BOOKS AND ESSAYS SPECIAL ISSUE

High Country News

For people who care about the West

HOME

How we find it; how we understand it; how we care for it.

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High Country News

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High Country News

High Country News is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) independent media organization. Our mission is to inform and inspire people to act on behalf of the West's land, air, water and inhabitants, and to create what Wallace Stegner called "a society to match the scenery."

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"To feel at home, stay at home."
–Clifton Fadiman (writer, radio personality)

Simple words, but I've taken them to heart. So have a lot of Westerners. The crummy economy and the "keep-it-local" movement have kept many of us from roaming as much as we usually do. One friend of mine went so far as to give herself a "hundred-mile habitat" — this year, at least, she isn't traveling more than 100 crow-miles from her home.

It's a good thing, I think. Instead of going cross-country, explore what's close by. Learn about the places where we live, and the people who were here before us.

Unless we have Indian ancestry, our roots in the West seