivial and cheap.”

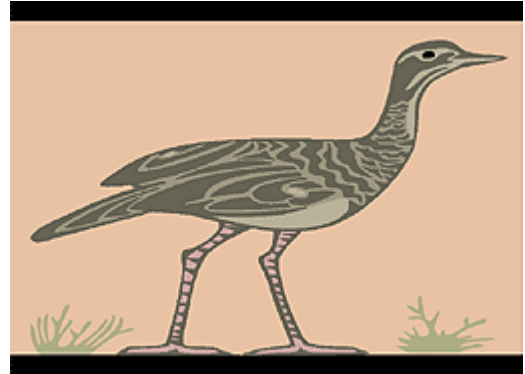
To the human ear, bird vocalizations span the spectrum from melodious to ominous. The bittern’s penetrating, startling song precipitated a plethora of legends and folktales. Its unique timbre has been interpreted to mean doom and desolation, leading to the prophecies in books of Isaiah and Zephaniah that Babylon and Nineveh were fated to become a wasteland, with the bittern’s cry echoing in the ruins of their palaces.

For many bird species, the weeks leading up to the vernal equinox serve as the fulcrum upon which their lives pivot. Responding to increasing day length, they undergo hormonal changes: acquiring colorful plumage and the urge to return to their breeding grounds. The arrival of daylight hours that equal those of starlight catapults them northward, their songs and calls resounding through wetland, forest, and field of the northern latitudes. In some species, both sexes sing elaborate songs—duets—in courtship or to maintain the pair bond. In a broader sense, bird vocalizations serve to maintain the bond between species, for those of us who care to listen.

Many species migrate at night to avoid predation. Scientists have cobbled together a modest network to record this nocturnal passage. They’ve learned that each call is unique to a species. Using software to analyze and interpret the results, call notes can serve as early warning indicators in the decline of a species. At least one of the pioneering sound engineers in this field used to point his microphones on the Grateful Dead at concerts, underscoring the link between seemingly disparate forms of music.

The benefits of technology are many, but they have come with a price. As we lead lives that are increasingly regulated, urbanized, and climate-controlled, birds remind us that we can participate in cycles that reach far beyond ourselves. Insistent, the birds call to us. Stepping outside at night during the spring or fall, to bask in this overhead passage, is a refreshing tonic that can serve as an antidote to feelings of disconnection and disharmony. Taking time to heed the bird-pulse of migration is more

important than ever, impressing upon us that there are lessons to be learned, affairs in the nonhuman world worthy of our curiosity and passion. Bernie Krause writes, “In the end—before the forest echoes die—we may want to listen carefully to this world, to discover that we aren’t separate, but a vital part of one fragile biological place.”



Throughout history, birds have been our allies, often serving as central figures in a culture’s myths and fables. Paul Shepard writes in *The Others*, “By observing the musical metaphor and animal dances of other cultures we see how widespread they are in linking people to each other and to the natural and invisible worlds. Animals are understood to have been the first musicians, halfway figures, mediators, like us yet themselves.” Interacting with other creatures, immersing ourselves if only for a short time in their conversations, encourages us to consider issues beyond those of self-interest. This moving beyond introversion aids us in shaping and re-examining what it means to be human, expanding our role within culture to include our place within the natural community.

“The Nightingale” by Hans Christian Andersen chronicles how an emperor deems the song of a living bird inferior to that of a mechanical imitation. Predictably, the expensive, gilded toy breaks, leaving the emperor heartbroken and deathly ill. The real nightingale, upon hearing of the emperor’s impending death, returns to sing him back to health. The bird makes clear that it is unable to nest in the emperor’s palace, but will come in the evening and sing and bring news of how the commoners within the kingdom are faring. This fable speaks to the age-old bond between man and bird, of how our insular lives can be enriched and healed by embracing the real, rather than the artificial.

Of all the gifts given to us by birds, perhaps none has proved as valuable for the health and well-being of ourselves and the planet as their declining populations following the widespread use of organochlorine pesticides that started in the late 1940s. Through bioaccumulation, birds at the top of the food chain—that fed on poisoned fish, insects and, other birds—stored ever-increasing amounts of toxins. Falcons, osprey, hawks, songbirds—even our national bird, the bald eagle—declined precipitously. Scientists discovered that compounds in pesticides such as DDT disrupted birds’ ability to absorb calcium. Shells thinned and incubating birds crushed the eggs beneath them.

In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson prompted us to envision a diminished world, where the annual re-birth of the planet was no longer heralded by birdsong. Her clarion call to protect the environment, and ultimately the human race, from such abuses, was published in 1962. Regarded by many as the seminal environmental treatise of the past half-century, *Silent Spring* ushered in the decade of the 1970s that brought passage of the Clean Water, National Environmental Policy, and Endangered Species Acts, plus the celebration of the first Earth Day. Using bird populations as a metric for planetary health, we came to see that everything is connected, and that declines in bird health and populations would presage harm to our own. Perhaps even more important, Carson’s willingness to learn about dangers of pesticides—contamination of the food chain, cancer, genetic damage—and her courage to take on the pesticide industry created the template employed by future environmental



activists.

In the 1980s birds again widened their “canary-in-a-coal mine” function. Ornithologists noted a decline in neotropical migrant birds—those that breed in the northern hemisphere and winter to the south—concurrent with the rapid destruction of South American habitat that included the Amazon rainforest. Although the factors for their decline are complex—and include habitat alteration here at “home”—migrant birds enabled us to envision the interconnectedness between the two hemispheres as never before. Birds were the catalyst for adding words like “biodiversity” to the popular lexicon, while serving as the most-visible icon for the emerging “Act Local, Think Global” philosophy.

Our kinship with birds—and the genetic memory triggered by their song—is so acute that it can transcend the horror of war. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell writes about the British experience during World War I: “Morning and evening stand-to’s [short breaks in the fighting] were the occasions when the sky especially offered itself for observation and interpretation... The one [larks] now became associated with stand-to at dawn, the other [nightingales] with stand-to at evening... What the lark usually betokens is that one has got safely through another night, a night made poignantly ironic by the singing of the nightingales.”

In 2004, Sergeant Jonathan Trouern-Trend of the Connecticut National Guard began a year’s deployment in Iraq. A birder since the age of 12, he began a blog that chronicled birds seen during his time there. He writes, “Out in the desert I watched a crested lark hovering about a hundred feet off the ground, singing its heart out. The amazing thing is that it kept it up for almost 10 minutes, slowly drifting in its hover. Finally it came flying down and rested on the ground near me.”

That birds can furnish a respite from the misery of war testifies to their ability to command our attention. Trouern-Trend continues, “When I started my online journal [Birding Babylon](#), shortly after arriving, I got significantly more response than expected. In retrospect it should have been no surprise. Most people’s view of life in Iraq focuses on the chaos and violence of war. ... Knowing that the great cycles of nature continue despite what people happen to be doing is reassuring, I think. There is an order we can take comfort in and draw strength from.”

Bird song and flight gave seers and shamans news of the will of the gods. They have and will continue to serve as augurs, as omens. In some cases, science has come to support the wisdom embodied in folk tales. Research has confirmed that American robins, considered harbingers of spring in the northern United States, arrive coincident with the 35 degrees Fahrenheit isotherm. At that average air temperature, thawing soil stimulates earthworm activity.

Regardless of birds’ ability to feed, entertain, warn, inspire, or keep us on schedule, we have an innate need to interact with them, as their presence is linked to grander cycles. As Trouern-Trend

writes in his final blog entry from Iraq, “Today I spent an hour watching Libyan jirds, a kind of large gerbil that lives in the dunes.... As I walked over the jirds’ dunes, I saw a pure white dove circle over the camp. I’ll take it as a good omen.”

[Tom Leskiw](#) works as a hydrologic/biologic technician for Six Rivers National Forest in Northern California. He lives near the city of Eureka with his wife Sue and their terrier Gypsy. His reviews appear online at [H-NET](#). His essays have been published in Birding, NILAS (Nature in Legend and Story), Watershed, and elsewhere. A partial archive of his monthly column in the Sandpiper, established in 1992, is available at [www.RRAS.org](http://www.RRAS.org).

## Essay



# Folsom *Blues*

by Andrew Wingfield

Editor's Note: This essay provides a glimpse of how, where, and why Andrew Wingfield developed his connection with some of the mountain lions that populate his novel, *Hear Him Roar*, which is reviewed in this issue of *Terrain.org*. Read the review by Judyth A. Willis at [www.terrain.org/reviews/19/hear\\_him\\_roar.htm](http://www.terrain.org/reviews/19/hear_him_roar.htm).

When I was a kid, Folsom, California was a gritty little town notable mainly for its single block of preserved Gold Rush-era facades and for the state prison that gave Johnny Cash the blues. Blue is how I feel today, driving over to Folsom from my sister's house toward the end of this year's family visit. Folsom is not a town anymore. Like my home town and every other little burg between Sacramento and the Sierra foothills, Folsom has succumbed to sprawl.

Blue is the color above me this sunny day—the smoggy, feckless blue of the Sacramento Valley sky. Blue is the color below me as I cross into the old part of Folsom on the original car bridge—the deep, dark blue of Sierra snowmelt impounded in Lake Natoma. To my left, up toward Folsom dam, stands the iron train bridge, just wide enough for a single set of tracks. To my right, down toward Nimbus Dam, stretches the new car bridge, wide enough for six lanes of traffic.

Soon I reach the Folsom City Zoo Sanctuary, the end point of my annual pilgrimage. Blue is the most striking color on the peacock that greets me from the gift shop roof as I enter the gate—the rich, royal, iridescent hue of the bird's neck, cap, and crest; and the many eyes of the fanned-out tail with their midnight pupils rimmed by a paler, twilight shade. Beyond this gaudy gatekeeper threads a simple network of paths that wind among a collection of enclosures nestled into the slope. Live oaks make deep shade for bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, owls, eagles, bears, and other northern California natives. I pay my respects to each resident en route to the mountain lion enclosure, where vines of wild grape weave through the green wire of walls and roof.

Blue is the color of a mountain lion kitten's eyes—the sweet, sudden blue of cornflowers. All but one of the zoo's five cougars had eyes that color when they arrived here. These regal cats, like all the

other animals in this sanctuary, live here because they wouldn't make it in the wild. Many are orphans, untutored in basic survival skills. Some have never recovered fully from serious injuries suffered at the hands of humans. These animals' bodies, some magnificent, some pitifully mangled, combine with the words on their enclosure plaques to tell individual stories of life among Homo sapiens in contemporary California. The many single stories weave a larger narrative that maims the region's myth of heroic growth.

The male cougar Willow lies in the grass grooming himself. His pink tongue makes long, scaly passes across his tawny hide. Dark stripes split the gold balls of his eyes. His ears move singly, as if each follows a different conversation. The last section of his black-tipped tail waves constantly, tracing shapes that look like the outlines of thoughts. Now and then he lifts his pink triangular nose to read the breeze.

Willow's mother killed a jogger not far from here more than ten years ago. She was shot by state authorities, who then found her kitten and brought him to the right place. A few years after Willow's arrival I appeared beside his enclosure one day with pad and pen. In a single afternoon, he taught me to say how mountain lions move.

Each year since then, my trip west has included a visit to Willow. This is the best ritual I've found for mourning a vanished place. The landscape that nourished my senses as a child has since devolved into a bewildering suburban Everywhere. Instead of wandering down dirt roads I used to love, strolling favorite orchards, straying out past town limits to experience the heady breadth of open space, I come here to meditate upon Willow. This cat embodies physical splendor. He animates wildness compromised, destiny diverted. He inhabits the deep pertinence of his biography. He brings me home.

Blues, I believe, is the longing for home.

Blues is what I'm building on this page.

Blues is a sanctuary.

[Andrew Wingfield's](#) novel, [Hear Him Roar](#) (Utah State University Press, 2005), deals with people and mountain lions in the northern California region "Folsom Blues" evokes. Andrew's place-based personal essays have also appeared in ISLE, Weber Studies, and other magazines. He teaches in New Century College, the integrative studies program at George Mason University in Virginia.

## Essay



WHERE HAS ALL  
THE ANGER GONE?

by Bruce Morganti

The other night, while driving home with my seventeen-year-old son, I turned on the radio. For a moment we played the dial-dominance game, tapping through the preset stations in turn, fiddling with the SEEK and SCAN buttons, trying, like we do every night, to find some common musical ground.

We have fairly compatible musical tastes, my son and I. He appreciates much of the music of his middle-aged father's generation, as do most of his peers. They call it "classic rock," which may or may not have meant something once upon a time, some reference to the mysterious, timeless quality of the popular music of a past era.

When I was seventeen, the music of my parents' generation, however great they told me it was, only appealed to me as novelty, like old cartoons or silent films. I confess that a similar gulf exists between myself and the stuff that comes out of the modern radio speaker, although, as a music teacher, I feel it is important to know what my students are listening to, so I spend a fair amount of time trying to bridge that gulf. It isn't easy sometimes, but I'm probably more abreast of trends and trendsetters than most guys my age.

In both old and new music, I hear quality and plenty of artistic merit. Some of the virtuosi of the Jazz and Swing eras, along with current pop heroes like the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Audioslave, were and are great musicians.

But something is missing.



Those of us who laid out hard-earned cash to buy records in the 1960s and 70s, before they became "classic," take pride in the staying power of this part of our popular culture. It belonged to us (we paid for it, didn't we?) and still does, and shows that if nothing else, we had good taste. It's no secret that most of what's "new" on the radio isn't really; it's an extension of a no-holds-barred creative explosion that started around forty years ago and is still growing, nova-like, through popular expression.

So there we were, fighting over the tuner. It never lasts long. We settled on "After the Gold Rush" by [Neil Young](#), mostly because my son was driving and had to watch the road. But I probably would have insisted. You can never hear too much Neil.

My son, who is a gifted musician, listened to the enigmatic lyrics roll from the radio via Neil's plaintive, sincere whine. At the French horn break, he turned to me and said, "Cool song. But what the heck is he talking about?"

What an opportunity! It isn't every day that your teenage child willingly admits there are still things you know that he doesn't. Perhaps a bit too enthusiastically, I launched into a knowing lecture about how Neil was using dreams as a vehicle for expressing an Apocalyptic vision, how he was essentially prophesying, based on the direction he saw humanity heading, a man-made end of the planet. Even so, I said, he sees humanity carrying on its less charitable traditions, as a select, privileged few are loaded into space ships and allowed to flee the dying earth while poor people and drug addicts get left behind—

At this point, I realized my son was dialing his cell phone. I had lost him. The music of my generation interested him but the message was Greek. Or maybe the idea of any message at all was foreign.



It would be unfair to say that none of the music before or after the "classic rock" era was message-driven. The songs of the Greek satirists, Chaucer, the court jesters and minstrels, Shakespeare and Molière, African slaves and [Woody Guthrie's](#) road warriors, are all examples of agitators using music to make their messages both palatable and pervasive, not to mention safe. And certainly artists like [U2](#) and [Pearl Jam](#) continue to sing about more than heartache and moonlight to anyone who will listen.

But there is no mistaking the fact that something happened in the time between the late 50s and the late 70s, something that made demonstrations commonplace, espousal of causes fashionable, and artists responsible for more than entertainment. It was as if everyone who sang was required to voice

their opinions on things like the environment, war, politics, gender roles—and they apparently spoke for their audience. Protest songs, nature laments, generational anthems—even a bad one would do in a pinch—were prerequisites to legitimacy for popular musicians.

Why? I'm not sure. Books and books have been written exploring the upheaval of that time, and smarter people than yours truly have mused endlessly about what made it different from other historically tumultuous periods. All I know is what I observed, then and now: music was, for a time, one of the primary, practically essential, means for spreading cause consciousness.

The real question is: Why are things different now? Why do popular musicians, for the most part, avoid singing about issues and causes? Music is certainly no less effective a tool for communicating passion. The world is still rife with things to take issue with. War is still an ugly exercise in greed and death. The less fortunate and the voiceless among us, including the multitude other species with which we share the earth, are as disenfranchised and endangered as ever. Maybe more so.

Do young people care less than they did a couple of generations ago? My son's theory, which I believe has merit, is that what was once fashionable behavior has gone the way of powder-blue tuxedos and giant afros. Caring about world issues was once hip; now it simply isn't.

I have my own thesis. The burst of activism in the mid-20th century that found expression in such magnificent songs as "[The Times They Are A-Changin'](#)," "[Eve of Destruction](#)," and "[Out in the Country](#)," was at first a movement of genuine concern and deeply-felt idealism, and some of us actually continued to believe things would change, even after the movement lost momentum and sincerity by becoming fashionable and (like everything else in our capital-driven society) profitable. Music, that naïve and loving art, took longer to knuckle under to cynicism than did the rest of culture. By the time Lynyrd Skynyrd sang "Now, Watergate does not bother me; does your conscience bother you?" most of the world was more interested in People magazine, Entertainment Tonight, and a right-wing extremist ex-actor in the early stages of Alzheimer's named Ronald Reagan.

Is it far-fetched to propose that profit spelled the demise of protest? That the bottom line demands apathy over activism? The music business, once infused with the spirit of individualism and the search for creativity, has become a trillion-dollar industry. ([John Mellencamp](#) says that when he got his first recording contract in the mid-70s, artists were encouraged to "be themselves, be unique." Now, he says, they are pressured to try to sound like someone else, to "get in line.")

What motivates industry besides profit? How profitable would it be to promote awareness of industry-caused pollution, poverty, and extinction when most of the larger media conglomerates count chemical, mining, and manufacturing interests among their mammoth holdings? Hardly the venue, you'd think, for singing about anything as banal and ephemeral as global warming.



My son, after seeing [Fahrenheit 9/11](#), wrote a song which includes the line, "This clown without makeup is fooling all of you." You can draw your own inferences, but I, as an idealist-environmentalist-activist-musician, am proud of that kid. He inspires me, helps me to believe that the flame of musical unrest still burns. I may be old, but I'm no less angry than I was as a young man. And I'll never stop, whether it's hip or not, singing my anger. There's an old hymn called "[How Can I Keep From Singing?](#)"

How indeed?

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## Fiction



by Al Sim

Teresa was swimming laps when the monsoons came. She was nearing the side of the pool when thunder rumbled behind her and children screamed. She turned without hurry and started back across the water in her slow smooth breaststroke. Ahead of her, an enormous thunderhead towered up behind the low cinderblock pool house. A few feet ahead of her, a bird flashed across the water and devoured a dragonfly in mid-flight. Teresa smiled at the bird and at the white mountain floating over the mesa. When she came to the pool, the sky was empty, and now the monsoons had come.

Children shouted and pointed toward the thunderhead. When sharp thunder came cracking across the open spaces, Teresa knew the children had seen lightening. Down in the water, she had missed it, her view blocked by the pool house. The lifeguards blew their whistles and ordered everyone from the water. The pool was high on the Western Mesa, at the far edge of Rancho Grande. It was a good place to get hit by lightening.

Teresa ignored the lifeguards and swam to the chromed ladder at the far side of the pool. She thought about the big summer storms that would come, how they would drench the desert and stab the mesas and mountains with lightening. Thunder would roll around the vast Río Huérfano Valley like bowling balls in an empty swimming pool, and she would lie awake in her bed next to her husband and listen. Teresa was very glad of it.

She grabbed the metal ladder and climbed out of the water. She found her towel and watched the thunderhead approach and the people scatter. Mothers were yelling at children and packing their things. When the thunder came again, louder and deeper this time, Teresa gathered her own belongings and made her way out to the parking lot.

Forked lightening flickered as she unlocked her car. She breathed deeply and smelled dusty ozone. She stood by her car for a moment and watched the thunderhead churn, watched the storm currents twist within it. Gray clouds were forming further across the mesa. The storm was moving north and east across the valley.

She got in her old station wagon and drove down Southern Boulevard through Rancho Grande. She

was stopped at a traffic light when the huge thunderhead slid before the sun and lightening flared within it. But it did not rain. The rain came later, when she was off the mesa and down in Los Huertos, on the flat land by the Río Huérfano, going north on the wide dirt of Entrada Oeste.

It started in heavy bursts of fat drops, then turned hard and steady as Teresa entered her narrow lane. It twisted in the conflicting gusts of wind, lashing her front windshield one moment and the rear window the next. She went slowly through it, parked in her drive, and was half-soaked when she stepped onto her front porch. The rain was cold and she shivered as she watched the water pool under the Russian olive tree in the middle of her yard. The water floated on a layer of dust, then it soaked through and ran into the earth and stained it the color of tea.

Chuy drove his truck down the lane a few minutes later and he was drenched when he stood next to her on the porch. They stood together and smiled at the rain. Teresa made dinner and they ate, and it was still raining, much softer now.

She woke past midnight and the rain was strong again. Thunder careened across the valley and collided into the mountains. The lightening bolts were long flickering, green-edged swords that sliced open the darkness. She knelt down next to a barely-open window and smelled deeply the spicy desert rain.



Teresa lay in bed and let her eyes adjust to the gray morning light. She knew there was something unpleasant that needed doing this day. It came to her when she was sitting up, her feet on the floor, looking out the window at their side yard through the part in the curtains. They were expected at their daughter's in-laws' for dinner.

“Good morning,” Chuy said.

Teresa looked at him over her shoulder.

“I just remembered what day it is.”

He smiled and put a hand on her lower back. His hand was rough and warm.

“You think it's going to rain?” Teresa said.

Chuy reached for the remote control and turned on their little TV set. He found the right station and the weatherman told them that storms were predicted to come that afternoon, clear around sunset, and return just after dark. The weatherman warned of heavy rains and strong winds and powerful

lightening. Chuy turned the TV off.

“I hope he’s wrong,” Chuy said.

They had talked about their in-laws’ invitation several times and agreed it might not be too bad if the weather was fair. If the skies were clear, their hosts planned to grill and eat outdoors. They could pass the time under the open sky, standing around with drinks in their hands. There is always a sense of escape when the sky is over your head.

They dressed in silence. Chuy went out in the yard for a while and Teresa made breakfast. They ate quietly. Chuy finished first and cleared his dishes, then leaned against the counter and watched Teresa. She sipped the last of her coffee, the cup in both hands, her eyes unfocused.

“Do we have to go?” Chuy said. “We’ll be stuck inside the whole time.”

Teresa lifted her chin and turned up the corners of her mouth.

“Didn’t you hear? It’ll clear around sunset.”

“Great,” Chuy said.

They did their chores without haste. Late in the morning dusky gray clouds blotted out the sun. The rain started early in the afternoon.

When it was time to go, Chuy and Teresa stood on their front porch and wished they could stay home. Teresa held a basket of cookies in front of her, cradled in both arms. A blue cotton dishtowel draped over the basket kept the cookies dry. Chuy had his hands deep in his pockets. They watched the rain fall in heavy sheets from greasy-looking clouds that churned overhead.

“Maybe you can pretend to be sick and we can leave early,” Chuy said.

His tone and expression were so serious it made Teresa smile.

“Why me? You look sick already.”

“Do I?” he asked hopefully.

“No. You look fine.”

Chuy frowned at Teresa and she laughed at him. The wind lashed rain against the side of the house. It sounded like marbles scattered on a wooden floor.

“It’s just a couple hours at your daughter’s in-laws,” Teresa said.

Chuy grimaced. Teresa started to laugh again.

“How can you laugh? It’s horrible.”

Teresa took his arm and felt the hard muscles and led him outside into the rain and into his truck.



The invitation was relayed by their daughter Marbella. Teresa was at Marbella’s house, helping sew a holiday dress for her granddaughter Karina. They worked in the dining room, spread out over a round oak table.

“Mamá, I have to ask you something,” Marbella said.

Teresa stopped and waited. Marbella’s eyes were cast down, watching her hands measure cloth. Teresa watched her daughter’s smooth motions. When Marbella looked up, Teresa looked into eyes that were large and round and bottomless. Teresa’s grandmother had the same eyes. Teresa often noticed how her daughter and her grandmother were alike. Marbella had the same soft build and was old-fashioned. When they worked together like this, Teresa felt her daughter was both her future and her past.

“Will you come to Wyatt’s parents’ house for dinner?” Marbella said.

Teresa swallowed the words that wanted to come out.

“It’s been four years,” Marbella said.

Teresa nodded and still said nothing.

“Karina is almost three now.”

“I know, sweetheart.”

“It’s gone on too long.”

“I know.”

Teresa noticed Marbella’s cheeks. Marbella always had lush skin but today she glowed. Teresa’s heart skipped when she wondered if her daughter was pregnant. She wanted to ask — but Marbella would tell her if she knew. Eventually Teresa reached out and squeezed her daughter’s hand.

“Yes, we’ll go,” Teresa said. “Of course we’ll go.”

They smiled at each other and went back to work. They pinched their lips together and frowned at the cloth in their hands. They said little more as the afternoon stretched on. They finished the little white dress with intricate red trim. It had short puffy sleeves and a wide skirt. The two women stood next to the table and Marbella held the dress up so they could examine it.

“Karina will love it,” Marbella said.

Teresa nodded.

“Thank you, Mamá.”

Teresa hugged her daughter.

“When do we go to the Ames’ house?” she asked.

Marbella told her the invitation was for 6:00 o’clock on the Saturday after next. Teresa kissed Marbella goodbye and went outside to her old station wagon.

Heat waves rose from the car’s roof and hood. Teresa climbed in behind the steering wheel, then reached around inside and rolled down all the windows. She had to lean way over the bench seat to open the ones in back. The hot vinyl stuck to her skin. She started the engine and went down the short side street her daughter lived on. She caught the green light at the corner and turned onto the boulevard.

Teresa thought about the Ames on her way home, remembering what she had been told. She knew their house was big and ugly, that Mrs. Ames was a terrible cook, and that Mr. Ames talked of nothing but his job. Wyatt would joke with Chuy and Teresa about his parents, then he would smile at Marbella and say, Isn’t that right, honey? She would nod and sometimes she would smile, but she said nothing.

Marbella would never say bad things about her in-laws. Marbella was not really comfortable saying bad things about anyone. She was like Teresa’s grandmother in this way too. Teresa did not feel like a nice person compared to her daughter. She knew how much Marbella valued peace and she resolved to do her part in achieving a truce with her daughter’s in-laws.

Wyatt was the only member of the Ames family present at his wedding. The others sent only their regrets and a clutter of cheap gifts. Wyatt’s parents ducked all involvement in the preparations, and with the date set and the deposits paid, Chuy and Teresa had yet to meet their future in-laws. That was when Wyatt’s parents told their son they could not attend his wedding because Mr. Ames was required to speak at a business conference in Germany, and that Mrs. Ames must accompany him because it was a “wives included” event. This announcement came just a few days before a dinner planned to finally introduce the Ames and the Sandovals. At Wyatt’s insistence, the introductory dinner was cancelled, and the introductions indefinitely postponed.



The rain stopped as Chuy and Teresa crossed the Los Huertos village limits, then splattered on and off as they made their way north on Route 418. Traffic was steady, but the four-lane road of velvety-looking black asphalt and glowing yellow lines wasn't crowded. It was built for growth, and all along it this growth was taking over the Western Mesa.

They passed the serial developments that spread down the slope from the road to the river. River View I started at the edge of Los Huertos; it was a jumble of large and medium-sized houses, many of them too dark for the desert sun. River View II followed; here the houses were more homogeneous in size and color, medium to medium-big, and all painted lighter shades.

River View III was last. All its houses were big and boxy, their walls covered with pale stucco, and their roofs slathered with thick tiles of glossy blue or green. And though the houses were larger and more ornate, the lots were the same quarter acre, so the big fancy houses stood cheek-to-jowl in lush irrigated lawns that were cut apart by low cinderblock walls.

This was where the Ames lived.

“We want to turn on River View III Way,” Chuy said.

Teresa pointed.

“There it is.”

The street was wide and black with no lane markings. It emerged between a pair of small yellow-brick walls. On each wall was “River View III” in thick brass letters ten inches tall. As they made the turn, the clouds opened up and everything disappeared behind the rain. The truck's wipers were useless. Chuy pulled to a stop just inside the entrance. He parked at the edge of the pavement, put his emergency flashers on, and turned off the struggling wipers. They watched the sheet of water pouring over the windshield. It was dimpled by the fat drops smacking into it.

Eventually the wipers could clear the glass again, and they made their way through the thicket of houses till they found the one they were dreading. It was a big chunky house with lots of gables. Wyatt's light blue sedan was in the driveway. Chuy pulled up to the curb out front and turned off the engine.

“Ready?” he said.

“No,” Teresa replied.

Chuy laughed and took her hand. They sat and listened to the rain. Sounds became muted and Teresa's skin tingled. She looked at her hands, at her fingers laced through Chuy's. There was a frozen moment of absolute stillness. Teresa looked up expectantly, sensing what would happen without knowing what it was.

Everything went yellow-white and an orange jolt of lightening exploded the brick chimney on a tall house a few lots down. The thunder clap seemed to split open the truck. Their eyes were stunned by the bright flash and their ears rang. They could not see the bricks from the struck chimney tumbling through the air, and they could not hear the thuds the bricks made when they landed in the manicured grass, the hard smacking sound one made when it landed flat in the street. The sound of the rain came back while they were still blinking, then the thunder rolled back from across the valley, where it had bounced around in the Jitomate Mountains.

"Are you ready now?" Chuy said.

Teresa squeezed his hand and nodded emphatically. They clambered from the truck and trotted up the driveway. The rain was thin now but the clouds were so thick overhead that the afternoon had the light of evening. Teresa carried the basket of cookies clutched against her stomach and she hunched over it as she swung her legs.



The big front door opened when Chuy and Teresa were halfway up the drive. A middle-aged Anglo woman stood with one hand on the knob, framed by the doorway and back-lit by the electric lights that glared from within.

"What on earth was that?" she called out.

She was small and fine-boned. Her hair was honey blond and as Teresa got closer she could see that it was dyed. The Anglo woman wore a linen pants suit and had gold jewelry wherever it could be hung or draped or clasped. The fat diamond on her engagement ring caught the light and glinted.

A deep voice came from behind her.

"Lightening, Georgia, what else could it be?"

Teresa stepped onto the short stone walk that led from the driveway to the house. Chuy was behind her. She glanced down at the flat stones to make sure of her footing. When she looked up again, an Anglo man was standing behind the woman in the doorway.

He was almost tall and had narrow shoulders. He wore black-framed glasses and had sparse colorless hair. He shouldered his wife out of the way and Teresa knew what kind of man he was. He had a round gut that hung low and pushed out his belt buckle. The buckle was large and ornate, made of silver and turquoise. The pants they held up were black and the shirt tucked into them was short-sleeved and off-white. There was an expensive pen in his shirt pocket.

Teresa went up the three front steps. On the small concrete slab that footed the front door, she stepped to the left so that Chuy could stand next to her and handle the introductions. Chuy put his hand on the small of her back and it felt warm and solid. The Anglo man extended his hand and Chuy took it, so these three people were connected by touch, with Chuy the conduit from Teresa to Wyatt's father. Teresa felt her husband's fingers stiffen against her skin and muscles. The warmth of that strong hand against her back dimmed.

"Brent Ames," the Anglo man said. "This is my wife, Georgia. Come on in. The kids are in the den."

He dropped Chuy's hand and turned inside. Chuy started to follow, then he stopped to smile and nod at Georgia, and abruptly stuck his hand out. Georgia tilted her head to one side and smiled back at him and took his hand in both of hers.

"So nice to meet you, Chew-ee," she enthused.

Chuy nodded and grinned and Teresa knew he wanted his hand back. Georgia released it and Chuy gave a slight bow before he went down the hall after Brent. Georgia turned to watch him go. As Teresa stepped through the doorway, she noticed that the Anglo woman seemed to be looking at Chuy's ass. A cold snake stirred in Teresa's belly and her footsteps clattered on the marble floor. She stopped to wait for her hostess. Georgia closed the door behind them, then turned and beamed at her guest.

"And so nice to meet you, Tah-ree-sa!"

Teresa forced a smile and held out her cloth-covered basket.

"I brought some cookies," she said.

Georgia took the basket and lifted a corner of the cloth and peeked inside.

"Oh, how lovely! You made biscochos!"

"Biscochitos," Teresa said.

The name of these cookies, anise flavored and dusted with sugar and cinnamon, divided the state and had been debated in the legislature. They were biscochitos in Teresa's family and in Chuy's family and always would be.

Georgia ignored Teresa's correction. She let the cloth drop back over the basket and put some

fingertips on Teresa's wrist.

"Did you make them yourself?"

She took the fingers away and waved the hand at Teresa.

"Oh, of course you did. Just like that darlin' li'l dress Sweet Bun has on! You are so good with your hands! Marbella tells me you taught her everything she knows."

Georgia said mar-bel-luh instead of mar-bay-uh. Teresa had been warned by her son-in-law, but she winced slightly anyway. Georgia was looking directly at her and pretended not to notice, but Teresa saw delight flash in those cold green eyes. The snake turned in Teresa's belly again.

It took Teresa a moment to decide that "Sweet Bun" must be Karina, the granddaughter they shared.

She isn't anything like a sweet bun, Teresa thought.

Karina was dark and slender with straight black hair and large round eyes the color of a moonless sky. She was quiet and intent and sensitive. Nothing fluffy or sticky or syrupy about her. Teresa looked at the fake smile plastered on Georgia's made-up face and felt appalled that such a woman could be the other grandmother of little Karina.

Georgia's fingertips were back on Teresa's wrist. They were light and soft and cool and feathery, like tarantula feet. A little shiver slithered down Teresa's spine. Georgia took her fingertips away again and started toward the back of the house.

"Come on in the kitchen! I'll show you what I made to eat."

Their footsteps sounded hollow on the marble floor. Teresa shivered again.

The kitchen was white tile and stainless steel and yellow pine. There were two sets of floor cabinets and three sets mounted on the wall. Along the top of the longest wall-mounted set was a long line of kachinas, ceremonial dolls made by Hopis and Zunis and Navajos. Georgia saw where Teresa was looking and waved her hand up at them.

"Aren't those darlin' things? I just love those things."

It always sickened Teresa to see the native culture's artifacts displayed as the conquering culture's trinkets. But she knew that artisans earned their living making things for women like Georgia, and if such women didn't buy them, the crafts would wither and might even die. It was a circle she always went around whenever she encountered it.

Georgia waved her over to the counter beneath the cabinets with the kachina dolls and showed Teresa the side dishes. The potato salad and coleslaw looked almost passable. Teresa recognized the

tortilla chips as a flavorless store brand. Georgia led her to the oven and turned on its interior light. A meatloaf bubbled within. There was a steamer on the stovetop that Teresa dreaded. Georgia led her to it and lifted the lid.

“Now I’ve never made tamales before, so we’ll jus’ hafta hope for the best.”

Por el amor de Dios, Teresa thought. The little gray loaves were slimy-looking and smelled of grease. Tamales were a specialty in Teresa’s family and she suspected Georgia knew it. Georgia gestured at two saucepots on the back burners and said one was beans and the other rice. She turned to Teresa and plastered on her fake smile.

“Well, let’s go see the kids,” Georgia bubbled.



The den was a square windowless room in a back corner of the house. There was a large gray stone fireplace opposite the door. Family photographs in silver frames were arranged across the mantle. The walls and ceiling were painted a creamy white. The carpet was dark green and the furniture was heavily made of wood and leather. Yellowish light came from four fixtures buried in the ceiling.

There was a small wet bar in the corner to the right of the fireplace. Brent Ames stood in front of it, pouring drinks. Chuy was in a low-backed chair next to the bar with a glass of beer in his hand. Brent carried the drinks he made over to Wyatt and Marbella, who were sitting together on a long sofa set against the wall to the left of the doorway. They were at the end nearest the door and Karina was at the end nearest the fireplace, playing silently with a doll.

Georgia touched Teresa’s left forearm with those spider fingers.

“Have a seat, Tah-ree-sa,” Georgia said.

Teresa sat next to her husband, in a matching low-backed chair, and Georgia sat by herself on a love seat next to the door. The love seat made a right angle with the long sofa.

“A drink?” Brent said.

He smiled only with his mouth. Little hairs went up along Teresa’s forearms.

“Please.”

“What would you like?”

She knew his wine would be too sweet. She glanced at Chuy's glass.

"Beer would be nice."

"Beer it is."

Georgia started talking and no one listened. Chuy took a deep breath. Teresa looked at him and he raised an eyebrow very slightly, then indicated Georgia with his eyes. Teresa widened her eyes for a moment. Brent moved toward them from the bar and handed Teresa a glass of beer. The glass matched Chuy's, green and thick, and a line of foam trailed down its side.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Brent went past Teresa to some stereo equipment in the corner to her left. He pushed some buttons and soft inoffensive jazz tinkled out of speakers mounted up near the ceiling in the back corners of the room, to the left and right of the fireplace. Brent moved past her again and sat in an easy chair next to Karina, down at the far end of the couch. Georgia had not stopped talking.

Teresa looked at her son-in-law. Wyatt was watching his mother with a pained expression. A large photo portrait of the Ames family hung above his head, taken when Wyatt and his siblings were teenagers. There was an older brother and a younger sister, both smiling imitations of their parents. The first son had his own pair of black-framed eyeglasses and looked stiff and self-important, and the only daughter had her own honey blond dye job over fixed blank eyes. The teenage Wyatt stood off to one side, with a knowing smile and a hint of defiance. He was dark against his pale family and lean against his fleshy father and brother.

"Our other two are Brent Junior and Suzanne," Georgia said.

It took Teresa a moment to realize this comment was addressed to her.

"That was taken when the kids were in high school. All three a year apart. Brent Junior was a senior and Suzanne was a sophomore."

Teresa looked at Wyatt and found he was looking at her. They smiled at each other.

"Wyatt was a junior?" Teresa said.

"Yes, that's right. Brent Junior played football and was in the honor society and Suzanne was a cheerleader."

See, Wyatt's face said, I don't matter here. Teresa held his eyes when she asked her next question.

"What did Wyatt do?"

“Oh, I don’t remember that he did much of anything. Did you, Wyatt?”

“As little as possible.”

Brent Senior grunted.

“Ain’t that the truth.”

“But I did get the best grades in college.”

“Your brother is vice president of his bank,” Brent Senior said.

Wyatt took a deep breath and looked at his drink.

“So you keep telling me.”

Brent Senior grunted again and glared at Wyatt and bit off part of his vodka and tonic.

Georgia resumed her chatter. This time Teresa listened. Georgia went on about Brent Junior and his successful banking career and his lovely wife and their two darling children. She said they owned a big beautiful home in a very desirable San Diego suburb with a Mercedes and a Lexus in the driveway.

Teresa looked at Wyatt while Georgia spoke and remembered what Wyatt had told her. Brent Junior had been drinking heavily since college. He spent as much time in bars as he did at home. His wife had stopped trying to conceal her affair with a Navy officer. The kids were sullen and neglected. The house was cheaply built and had a commanding view of a superhighway. Wyatt went there once and swore he would never go again.

Brent Senior cut Georgia off. He cleared his throat loudly and his wife stopped talking in mid-sentence. Brent frowned at Chuy.

“I understand there’s good money for men who can work real adobe.”

His practiced voice was deep and round and sonorous. Chuy almost smiled. The corners of his eyes crinkled.

“I make a living. I’ll never get rich patching old walls.”

Brent deepened his frown and pursed his lips. When he lifted his drink to his mouth, Georgia started chattering again.

Now she bragged about her daughter Suzanne who married her college roommate’s rich uncle and moved to Atlanta where his family was in the construction business. They lived in a spectacular old

plantation house and belonged to the right clubs and Suzanne was on all the right social committees. Suzanne's darling teenaged stepdaughter was an accomplished equestrian and attended an exclusive private school.

Teresa watched Wyatt again. He could laugh about his brother, but his sister pained him. His brow tightened while his mother spoke. He had told Teresa that his sister's husband was fat and abusive and his sister was skittish and anorexic and the stepdaughter was a gorgeous slut. Wyatt visited them once while he was at a software conference in Atlanta and said their house was like a museum. He spent most of an hour wandering through it, looking at the art and bric-a-brac. He came upon the stepdaughter in an upstairs lounge. She made a pass at him and got foulmouthed when he declined.

Georgia stopped in mid-sentence again, this time because lightening struck loudly nearby and the lights dimmed. Teresa had forgotten about the storm outside. The sounds of the wind and rain didn't reach the cave-like den.

"Heavens-to-Betsy what was that," Georgia said.

Brent grunted from his chair in the corner.

"Lightening, Georgia. Just like it always is."

Karina put her doll down and crawled across the couch and curled up against her mother. Marbella cooed to her and stroked her hair. Teresa watched them and noticed again how Marbella's skin glowed. She felt a catch in her throat when the powerful hope came that Marbella was pregnant. Teresa swallowed hard and looked down at her lap. She swallowed again and brought her eyes up and looked at Brent Ames.

Brent had cleared his throat again. It stopped Georgia from more babbling, this time about storms and lightening and how they scared her. Wyatt looked at his father with disdain; he seemed to know what was coming. Brent spoke again, and again it was to Chuy.

"Maybe Wyatt has mentioned that I work for Persicon. My background is in materials research."

Brent Ames went into a long discourse about his job, in his studied domineering voice. He wallowed in his own self-importance. He did not notice, or did not care, that no one listened. Teresa had been uncomfortable and anxious; now she felt the heat of anger start to burn in her heart.

They all knew what Brent Ames did. He managed people and machines that made silicon chips. He led a team of engineers and technicians at the cubist chip plant that perched on the edge of the mesa overlooking Los Huertos. The chip plant dominated the local economy, and Brent was in senior management. In a few years, or even a few months, he might be running the entire plant. The chip business was booming and promotions came fast.

Teresa looked at his thinning colorless hair, oiled back against his head. She noticed that his eyes

were beady and red behind their black glasses. His low-slung gut bulged onto his lap, pushing his belt buckle up and out so that it angled toward the ceiling. His words were a humming drone, like the sound of the machines he was describing.

Teresa imagined him at that conference in Germany, the one more important than his son's wedding. She saw him standing at a podium, speaking in this same condescending tone to a roomful of identical men. And his wife sat in the front row and admired her fingernails.

Teresa looked around the room and saw that only Chuy was watching Brent. Wyatt had his eyes on the floor. Marbella looked down at Karina, who sat sideways in her mother's lap, facing away from the talking man. Teresa suppressed a smile when she saw that Georgia was examining her fingernails.

Teresa looked at Chuy again and knew he was not listening to Brent's words. She also knew that Chuy thought this man a fool. Her husband's mouth was a straight line and his eyes moved slightly over Brent's features. At the corners of his eyes the little crinkles came and went. When he was a younger man, he would have wanted to punch Brent Ames. Teresa was almost sorry that wouldn't happen.

Teresa looked at Brent and made herself listen to his words. She was curious what this ugly and pompous man thought was so compelling about his employment. He was deep into the details of the manufacturing process of silicon chips. He mentioned water, and for Teresa the words went away again. The droning hum returned.

Teresa knew about Brent's chip plant and all the water it needed. People had lost their water so that Persicon could pump wet money from beneath the desert floor. Chip making requires immense amounts of water, and when the big plant came to life and started sucking at the aquifer, well levels all over the western edge of the valley fell. Some wells ran dry. Families who had lived in Los Huertos del Río Huérfano for generations, people who had good wells for a hundred years, found themselves without water. A few landowners tried to fight but too much money was on the side of the chip makers.

Georgia excused herself and left the room. Brent ignored her and droned on. Georgia returned and stood in the doorway. Brent scowled at her and kept talking, for another minute or more. He concluded abruptly, then turned to Chuy and gestured at his empty glass.

"Ready for another beer?"

"Dinner's ready," Georgia said.

Everyone looked at her but no one moved. Brent gestured at Chuy's glass again.

"That doesn't affect whether the man wants another beer."

Everyone looked at Chuy.

“No thank you.”

“Well then,” Georgia trilled.

She turned and left. Brent went behind the bar and clanked ice in a glass. Everyone else slowly left their seats and carefully made their way into the dining room.



Georgia insisted on serving and heaped their plates. The food was even worse than Teresa expected. The greasy tamales had a sour aftertaste. The meatloaf tasted like lard and bread crumbs. The coleslaw was runny and both too sweet and too tart. The potatoes in the potato salad were overcooked and the sauce they swam in was heavy and bitter and tasted of cheese. The rice and beans were dry and salty. The store brand tortilla chips seemed good in comparison.

Teresa picked at her plate and glanced around the table. Chuy and Teresa sat on one side, their daughter's family on the other, and their hosts at either end. Georgia sat to Teresa's left, at the foot of the table. Wyatt was across from Teresa, with Marbella at his left and Karina in between. Brent was at the head of table, off to Teresa's right. Chuy sat next to Teresa, between her and Brent. Teresa watched her hosts and saw that Georgia opened her mouth wide around each bite and squinted when she chewed. Brent methodically chomped each mouthful.

Teresa tried to stop it, but her anger grew, swelling in her chest, pushing her heart against her ribs. She was offended by the horrid food, the waste of it, the hostility of it. No one could make food this nasty without trying. She watched Marbella and Wyatt pick at the disgusting tamales. She looked at her hostess again and saw in Georgia's eyes that same cold delight with which she mispronounced Marbella's name.

Brent rose and lumbered toward the kitchen. Karina asked Marbella if she could have a glass of water. Before Marbella could respond, Georgia passed the request to her husband.

“Brent dear, while you're up, please fetch our li'l Sweet Bun a glass a water.”

Heavy footsteps moved across the kitchen. A cabinet door opened and closed, then the footsteps came again, followed by the sound of running water.

“Not tap water, dear. Are you trying to give her a stomach ache?”

“Oh, for Christ's sake.”

More footsteps, then the sound of the refrigerator door being yanked open and smacked shut. Water gurgling into a glass, then the refrigerator opening and closing again. Footsteps coming toward them. Brent entered the room, a bottle of steak sauce in one hand and a glass of water in the other. He put the glass in front of Karina and resumed his place at the head of the table. He covered his meatloaf with steak sauce while Karina sipped from her glass.

“Thank you, grampa.”

“You’re welcome.”

The room was quiet and still. Only Brent was eating. Karina slowly drained her glass.

“Your water isn’t good?” Chuy said.

Brent and Georgia answered simultaneously.

“It’s fine.”

“It’s terrible.”

Brent took a bite of meatloaf.

“It makes my stomach hu’t”, Georgia drawled at her husband.

“It’s good enough for me. If it’s good enough —”

Brent was mumbling around his mouthful. He chewed and swallowed and wiped his lips. Georgia sipped her Pepsi.

“If it’s good enough for that expensive equipment down at the plant,” Brent said, “it’s good enough for your damn stomach.”

Georgia drew herself up and put her chin in the air.

“Brent Ames, please watch your language. I will remind you that your granddaughter is present.”

Brent glanced at Karina, then went back to his meatloaf. Teresa wanted to plunge her fork into his throat.

“Why do you do that here?” Teresa said.

Her voice came out too loud. Brent pretended the question wasn’t for him. He squinted at his plate and put a bite of his wife’s disgusting tamales in his puckered mouth.

“Why in the desert?” Teresa said, her voice more controlled.

Brent sat up straight and squinted down the table. He put his cutlery down and cleared his throat. Teresa glanced at Marbella. Her daughter gave her a level look. Go ahead, the look said. Do what you have to do.

“Do what in the desert?” Brent said.

“Why make computer chips in the desert? It takes so much water, why do it here, where there’s so little water.”

He adjusted his glasses and lifted his chin. He gave Teresa a blank look, then put on a tight little smile.

“Actually, Teresa, there’s plenty of water. We’re sitting on the largest aquifer in the United States.”

“You don’t know that.”

He adjusted his glasses again and frowned at her. Teresa gave him time to reply. He did not. He took a sip of his gin and tonic instead.

“I have a cousin works in the governor’s office,” Teresa said. “She tells me no one knows how big the aquifer is and it costs too much to find out.”

She paused. Brent blinked at her.

“Three hundred million dollars, the Army Corps of Engineers estimates. No way the state can come up with that. No way your company will ever pay that. So the people who want it to be big, they say it’s big.”

Brent blinked again, then he smirked at her.

“And the people who want it to be small say it’s small.”

“When it’s gone, no way to put it back.”

Brent frowned again and looked away. He intertwined his fingers and studied his hands.

“The aquifer is enormous. We’re sure of that. We’ve made an investment here —”

“I know people with wells went dry.”

His chin came up again. He puckered his mouth. Some color came to his pasty cheeks.

“That had nothing to do with us.”

“I don’t believe that. My cousin tells me the governor doesn’t believe that. No one but Persicon and your supporters believes that. I don’t even believe that everyone on Persicon’s side believes that. The plant starts up, the wells go down. Old wells, wells that were good through bad droughts. How much more obvious does it have to be?”

Brent looked away from her and cleared his throat again. He swallowed and cleared his throat some more, then he lifted his drink and drained it. He held onto the empty glass after he put it back down on the table. He looked at the glass while he spoke.

“I really don’t want to argue about water.”

The disdain in his voice was violent. The room was quiet for a long moment. Teresa saw that Georgia was examining her fingernails again and felt her anger rise some more and managed to clamp it down.

“She has a good point,” Wyatt said. “Is that why you don’t want to discuss it?”

Brent exhaled deeply. He let go of his empty glass and put both hands flat on the table. His face paled while Wyatt’s darkened. Even Georgia looked up to see what was going on.

“You don’t know anything about it,” Brent said.

“How much is there to know? We live in a desert. How can water not be a problem?”

Georgia waved bespangled fingers over the table.

“Mar-bel-luh,” she said, “what do you call that darlin’ dress Sweet Bun has on?”

Wyatt looked sideways at his mother. Brent stared at a spot on the wall over Georgia’s head.

“It’s a holiday dress,” Marbella said.

“A holiday dress? Why that’s just lovely.”

Brent stood up. He shoved his chair back as he rose and it slid off the rug and scraped on the hardwood floor. He remained at the head of the table for a moment, then stomped out of the room, each footstep shaking the floor.

“What holiday would that be?” Georgia said.

Teresa found Marbella’s eyes. Teresa raised an eyebrow and twisted her lips. These people, her expression said. Marbella held her mother’s gaze while she answered her mother-in-law’s question.

“It doesn’t have to be a holiday,” Marbella said. “A holiday dress is a nice dress that you make for wearing on a special occasion.”

She made her voice even softer and more soothing than usual. Teresa took a deep breath and smiled at her daughter. No one spoke for a moment. Chuy shifted in his seat and the chair creaked.

“Any occasion? Well that’s just lovely,” Georgia said. “I thought maybe today was some Latino holiday I didn’ know ’bout.”

Teresa’s heart boiled. She looked at Marbella and could see that even her placid daughter was finally angry. Teresa looked at Georgia.

“Are we in Latin America?” Teresa said.

Her voice was sharp and pointed. Georgia’s eyes opened wide and her hand went to her throat.

“Why no. Of course not.”

“Latinos are from Latin America. Our families have been here, in North America, for many generations. Some for thousands of years. We have ancestors from Spain. Spain is in Europe. Spain is not in Latin America. We are not Latinos.”

Teresa was relieved by her outburst. The heat in her chest subsided to a warm glow. It felt good to talk to these people as they deserved, to speak her mind, even if what she said was just a snippet of all she wanted to say. Georgia blinked at her and said nothing. Teresa watched as the Anglo woman’s eyes fluttered among the females in the room, from Teresa to Marbella to little Karina.

“You know,” Georgia said.

She let the words hang. Teresa saw Wyatt lower his head and look at his mother from under his eyebrows. His face darkened again.

“You know,” Georgia repeated.

She put her chin up and gestured at Karina, waved bespangled fingers in her direction. It was a dismissive gesture and Teresa was very tired of it.

“I think I’m gonna have to make our first granddaughter — Brent Junior’s little Darlene — a holiday dress.”

“Aw Jesus,” Wyatt said. “Would you stop?”

Georgia pulled her chin down.

“Why I never,” she said.

She fluttered her eyelids.

“Wyatt — how dare you.”

She put her chin back up. She rose slowly and took mincing steps away from them. She gasped theatrically when she was out in the hall and her small hard heels were clacking on the marble floor.

Teresa looked at Chuy. His face was immobile but his eyes gleamed. He raised one eyebrow. Teresa did the same. Karina said something to Marbella that Teresa could not hear. Marbella leaned over and rubbed her daughter’s back and whispered an answer. Teresa saw the little head nod in response. Marbella kissed her daughter’s hair.

Heavy footsteps approached. Brent charged into the room and glared at his son. Little Karina huddled against her mother. Teresa’s heart throbbed against her ribs. Brent jabbed his finger at Wyatt.

“I want to talk to you,” Brent boomed.

“So talk.”

“I said I want to talk to you.”

“Anything you have to say to me, you can say it right here. This is my family.”

Brent stopped jabbing. He waved a hand at Teresa.

“These people?”

He stopped flapping his hand and let it fall to his side. Teresa was surprised by her own calm. It felt good to have his distaste for them finally out in the open. Brent jabbed his finger at Wyatt one more time.

“Damn you, Wyatt. God damn it.”

He turned and left. His heavy steps pounded on the marble in the hallway. Teresa looked at Wyatt. He smiled sadly at her and Chuy.

“I should have known,” Wyatt said. “They just don’t know how to behave.”

“Should we leave?” Chuy asked.

Wyatt looked pained.

“Only if you take us with you.”

Teresa and Chuy nodded. Marbella managed a smile. Wyatt patted Karina’s head and stood up.

“I’ll go end this circus,” he said, and left the room.

No one spoke while Wyatt was gone. Teresa’s fading adrenaline left a hollow feeling in her chest. She watched her daughter stroke her granddaughter’s hair and felt her own tensions being smoothed away. She wondered if Karina would also have a daughter when she was grown and this chain of women would continue. She hoped very deeply that it would.

She felt eyes on her and found Chuy watching, his black eyes glittering. She was certain he knew her feelings and she smiled and looked away and felt color in her cheeks. The power of her love for this man and this young woman and this girl overwhelmed her. She felt it hard to breath.

Two sets of footsteps came from the hall, one unmistakably Georgia’s prim little march, and Teresa’s heart throbbed again. She sat up straight in her high-backed chair. Wyatt came into the room first and Georgia followed behind, dabbing at reddened eyes.

“Please y’all,” she said, “I do wish you’d stay for dessert.”

Teresa was shocked. Why extend this ugliness? There was no one left to maintain appearances for. She started to decline, began to form the words, then saw the look on Marbella’s face and stayed for her. Chuy did it because he was too polite not to.

Brent did not join them. They had coffee and Teresa’s biscochitos and a supermarket ice cream cake with red and blue icing. Everyone got a piece of it and no one ate much, not even Karina, but Teresa’s cookies disappeared. When the cake had been melting on the table for fifteen minutes, Georgia excused herself for “the lady’s room” and while her steps still sounded in the hall, Chuy leaned close to his wife.

“Please let’s get out of here,” he whispered.

“As soon as she gets back.”

He nodded and squeezed her hand. Teresa kissed his cheek. He squeezed her hand again and everyone waited to go.

Georgia was back in a few minutes and didn’t argue when Wyatt said they were leaving. She resumed her mindless banter, as if the angry scenes had never happened, made sure Teresa had her empty cookie basket, then mumbled excuses for herself and went upstairs.

The Sandovals gathered in the front hall. Chuy opened the big door and Teresa was surprised to see sunlight. The low thick rain clouds had become high and spare, and the long summer evening was still winding down. Scattered raindrops caught the sunlight and made short gleaming streaks through the air.

Wyatt held a big green and red umbrella and walked Chuy and Teresa down the driveway to Chuy’s truck. He opened Teresa’s door for her.

“I’m sorry,” Wyatt said.

He stood in the corner made by the cab and the open door. He crouched down so that he could see Chuy too.

“I thought maybe they had changed. They never do.”

Chuy leaned forward on the steering wheel so he could see past Teresa.

“These things happen,” he said. “Family can be real tough.”

Teresa reached up and put a hand on Wyatt’s cheek.

“You deserve better,” she said.

He smiled. His eyes glinted like purple agate.

“I have better,” he said.

He stood up straight and closed Teresa’s door. He patted the roof of the pickup cab and went back up the driveway with the big colorful umbrella to fetch his wife and daughter. Chuy and Teresa waved at Marbella and Karina standing in the doorway of the big ugly house, then Chuy started the engine and eased the truck into gear and they glided away down the rain-soaked street.

The pickup truck went straight for about a hundred yards, then Chuy made a gentle swerve around a small dark lump lying in the road.

“What was that?” Teresa asked.

“Looked like a brick,” Chuy said.



When Chuy and Teresa pulled into their drive and stepped onto the sodden earth, ragged clouds in the western sky were tinted peach and bronze by the setting sun. The low sun shot golden beams in under the clouds and across the valley to the Jitomate Mountains. The Jitomates form a stone wall at the eastern edge of the Río Huérfano Valley. It is a vertical mile from the valley floor to the crest of the ridge, and the mountainside that faces the valley is sheer bare rock. The stone is a predominantly pink aggregate that responds dramatically to light, so the face the Jitomates presents the valley changes with the time of day, the weather, and the seasons. This time of year, they were usually deep

purple at dawn, reddish brown in the morning and midday, and spectacular reds and pinks in the late afternoon and evening. Today the golden sunset turned the illuminated stone into hammered copper, and cast shadows that were a deep tomato red.

At the crest, a rainbow arched. Intensely colored from end to end, it had thick deep bands of purple and red. Under its curve, a small thunderhead, wedge-shaped and cotton-white, sent jagged lightening bolts skittering across the rock edge of the ridge. The lightening and the stone turned shades of bronze. Behind this, the sky was a pure and enveloping deep-ocean blue.

Teresa had lived all her years in this spectacular valley and was used to the spectacle of its sunsets. She could look out her window and smile vaguely at a display of colors that would make the tourists cry for more film. But this evening's display was more astoundingly beautiful than she expected to encounter in this mortal life.

"Look at that," she whispered.

She touched Chuy's arm.

"I've never seen anything like that."

She watched the lightening bolts flicker and jump along the open rock at the ridge's crest and laughed like a child. She stole a glance at Chuy and saw his mouth hanging open. When she looked back at the rainbow, she noticed its colors had darkened slightly, and the rounded edges of the thunderhead were now tinged with gray and pink. She was moved by the subtle changes and how imperceptibly they occurred.

She heard a car out in the lane, glanced down and saw a familiar light blue sedan through a gap in the trees. She turned away from the mountains when her daughter's family pulled into the drive. Wyatt was at the wheel, Marbella was beside him, and Karina was in back. Teresa waved, then she turned back to face the Jitomates and stepped closer to her husband and took his arm. Car doors opened and closed.

"Daddy, look!" Karina called out.

"It's so beautiful," Marbella said.

They came and stood with Chuy and Teresa and everyone was mesmerized. Eventually the lightening stopped and muted conversation began. Then Wyatt followed Chuy back around to the garden, to check on Chuy's peppers. Marbella stood with Teresa, Karina between them, and they watched the colors shift on the mountains as the light faded and the shadows grew. They watched the thunderhead drift slowly away, toward the rolling plains past the mountains.

"I'm going in, momma," Marbella said. "That food was so horrible. I want to make something we can eat."

Teresa laughed.

“That’s a good idea. I’ll be there in a little bit.”

Marbella went across the yard and up the porch and into the house.

Teresa had pushed the ugliness at the Ames out of her mind somewhere back in River View III. She had enjoyed the beautiful weather all the way down Route 418 and into Los Huertos and right into her own front yard. She felt guilty for forgetting about the ugliness when she knew how heavy it must weigh on Marbella.

Little Karina leaned against her thigh. Teresa lifted Karina up and perched the child on her hip. She felt the good cotton cloth they had used to make the girl’s dress, and she felt the smoothness of her granddaughter’s skin. She shifted the child a little higher and put her cheek against Karina’s head. She felt the silkiness of the little one’s hair and smelled its hay-scent.

Shifting the child brought Teresa’s right index finger to a small tear along a seam in the holiday dress. She worried the tip of her finger into the hole and again Teresa had the sharp pang of hope that Marbella was pregnant. She stood in her yard, the damp earth dark under her feet, and held the silent Karina tight and watched the Jitomates slowly conclude their color show. She stood till the rainbow was a barely perceptible smear of purple and red, and the small thunderhead was no longer in sight.

[Al Sim](#) is the author of [Stories in the Old Style](#), published in 2006 by [Press 53](#). He is the recipient of the Glimmer Train Very Short Fiction Award, and has published in *Antietam Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Portland Magazine*, and many others. "The Holiday Dress" belongs to a sequence of linked stories set in Los Huertos, a fictional village in the Southwest. A first volume of these stories is slated for publication in Spring 2007 by Press 53.

## Fiction



by **Jacob McArthur Mooney**

It wasn't quite beautiful in Camp Country, USA. This was a disappointment, a setback for the photographers behind the postcards, for the people who sold sunglasses and backpacks to the hiking groups, and for the kids who came from Connecticut and Manhattan to see the beauty of America. It wasn't quite beautiful and it wasn't sunny. It was always an off color, impatient sort of overcast. The sky was the shade of a sick child, the monotonous fuzzy white of used underwear on a bedroom floor. It was grating, it got under your fingernails and made it so your clothes wouldn't dry. It was enough to make you miss the cold of Utah, Colorado, or wherever you were from, miss the dry, dependable vacuum of the wider, emptier, States of the Union.

But there was no sky in the bar called the Rolton Raucous Room, and so for a little while this didn't matter. For a little while my coworkers and I, and the participatory segment of the local population, didn't think too much about the weight of the sky, the terrible defocus in the lower atmosphere. We were drinking exceptionally cheap draft of conspicuously low quality in small groups under poor lighting and convincing each other to make our travel plans together. We were feeding on the moments of our time off from babysitting the ungracious children of the gifted elite of the Northeastern United States. We were concentrating on having as much fun as possible in the time provided to us for such pursuits.

I was the only one not anchored to a conversation. I floated around the room, cup of frothy beer in my left hand, dropping in on the dialogs, taking the temperatures of my peers, assigning value and making quick decisions based on shards of topic. I stopped and stuck my head into a quartet arguing politely about domestic politics.

"Sure, but no one ever said Head Start was going to be a cure-all," said some girl I had met the night before and immediately left forgotten. I offered the crowd an on message 'Hey' and walked off.

This was Friday Night in Camp Country, and we were part of that idealistic, restless mass of youth left coating the bakepan of the Anglo American Empire. We were among those who fell in on Pennsylvania, New York, and New England for eight to twelve weeks in the summer to earn small

amounts of money and tread water as enthusiastically as possible. We were perfectly crafted for the task, too. Scanning the room, I saw nothing but bandannas and sunburns, a shifting sandbar of cracked, peeling skin over diced freckles, under horn rimmed glasses, with mid hip jeans and belly button rings. The lifeguards with their knock off Raybans. The art instructors with the ubiquitous stains on their wrists and calves.



I hit the bar and we were singing out of tune. We were humming mostly, the older counselors making claims to the choruses. The bar played a lot of songs that were big back when I was in kindergarten (birth date = October 16th, 1985, but don't tell the bartenders). I knew and appreciated these songs from the snippets that were aired on the commercials for the multi disc sets that got released every few weeks celebrating whatever there was to celebrate about popular music in 1988. We all liked these songs, with the detached, ironic appreciation the young reserve for the artifacts of age. Like reading *The Hardy Boys* or watching *M\*A\*S\*H* on Sunday mornings; a pretty good time, but make sure you keep your head up.

This particular choir consisted of my key grouping for the evening and a few older friends. With two feet to spare, I felt the cold, fat hands of Amy on my arm. Amy was an oyster, born without the pearls. Amy was my catastrophic best friend. She was an enthusiastic self hater who's arsenal featured food, booze, pills, a constantly open mouth and (at one point) the biting end of a razor blade. She danced up my arm, jammed a spongy thumb into the back of my neck and laughed inappropriately in my face. It was not going to be a good night for this girl. She prompted me forward with her head.

"I'm fucked," she said, eyebrows arching away.

"Indeed." This was our game, she'd be loud, she'd be big, and I would counterpoint with a subtle, stoic reply. She was Oscar and I was Felix. She was Homer and I was Marge. It went on.

"I took a bunch of shit. I'm totally gone. I don't want to work tomorrow."

"You could take a sick day."

"Maybe. Hold my drink." Amy turned to spit a wad of waxy saliva on the dirty floor of the Triple R.

"Charming," I cringed. Amy held herself against me for a second, fixing her sock in her tennis shoe. Her red hair lost something in the din of the bar. She was fat, but not in the roly, curvaceous sort of way. Amy was a natural linebacker. She was born big, was destined to look obese no matter how much she worked out or what she ate, so I guess she decided to call it in early and had recently

started adding twenty or so pounds a year. At this rate, she'd reach 300 by 30.

Amy realigned her white-on-black hoodie, made sure the writing was legible, and swallowed hard. She must have been vomiting earlier, there was a slight disjunction in her breath, a subtle caution to her movements. Her whole body emanated some unacknowledged fear of her digestive tract.

"Want me to punch Katie Lewis?" Katie Lewis was enjambed in the far end of the bar crowd. She never did anything to anyone that would deserve a punching, never did anything but smile and excel. This was probably a key source of Amy's hatred.

"Why?"

"She spilled my drink."

"She was doing you a favor."

"Shut up," and she took a swig of protest, keeping her lips agape after she was done. Amy's mouth was open even when at rest, just a little too much to be socially acceptable. I should say she didn't do this with the vacancy of the slow children we all saw in elementary school, the punch drunk mascots of my youth. She lacked their laissez faire attitude, the absence of interest that characterized being ignored by one's peers and then their younger siblings as they swam on by you up the spawning stream of adolescence. Amy held her jaw up and out like she was preparing to bite you on the face, out of intensity, not ennui. Her mandible stuck out at an odd angle, her pointed chin stood dagger ready, aimed at your throat. She looked like a combative thirteen year old on her first day back to school after getting braces, wanting you to say something so she could punch you in the gut. No one ever said anything to Amy about her mouth.

I lost myself briefly to my own thoughts and when I looked up Amy was leaving. I made sure her trajectory would keep her away from poor Katie and left her to the next stop along the rails. I was so totally entranced by Amy's bullshit, the unique rationalizations and leaps of logic that kept her head above water.

If the after-school specials were true and we all excelled at something, then I excelled at detecting and appreciating the bullshit of others. I was a collector of it, I saw it miles away and wanted to understand. Some people would call this empathy, but that's not the word. Empathy is a tool of psychoanalysts, social workers, and doers of good deeds. Empathy is used to help people; I didn't help them, I didn't have the drive, energy or conscience for that. I was a collector, I binge drank in the great lies of others. It was a little lonely, a curse sometimes, to know when someone was bullshitting. It wasn't necessarily worth it to see the connection between someone saying they'd never fly because they worried about terrorism and the tormented contortion on their face when forced to climb up a ladder. Their flying bullshit. What good did it do you to know that Howard Washington from the tennis department didn't abstain from the bars out of virtue, but rather because he was raised under the tenure of an abusive, drunken father (or uncle, I haven't figured it out for sure).

It passed the time and made for good thinking. What kept me interested in other people's lies was the break in the story, the beautiful moment when, say, I realized that Amy wore full length sweaters because she had plotted out the entire Mississippi river system in scar tissue on her arm. Not, as she said, because she refused to be gawked at by horny men.

I must have been staring. When I looked up Katie Lewis was smiling back at me. The accommodating, coy smile of a girl who didn't mind too much the gawks of horny men. I let it go for now, smiled back out of habit, but mostly I let it go.

I finished my drink and remembered that I really didn't care for beer. It was something I had thought of before—that beer was one of those things in life that seems a lot more pleasant in yearning, in possibility, than in reality. I think I even swore off lager completely one point last summer, probably at this exact same bar, with a similar pile of sea foamy beer in the bottom of a similarly disposable cup. This decision was different, I knew; this one meant something. I threw my cup down. It bounced once, twice and leaked its foam out on the table. It teetered for a moment and fell over. Gravity. Conclusive. Pat. Like the unavoidable result of a hundred ball bearings pushing down their weight. I sneezed and wiped my hand under the bar. I put two dollars on the counter and ordered another draft. Not every little moment was an epiphany, even the quietest ones were mostly not important.

It was two o'clock and I was locked in now. The opportunity for a swift, responsible evening had passed. Nonetheless, the bar should be closing soon, because this part of the world was founded by fanatics and run by their disciples. Because all the employees have children under ten who will want to go to school tomorrow, because our bosses think that while we should be allowed to take care of children while hungover, we should probably not be still drunk. I spun my stool around, looking for a driver to take me home. No luck. There were five people left in the bar, and I didn't recognize any of them. Then Katie Lewis called out from the ladies room for someone to wait up for her. I decided I would do.



Fast forward fifty minutes and Katie Lewis and I are running. We're running, disjointed and clumsy down some random back road that only gets a number, no name except for whatever the half-dozen residents have thought up over the years. Bog Road maybe, or Bendy Street. We are running and scared shitless, but we're laughing. Forty yards behind us a large man who wants to join the army and goes by the name 'Mex' is picking himself up, peeling away a layer of dew dampened road dust and swearing me away. Then he is running too, but his running is fueled by embarrassment while ours is by fear (and in my case, lust, though the two are easily confused). So we keep adding to the distance, fifty, sixty yards and he falls out of sight with every new hinge in the road, every lump of Pocono between us. Seventy, a hundred yards, a football field and we're safe. We strain into the

nothingness and he's not running anymore. He's gone. Mex has left us alone.

"Are we okay now?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Do you want to head back to camp and maybe eat some ice cream?" I loved these questions, the ones that could only make sense in the hooligan hours, and in this case only when said with the pure simplicity of a beautiful woman who's been shooting Tequila all night.

"Sure. Ice cream sounds good." We had made a wrong turn when Mex started chasing, so we had a bit of a walk. This afforded us time to sober up, to laugh about the night, to retell in anecdote what had just taken place.

"He had it coming," she went on. "That asshole had no right being out here like that. People live on this street."

"They sure do."

"Remember what he said to me?"

"He called you juicy."

"Yeah", and she paused for effect, "I am pretty juicy." This set her off laughing and I laughed at her laughing. Roughly speaking, this was comedy.

The night suffered along behind us. It was weird, the way light hides at nighttime, these weird pockets of brighter space, open spots where the moon comes in uninhibited and it could easily be dusk. This is what I loved about the early morning, nothing was final, no matter what songwriter sang otherwise. There was no rock bottom to the light, it lived on, breathing shallow under the weight of darkness. I didn't know if Katie Lewis thought this, I guessed that she didn't.

"What do you lie about?" I had said this, I guess. Sometimes we talk without prepping the sentiment beforehand.

"Excuse me?"

"Do you ever lie?"

"I try not to. Do you?"

"Sure."

"About what?" I took this very seriously, let the pace of our feet keep time, let it count out ten beats before I started talking.

"I hate beer."

"No you don't."

"I do. It's fucking gross." This wasn't a lie to everyone, I had told Amy once. But Amy and I were better, longer term friends and with all the entertainment I derived from her secrets I felt I owed her at least one in return. Now I had come clean to two people. I felt my secret was still safe, as domestic and unimportant as it was. I didn't have many lies, much bullshit, if you will, and it didn't trouble me to reveal some of it to a drunken blond in sandals and hoop earrings and the terribly inadequate Pennsylvanian sky.

We walked, and the light and the darkness walked with us, the trees must have kept pace too, because we never saw them changing. The camp came to us in increments, a gradual increase in the size of the signs advertising its approach. Eventually there was color to the signs, then one more big, rainbow banner and we were there. We high stepped it through the tall grass in the back way and found ourselves at the main office. No lights were on. No one was up.

"I'm gonna take a piss," she said and turned around the back of the building. I pulled out a bill and scored a soda; it felt like it might rain. I was in that post drunk malaise now. The time when drunk drivers are so dangerous. You have the intoxication plus the fatigue plus the lack of concern brought on by acclimatizing oneself to both. I wasn't driving anywhere. Katie came out like she had been crying.

"I threw up." She had. Her eyes were all bloodshot, she was teetering a bit. She wanted a hug and I was certainly willing.

"Don't worry about it." I held her to my face for a second, hoping to inspire some sudden romantic whim, like how on TV all the big flings start with an awkward silence, or a stare held two seconds too long. I could tell from her breath she had eaten onions. She could tell from my hands I was lying when I said I wasn't cold. If this was romance, I didn't want any. We are all just excuses for sex.

"Why were you staring at me in the bar?"

"You were staring at me."

"Whatever."

We kissed. Not as much as you'd think, but we kissed. Her lips were gross, just disgusting, the soft pink underbelly of a virginal drama queen. I loved them both equally, my first born son and daughter. Around us, the night huddled in to share the secret, birds stopped flying. Somewhere in rural Virginia her seventeen year old boyfriend was wondering why his nose itched so much.

"What do you lie about?" I pulled back as I said this. I pulled back because I am stubborn and afraid of love.

"Why does it matter?"

"What do you lie about?"

"Not everyone lies."

"Bullshit."

We never got more than a half a foot apart the whole time. I could see every detail of her eyes; the sharp, piercing facade of questions that don't need answers and after that, quieter, the answers waiting for the perfect question to come find them. I went fishing.

"Do you love your boyfriend?" This caught her a bit. Something happened.

"I don't know, why?"

"Have you slept with him?" and she shook her head and backed away, disgusted, like a dog who just had smoked blown into its face. Like a girl who I did not just kiss in a dark forest, who did not just throw up behind her boss's office at 3:15 in the morning.

"Do you think that's any of your business?"

"Absolutely not."

"Good then."

"Have you?"

"No."

"Really. Why?"

"I don't know. Leave me alone". She was free to walk away.

"You've been together for six months."

"I'm saving myself."

"No you're not. Why no sex?" She softened a bit in my assertiveness, and the conversation forked up the highroad, or at least, the less dirty, less abrasive one.

"He doesn't want to."

"Why not?"

"He says it'll ruin me. And we wouldn't be together any more after."

Somewhere in rural Virginia a chicken shit seventeen year old who knows nothing about anything is fucking up a beautiful young girl for his own vanity. His-and-hers sex bullshit.

I let it drop, and the evening resumed its course towards parting. I don't know how to describe my crush on Katie Lewis. I liked her, but that was almost a given around a girl of her quality. She was impossible not to like and every heterosexual male in Camp Country would admit some degree of admiration, or at some initial sense of (anonymous) lust. It was just that the Katie Lewis's of the world, their purity, the uniformity of their beauty, they were off the radar screen of your average short, non-athletic young man like myself. When she drops from the sky, she's like an August snowstorm, like the Coke bottle in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, it's all we can manage just to worship and stay sane.

I wanted to express this, helped by drink, camouflaged by the blanket of the night (she might think it's someone else. I wanted to tell Katie Lewis that I loved her. We were three quarters up the path to the girls' bunks when I grabbed her arm.

"Katie?"

"Yeah."

"Thanks for telling me your lies."

"Why are you so into other people's lies."

"I don't know. I'm into yours." And she got quiet with this first admission, she knew what was coming. Like the perfect playing partner, she set me up a beauty, and I killed it.

"What do you want from me?"

"I don't know. Everything. I want five kids, a house with a two-car garage. I want your mom to like me. I want your dad to hate me at first but then to like me later. I want to rush around our kitchen making coffee and the kids' lunches with you. I want us to stay up all night arguing about politics and movies, then drive each other to work. I want to get at least one black eye defending you from someone else."

And there we were. Just us, the low pressure system, a string of worker ants walking single file between our legs, and the mountains, shoulder-to-shoulder, boxing out America. I couldn't make out Katie Lewis's face in the darkness, so I had to rely on the bigger body parts. Her legs were twisting back and forth so her ankle rolled around in the mud. She had a hand on her hip and a hand on her thigh. She was cold, I could see it in her shoulders.

She walked away, slowly, then faster and I ran after. I called her name, yelled for her to come back

and she did. She shuffled back and jumped in my arms, tried to kiss me and missed. She hit her top teeth on my chin. She was crying. I could feel it on my cheeks, they were my tears now, I owned them. She said something I couldn't hear and then she let go. She turned and walked away, not too fast, but she had somewhere she wanted to be. I didn't follow this time.

For one hour and eighteen minutes I sat on a fallen tree three-quarters of the way up that path. I thought about detecting bullshit and whether a new hobby might be in order. I counted all the people I loved on one hand. I thought about Amy and jabbed a sharp twig into my forearm to no effect. I thought about Mex who would never tell his army buddies the story about how he got a face full of mud while talking up some out of town girl on a drizzly night in the Poconos. He would forever leave out the part of the story where some little shit in glasses snuck up behind him, kicked out his legs, threw a half a cup of wet Pennsylvania in his face, and ran away. The night crept on behind me and the day was unavoidable now, it was coming. The bastard sun would rise again. The leaves on the trees lightened from black to dark green. It was 4:45 and I wanted to be an Eskimo. I wanted to live for months on end in darkness. I couldn't bear to see the color of my hands.

At this lowest valley I was sucked from my daze by two older campers, a boy and a girl. They were dressed to get wet and probably had. This I loved. I loved the institutionalism of summer camp design. The sexlessness of the whole thing, the segregated boys and girls sides, and behind that, the rustle in the bushes, the glacial force of adolescence that no walls or curfew could hold down. If you closed your eyes tight, you could hear the sound of cherries being broken. They haunted the mountains like morning peepers, like crickets rubbing legs. The couple pretended to not notice me and I let it pass.

With the first hint of sun came Amy, and I had underestimated how bad she'd be. Amy was a complete disaster, no part of her was as I left it. I apologized under my breath for not following her into the Rolton crowd several hours earlier. She was carrying a bookbag, wet and the color of (I'm sorry I had to say it) shit. Her mouth was opened more now, like the weight of her jawbone was dragging it down, eating her lower face away. She stopped short, five paces in front of me and started crying. I had enough of the tears of young women tonight. I was filled to capacity, brimming with the salty brine.

"Stop crying."

"Shut up." She kept walking.

"Go away."

"This is the way to my bunk." True.

Amy kept walking, and I didn't talk her out of it. She sat down beside me.

"I thought you were going to your bunk?" But she was already lost, crying and caving in. I deduced that the bunk was just an excuse. She tucked her head into her hoodie and shrunk away. I sat with Amy. The day stopped creeping, ceased fire out of respect.

"I don't know what's wrong." Amy's eyes were glowing in the darkness, catching every single splash of the little light there was. "No one likes me."

"I like you." From somewhere far away, I was laughing at myself.

"You make fun of me." She had been talking to the right crowd. "You told people I used to hurt myself." Had I? I had no specific memory of it, but I had been drinking heavily since five o'clock the day before and had specific memories of very little.

"I didn't make fun of you." It should be said that this never resembled an argument, more a pouting game of charades. We took turns squeaking out these half sentences in the only cloudy cadence we could find.

"Katie Lewis said you did."

"When did you see Katie?"

"Few minutes ago. She was with Ted." I might have flinched, but Ted was no problem. He was a friend to everyone and a drunken drag off to none. She would sleep on his couch and he would make her soup. "Why don't I get anybody?"

"Not everyone gets somebody."

"Do you think I deserve somebody?" and she shifted her weight towards me. She was a beautiful mess, just a sloppy deconstruction of a girl. Things were out of place; eyes, ears, and cheeks looked like they had been removed and reassembled from memory by a five-year-old. What could I say?

"Yes. Everyone gets somebody." I was unnecessary, now, to the conversation, I was Amy's sounding board, her mirror, mirror on the wall.

"I just want to be close to someone. I just want to know people." And she burrowed her head in my lap. I tried my best not to think about sex. She was sobbing, yes, but the random intonations it caused in her hot breath made me think of orgasms. I lifted her up and held her melting face in my hands. Her eyes sat half open on her cheekbones, looking past me over either shoulder, everything about her screamed "disease" at different volumes.

"I love you, Amy." What else could I have said? The morning slid in between us, but I refused it. I have said 'I love you' to too few people to notice things like the sunrise. I looked at Amy's failing face but thought about Katie Lewis, yet another virgin princess sleeping it off on the futons or dorm beds of America. I thought about all the girls I did not say I loved when I could have. All the junior and senior high crushes, the random chance meetings in the bars and grocery stores of my world. I thought about the stupidity of observation for its own sake, the hallucinating fear of a life you're meant to spend in reality. I thought about what to say to Amy to get her to sleep with me tonight. I didn't know anything else but sex. Love was for nights when you haven't been self-poisoning. Love was a long-term project and I could get started in the morning. Amy was speaking for the both of us

when she wondered why she always ended up alone.

"Do you?" The question came like a mouse running across my foot. Do I what? She shook her head a little, then she served up me up the question of the night, "Jesus. What do you want from me?"

I only had one good answer to this, and I already used it. But it was quarter to six in the morning and I was too cold to sleep alone. I used the one I had.

"I don't know. Everything. I want five kids and a house with a two-car garage. I want your mom to like me. I want your dad to hate me first but then to like me later. I want to rush around our kitchen making coffee and the kids' lunches with you. I want us to stay up all night arguing about politics and movies, then drive each other to work. I want to get at least one black eye defending you from someone else." This is how I remember it. I probably left out some parts and maybe stopped the whole thing short, but Amy was drunker, uglier, and had lower expectations than Katie Lewis. It worked fine.

I stood up and was shocked again by the velocity of morning. I thought about my campers, who would be up for breakfast in two and a half hours. I thought about their mothers, who paid good money for them to be looked after by honest professionals who didn't take advantage of drunk girls with low self esteem to fulfill their own desperate self interests.

I thought about Katie Lewis the entire time we made love, if that's what you'd call it. I realized I could never love Amy, as I thrust away on the dirty wet floor of the abandoned boathouse. I couldn't even look her in the eyes so I'm not sure if she ever stopped crying. When we finished I stayed inside her, and she clung like a kitten to my back. There was no bullshit now. I dragged my lips up her Mississippi river to Chicago, strumming her blue forearm with my tongue. I asked if her scars hurt and she said yes. We fell asleep naked. There could be no more bullshit when you've fallen asleep inside someone, naked and sweaty and all the lights still on.



I'm lucky I woke up, by myself and without anyone in power noticing. The couple of hours I had slept bought me enough sobriety to know I was being an idiot and it's just dumb luck I hadn't been caught. I shook Amy and she didn't wake up. Figuring she'd end up getting fired if forced to work with children today, I checked her breathing, threw a blanket over her, turned the lights off, and left.

There's a certain perversion to great activity when you're hungover. Alcohol gives you this weird sense of unity, probably because it's usually consumed in large social groups. Then when you see people going through their mornings; upbeat, energetic and generally oblivious to the tone of your day, it catches you off guard. I snuck by the pile of chattering kids and into the cafeteria, where a handful of kitchen staff hurried around getting ready. The coffee machine was high up on a shelf and

in the corner of the building, this to keep the young ones away.

I was glad there was no sky in the cafeteria, glad this story ended where it started; indoors. I worried that I was thinking too much about the weather, that this was a sign of coming age, brought on by exposure to an environment dominated by the young. The truth is that there are only four characters in this story. In descending order of importance to the plot, they are Katie Lewis, Me, Mex the Local, and Amy. The sky said nothing, means nothing. I deny the whole damn thing.

[Jacob McArthur Mooney](#) lives predominantly in Atlantic Canada with some roommates and an oak tree. There is an ocean nearby. His poetry, fiction, and reviews may be tracked down at places like Nth Position, Thieves Jargon, Word Riot, and the Laura Hird Showcase.

## Fiction



by T.R. Healy

"Hello."

"Hello there," the older man mumbled as Chapin sauntered across his lawn.

What can I do for you this morning?"

He stepped around an empty wheelbarrow and handed Barnicle his business card. "I recently moved here from Springwater and opened a studio on 92nd Street and thought I'd introduce myself and let folks know I'm open for business."

Barnicle glanced at the card which identified Malcolm Chapin as an award-winning violinist who offered private lessons at reasonable rates. "You any good?" he asked.

"Good enough for what I charge."

"Well, I am afraid I am a little old to start learning how to play the fiddle, but I suppose some folks around here with little ones might be interested in your services."

"Oh, I assumed you had some kids because of what you're doing here," he said, glancing at the crude shell of a midget racing car that the man was earnestly sanding in his driveway.

He chuckled. "No, as a matter of fact, this is all mine. It's a soapbox derby car."

"So I can see. But isn't that a race for kids?"

"It is but for the past four years we've had this event at the park down the street that's strictly for grown-ups—or at least people who claim to be older than twenty-one. It's kind of a crazy afternoon

with all kinds of people competing in all kinds of different cars that they've made themselves or with the help of their friends. All the money that's raised from the entry fees goes to the Hobgood Children's Hospital, so it's definitely for a worthy cause. But the main appeal is that you get to act like a thirteen-year-old again."

"I've heard of worse things a person can do in his spare time," he said as he started to leave.

"You should enter a car yourself," Barnicle told him. "You'd definitely meet a lot of people there with kids."

"Oh, I don't doubt that. But I wouldn't know the first thing about constructing one. When it comes to doing things around the house, I'm all thumbs I'm afraid."

"Really, it's a lot easier than it looks."

"Maybe to you it is but not to me."

"Well, give it some thought, and if you decide to give it a go, I'll be glad to give you a hand in building your rig."

He grinned. "I appreciate the offer but I don't think that's something I'm likely to get involved in."

"Suit yourself," he replied. "But you know where to find me if you change your mind."



His shoulders swaying, his right foot scraping the pavement, Chapin finished a furious rendition of "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" then went right into another old mountain tune in which his fiddle seemed to chirp like a mockingbird. Close to a dozen people had gathered around to listen. Some stayed through an entire song, some even two or three, but most moved on after a few bars, shyly dropping some change into his violin case. He had not played his fiddle on a streetcorner in years, not since he was in college and did it then only to earn his rent money. But ever since he arrived in town a couple of months ago, he had been out playing nearly every day to let people know about his studio. He left open his violin case so people could toss in some spare change but what he really hoped they would do was take one of his business cards. But few did, fewer even than left money. Still, he continued to go out and play, as well as hand out his cards door to door, convinced that eventually he would drum up some business.

"You know 'Old Joe Clark?'" someone asked after he paused to take sip from his water bottle.

"Sure," he replied, idly plucking a note on his fiddle.

"How about playing it then?"

Raising his bow to his fiddle, he obliged the request, tearing into the old chestnut as if it were the first time he had played it. The woman who made the request smiled, her immense body awkwardly moving in time with the music, and he smiled back, hoping she would take a card.

Despite all the times he had played outdoors the past two weeks, he still could not believe it was really he and not someone else out there. Only a couple of months ago he had been at Alexander Hamilton High School, giving violin lessons and teaching classes in music appreciation. He had been there four and a half years, until he was summarily dismissed during spring break. He could not believe it anymore than he could believe he was now standing on a corner playing his fiddle.

One afternoon, while giving a lesson to a contentious student who seldom ever did what he was told, he lost his temper and shook the boy by the shoulders, inadvertently banging his head against the chalk board. Clearly he was wrong and, as expected, the boy told his parents, who complained to the principal. He expected to be suspended without pay for a couple of days, perhaps even a week, but instead he was terminated. The past two years, reports of abusive teachers in other schools had periodically appeared in the media, so Mrs. Fulwiler, the principal, decided such conduct would not be tolerated at Hamilton. He was stunned by her decision, futilely tried to persuade her to change her mind, but she was adamant that what he had done was inexcusable. He agreed, but still didn't believe he deserved to lose his job.



"My my, I didn't expect to find you playing out here," Barnicle remarked after Chapin finished "Rhapsody in Blue" to sporadic applause.

"Neither did I, to be honest."

"Haven't you recruited any students yet?"

"There are a couple prospects, but you can never be sure."

"I don't know the first thing about music but you sound too good to be playing outside a shopping mall."

Chapin smiled, idly tapping his bow against the side of his knee.

"You give anymore thought to entering the Adults Only Derby?"

"No, can't say that I have."

"Some people are coming over to my place tonight for some advice about the construction of their cars. Why don't you stop by and I can show you what is involved in making one. It's really not that difficult."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Hell, you might as well," he insisted. "Who knows? You might even round up a couple more prospects for your studio."

"I'll think about it."

"No, you've already done that. Just come by and see if what we're doing interests you, and if not, I promise I won't bother you again."

Not really having anything better to do, he wandered over to Barnicle's house that evening and found him showing four members of a Lutheran social club how to construct a dependable coaster. Parts were scattered all over his work bench, along with the handful of tools needed to put them together. Chapin half listened to what he had to say, however, still not the least bit interested in making his own car.

"What brings you here?" one of the Lutherans inquired after Barnicle introduced him as a newcomer to town.

"Oh, I just got bored with what I was doing," he stammered.

"And what was that?"

Not wishing to disclose that he had lost his teaching position, he quickly said, "I was writing copy for an advertising firm."

"You going to look for a job here in advertising?"

He shook his head. "I've been writing copy long enough," he said, continuing to lie. "Now I'd like to see if I can make some money as a musician again."

Others, during the course of the evening, probed further and, almost reflexively, he continued to fabricate things about himself. He said he occupied the first chair in the Minneapolis Pops Orchestra for a season, said he had lived in Paris for six months and once shared a stage with Stephane Grappelli, said he had toured all over Europe, said he had sat in on a recording session with Alison Krauss and Union Station. All the things he wished he had done he said, and they believed him. Not

one of them, including Barnicle, voiced any doubts about his many claims. He was surprised how satisfying it was to know that others could believe he was capable of doing all these unusual things. To them, he was not a disgraced music teacher, but rather someone to be respected and admired.

It was far more interesting to construct a whole new identity, he reckoned, than it was to construct some playground car. Indeed, the only reason he would continue to visit Barnicle was so he could add more details to his colorful new past.



"This may sound a little strange," Barnicle remarked one night to Chapin while helping him align the wheels of his cobalt blue car, "but some folks believe it helps to scream when you're going down the course because it gives you a smoother ride."

"How's that?"

"They think the screaming mitigates against the vibrations of the cars as they roll down the course."

"You believe that?"

He shrugged. "It can't hurt I figure so you may as well do it."

Another driver, Ammons, looked up from his teardrop-shaped car and said, "I scream my lungs out when I go down the hill but I think it has more to do with my nerves than improving my chances of going any faster."

Barnicle chuckled. "Ain't that the truth."

"I know that's why I'd be hollering," Chapin admitted, slowly revolving the left front wheel of his car.

"You probably won't make a peep," Ammons predicted. "You'll be so focused, just as you must've been when you played the national anthem at Yankee Stadium."

At once, he imagined the enormous degree of concentration such a performance would have required, as if he had really played there. Then he smiled to himself, almost remembering something that never occurred. It was not the first time he had nearly convinced himself he had performed one of the remarkable things he had claimed. Indeed, the more claims he made the more he began to believe they were actually part of his past.

Certainly those he spun his stories to believed him. Before long, a picture of him playing his fiddle on a corner appeared in the neighborhood paper accompanied by a lengthy article listing the many venues where he had performed in Europe and North Africa. It seemed right somehow, as if he really deserved all the attention he received. No longer was he a dismissed music teacher. Now he was someone others recognized and wished to emulate. More and more people stopped to listen to him play, and many of them took one of his cards. He even acquired a few students, eager to learn from someone who said he had performed with Grappelli.



"Remember, this isn't really a race," Barnicle reminded Chapin as they hauled their cars in his pickup truck. "It's just an excuse to have a few laughs and raise some money for a good cause."

"If it's not a race, why does everyone call it one?"

"Just a figure of speech. No trophies or ribbons are handed out. The only goal other than to have a good time is to finish your run."

He laughed nervously. "I should be able to do that."

"You should have no problem after what you did the other day," he said, referring to the trial run Chapin made on the small slope behind Barnicle's garage. "Just avoid hitting any bumps and you'll do just fine."

"I hope so."

"No problem," he assured him. "Then, when you're through, you can mingle with the crowd and pass out your cards and maybe play your fiddle. And I bet by the end of the day you'll have enough students to fill a damn classroom."

The thought of a classroom suddenly made his pulse race, reminding him of all the musty spaces he had taught in over the years. They were his real life, not some imaginary recording studio in Paris or Memphis.

The narrow road that wound through the park was lined with cars and vans and flatbed trucks, which surprised Chapin, who had not really believed the event would attract so many people. He realized Barnicle was correct when he told him this would be a good place to meet people and pass out his cards. Near the crest of the hill they parked under a big leaf maple tree and rolled off their cars, pushing them over to the pit area which was marked off with orange traffic cones. Beside it, the

Grateful Dead blaring through a speaker on its roof, was a canary-yellow popcorn wagon that was surrounded by children. A few tangerine balloons drifted loose from the banner stretched above the finish line. Spectators were everywhere along the half mile course, seated on the grass and on stools and camp chairs and a few even on tree limbs.

"Good God, it's like a damn circus out here," Chapin declared as he noticed a car resembling a Roman chariot being pushed through the pit area by a driver outfitted in a plastic breastplate.

Barnicle smiled, noticing the centurion. "Circus Maximus, you mean."

"I can't believe the work put into the construction of some of these cars."

"A lot of amateur engineers like to test their imaginations."

Chapin gazed intently around the area, amazed at the elaborate designs of some of the vehicles. He saw three crafted from beds, a couple of coffins, a giant goldfish bowl, and a half-dozen enormous beer cans. And the drivers and crews appeared just as outrageous, decked out in clown suits, goggles and dusters, iridescent jumpsuits, tiger-striped fatigues, top hats and tails. He seemed almost conservative wearing the Captain America motorcycle helmet that Barnicle had loaned him.

"Your car might not look as colorful as some of these contraptions," Barnicle conceded, "but I guarantee you it'll go as fast as any of them. Don't forget, they're all powered by gravity so no one really has an advantage over anyone else."

He did not reply, his attention still fixed on the strange cars and crews in the pit area.

Moments later, as Barnicle tightened the rear wheels of the car, a water balloon sailed through the air and splashed beside him, soaking his trousers and shoes. He shook his head, laughing. "Now that's something a driver can't have any control over."

"What do you mean?"

"Some crews spend half their time lobbing water balloons at one another. It's just something you have to be aware of and then just as quickly put out of your mind. All you should be thinking about is crossing the finish line as fast as you can."

"That's easier said than done."

"Not if you really put your mind to it," he said sharply.

Chapin nodded, dodging the path of another balloon.

"You should be called to the starting line any minute now."

He glanced at his watch. "I know."

"You feeling all right?"

He smiled tentatively. "The butterflies in my stomach feel like their wings are made out of razor blades, but otherwise I feel fine."

"Good, because I know you're going to do well out there."

Less than four minutes later, he was finally on the starting line, wedged between a swollen hot dog and a car built from an aluminum fishing boat. The driver of the boat wore a crumpled skipper's cap, the other driver had on a straw pith helmet. The flag girl stood a few feet in front of them on the track, waiting for the countdown from the derby director. She didn't appear much older than the students at Hamilton and like many of them found it difficult to stand still and pranced around as if on a dance floor. Appropriately, she had on the knee-high white leather boots of a go-go dancer, a black tank top, and a fringed miniskirt.

He watched her for a moment, the fringe of her skirt shaking frantically above her knees, then peered down the track. It was much steeper than the slope he had practiced on behind Barnicle's garage, and nearly twice as long. For a split instant, he wondered if he would be able to stop after he crossed the finish line, if he might continue on and race through the park until he crashed into one of the huge maple trees. The thought made him cringe but quickly he dismissed it, aware that every other driver he had watched had come to a complete stop.

The cars could be pushed for the first ten yards. Then the drivers were strictly on their own. Barnicle had agreed to be his pusher and now slowly, anxiously he pressed his bony fingers into Chapin's shoulders.



"You all set?" he asked after a moment.

"As much as I'll ever be, I guess."

He then bent down and whispered into his left ear. "You're going to do just fine. I am sure of it."

"On your mark," the director bellowed through his bullhorn.

Barnicle, inhaling slowly, stepped back and braced his shoulder against the rear of the fuselage.

"Get set ... go!"

The flag girl, her hair tumbling over her shoulders, jumped up and down, furiously waving a checkered flag the size of a car blanket.

The car bolted ahead, with Barnicle groaning loudly as he pushed it into the lead. Then he peeled away and Chapin was on his own and leaned forward, straining to make the car go faster as the grade rapidly grew steeper. A bulging water balloon splashed beside his left rear wheel then one struck in front of him, soaking the sleeves of his windbreaker. He ignored them, concentrating on staying in his lane.

Gradually the runabout began to pick up speed and close on his left shoulder, and he leaned forward even more, and urgently began to scream. Soon the boat disappeared, and all he could see out of the corner of his eyes were scads of spectators lined along the course. He smiled uncontrollably, amazed that the trick worked, and raced across the finish line before the other cars.

Moments later, Barnicle joined him at the finish line, his toothy grin as bright as the wire wheels of the car, and offered his congratulations. "You could not have driven a better race!" he said, effusively pounding him on the shoulders.

"You were outstanding."

"I did everything you told me to do."

"You certainly did."

He then urged him to pass out his business cards and play some tunes on his fiddle. Immediately his heart dropped a notch, and a vein in his forehead began to pound. The suggestion stung him back to reality, reminding Chapin that he was not really here to enjoy himself and accept compliments for his performance on the hill but to continue to pretend he was someone he wasn't. Despite what he did moments earlier, he knew he was a fraud and that made him cringe in revulsion. The last thing he wanted to do now was play his fiddle, but he obliged Barnicle and said he would get it out of the truck.

A few people offered their congratulations as he passed by, some even shook his hand. And he was surprised how grateful he was for their support, gradually realizing that he had accomplished something genuine for a change. Shortly after he started back to the truck, he paused and glanced around at the road that wound through the park, and then, before he quite realized what he was doing, he shoved the car onto the road, hopped it, and began to roll through the first turn. A curious, almost infantile squeal rose from deep inside of him as he raced ahead, reminding him of the satisfaction he had felt hurtling down the course just moments ago.

[T.R. Healy](#) was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, and his stories have appeared in such online publications as Flashquake, Plum Biscuit, and Verbsap.

## Article



by Florence Guido-DiBrito and Alicia Fedelina Chávez

View online slideshow at [www.terrain.org/articles/19/guido-dibrito\\_chavez.htm](http://www.terrain.org/articles/19/guido-dibrito_chavez.htm).

*Before I even knew the name of this place  
I could have proven to you that it had always existed in my heart...  
There is continuity in the blood that transcends  
geography, language, skin color, time...  
So I embrace ravens, magpies, killdeer,  
my neighbors, their sheep and the mountains.  
When I got here, finally, my body caught up to the rest of me  
and my life became a victory.*

— John Nichols, *If Mountains Die: A New Mexico Memoir*

What does it mean to craft a college campus in the spirit of the place it serves? The [University of New Mexico - Taos](http://www.unm.edu), an emerging college less than 12 years old, is deeply rooted in the high desert mountains and tri-cultural communities of northern New Mexico. As a tiny collegiate organization crafted through consistent, reflective application of an integrated campus ecology, UNM-Taos embraces holistic values, healthy relationships and inspiring, sustainable built and natural spaces. This article and slideshow, from the perspectives of campus leader and photoethnographic researcher, provide a snapshot of a college developing in congruence with the unique rhythms of its physical and spiritual environment.

With heightened awareness since 9/11, U.S. citizens long for places that make them feel nurtured, empowered, inspired and welcomed. We believe that the future of higher education likewise lies in evolving campuses congruent with the spirit of the places they serve and that are much kinder to the earth that sustains us.

## **Journey of Creation**

**by Alicia Fedelina Chávez**

*Querencia* is a Spanish word that speaks of a longing for your spirit home and the familiar rhythms of your heart. In fall of 2001, I began my role as a leader in the creation of a new college in my home town of Taos, New Mexico. After 25 years of leading and teaching in other colleges around the nation, I am where I want to be—serving New Mexico in ways I never thought possible. As a person of Spanish and Native American heritage, raised in northern New Mexico, I thought it would grow easier to be away. In truth, it became increasingly difficult each day because I was lost without the rhythms of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the smell of desert sage, the headiness of high altitude vistas, the power of alpine storms, skies so blue they hurt your eyes, the passionate blend of ancient and new traditions, the balance of a contemplative life, and the intrusive challenge and warmth of Spanish and Native American relations. I interpreted my leadership responsibility for this emerging campus as facilitating the creation of a campus ecosystem in congruence with the rhythms of Northern New Mexico. These rhythms include strong emphasis on a balanced, contemplative, communal, and spiritual life leading to the building of a collaborative learning community and a sustainable campus ecosystem.



UNM-Taos is located on 80 acres donated by a local family in the high desert of northern New Mexico. It serves 1,300 students, mostly from Hispanic and Native American communities in the region.

## **The Taos Region**

**by Florence Guido-DiBrito**

What does it mean to live in a place that is your spirit home, regardless of whether you were born there or not? In fall 2003, I began a sabbatical at UNM-Taos to fulfill my goal of involvement, as a researcher, in creating a college and building a learning community in northern New Mexico. As a photoethnographer, I found myself observing the land, people, and diverse cultures that paint a picture of UNM-Taos and the enchanted circle region.



Taos is characterized by its abundance of adobe architecture, artistic expression, diverse peoples, deep contrasts, and brilliant blue skies.

The Taos community, where UNM-Taos is situated, deeply reflects its 900-year-old heritage. Adobe homes and narrow streets with signs like La Placita and Romero lined with latilla fences adorn this community. Taos Pueblo, nestled into and protected by the highest peak in New Mexico's mighty Sangre de Cristo Mountains, is a compelling presence in the valley and home to its richly-spirited descendants of early peoples. Ancient acecias wind through the valley, bringing precious moisture from snowy peaks to sustain life-giving pastures. Earth ships, geodesic domes, beer can, glass, and straw bale homes, alternative energy design structures, and buses running on vegetable oil are outward community symbols of creativity, traditional and pioneering

ingenuity, sustainability, and independence. Artists abound in such number that there are over 86 art galleries in a valley that is home to only 35,000 people. Cowboys on horseback, pastures of sheep, antique low-rider pickup trucks, bicycle commuters, and motorcycles are also at the heart of the community's spirit.

“Foreigners”—those not born in the community—are often seen as outsiders and, depending on the point of view, may also include those whose families have lived here since the time of the Conquistadores. Spanish and Native American traditional rituals are sacred and lived. The Catholic Church—profoundly altered by Native spirituality and Spanish mysticism—is a formidable presence in the region, yet a wide range of spiritual, religious, and New Wave beliefs proliferate. Those who visit the Taos area cannot help but feel the all-encompassing presence of the Taos Mountain. She is spoken of by locals and visitors alike as a primary personality, energy source and spirit in the life. Local folklore insists that she fully embraces you, or sends you quickly on your way if your spirit is not of this place.

Taos is filled with stark contrasts. It is a place where realities—such as the harsh desert, Rio Grande Gorge, and high surrounding mountains; daily responsibility to tribe and/or extended family; and extreme poverty—create conditions in which going away to college remains an impossibility for most. It is a place where creativity and community abound and yet violence is four times higher than the national average. It is a place where magical light attracts thousands of artists, yet there is tension between those from varying cultures. It is a place where education is highly valued and yet life challenges create a high school dropout rate approaching 50 percent. This is the rocky ground on which UNM-Taos is emerging.

## UNM-Taos History and Context

by Florence Guido-DiBrito

A collegiate presence has been in the Taos area since at least 1927, when University of New Mexico education and art courses were offered at the local Harwood Museum. Early efforts to invite a larger college presence were cultivated with two other institutions in northern New Mexico: a four-year liberal arts institution and a two-year community college. In line with the fierce independence of the people of this area, both of these institutions were eventually asked to leave—one for poor follow-through and the other for refusing to collaborate to provide for the needs of the area.

In 1989, the leader of the Taos School Board and the town mayor approached the president of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque to request postsecondary programs and services for this large, rural county. UNM responded by supporting the development of an educational center in Taos, which grew from an initial enrollment of 297 to a steady enrollment of about 1,200 students less than six years later. Seemingly superhuman efforts by local public leaders have been necessary to gain approval for a new college in this sparsely populated state. State laws were changed and an unprecedented local gross receipts tax was approved by voters to support the physical construction of the campus. In 2001, UNM-Taos was officially approved by the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education and the State Legislature and became a full branch community college of the University of New Mexico on July 1, 2003.

The student body at UNM-Taos is comprised of 71 percent women, 78 percent Hispanic and/or Native American populations, and an average age of 34. Most are first-generation college students living below the poverty level and most support children as well as elders and other extended family members. Because of the rural and tourist-based economy of this area, most students work not one but several part-time, often seasonal jobs to eke out a difficult living.

The presence of a college in this remote area is profoundly changing the lives of those in the mountain communities it serves. Curricular programs have been developed through largely entrepreneurial efforts by adjunct faculty to include fine and applied arts, trades and vocations, business and technology, health and human services, medicine and sciences, and liberal arts, all combined with a limited though strong base of student services. UNM-Taos currently serves two Native American tribes, seven school systems, and twelve townships in the Sangre de Cristo region of northern New Mexico.



UNM-Taos campus celebrations reflect a mix of ancient and new traditions and images. A recent UNM-Taos graduate proudly wears traditional tribal clothing combined with academic robes.



UNM-Taos is continually shaped through lively discussions, often at local inspirational venues. This discussion was part of a faculty, staff, student, and community retreat to develop the current organizational vision and values.

## **Building a Collegiate Learning Community**

**by Alicia Fedelina Chávez**

As a new leader for the campus, I noticed quickly that—though the cultures of this area are collaborative in nature—hierarchy, territoriality, fear, and inappropriate actions were common at UNM-Taos. It seemed important to focus first on developing a learning community based on collaboration rather than on hierarchy. Some close direction had to be utilized to get things going. Those desiring to retain a hierarchical model were quick to point out the inconsistency of “requiring collaboration.” Fortunately, many more learning community members brought positive energy and creative innovation to this journey and I often took a deep breathe, calmed myself, and took the chance of handing over decision making to large and small teams.

I found it hopeful that many were not afraid, even in the beginning, to provide lively critique. Conversations, collaborative development of a set of organizational values, community gatherings for professional development, shared problem-solving, cross

departmental initiatives, and a consistent application of accountability were critical in this shift.

It has taken almost four years for a collaborative culture to take hold in a substantial way and recent signs confirm that collaborative processes are widespread and beneficial. As individual players live the benefits of collaboration and shared decision-making, empowerment of organizational members is reality—enhancing creativity and lifting morale.

## **Nurturing Sustainability and Our Chosen Learning Community Values**

**by Alicia Fedelina Chávez**

The values chosen by the faculty, staff, and students of this neophyte institution are shifting from those traditional values held at its inception. For nearly the first decade of existence, values held by the institution and its leaders focused on maintaining and building a hierarchical administrative structure with individualism, autonomy, fear, and competitive territoriality as key operating factors. My first goal as a campus leader was to spend extensive time listening to the hopes, concerns, visions, and priorities of staff, faculty, and students. I knew I had come home when I began to notice unmistakable patterns in-line with the rhythms of northern New Mexico. Faculty, staff, and students consistently spoke of the need for UNM-Taos to:

- Build a sustainable campus
- Form strong community balanced with fierce independence
- Show compassion toward each other and the earth we inhabit
- Be spiritual and contemplative in our actions
- Shape a vibrantly creative learning community that embodies integrity, compassion, and respect

These beginning conversations led to shared development of the values shown in the photos and diagram included above. Our daily challenge and privilege is to turn these conversations into campus operations, campus physical design, learning environments, organizational structures, and financial as well as policy decisions. These values, co-created by learning community members through retreats and discussion sessions, are slowly permeating operations and the physical campus construction, as they are taken into formal consideration by task forces, decision-making committees, and individual professionals in their daily work.

Recent examples of these shared values manifest themselves through the campus's [green building initiative](#), including:

- Sustainable design architects for current and future construction
- Xeriscaping
- Use of daylighting
- Solar water heating and energy production built by students and faculty
- Switching the campus entirely to locally offered wind power.

We also are working to meet the challenge of a budget cut with principles to protect those staff and faculty at the lowest salary levels; limit faculty teaching loads to enhance wellness, providing work time for staff to attend classes, exercise, and/or spend time in personal contemplation; build campus spaces that inspire through beauty and directly facilitate connections between various types of professionals and students; and build the academic calendar around important community days in the year, spiritual traditions, and tribal and family responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Colleges and universities have a unique opportunity—as organizations with life spans of hundreds of



The views from the UNM-Taos campus are stunning. Campus master planning has emphasized maximizing views from buildings, courtyards, and walkways. A core principal of UNM-Taos is that learning, creativity, and community are enhanced by beautiful natural environments.

years—to develop physical and community environments in congruence with natural rhythms. Learning is enhanced by inspirational environments both built and natural, and we as stewards of students young and old have the unique chance to role model responsibility. There are some colleges who make this a focus, yet more who do not. It is time that we, as college educators, reach deep into the heart and spirit of place and consider the effect of our decisions and actions on the next seven generations. Our goal is nothing less at UNM-Taos.

*We must live life as full, authentic, human beings..., living honorably  
and sharing responsibility for seven generations into the future.*

— Wilma Mankiller, Chief of the Cherokee Nation

**View online slideshow at [www.terrain.org/articles/19/guido-dibrito\\_chavez.htm](http://www.terrain.org/articles/19/guido-dibrito_chavez.htm).**

[Florence Guido-DiBrito](#) has been teaching graduate students in higher education and student affairs leadership for the past 19 years, emphasizing ethical leadership, student and organizational development, and social justice issues. Recently, she combined her personal and professional passion for photography with her qualitative research skills to conduct a year-long photoethnographic study titled Journey of Creation: A Photoethnographic Study of Community, Culture and Leadership in a Northern New Mexico College.

[Alicia Fedelina Chávez](#) served as the CEO at University of New Mexico – Taos for the last four years and recently returned to faculty life. She is currently developing international visual ethnographic research of a variety of colleges and universities and lives in Taos.

## Article



# RECOVERY

## Learning the Music of History

by Jake Adam York

Twelve years ago, as a young writer whose Alabama accent suggested hidden motives to more than a few colleagues in our MFA program at Cornell University, I began to take my comfort in music. First, I turned to jazz, to discs my best friend, a college DJ, had given me, and then to the hard rock and heavy metal I'd played since high school, and finally to the roots music that would swell my shelves—box sets of Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and stray cases of Charlie Patton and Son House. The jazz reminded me both of Sundays spent listening to my friend spin classics into the short radius of the campus airwaves and of the summer trips to New Orleans my family took each year. The rock recalled days water-skiing the Coosa River with high-school friends or punching guitars in someone's basement. But the roots music dug more deeply, excavating mornings in my grandparents' kitchen, where ancient country music bore through the crackle of bacon. As the winters set in, the music kept me warm, and as it kept me warm, it kept me comfortable, cocooned me in the sounds of home.



I carried that warmth everywhere I went. On the coldest days, I'd press the earphones hard while Branford Marsalis's *I Heard You Twice the First Time* (1992) wound onto a traditional holler, "Berta, Berta," an a cappella chorus over cycles of crickets and cicadas. Nights, I could pile quilt on quilt, open wide the radiators and sweat to the sound, almost forgetting New York altogether.

The longer I lived there, the larger the library became, swelling to include all the Johnny Shines,



Jimmie Rodgers, and Leadbelly I could find. And more and more what I took for the sounds of home became a home. I began listening to music I'd never liked before, either because everybody else liked it or because my father wore it thin. I turned to Hank Williams, Doc Watson, and Bill Monroe. I even began to give new country half a chance.

One afternoon in my second year, I unwrapped the eponymous BR5-49, slid the disc into my player, then checked my speaker wires. The first seconds of the first track, "Even If It's Wrong," crackled like a record, dust popping from a turntable's needle. Sure of all connections, I restarted the disc: static once again.

It was deliberate—the proper conceit for the debut of a band whose allegiances lay not with industry country-western but instead with early string bands and 50's rockabilly—music that

first appeared on acetate or vinyl and that, by and large, had not made it CD yet. It signaled a genealogy whose strongest roots tangle in an analog past oddly trogloditic and technological at once—the country limbo of Hee-Haw, the 70s country-music variety television show on which finger-picked banjos crossed electric telecasters and phone numbers still began with alphabetic exchanges, like BR5-49, the number for the show's used car lot. The static was, I think, supposed to trigger my own nostalgia for the show, which I watched each week with my parents and then each night when reruns filled the local schedules, and for the tub-thumpin', knee-slappin', pickin'-and-grinnin' numbers that were, ostensibly, anyway, the show's main events. These opening seconds, this jewel-case insert featuring a rotary phone, and the name serving to indicate the band and the album and so being quietly repeated, these things were supposed to call like a grandmother to me and my generation and tell us to come back home and sit a spell.

The static recalled a thousand excitements, pregnant moments between the needle's contact with the smooth edge and its descent into the vibrating hollers of Patsy Cline or the Louvin Brothers or the Carter Family. But this deliberated static, the residue of the analog, didn't belong to BR5-49.

The very next year, my Oxford American Southern Music Sampler arrived with "St. Louis Cemetery Blues," a B-side by the Squirrel Nut Zippers, a so-called "hot band" named for an old-fashioned candy bar. There, it would seem, the Zippers, not content with an initial haunting, lay an entire cut's worth of static over the tune, trumping *recherché* orchestration—trumpet, trombone, banjo, tom-heavy drums, stand-up bass, violin and mandolin—by adding another instrument, the phonograph record. Though I had no doubt the song had been recorded the year before, it sounded, in so many ways, like the recovered and re-mastered 78 sides of Robert Johnson, the Hot Fives and Sevens, Louise Bogan and other early 20th century musicians then newly available on CD, digital recordings made from analog records, many of them either heavily-chipped acetate platters or the even older aluminum discs that had slowly corroded into silence.

Was the static, I wondered, some kind of homage? As it covered some of the orchestrated sound,

was it, in some way, a sacrifice to the ghosts of the past, a voluntary loss to answer the loss of those small flecks of sound that lie under rust or swirl in warehouse and storehouse devils in those long-amputated towns on the edge of nothing? Was it, simply, a kind of kitsch? A new valence of nostalgia?

These recordings—the Zippers' and BR5-49's—never had to be pressed on vinyl. They were recorded digitally, mastered digitally, and reproduced digitally. They were burned into emulsions that would never acquire statics of their own through wear and age: scratches, however unlikely, would produce only sound-stopping diffraction. The rainbowed releases would only ever possess this one strangely static static.



On the one hand, this static seemed to record, more than anything else, the listening that went into producing this music in the first place. These musicians, working down toward a past that neither they nor the fans who buy the discs could have known directly, spent a lot of time listening, both to old records and to the digital copies that now circulate, complete with the static that can never be erased. Now, the new compositions, and new recordings the old music has inspired, preserved the pop and hiss of the media through which we have approached the original styles.

But it called us to listen as well. If it recorded any kind of listening, the static came to signal any listening, that of the producer or that of the consumer. That static, even if it only imagined the held-breath waiting for sound to emerge from the dark, asked us to be quiet, to negate as much as we could the rhythms of our respiratory and circulatory systems and tune ourselves toward another world that would emerge through sound from somewhere else. Through that static, we descend into the spiral valley of song.

And if the static kept, then it functioned as an audible membrane that separated the moment and situation of our listening toward that music from the moment of the music itself. The sub-static groove lay somehow beyond our reach, in the end, kept from us by decay or age. And so the music that incorporated the static into itself attempted to cover itself with or embed itself more deeply in time, to distance itself, somehow, from the contemporary. It sought, at least, to acquire the noise of history, or through that noise, the place of history.

The static, however, had to be a signature. The hand must have been occupied elsewhere, performing other offices of recovery without which the static would overlay nothing, would be hollow, and would lead nowhere.

BR5-49's instrumentation alone performed some recovery. The use of steel guitar, dobro, fiddle, mandolin, and upright bass signaled a return to what might be called "classic country." But the more substantial salvage was audible in the cover songs. Almost half of the debut album's tracks—five of

the eleven—are covers. Johnny Horton’s “Cherokee Boogie” is the second cut, followed immediately by “Honky Tonk Song,” a Mel Tillis number recorded by George Jones. In the dead center of the list is “Crazy Arms,” a song performed most famously by Ray Price but offered as well by a half-dozen other luminaries, including Patsy Cline and Chuck Berry. This is chased by Mel Tillis and Webb Pierce’s “I Ain’t Never,” with Graham Parsons’ “Hickory Wind” blowing in the penultimate slot.



Covering is common in country music, whether to please an audience or signal one’s roots, to show what one can do or shape the context in which one wishes to be considered—and we might easily understand the presence of these covers on BR5-49 as performing all this work. “Crazy Arms” is a perennial favorite, surely an audience pleaser, but also a reference of a band’s influences. Taken together, the covers advertise the band’s intention to bracket the last several decades of country music, its desire to be considered a creature of the 50s. The performances themselves are conservative—there’s very little if any variation or update beyond the fact of a different voice. They serve to reactivate the past, not to argue with it, to situate themselves just beneath that opening static so there’s something to find

when we begin to listen as the album asks us to.

Much of this, however, is inaudible. On BR5-49, the descent can’t be marked after we’ve moved from the opening seconds into the first track. Throughout the disc, the band’s original material is laid side-by-side with the cover, beneath the static, and so the distance between the 1950s and the 1990s is collapsed, and once one is inside the album, the distance we have to bridge becomes inaudible, almost non-existent. While it seemed the project of the album to enter history and make it audible, in the end, the project is instead the resituation of the present work, using the cover to obscure the temporal circumstance of the band’s own effort.

Much more interesting, entertaining, and challenging, as well as much more difficult, is the performance of a song in a way that makes audible that distance between past and present, that makes history audible—a cover in which the fine musical textures, rather than the broad recycling gesture, constitute a more complex relationship, one that requires a somewhat deeper consideration of attachment and secession. In such moments, the cover is both a more total static and a filter that can modulate that noise. The performance repeats the form of the original and rides over it to enable us to hear or prevent us from hearing the past in ways that are to be as meaningful as entertaining. To listen to such a cover is to read for both fidelity and disregard and to puzzle the value of the amplification or diminishment of a song’s historic qualities.

BR5-49 has approximated this only once, to my knowledge, in the live recording of “Knoxville Girl” that appears on the band’s Live From Roberts EP.

The song is traditional, stretching back, in some version, to the 17th century, where it's rooted in a poem, a broadside ballad entitled "The Cruel Miller." The poem drifted through the British Isles, where the story was known as, among other things, the Oxford Girl and the Wexford Girl, and then emigrated to America where it settled in the Appalachians and became known as "Knoxville Girl" in the mountains of east Tennessee. The song has now been recorded many times—by Nick Cave and Elvis Costello, among others—but the most important recording is the one on the Louvin Brothers' *Tragic Songs of Life* (1956) because this is, very likely, the recording that brought the song to wider attention and saved it from obscurity. It's to this recording BR5-49's responds.

The Louvin Brothers' version, though markedly different from the original broadside poem—the song's much shorter—presents the traditional circuit of the murder ballad from pleasant beginning to sudden, uncontrollable violence, to remorse and punishment. The song's narrator begins by introducing the title character:

I met a little girl in Knoxville,  
A town we all know well,  
And every Sunday evening,  
Out in her home I'd dwell.

Quickly, however, the narrator has, on an evening walk, struck this "fair girl down" and beaten her to death. He throws her body in the river then returns home where, bloody and aching, he dreams of hell. He wakes to be arrested and carried to jail where, at last, he expresses remorse for the killing in a way that gives the poem a moralistic cant, as if it's meant to be a cautionary tale. There are twelve verses in all, executed in waltz time and sung in an unwavering melody that is, if nothing else, disturbingly sweet.

The BR5-49 version is, following the Louvins', a waltz, and singers Gary Bennett and Chuck Mead harmonize like Charlie and Ira Louvin, in a hauntingly sweet melody. This fact alone makes the BR5-49 cover unique among the covers of this particular tune, for no one else provides a double-male harmony, and this is the auditory gesture that indicates the source of the tune.

This version, though, is not, as many of BR5-49's covers, an exact repetition. This version is about twenty seconds shorter, having subtracted a number of verses. Whether the steel guitar solo is the cause of the emendation or only its witness, the BR5-49 version pauses between the stanza in which the narrator kills the girl and the stanza in which he throws her body into the river, managing to heighten the song's emotional tension. After we're told that he "only beat her more / Until the ground around her / Within her blood did flow," the steel guitar takes the melody for a full 40 seconds, during which we can, if we know the Louvins' version, almost hear the stanzas in which the body is disposed and the narrator returns home. These verses seem suppressed, and it's a kind of relief, a respite from violence that allows the story to drown in melody. However, when the harmony returns, the narrator is just throwing the body into the stream, and what seemed a relief now reads as a serious pause, a catching of breath between the murder and the cleanup. To me, anyway, this version is even more violent because it provides a space in which emotion and drama can build.

You can listen to and enjoy this tune even if you don't know it's a cover, and I think you can still read the tune in a similar way. However, the subtractions, which I read as momentary suppressions and dramatic enactments, and which make the song read more quickly, can only be measured against the earlier version. If we hear the Louvins straining to throw the murdered woman into the river as BR5-49's Don Herron translates vocal into string melody, the newer version acquires a depth it could not achieve on its own.

Perhaps it's unfair to ask a band as young as BR5-49, a band so recently arrived though clearly hoping to sound much older, to achieve something so difficult that so few performers seem capable of one, much less a stream of such songs. But BR5-49 arrived at an interesting time in country music, when roots music and classic country seemed to be resurging in a swell that made possible new ways of thinking about history in and through music.

The release that had the most serious impact, on my thinking anyway, was Johnny Cash's 1994 *American Recordings*, a disc that signaled both a serious change in Cash's career and the materialization of a major and long-brewing change in American music.

The importance of the disc to Cash's career cannot be overstated. Though Cash released at least one record a year from 1957 to 1988, in the latter years of the 1980s and the early years of the 1990s, many of these records were compilations or anthologies, best-of records, the kind of records that, in many cases, announce the slowing of a musical talent, the end of a career. Cash had, in the very early 90s, been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and given a Grammy Legend Award—again, recognitions that usually read as valedictions. The release of *American Recordings*, however, seemed to turn all that around. As Cash himself allows in his autobiography ([Cash](#), by Johnny Cash), he found himself, in the early 90s, ready to leave record companies behind for good, having watched his status at Mercury/Polygram slowly deteriorate. Rick Rubin convinced Cash to try again, with him, and the result was an album that brought Cash many new fans, that opened larger concert venues, addressed his music to young listeners, and earned him Rolling Stone's Best Country Artist and Comeback of the Year awards in 1995. The album's success galvanized the relationship between Cash and Rick Rubin, and that made for a cartload of amazing music in the nine years before Cash died in 2003. The albums are still emerging from the vaults.

Cash's tunes possessed the radios of my childhood—tinny AM channels squealing through the metronome of my grandparents' percolator, and the knobless pick-up, dual-band console in my father's truck—and I thought I knew Johnny Cash. I still listened to the Sun recordings and the legendary prison concerts of the late 60s, but I, too, thought Cash was winding down. The American label, the inverted American flag tucked into the pre-release advertisement, made me curious at first, then covetous. Rubin's American label descended from Def American, the venture that published the Beastie Boys and death-metal's Slayer, artists whose music I loved as well. To see a silver-gelatin Cash advertised under American's star-spangled banner begged the question: How does Cash sound



under a label most often associated with aggressive youth music?

The disc's first track, "Delia's Gone," provided the answer. The song begins:

Delia, O Delia,  
Delia all my life,  
If I hadn't've shot poor Delia,  
I'd've had her for my wife.  
    Delia's Gone,  
    One more round,  
    Delia's Gone.

This is the territory of the American murder ballad, an arresting crossing of tenderness and violence. The song is, nevertheless, not all finesse. The second verse turns directly toward what can only be a calculated murder:

I went up to Memphis  
And I met Delia there,  
Found her in her parlor  
And I tied her to her chair.  
    Delia's Gone,  
    One more round,  
    Delia's Gone.

This seems much more disturbing than the fantastic, biblical apocalypse that was Slayer's stock in trade and, in its own way, more energetic than the Beastie Boys' old-school-rap stichomythia. That Rubin should produce and release this at the very moment the label was changing from Def American, whose name signaled its allegiance to youth music with one foot on the street, to American, whose name suggests a broader range of interest and address, is telling: Cash is all that has come before deepened.

The deepening is structured on the play between the contemporary consciousness, the contemporary directness of the song, and the song's traditional musical and narrative roots. Much of this can be heard directly, as the song returns from increasingly bolder narration with increasingly contemporary vocabulary in the verses to the stable, traditional foot of the balladic refrain. So, the third verse goes:

She was low-down and trifling,  
She was cold and mean,  
Kind of evil make me want  
To grab my submachine.  
    Delia's Gone,  
    One more round,  
    Delia's Gone.



The arrival of the submachine is startling. Before, much of the song's lexical surface is studiously antique, from the vocative "O Delia" to the identification of her room as her "parlor" and the characterization of her as "trifling," and perhaps even the Memphis locale, which somehow always seems to evoke the past. The submachine gun, though, is decidedly contemporary, a creature of gangsta rap, not country music. Its appearance, however, has only time enough to ripple, for the refrain quickly re-establishes cool tradition.

This tension between the audibly contemporary and the sound of age manifests a much deeper play with the long and tangled history of an American ballad, known either as "Delia," "Little Delia" or "Delia's Gone," a tension embedded in Cash's 1994 performance.

The song or class of songs is based on an actual lover's quarrel that ended in murder on Christmas Day, 1900, in Savannah, Georgia. One version was recorded in 1935 in the Bahamas, another in Atlanta as early as 1940. Variations would later be offered by Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte, Bobby Short, Bob Dylan, and many others. Some, following Blind Willie McTell, tell a whole story, from initial slight to the final sentencing of the killing lover, while others visit only episodes, providing a few verses to suggest the rest. All instances agree that Delia's lover shot her dead, though not why—some suggest she cursed him, some that she left him, some that she was a whore and he was her pimp—and all carry some version of a refrain that's something like "Delia's gone / One more round / Delia's gone" or "I shoot / One more rounder's gone."

Even Cash did the song once before, for the 1962 album *The Sound of Johnny Cash*. Even though it's different from the 1994 version, considered against the field, even the '62 approach is oddball. It is highly episodic, offering comparatively little in the way of narrative. But what's more conspicuous is that what we have records, solely, the killer's point of view. The Nassau String Band version, recorded in 1935, and the Blind Willie McTell version, recorded in 1949, allow us to hear the killer speak at times, but the narrator is omniscient, able to visit any of the characters involved. Cash's 1962 version, by contrast, is severely contracted, and its fragmented narration produces another kind of limit that may reflect the partiality of the killer's account.

The 1962 version doesn't answer any of the narrative questions we might have—like why Delia's lover killed her—so the shift of person doesn't expand the story in any particular way. Instead, it transposes the Delia tragedy into the shapes of the Appalachian murder ballad. As in the Louvin Brothers' "Knoxville Girl," the murder occurs early in the song—in the second verse:

First time I shot her,  
Shot her in the side.  
Hard to watch her suffer,  
But with the second shot she died.

In the third and fourth verses, the narrator suggests that Delia was favored by many others and that he had decided he didn't want to marry her, but these things are quickly forgotten as the song makes its inexorable progress to the jail where it will meditate on punishment and remorse, staples of the Appalachian murder ballad. So, the sixth and seventh verse enter despair more deeply:

But Jailer, O Jailer  
Jailer, I can't sleep  
Cause all around my bedside  
I hear the patter of Delia's feet  
    Delia's gone  
    One more time  
    Delia's gone

So you give me my hammer  
I'll drag the ball and chain  
And every rock I bust  
I seem to ring out Delia's name  
    Delia's gone  
    One more round  
    Delia's gone.

The song performs, perhaps overperforms, its sorrow, as the refrain is repeated and punctuated with further calls to Delia as the tune fades, suggesting perpetual self-punishment like the castigation that closes the Louvins' "Knoxville Girl."

The 1994 recording is much bolder and departs further from the body of Delia recordings, entering the persona of the killer much more fully and escaping the orbit of the traditional murder ballad, refusing to occupy the offices of remorse with such sincerity. Here, again, Cash provides the verse in which the narrator shoots Delia in the side, then again, and, as in the 1962 version, we move quickly to the jail. This time, however, Cash omits the further characterizations of Delia as a woman with many callers or a potential ball-and-chain, so the violence is even more inexplicable. He still hears the patter of Delia's feet, but remorse is far from mind as the song closes:

So if you're woman's devilish,  
You can let her run,  
Or you can bring her down  
And do her like Delia got done.

Some of the longer versions show the killer in his cell "drinking from a silver cup" (McTell), suggesting this lack of remorse, but nowhere is this character bolder than in Cash's imagination, which seems to reject as much as accept the influence of tradition.

Few listeners know the Delia tradition well enough to begin to imagine the permission and rejection that shape Cash's composition. But the song's real triumph is that the discontinuity of or apparent contradictoriness within the song's verbal and emotional textures—moving between antique and contemporary language and between remorse and dark pride—produced by the struggle with and against the tradition, are significant in and of themselves and audible to even the most untutored listener, provided he or she listens well. This is to say, Cash found a way to embody in sound the depth and fracture of history that gives the song a sense of enormity and power, even if a listener doesn't know the entire archaeology.



Not every song can present such an auditory palimpsest, but it's not necessary for every song to do such work. In the case of Cash's 1994 American Recordings disc, the discontinuities and complexities of "Delia's Gone" constitute a pattern not for each of the songs but for the album as a whole. Nine of the thirteen tracks are written by others. Some of the songs arrive from expected sources that express Cash's country origins, as with "Why Me Lord," provided by Kris Kristofferson. Others, however, come from outlying counties of popular music. "Down There By The Train" only barely betrays the harder rock of Tom Waits' roots-inflected song-craft, and "Thirteen," a song written Glen Danzig, former frontman of the legendary punk outfit The Misfits delivers all the melodrama that marks heavy metal from rock. But Cash is able to make each song his own, tying together disparate personal and generic tendencies with the instrument that has come to signify history most consistently, his voice.

The voice is so strong, it even seems to reverse the paths of history at times. "Thirteen," for example, was first recorded by Cash, having been tendered by Danzig at Rick Rubin's request. Only later, five years later, did Danzig raise his own voice into those lyrics, on the album 6:66 Satan's Child. But the struggle isn't Cash's to naturalize Danzig's tune; the struggle is Danzig's to reclaim it. The track appears at the close of Danzig's twelve-track fantasmagoria but, despite its self-conscious nihilism—"The list of lives I've broken reach from here to hell"—the performance is subdued, constrained by the precedent of Cash's own implacability. Danzig's trademark caterwaul is conspicuously absent, so he almost talks the song; if there's any difference between this reperformance and Cash's, it's ultimately not one of tone or approach but volume, as if one could insist one's way out of history.

Cash reverses the order of things again in a recording of "God's Gonna Cut You Down" on American V: A Hundred Highways, which may be the last of the American series, appearing almost three full years after his death.

This song, like "Delia's Gone" has a long foreground. Under various titles, including "God Almighty's Gonna Cut You Down," "Run On For A Long Time," and more simply "Run On," the tune has been something of a minor gospel standard for decades. The Golden Gate Quartet recorded "God Almighty Is Gonna Cut You Down" for its 1947 album Atom and Evil, and Bill Landford and



the Landfordaires recorded it again, shortly thereafter, in 1949 (a version sampled by Moby on *Play*). Odetta's version appeared on her 1956 *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues*, and Elvis recorded it as "Run On" for his 1967 *How Great Thou Art*. More recently The Blind Boys of Alabama offered "Run On For A Long Time" on its 2001 album *Spirit of the Century*.

Cash's take on this tune, which is credited as "Traditional," is the second track on *A Hundred Highways*. It's not even the first cover, as it follows a version of Larry Gatlin's "Help Me," and it's not the last, as Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind" and Bruce Springsteen's "Further On Up the Road" are close behind. But "God's

Gonna Cut You Down" is the album's standout, for many of the reasons "Delia's Gone" was so powerful.

The lyrics, which suggest a round with frequent return to an extended refrain, are nearly spoken, delivered with an almost tired composure. Some have remarked, in recent years, that Cash's voice has sounded tired or brittle in these last recordings, but here the ease seems to register the fact that, outside Odetta's version, the song is usually delivered entirely in harmony, several voices combining the whole way through. Even in Elvis's version, a strong chorus haunts his lead all the way through the song, refusing him too much vocal leeway. Cash performs here as if in a chorus, as if working in a narrowed range between other voices, so we can almost hear the evensong of Bill Landford's delivery.

Just so, the song's instrumentation testifies to the its choric background. A slide guitar, maybe two, keep the central melody, while another's fingerpicked to open the chords' notes, as if making them available for late-arriving harmonizers. The percussion as well doubles itself and offers multiple avenues to the governing rhythm. Kick drums keep the bars, while hand-claps imply the gathering of a prayer meeting or a quartet. So, the tripling or quadrupling in the Golden Gate Quartet version, Bill Landford's version, and the Blind Boys of Alabama version enters the song, keeping close company with Cash's paces.

But Cash's reach engages history, allows it, without being appropriated by it. And so his voice rises once, when his line departs from tradition. Each version narrates a direct command from Jesus to preach God's anger to various sinners. Usually the first transit from verse to refrain passes through the lines: "Then he put one hand upon my head / Great God Almighty, let me tell you what he said." Cash's version, however, goes this way: "He called my name, and my heart stood still / When he said John, go do my will...." Cash's voice rises on his own name, creating in the song a moment of self-recognition as Cash performs both his own part and that of Christ and so, in a sense, calls his own name, a moment in which Cash, with one foot keeping time with history, also steps into the moment of his own performance.

This is where Cash asserts his own artistry, the prerogative of the performer, and exceeds the boundaries of tradition. And perhaps paradoxically, Cash creates a moment in which his performance seems almost antecedent to any of the historically prior recordings since it could just as well be a moment that has not yet been regulated by repetition rather than one that exceeds that repetition. Taken together with the carefully rooty guitar orchestration and the country-church hand-clapping, it's hard to say what, exactly, is the sound of 2003 or 2006 or 1935: the mixing is seamless, but the moment of self-identification breaks the form and curls like a signature to tie the rest into a moment that belongs to the singer, wherever he belongs.



Cash's five records for American and the four discs of material brought forth in the *Unearthed* box set develop a space between nostalgia, which wishes from a distance or simply denies the distance at which a present life is lived, and what I would call *aftertude*, a demonstrated escape from the past, however supportive—an escape that increasingly valorizes the creativity, the reforming power of a younger artist while showcasing the wisdom of that artist's attention to his or her forebears.

This is the wonder that is Carla Bozulich's *Red Headed Stranger* (2003), a song-by-song remake of Willie Nelson's 1975 classic concept album. The original was an interesting species of historical reconstruction, a cycle built on a folk tale created by Nelson to situate songs written in traditional forms, like waltzes, at a time when the country music at large seemed to be losing touch with its roots. And Bozulich's reconstruction participates in such staged nostalgia, in simple gestures, like the inlay tableau of molded plastic children's toys, and in more impressive arrangements, such as the feat of getting Nelson himself to appear on three of the album's tracks.



But if Nelson's presence secures the relationship between the present effort and the precedent endeavor, it does nothing at all to constrain or even to definitively locate Bozulich's recreation, which veers quickly and often into the high relief of her own emotional landscapes. For example, as Bozulich, in the third track, reprises the "Time of the Preacher" theme, per Nelson's sequence, the instrumental and the vocal textures become more densely grained and distended, as violin bows and vocal cords scrape over light distortion and persistent, seething feedback. The track doesn't, as it might, simply signal the return of one of the tale's major figures. It is more importantly and more audibly an apotheosis of the remembrance that produces the album. Bozulich seems to reach for the next note, the next bar, and the song's time retards, as if to allow a recovery, then quickens toward the next crisis; altogether, the song seems to reach back, toward Nelson's original, as if the musician is working without a chart, trying to hear her way back to the plan.

Just so, at large, Bozulich's revisitation of Nelson's Red Headed Stranger seems aware of itself as such—it announces or performs this self-awareness in its aftertude—to such an extent that its self-awareness assures its difference, its independence, and its status as a thing in itself. The goal of Bozulich's Red Headed Stranger is not, it seems, to contest, challenge, stand beside, or even directly approach Nelson's. Instead, it seems determined to follow, using the original as a benchmark, trading on the stability of the first iteration toward its own development. Bozulich's album exists in an afterness that allows the music to become something else, something new: freed of the burden of maintaining the form of the original, the musical effort can be invested toward the development of Bozulich's own style, the highly expressivist seethe that unfolds like napalm in winter on her subsequent release *Evangelista*.

In his poem "Elegy for the Southern Drawl," Rodney Jones writes:

I feel odd hearing a tape of my own voice  
That marks wherever I go, the sound

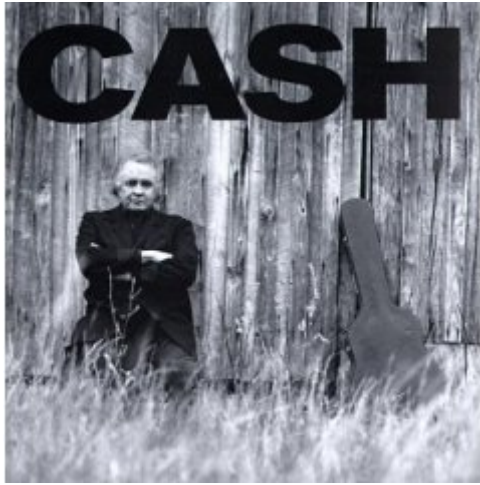
Of lynchings, the letters of misspellings  
Crooked and jumbled to dupe the teacher,  
Slow ink, slow fluid of my tribe, meaning

What words mean, when they are given  
From so many voices, I do not know myself  
Who is speaking and who is listening.

Jones expresses in these lines better than I have and better than I could the experience of being an audible Southerner in America. From those first days in Ithaca, New York, I found my own history, written in the drawling tones of my own voice, dogged me, answering to everyone's call but my own. I wanted so badly, hearing what others heard issuing from my throat, to step away from my own history, or to stand on top of it, so I could look out in new directions and, maybe, learn to sing a different song.

In those moments, I searched for something like Bozulich's Red Headed Stranger, an album which I still envy, wishing for both the confidence and the mastery that would allow me, in my life and in my writing, to discover the particular formation of history I could form into the ideal foundation for my future, that would support the architecture of my aspiration. When I began listening to the Squirrel Nut Zippers and BR5-49, I was looking for this, a kind of aftertude that would free me from my history and give me power to use it rather than be used by it. But in those albums, I found gestures, not poetics, and so I shelved them, as I shelve Bozulich's Red Headed Stranger.

Cash, though, is perpetual rotation. The jewel cases crowd the CD player. The list of his songs is among the longest in my iPod. Not a week goes by without some Cash, and I've taken to the work so completely, I've tried to get my colleagues to adopt the name as a term for excellence, as in "That is so Johnny Cash."



Cash's work carries, for me, the lesson of a quiet confidence, a trust in one's ability to stand surrounded by a past without being overwhelmed by it, and a knowledge of one's place and a sense that history is not something that can be exceeded, something one can escape through insistence. Rather, it provides the chords we must harmonize.

What I learned in New York, what I forever relearn, is that, though my accent is not terribly thick or deep, it remains so steadfastly I can never escape my origins enough to have an aftertaste, and I question too much to find a quiet home in a neighborhood of the past. More and more I live in an in-between, and I listen to Cash, not just for comfort, but for

prayer as well.

Tonight, I'm listening to Cash's "Southern Accents," a Tom Petty tune on the second American album, *Unchained*. I keep replaying one verse in particular:

There's a dream I keep having  
Where my mama comes to me  
And she kneels down over by the window  
And says a prayer for me.

I got my own way of praying  
But everyone's begun  
With a Southern accent  
Where I come from.

Tonight, I hope that somehow I too can blend my voice with the bygone, in the ghost choruses of culture, and yet raise it when called to answer, to be able to say, with strength, "I've got my own way of talking," yet listen rightly, if the voice that gives me voice should say, in some way, Go do my will.

[Jake Adam York](#) is an Alabama native now living in Denver, where he teaches for the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center. His first book of poems, [Murder Ballads](#), was published in November 2005 by Elixir Press.

## Article



Editor's Note: This article combines a [Rainforest Alliance case study](#) with a Gibson press release, and is printed here with permission of both organizations.

The road through Honduras's Caribbean coastal mountains is a muddy rut even in the dry season, skirting within inches of vertical slopes that plummet into rivers and the rainforest it traverses. For years it has been the only artery for trafficking illegally cut mahogany out of the rainforest, the loot from a not-so-lucrative practice that threatens the integrity of the nearby [Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve](#).

Since August 2005, however, loggers from Guayabo, a village of half a dozen homes, have used the road to haul the region's first legally and sustainably extracted mahogany to a stockpiling center it shares with two other villages, Sawacito and Mahor. Together, these three villages have formed a cooperative and filed for legal permission to extract mahogany. These efforts prompted the [Rainforest Alliance](#), an international conservation organization, to tap the villages as pioneers of certified sustainable forestry in Honduras, and link them to U.S. guitar manufacturer [Gibson](#), as part of the Rainforest Alliance's [SmartWood program](#).

Through a business liaison brokered by the Rainforest Alliance, subsistence farmers and loggers are now lugging mahogany planks out of the woods on muleback, cutting them with donated



The Rainforest Alliance first certified forests like this in Honduras in 1997, and now guarantees the sustainable management of 86,500 acres (35,000 hectares) in the country. Photo courtesy Rainforest Alliance.

planers and table saws and stacking them for shipment to the U.S. None of the loggers has ever seen a Gibson guitar, but the company that has outfitted the likes of rock and blues legends Santana and B.B. King is paying them \$40,000 monthly for a container of two-foot mahogany blocks—a windfall to the loggers, and, because the wood is harvested sustainably, a line of defense for the wildlife in the biosphere reserve.

“This is the best market we’ve seen,” Guayabo logger Alcides Escaño says. “We used to sell wood for four or five lempiras (less than \$0.25) per foot to national companies. Now we sell directly to the buyer for almost 40 times as much.”

With training from Rainforest Alliance foresters Medardo Caballero and René Lara, the woodsmen work on the fringe of the reserve’s protected buffer zone to salvage flawless mahogany blocks from trees felled by storms or left behind by loggers, which they then cut to Gibson’s exacting standards. Whenever live trees are harvested, the loggers adhere to a management plan approved by the State Forestry Administration, which allows controlled logging in buffer zones around reserves and in areas of cultural significance.

José Álvarez, the community’s gray-haired, often shoeless patriarch, can point to marked changes in the woodsmen’s attitude toward the forest in which they live. “We used to throw everything on the ground, but now we pack out our trash and go back to pick up what we find that wasn’t ours,” he explains. “We replant after cutting, which we didn’t do before, and we don’t clearcut a whole area. Things are going well for us. There’s no reason to cut illegally.”

### Gibson’s SmartWood Guitars



A guitar craftsman cuts the neck of a Les Paul guitar from sustainably harvested mahogany, at the Gibson factory in Nashville, Tennessee.  
Photo courtesy Gibson.

When guitarists take possession of a Gibson guitar containing wood certified by the Rainforest Alliance under the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council, they are acquiring more than a beautiful, handcrafted instrument. They are joining Gibson’s commitment to the environment, as the final link in a chain of responsibility that extends back through Gibson’s manufacturing process, through the wood vendors, all the way back to the harvesting and milling of mahogany trees.

Gibson began working with the Rainforest Alliance ten years ago, introducing the SmartWood [Les Paul](#) in 1996 to symbolize this new commitment and to raise industry awareness of the need for responsible forest management. Since then, Gibson has quietly moved closer and closer to a goal of 100 percent certified wood, and the majority of Gibson products now have certified content.

The Rainforest Alliance is playing a major role in accelerating Gibson's progress by sending representatives to Guatemala and now Honduras, the music instrument company's primary sources of certified mahogany, and bringing it into closer relationships with wood suppliers. Members of the Rainforest Alliance team have been training the community and the local sawmills to mill mahogany to Gibson's particular needs. Pieces that in the past would have been thrown away are now milled for Gibson guitar neck stock, which increases the yield from every mahogany tree.

In addition, the Rainforest Alliance is introducing Gibson to suppliers in Nicaragua, which will start the certification process for those suppliers and open up new sources of high-quality mahogany for Gibson guitars.

"It's not just a matter of doing the right thing as a corporate citizen of the world," said Gibson chairman and CEO Henry Juszkiewicz. "It's good business," and the ultimate level of quality control "to have Rainforest Alliance representatives there at the birth of the materials that we use in manufacturing. Thanks to the Rainforest Alliance, we can ensure that our materials are optimized not only for Gibson guitars but for the future of our environment, as well."

### **The Daily Reality of Logging in Honduras's Rainforests**

Two by two, loggers ford the meandering bends of the Guayabo and the Paulaya rivers with mules in tow. When the mahogany blocks are cut, the loggers lash them to a wooden frame on a mule's back and let the animal navigate its own way down the forest's slick slopes to the first of dozens of river crossings they must make each day. In some places the wood must be hauled on muleback for up to eight hours before it reaches a road where it can be loaded onto a truck. If the rain catches the loggers in the woods, they slash banana and palm leaves with machetes and, within minutes, string up a lean-to to wait for a dry spell to crank up their chainsaws.



A Honduran millworker inspects cut mahogany ready for shipping to Gibson.  
Photo courtesy Rainforest Alliance.

The village of Guayabo is one of the many clusters of wooden homes interspersed among the curves of the Río Guayabo, a fickle neighbor that cuts them off from the forests—their livelihood—and each other when it swells during rainy season downpours. Chickens, ducks, pigs and cows mill about on the usually muddy roads between the houses, which are surrounded by the most remote reaches of the biosphere reserve.

Though he's grasping a chainsaw, local resident Omar Antonio Rivera sounds like a hopeful ecologist. "Over the years we've seen the animals move farther and farther away, and there aren't as many fish in the streams because of all the hunting and fishing here, but the idea is they will come back because of our conservation work."



Once the mahogany blocks are cut, the loggers lash them to a wooden frame on a mule's back.  
Photo courtesy Rainforest Alliance.

Seeing the chainsaw in Rivera's hands, Rainforest Alliance forester Lara, who has worked in Honduran forestry for three decades, describes it ominously as, "the machine that is destroying the world—along with the match." He says every household in the region has a chainsaw.

On the road to Guayabo, fires set by slash-and-burn cattle ranchers are so commonplace Lara only notices when he doesn't see the snaking plumes of smoke. The rising tide of burning and illegal logging prompted the government to unleash the Honduran army on the forests. Soldiers now guard

the roads through villages like Guayabo and patrol the woods, confiscating mahogany and other timber from unlicensed loggers.

But Lara knows his work with the local loggers fosters the responsible use of chainsaws and a respect for the natural world. "I like what we're doing here," he says. "It's a response to illegal logging that meets national and international demand."

#### Widespread, Lasting Change through Forest Certification

Since 1989, the Rainforest Alliance has promoted sustainable forest management. In nearly 50 countries, it has certified more than 71 million acres (28 million hectares) of forests to standards established by the [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#). The Rainforest Alliance is the largest certifier of forests accredited by the FSC, the international organization that sets standards for responsible forest management worldwide. The Rainforest Alliance first certified forests in Honduras in 1997, and it now guarantees the sustainable management of 86,500 acres (35,000 hectares) in the Central American country.

Through its [Training, Research, Extension, Education and Systems \(TREES\)](#) program, headed by Caballero in Honduras, the Rainforest Alliance trains and prepares communities for FSC certification and facilitates links to certified markets. Caballero and Lara are working among seven other villages in the country that together manage a combined forestry concession area of more than 173,000 acres (70,000 hectares). When these lands are certified, they will triple the area of certified forestland in Honduras, a country where, as Lara says, "thousands and thousands of people live off the forests and even the president was once a lumberjack."

This collaborative effort is funded by the U.S.-based aluminum producer [Alcoa](#) and Gibson. The Rainforest Alliance coordinates with the [GTZ](#)-funded



The Les Paul Standard Premium Plus, with mahogany neck and back.  
Photo courtesy Gibson.

[“Protection and Management of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve Project.”](#) which trains communities on forest management practices.

### **About Gibson**



Gibson is known worldwide for producing classic models in every major style of fretted instrument. Founded in 1894 in Kalamazoo, Michigan and headquartered in Nashville since 1984, Gibson Guitar Corporation's family of brands now includes Epiphone, Dobro, Kramer, Steinberg, Tobias, Slingerland and Maestro. Baldwin, founded in 1862 in Cincinnati, is one of the oldest and most respected American piano makers, and the Baldwin Company, which includes Hamilton and Wurlitzer, joined the Gibson family in 2001. Gibson's digital guitar represents the biggest technological advance for the electric guitar since the instrument was invented 70 years ago. Visit Gibson's website at [www.gibson.com](http://www.gibson.com).

### **About Rainforest Alliance**



At the Rainforest Alliance, we believe that the key to ensuring long and healthy lives for people, for wildlife and for the planet is by establishing sustainable ways of working the land. In over 50 countries around the world, we are collaborating with farmers, workers, business leaders, NGO's, governments, scientists and local communities to develop and implement standards that are socially and environmentally responsible, as well as economically viable.

By creatively and systematically helping to overhaul the way that crops and timber are produced and the way tourism is managed, the Rainforest Alliance, its partners and the consumers they serve are ensuring that the resources we depend on today will be here far into the future.

- [View Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Forestry Fact Sheet](#)
- [View Rainforest Alliance Overview](#)

Learn more at [www.rainforest-alliance.org](http://www.rainforest-alliance.org).

## Article



# Telling Stories to Change the World

*Social Entrepreneurship and a Network Proposition*

by **Scott Edward Anderson**

My children have always loved stories. When my oldest, now 10, was little, I told stories to him every night before he went to sleep. He came to rely on these stories and I needed to become more creative with each telling. Soon the stories had recurring characters, including his stuffed bear, Babe, or "Binky, the Fifth Beatle." His favorite stories were about Babe getting lost—all true stories: left behind in a blueberry patch, on a hike in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska, where we lived, or in the Kauai airport on vacation. Babe was always safe, found, or delivered back into my son's arms by me or by strangers.

My 3-year-old twins have continued their brother's love of story. During a recent camping trip they started telling stories to us, little adventure stories featuring themselves and the rest of the family. Storytelling is now an important part of their daily lives, and their stories are becoming more elaborate, filling with details from their lives.

Our experience bears out research by American psychologist Jerome Bruner, author of the influential essay "The Narrative Construction of Reality." Bruner has documented that children, as early as two years old, show that "they understand the stories that their families tell them, and they start to tell their own stories, and in particular start to tell stories to themselves as part of their first efforts to make sense of their lives." Indeed, this supports the notion that we may be hard-wired to tell stories, as some scientists believe.

What is it about stories and storytelling that seems to resonate with all of us? Why are stories such an important part of who we are as a species and how we view the world? It may help to look at what stories are.



## What is Storytelling?

A story is a narrative account of a real or imagined event or events. Stories build worlds and define worldviews. Sharing experience through stories, we pass on accumulated wisdom, beliefs, and values. Through stories we explain how and why things are, and we define our role and purpose.

"Stories are the building blocks of knowledge, the foundation of memory and learning," according to the [National Storytelling Network](#). "Stories connect us with our humanness and link past, present, and future by teaching us to anticipate the possible consequences of our actions."

Think of our earliest time as a species, as hunter-gatherers. The stories we told were about the best hunting places or where plentiful berries could be found. Later, we told each other stories about planting crops and which crops grew best in what climate, soil, or aspect of the sun. We evolved as a species through stories and we are grounded in stories. Storytelling may be a tradition as old as human communication itself.

Stories connect people to other people and to place, to the land and sea. Like the songlines of the Aborigines, stories map a place in a way beyond symbols and geography.

Internationally renowned storyteller Anne Pellowski, in *The World of Storytelling*, suggests that storytelling is rooted in play. Over time, storytelling became a way of passing on religious beliefs and rituals, of telling the history of a people, and to educate the next generation. It has been suggested that one of the earliest records of the storytelling tradition can be found in a papyrus of tales told by the sons of the pyramid builder to Cheops, their father.

A story usually consists of a narrative, which is a way of ordering events and thoughts in a coherent sequence. Narrative, in psychologist Jerome Bruner's theory, illustrates how the mind structures its sense of reality through various "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems."

Stories about change are narratives of conflict and hope, problems and solutions. A conflict of some kind is set up that leads the reader to hope. And telling these stories helps others make change. In the words of award-winning journalist and author David Bornstein, stories help "a person form the belief that it is possible to make the world a better place. Those who act on that belief spread it to others. They are highly contagious. Their stories must be told." [Emphasis mine.] This, too, would corroborate Bruner's theory that stories are cumulative and that new stories build from older ones.



## Making Sense of the World and Making Change

Former World Bank executive Steve Denning tells a story about change in [Storytelling: Passport to](#)

[the 21st Century](#). The World Bank was one of the most successful lending institutions in the world. Yet, though it had programs in many countries, it was facing tremendous competition.

"A whole set of private banks had emerged that were lending far more than the World Bank could ever lend," Denning writes. "And they were doing it faster and cheaper and with less conditionality than the World Bank. There were even world-wide campaigns to close the World Bank down. There was a political slogan chanted by protesters: Fifty years is enough! In fact, our future as a lending organization was not looking too bright."

The problem, as Denning saw it, was that the World Bank was "drowning in information. We were spending a ton of money on it and getting very little in the way of benefits."

Denning's solution was to encourage the World Bank to share its knowledge. "Over the previous fifty years, we had acquired immense expertise as to what worked and what didn't work in the field of development," Denning tells it. "We had all this know-how on how to make development happen in countries around the world. But it was very hard to get access to this expertise and know-how. It was very hard to find it."

Denning determined that he needed examples to convince management that knowledge-sharing was a strategy that could help improve its core business. So he told a story about a task team working with the highways department in Pakistan. Highways in that country were crumbling as fast as they were being built. The government needed a solution or it would face a crisis. Spreading the word via the Internet, the team found possible solutions in South Africa, New Zealand, and elsewhere, and quickly shared those stories with the government—leaving the officials to draw their own conclusions. This was not your father's World Bank in action. ([Read the full story.](#))

Suddenly, Denning had the attention of management. "And they started to think: 'Well, that's remarkable how quickly we could respond to that kind of situation in that out-of-the-way part of the world. Imagine if we had that kind of capability, not just in the highways community, but all across the organization. Imagine if the whole World Bank functioned like this,'" Denning writes. He found that storytelling is "an extremely powerful tool to get major change in this large change-resistant organization."

As Denning says, "What we are looking at here is the phenomenon that Carl Jung pointed out, namely, that there are some parts of the human self that are not subject to the laws of time and space. And storytelling, the telling of, and the listening to, [is simply] one of those things." Storytelling helps us connect to and make sense of the world. And with that understanding comes a tremendous power of emergent change, of seeing what is possible.



## A Part of My Story

When I was a teenager, I dreamed of making a difference in the world. I didn't like the way things worked and I didn't value a lot of the things our society valued. I was an idealist. I joined political movements, explored spiritual realms, and created an alternative story through art. It turned out that these many paths were really one. And while there were often stumbling blocks, false hopes, and blind alleys, I kept being reminded of something the artist Man Ray once said, "The streets are full of admirable craftsmen, but so few practical dreamers."

Today, I consider myself a practical dreamer, which may simply be a more mature idealist. But my story has been built by many divergent routes along one path, choices made and chances taken. I'm more of an "and" not "or" person. Consequently, much of the story of who I am seems contradictory. I am a poet who wishes he had an MBA. I believe in free trade and I want it to also be fair trade. I am a social liberal and a fiscal conservative. I believe globalization is inevitable, yet I also believe we can create a more enlightened globalization that acknowledges, even fosters a better environment and a better place for all people. Is it too much to ask? Perhaps, but I can't help myself; that is the nature of being a practical dreamer.

Practical dreamers are coming up with solutions every day and their stories must be told. My theme song has long been like John Lennon's song, "Imagine:"

You may say I'm a dreamer,  
but I'm not the only one.  
I hope some day you'll join us,  
and the world will live as one.



## Practical Dreamers: Social Entrepreneurs and Changemakers

"Social entrepreneur" is a fairly new term for a phenomena that has actually been around for quite some time. Florence Nightingale, Mahatma Ghandi, and even Ben Franklin would be considered social entrepreneurs today. Indeed, many social innovators and change agents can be considered social entrepreneurs. Let's take a look at some definitions.

David Bornstein in his book [How to Change the World](#) defines social entrepreneurs as "people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in pursuit of their visions, people who will not take 'no' for an answer, who will not give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they possibly can." Bornstein profiles a number of social entrepreneurs from around the world, individuals who have helped bring electricity to remote parts of their country, helped low-income high school students get into college, or developed home-based care models for AIDS patients.

Many of Bornstein's subjects are associated with [Ashoka](#), the leading organization investing in social entrepreneurs. They relate that the "job of a social entrepreneur is to recognize when a part of society is stuck and to provide new ways to get it unstuck. He or she finds what is not working and solves the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."

"The idea of 'social entrepreneurship' has struck a responsive chord," J. Gregory Dees, adjunct professor of social entrepreneurship and nonprofit management at the Fuqua School of Business at Duke University, wrote in his [1998 article](#) on the subject. "It is a phrase well suited to our times. It combines the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination commonly associated with, for instance, the high-tech pioneers of Silicon Valley. The time is certainly ripe for entrepreneurial approaches to social problems. Many governmental and philanthropic efforts have fallen far short of our expectations. Major social sector institutions are often viewed as inefficient, ineffective, and unresponsive. Social entrepreneurs are needed to develop new models for a new century."

In short, social entrepreneurs are changemakers, agents of change who pursue new, hopeful models to make a difference in our world.



### **Stories of Social Entrepreneurship in Action**

On my web log, [The Green Skeptic](#), I've begun to tell stories of social entrepreneurs, of remarkable people and the extraordinary change they are making.

There's [Iqbal Quadir](#) who recognized an issue in his home country of Bangladesh—lack of access to phones and its impact on health and poverty—and brought cell phone access to women in poor villages, thereby creating businesses and access to markets, and what is now the largest telephone company in that country.

There is [Kiva International](#), a micro-lending institution that is using the power of the web to connect entrepreneurs in Africa and Latin America with potential investors.

And [Uday Khemka](#), whose family owns and operates the Sun Capital Group in India and the U.K., and who, as one of the World Economic Forum's young global leaders, saw former Vice President Al Gore give his presentation on global warming and is now dedicating himself to the issue of climate change.

I have also been scanning widely for other stories being told elsewhere, such as the story of Dr.

Govindappa Venkataswamy (aka "Dr. V"), who recently passed away. He created the [Aravind Eye Care System](#) to eradicate needless blindness in rural India through comprehensive eye care services. And stories about companies such as [CEMEX](#) that provides affordable construction materials and access to credit for people below the poverty line in Mexico.

These are hopeful stories that need be told, and told widely.



### **New Stories of Hope through Social Entrepreneurship**

Social entrepreneurship is an approach that is well-suited to the 21st century. However, Bill Drayton, founder and CEO of Ashoka, has recognized a conundrum. On the one hand, the so-called "citizen sector" has been growing at a rate two-and-a-half times greater than the rest of society; on the other hand, the financial model has not kept pace.

The trouble is what I call "the whim of altruism." The kindness of strangers (and, okay, a few of your organization's closest friends) only gets you so far, then the resources run out or the donors move on. Your organization grows too big for the initial start-up investments preferred by many foundations or governments. Foundations change their focus—often a seemingly whimsical exercise in itself—as their newly developed strategies become narrower and narrower. Or your organization's success breeds complacency: there is little risk-taking or new ideas.

"Business," argues Drayton, "could not have succeeded as it has without the highly responsive, creative, diverse financial institutions that serve it." Whether so-called "angel investors," a concept that has not yet been around for two decades, venture capitalists, investment bankers, commercial lenders, advisers, brokers, what have you, institutions have evolved to meet the rapidly changing needs of the business sector.

Why isn't this the case with social ventures? Drayton posits that "the resulting gap, which is growing wider as accelerating change on the operating side outpaces innovations in social investment, is probably the single biggest threat to the successful maturation of the citizen sector."

To address this dilemma, Drayton suggests forming a new financial services industry, one that serves the growing needs of the sector and its entrepreneurs just as similar models serve other businesses.

His concept: provide a range of investors to support new ideas, provide "medium- to long-term investments to test and refine the idea, learn how to market it, and build an institution and movement," as well as ensure its long-term viability. This, according to Drayton, will keep social entrepreneurs from "spending most of their time chasing many small, short-term, partial grants" that may in fact force them to pursue "often conflicting goals and visions."

Applying business models to civil society and investing in social entrepreneurs is an approach whose time has come. Steve Denning's World Bank situation is a not unusual one—large institutions stagnate and become complacent. And they are not always open to change.

Global issues such as poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate change, however, will not wait for large institutions to adapt. There isn't enough time. We must become more nimble and responsive to local and global change or, to use The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman's phrase, "glocal" concerns. The world is changing at such a rapid pace. It is time for knowledge-sharing to help accelerate change through inspiring stories of what is possible.

There are many people doing amazing work in the world. And their stories are very different than the one that is too often told, the one that breeds fear and encourages anxiety and hopelessness. We have too much to lose to let that story continue. We must begin to tell new stories of hope and become part of the transformation. What can we do to foster the good work and inspire others by telling the stories that need to be told?



### **Moving from Dialogue to Action: A Proposition**

A friend and colleague of mine, management consultant Cam Danielson, suggests a possible solution: find the stories out there and circulate them widely.

His idea is to form a kind of "council" of scouts and action teams to scan, identify, and foster innovative solutions to localized problems—much like Denning's Pakistan highways story, where a small team of seekers reached out to a larger network to understand potential options through the stories they collected from the experience of others. Only this effort might be more formalized, structured, and expanded. In other words, to create a network of story tellers who are moving from dialogue to action.

The network approach represents a new critical path for change. In his book, [High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them](#), J.F. Rischard, the World Bank's vice-president for Europe, suggests that the future is in "network-like organizations, [where] people won't be merely information transmitters—they will be empowered assets, acting independently." In such organizations, Rischard offers, "Information will stay at the level where it can readily be used to adapt to changing needs."

This network approach could have a ripple effect by inspiring others to start a new venture or to keep at it in the face of adversity. The stories will be examples of the successes and fortitude of others.

In my own case, I recognize the impact such stories can have. As I've watched my own institution

grow larger and seemingly less efficient and entrepreneurial, I've begun to realize that there are many other models out there, other ways of approaching problems. We must try these other ways. Often, what seems to hold us back is lack of access to the good stories. Information, as in Denning's experience with the World Bank, gets in the way. We need stories and their resonant power to make the kind of change we need today.

To that end, I've begun to search for ways to connect people to stories of change, hoping that others will want to join the conversation, become searchers or scouts or seekers to uncover other stories, share their own stories, and share with each other in the larger, flatter world offered by the Internet.

A colleague turned me on to a social networking web site called [gather.com](http://gather.com), which may foster such dialogue. I've created [a place for social entrepreneurs](#) to begin building a network. Thus far, we have a dozen members. And I've heard from dozens of others from around the world, as far away from where I sit (in the northeastern U.S.) as Japan, India, and the U.K.

Then Seth Godin told me about his new venture, Squidoo, which consists of "lenses" built around a wide variety of interests. I created the ["Changemakers" lens on Squidoo](#) as a place to pull together links to resources for folks who are considering becoming a social entrepreneur or for investors who are looking to fund such work.

My hope is we can create a larger community of searchers, scouts, and seekers—of connectors. That we'll share the stories of remarkable people who are making change happen every day and thereby embolden others to make change.



## Epilogue

My twins told me a story at bed time the other night. Each one told essentially the same story from his or her own perspective, one after the other. There was some elaboration and some feedback from and to each other. Basically, the story went like this: We are walking in a forest and we find a little bear. The bear says to us, "I need to find my home." And the twins each take turns telling the bear how to get home, until finally one of them decides the bear is already home and it is the twins who need to return home. "That is all the story," one of them says. "Good night, Papa."

But I know it is only the beginning of the story. We are at the cusp of a great potential transformation, becoming the change we want to effect, sharing our stories full of hope. I want to be part of that story.

[Scott Edward Anderson](#) is an award-winning poet, writes [The Green Skeptic](#) blog, manages the [Changemakers lens on Squidoo](#) and the [Social Entrepreneurship group on Gather.com](#), and works for a global conservation organization.

## Review: Woman at the Loom of Language

Deborah Fries reviews *The Errant Thread*, poems by Elline Lipkin

Strong as hemp, iridescent as the wings of a blue morpho, strands of memory and myth weave their way through the 48 poems in Elline Lipkin's first book, *The Errant Thread*. Her poems are richly crafted—with light, with music, with metaphor and meaning—all layering and building an elegant, shimmering texture.

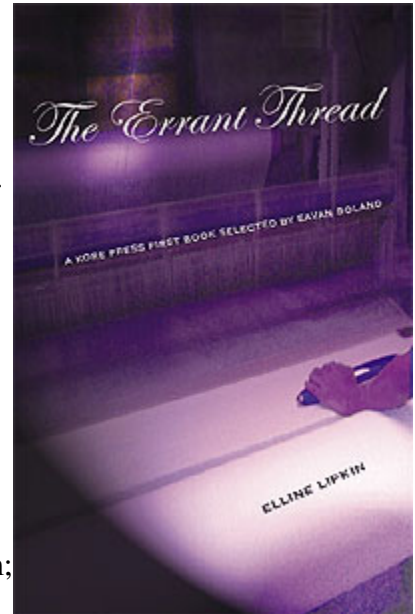
Working at her loom of language, Lipkin shuttles us through family fable and fairy tale, through favorite places and repeated glances in the mirror. Following the tinselled thread of memory, we learn how her parents met and married; how her father lay helpless in the hospital; how her family drank limoncello in a back yard in Belgium; how her grandfather released a canary into a winter sky.

We travel with her as she weaves her way through dusty rooms and dun-colored light to Paris, Brussels, Kigali and Seattle, lingering in cafes and galleries. We agree to observe the seasons with her as she illuminates the uphill climb of October, a New England morning's mullioned sky, the emergence of a spring bulb in the city.

Lipkin is mastering a decorative art in which ordinary experience is embellished with myth. Her diction is crisp and capable of lacing together memory, myth and place with precision. In this collection, she crafts lyric narrative tapestries that depict timeless crimes and longing, epiphanies, elegies and lamentations. Entering an illusory world where she summons up angels and cupbearers to the gods, it is sometimes easy to forget that she is a post-doctoral scholar at Berkeley, anchored by contemporary life. There is a feminine, Pre-Raphaelite beauty in these poems that is both unsettling and engaging.

Itinerant, omniscient, the errant threads of her poems wind their way through time and invention, with equal empathy. In "Three of Cups," one of my favorite poems in the book, she takes us from a formal tearoom of the present tense to an evoked past:

When the first teak clippers returned to Britain  
each captain was weary and tearful to again see  
the fog drift over London. They pried open  
wood crates for custom officials and let out  
the dense smell of the far lands they'd left.  
They weighed the crushed leaves workers  
had plucked, hands reaching low for weeks  
in the sun before scattering each heap to dry



across the weave of a talipot basket, then  
rolled under native feet to stamp the earth's taste  
into the leaves' released oil. The merchants argued  
grams and calibration, distilled their travels  
to the brewed taste in each cup: China, Ceylon,  
the far coasts of India rose in each scent like  
the porous relief of a map. They waited for customers  
to become drugged on the flavor of a tropical fever  
they'd never else know.

In her debut, Lipkin evokes dead merchants of other centuries, ancestors, Fates, gods, the girl she used to be. She summons guardian spirits, literary characters, dead poets, a vision of her father saying Kaddish for his father, and her own, personal Morpheus.

It is fitting that Lipkin, who honors the powerful resonance of myth in women's lives, would find a publisher in Kore Press. Since 1993, the Tucson feminist literary arts press, named for the myth of Persephone, has brought over 40 creative works by established and new voices into print. The Errant Thread was selected by Eavan Boland as the winner of the 2004 Kore Press First Book Award. Through a series of competitions begun in 2002, Kore has been encouraging emerging women poets and short fiction writers with not only the reward of publication, but also of being in good company.

Elline Lipkin is the third recipient of the Kore Press first book competition. Jennifer Barber was the first. I was the second. Sandra Lim is the fourth. When I finished *The Errant Thread*, I looked at its affecting purple cover and thought of all of us artisans in a room together, at our looms, with our different voices and ages and experiences, treadles and heddles clacking, and images piling up into poems and books of poems. Each of us believing in the myth of transformation that publication offers. Each of us given that chance, and, like Lipkin, unafraid of Procne's revenge.

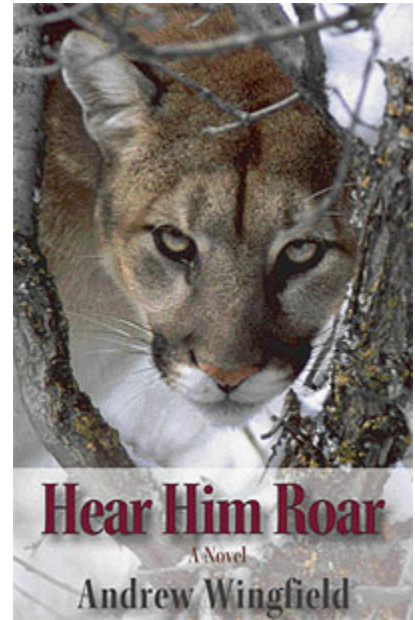
[Deborah Fries](#) was the 2003 recipient of the Kore Press First Book Award. Her manuscript, [Various Modes of Departure](#), was selected for publication in 2004 by Carolyn Forché.

## Review: Not a Roar but a Barbaric Yawp

Judyth A. Willis reviews *Hear Him Roar* by Andrew Wingfield

The roar you hear in Andrew Wingfield's first novel, *Hear Him Roar*, is not the cougar on the front cover. The roar comes from the aging curmudgeon Charlie Sayers giving birth to his soul. His roar is precisely what Walt Whitman described in "Leaves of Grass:" I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, I sound my barbaric YAWP over the roofs of the world.

Charlie has reached the age where his death is dogging his thoughts. Transferred from his position of biologist in the Department of Wildlife to Community Relations, a position not particularly suited for a curmudgeon, he is now in charge of taking welfare kids fishing for the day. Assignments like this add to his feeling of being old and useless. To deepen his discomfort, he is secretly concerned because he is no longer interested in sex with his partner, Jean. The anniversary of his son's death is nearing and a pain in his stomach is signifying unresolved issues.



Furthermore, he has seen the countryside developed with too many people building too many houses, and he doesn't like that either.

Amidst all these issues, Charlie is angry that the Department of Wildlife is going to go after the cougar that killed a jogger. Charlie none-too-secretly sides with the cougar. The retired, aging man, might look and even act tame, but underneath he is burning with the need to lash out against his diminishment.

In creating Charlie, Wingfield has given us a character with a memorable, unwavering voice: Charlie speaks his truth. While driving to work one morning he clearly illuminates the conundrum presented by man's encroachment on wild places.

I, all unheeded, took my bitter pleasure in remembering how it started. In the beginning was the army of earthmovers that rolled across the empty undulating spaces to flatten big patches out. When that was done they headed for the hills, blitzing the draws and canyons and clearing away the brush. Reinforcements swarmed in behind them to run pipe, lay pavement, string wire, and cut down inconvenient trees. Houses went up and these auto pilots to the left of me, after buying them, set to work beautifying their lots, putting lush lawns down, planting all kinds of young trees and shrubs. They marveled at the deer when they started to arrive. Beautiful creatures! What could make their garden more delightful? But deer must eat. And deer will be eaten, especially if you vote to protect the deer's natural predator, the mighty mountain lion. I had no beef with the big cats. What bothered me was this other species, homo dingus dongus. In their natural state those hills were cougar

country. The cougars had little really good habitat left, but plenty of food, so long as they didn't mind keeping company with homo dingus dongus. But wait, why fault him? He means well. He bears no grudge against the cougar. Hell, he voted to protect the damn things. But did he ever think that cat might come back to bite the hand that shielded him? Of course he didn't. For he is a near-sighted animal. His vision rarely reaches past the edge of his fastidious front lawn.

“HEY!” I shouted as I charged past, “WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THOSE BIG BROWN KITTIES NOW?”

The Aging, Raging Male. Hear him roar.

Charlie's yawp is aimed at the heads of the endless line of commuters driving to work, but it is more truly aimed at life and the pain of being a man in today's world.

Without a doubt, Wingfield's main character is untranslatable. The mystery of the man remains veiled as the story unfolds. There is no knowing what he will do next. How perfectly un-perfect! Unlike Atticus Finch, Charlie's make-up requires that he show his pain as he wrestles with life. The cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude don't come easy. He suffers the pangs of parental guilt, he lusts after women (is lusting okay if it gets your aging motor running?), he embarrasses himself, he resents his partner's son. He is a likeable human. And therefore his yawp is tolerated, perhaps even appreciated.

Life is hard, being diminished by age hurts, but Charlie isn't giving up.

One would think from all this that Charlie is the lone character in the story. Oh, no. Wingfield clearly delineates unique, believable characters. There is Don, Charlie's former partner in the biology department: “One thing I'd always enjoyed about Don was how deeply laughter altered him. Right now it set his neck-skin waggling. It made his shoulders rise and his eyes disappear and his purple color darken fiercely.” Their relationship reads just right with the manly silences, the tough sort of teasing, the ways of relating that exist between guys.

There is Sadie, Charlie's daughter, so carefully defined as female in Charlie's inner conversations about her. She is looking for a way through her grief over her brother's death. She is willing to share her journey with Charlie, whether he is willing to accept her help or not. It is going to mean some work on that soul he has so carefully hidden from himself and the world.

Hear Him Roar is a thoroughly enjoyable read and I sincerely hope this is not the first and only novel by Andrew Wingfield. I'll be waiting.

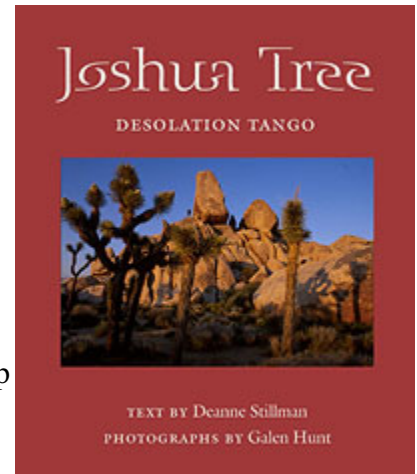
[Judyth A. Willis](#) has spent the last sixteen years teaching in the American school system. She is currently an office clerk, health aide and para pro at a peace-based middle school: there is hope in her heart. She lives in Civano, an environmentally friendly village in Tucson, Arizona.

## Review: Sun-Baked, but not Half-Baked

Simmons B. Buntin reviews *Joshua Tree: Desolation Tango*, text by Deanne Stillman and photographs by Galen Hunt

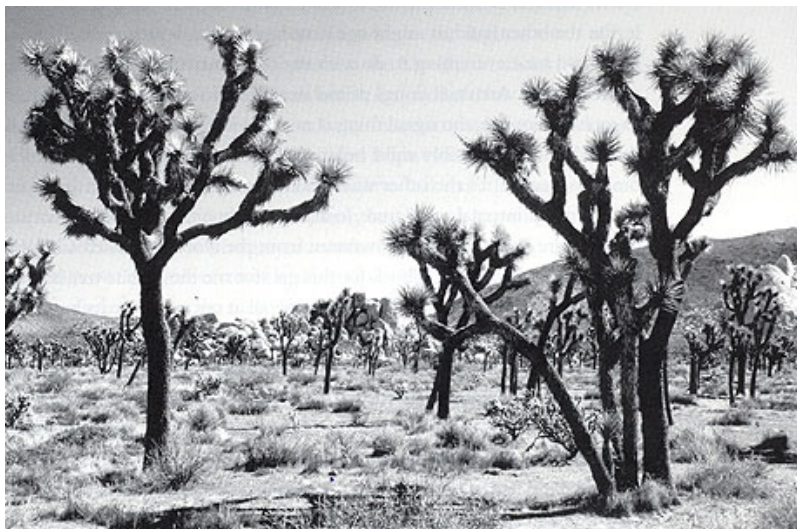
Often, reviews begin with a pithy analogy of something the reviewer did—somewhere he went, someone he knew—that relates to the book he is reviewing. For better or worse, however, I have no such story to share of Joshua Tree National Park—a place I have only been by and not to, enticing though it is.

Fortunately, my lack of just such an introduction is more than made up for by the pithy writing and stories in *Joshua Tree: Desolation Tango* by Deanne Stillman, with photographs by Galen Hunt. To whit:



The Mojave is the kind of desert that won't just outlast you, like all deserts, but really looks like it will. The Colorado Desert, on the other hand, the softer half of the park, the southeastern side, is at a lower elevation, not quite as close to the sun, although it is generally hotter than the Mojave. It's also prettier, doesn't appear to threaten in any way, which is why it doesn't get as much press or fanfare. But it should; if Joshua Tree National Park had been limited to just the Mojave side, it would not be the amphitheatre of strange magic that holds me in its unshakeable and ever-comforting spell. I like to think of the Colorado as yin (female) to Mojave's yang (male); the Colorado as a beautiful dancer who endlessly swivels and arcs and laments and loves, the Mojave as a goofy, ruggedly handsome killer with a face full of crags that you will never find your way out of, the Colorado that sucks the extreme energy of the Mojave into its pores and breathes it back, without the edge.

Stillman's insightful, witty, and sometimes odd narrative is beautifully supported by Hunt's photos. To whit:



Rather than a comprehensive guide to the park, or a travel memoir, Joshua Tree reads like a meandering essay, which in fact it is. The book itself is magazine-length: 76 pages, including bibliography, with a full-color, soft and glossy binding. It's easy to slip into the backpack and pull out while waiting for your vehicle to be serviced, which is precisely when I read most of it, in one wonderful sitting.

Stillman is a regular at Joshua Tree National Park—she has daggered friends growing from the desert floor, friends she confides in, whom she measures her progress against even as the land around the park becomes less and less parklike. It helps to know, too, that she is the author of the critically acclaimed [Twentynine Palms: A True Story of Murder, Marines, and the Mojave](#), first published in 2001. It's more important to note, however, that Stillman is not just a reporter of events, whether those in real-time or in a more geologic sense. She is a participant. And the good news in that is that we become participants by reading her stories, by meeting her more human friends, such as Larry and Donna Charpiéd, “a delightful pair of jojoba farmers who have lived just outside the park for twenty-three years and over time have become its unsalaried guardians, defending it against all manner of threats as civilization closes in.”

Near the center—the apex, perhaps—of the book-length essay, Stillman recounts how she met the Charpiéd, their fight against “a mega-garbage dump at an old mine site” near the park, Donna's arrest for participation in an earlier blockade of the Diablo Canyon Power Plant, and how they learned to farm jojoba, a native plant. So too we meet Raven, a “body art pioneer” who moved to Twentynine Palms from Sunset Boulevard to open a used bookstore.

And what we discover is that, even in the immensity and peculiarity of the desert—whether Mojave or Colorado—this place called Joshua Tree National Park is not only about, well, this physical place. It is also about its human culture, though perhaps sporadic, and about its wavering blanket of individual and even ecological spirituality.

Joshua Tree concludes—as by necessity most collections about inspirational places must in this day and age—with a review of the threats to the park and its flora and fauna. It is important we know these things, that we understand why they are threats and, just importantly, what can be done about them. One of the stylistic approaches I really enjoy, though, is how even in portraying these challenges, Stillman remains true to her literary, quirky self:

Lest you think I'm sun-baked, or maybe even just baked, rest assured that I'm not the only one who depends on the Joshua tree for succor and support. The multi-limbed character with the furry-looking bark and the dagger-like leaves is actually the original desert housing development. If you can fit into its trunk or one of its branches and have the kind of skin or shell that can withstand its serious armor, you can move in for nothing down!

Stillman makes it clear that we all want—indeed, all need—a place like Joshua Tree National Park. And I'm delighted to report that, thanks to the University of Arizona Press, we'll soon have more books on other sacred (or at least scattered) desert places. Similar books on the Grand Canyon, San Luis Valley, Black Rock Desert, Cedar Mesa, Chiricahua Mountains, Organ Pipe, and the Hansford

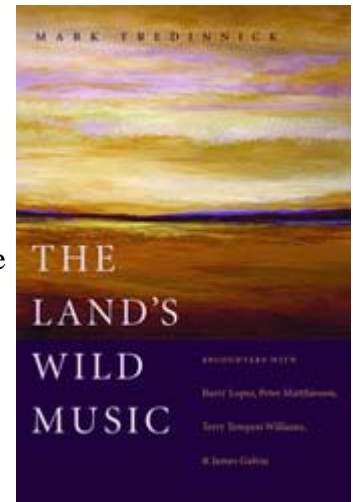
Reach already exist. New books on Escalante and the Painted Desert come out this fall. If these other personal portraits of desert places are half as enjoyable, and beautiful, as Joshua Tree, then they will make a welcome addition to my already eclectic library, indeed. Better [go check them out](#) for yourself—both the desert and your sun-baked soul will thank you.

[Simmons B. Buntin](#) is the founding editor of Terrain.org: A Journal of the Built & Natural Environments. With a master's degree in urban and regional planning, he is—logically—a web program manager for the University of Arizona. His first book of poetry, [Riverfall](#), was published in May 2005 by Ireland's Salmon Publishing. He has work forthcoming in The Manhattan Review and Orion, and is a recipient of the Colorado Artist's Fellowship for Poetry.

## Review: Guiding and Governing the Literature of Place

Terrain.org reviews *The Land's Wild Music: Encounters with Barry Lopez, Peter Matthiessen, Terry Tempest Williams, & James Galvin*, by Mark Tredinnick

In *The Land's Wild Music* (Trinity University Press), Australian author Mark Tredinnick contemplates the act of nature writing, or more appropriately the literature of place, from two angles. The first takes place in the introduction and book's first chapter—an academic orientation to the craft of environmental essay. The second—representing the “headliners” of the book—takes place in the four following chapters, in which he holds conversations and meditations at-length with some of America's most accomplished environmental writers: Barry Lopez in the McKenzie River Valley, Oregon; Peter Matthiessen in Sagaponack, New York; Terry Tempest Williams in Southern Utah; and James Galvin along the Wyoming-Colorado border as well as Iowa City.



Tredinnick begins, “This book is a roving study of the literature of place. It is a meditation on the nature of places and the prose that witnesses them, on lyric apprehension and the ecological imagination.” The problem with the introduction is that he overtells what the book is about, such as “This book is a writer’s road trip through the texts and home terrains of four North American writers of the natural world. It is the pilgrimage of an essayist and ecocritic through the words and worlds of....”

One of the cardinal rules of the personal essay is the polar opposite of the cardinal rule of both fiction and poetry: Show, don’t tell. So, in essay or in creative nonfiction, we tell rather than show. In this case, however, in both the introduction and first chapter readers may find themselves frustrated with so much telling, the leading up to what they came to the book for in the first place: the discourse with and about Lopez, Matthiessen, Williams, and Galvin.

While some introduction is of course appropriate, two lengthy chapters may be too much for the average reader. I say the average reader here because, for someone who him- or herself is interested in writing the literatures of place, there may be just the right amount of narrative. Indeed, Tredinnick provides an introductory course-worth of environmental essay craft that is interesting, historically significant, and, for new writers especially, beneficial. For example:

It proceeds by narrative, telling a story—though not always in a straight line and not always continuously; it makes its way in fragments—in episodes and excursions. It speaks in a human voice—mine, as it happens, for it is an essay. And it grounds itself within the natural histories it concerns. Ecocriticism has made virtue of such techniques. “Ecocriticism without narrative,” writes Scott Slovic, “is like stepping off the face of a mountain—it’s the disoriented language of freefall.” Narrative that acknowledges the presence of the critic in the inquiry; that describes the relationship between critic, subject, and place; that explores specific geographical ground; and that favors the (intelligent) vernacular over the disembodied diction of conventional critical discourse—such

writing is likely to engage its readers and, with luck, win their trust without compromising its critical integrity. It is also, in my case, more likely to disclose what really took place in my encounters with these writers, their country, and the country of their words. Such language, the phenomenologists would say, sings the lifeworld of the research experience. In collaboration with the texts and authors I study here, I have tried to speak, as they do, in what Slocic calls “the language of solid ground.”

Here, once again, Tredinnick is talking about what he will talk about—the contents (and process and path) of this book. But what he’s also doing is providing instruction for creative nonfiction. These first two chapters are written as a guide to those who also wish to craft such environmental nonfiction, or ecocriticism as he also calls it. That is why these first many pages specifically will appeal to budding young writers, but not necessarily to those in it only for the read. It is for this reason alone that we would recommend this book as a creative nonfiction text at the undergraduate and graduate levels, but advise skimming or even skipping those sections for readers interested only Lopez, Matthiessen, Williams, and Galvin.

Tredinnick’s four conversations and meditations are eloquent, informative, and inspiring. Beginning with Lopez and ending with Galvin, we learn much not only about these authors but also the places that create such presence and passion within them. We come to admire (if we don’t already) their writing, and also discover the welcome elegance of Tredinnick’s own writing:

This place is delicate, though. We leave the rock and drive to the mouth of another canyon of red rock: Moonflower Canyon. Terry leads me into it, among bare cottonwoods, up a small stream running in a flat expanse of sand and tumbled mother-rock. We step across the water on stones. The surface of the stream has frozen in places, and the ice is a transparent mosaic. On the streambed beneath the crystals lie fallen leaves of Gambel’s oak and cottonwood. We walk up the narrowing canyon, headed for a place where the walls close around a pool and the shallows hold broken red rocks and some pieces of the sky.

We also learn essential writing truths, the gems of information those of us who write are always seeking:

Critics and commentators usually misunderstand writing altogether, Lopez says. “I have had interviews on radio and television where the anchor—and this is the same with some critics and academics—asks questions about what I intended to do, to say, to achieve in my writing, as though the writing is intentional or purposive. They think that you sit down to write down what it is that you think about something. Writing does not work like this at all. I sit and write, and in the writing I am simply present—with the thought, the place, the idea. It arrives.”

Additionally, Tredinnick provides a thoroughly absorbing sense of the place in which, or perhaps better from which, these writers create their prose:

As the shoreline marries the dour and the delicate, the violent and the pretty, the recurring and the fleeting, the masculine and the feminine, the yin and the yang, so does Peter Matthiessen’s prose. It is composed in a cottage on a fish-shaped island anchored just off the coast of America’s industrial northeast. And on the long coastline near the house, the eternal drama of wave and beach, and the ancient—and faltering—engagement of men with the sea, continue daily. Like the wind birds, Matthiessen flies from this shore every year to distant places; but here, every year, he returns. His tales are often of elsewhere, but his voice on paper belongs to the shore, just as the voices of plover and sandpiper, curlew and godwit belong to it, though they carry within them the music of the far places and the distances they’ve traveled. For to belong to the shore is to belong both here and elsewhere at once.

Finally, Tredinnick's conversations provide good lessons on language, on how to approach the language of place, about methodologies and messaging:

Although he has written this book of prose... James Galvin think of himself as a poet. To be known as a poet is important to him. It is a matter of temperament, he says. He doesn't feel prose is up to the tasks to which he wants to put language on the page. "Poetry has a kind of snap to it," he says. "Getting back to horse terminology, poetry steps out so smart."

Prose, according to Galvin, is tethered to time and ordered by reason, whereas poetry, ruled by line breaks and shot through with gaps, runs to a beat. It is organized spatially, not temporally; it moves outside time—it is lyric. "If you sit down to write a prose work," Galvin says, "before you even touch the pen to the paper you have already addressed the idea of the passage of time. And if you sit down to write something that's in lines, you have already decided to resist that passage." A line of poetry depends on space; its very purpose is to fill a set space with a particular pattern of beats. A sentence, however, disregards space; it sets out to name something and to say something about that thing: subject and predicate—there is your sentence, no matter how long or short, regardless of its syllable count. Sentences and paragraphs are defined as units of thought. Of thought, you see; not of music, not of space.

We may well disagree with Galvin here, but thanks to Tredinnick's comfortable approach, his wide-ranging and yet centered discourse, we understand where Galvin—and the other authors—are coming from. There is the necessary context, not only individual (that is, not only for each essay and author) but for the entire quadrille.

The Land's Wild Music concludes not in North America, but rather in Tredinnick's New South Wales, Australia, where he has returned to piece this collection together. Here, he focuses on prose as music, the lyricism of place, the tying together of these similar but distinct voices. One of Tredinnick's strongest references in the final chapter is to a paper by Scott Slovic presented at Australia's first festival of nature writing, held only a year ago. Let's conclude in Tredinnick's words:

Scott's paper described the enterprise of nature writing as something profoundly political. Its task, he says, is to find new ways to reanimate the language we use for landscapes. And this matters because that is what it takes to reanimate places—nature itself—in human minds and in the discourses of politics, lawmaking, and everyday life, so that, in turn, we might be moved to preserve something of the dignity of the places we live in, in the face of the (often destructive) change we, in our human nature, continue to work upon them. Through this renovation of language we writers and readers may be returned to some lively intimacy with the rest of creation. And finding ourselves again embedded in the world, in its dynamic structures, we may know how and why to work to save it, and also ourselves.

This is the work of lyric apprehension. The poetics of listening and responding is vitally political. At the heart of the work of nature writing, this reanimation of language and landscape and the relations between them, is the work of discerning and recalling in our writing the larger order of reality in which we live our lives and practice our governance.

For those interested in the literature of place—especially young writers—The Land's Wild Music is an essential text, a sort of guide to the governance of our writing lives.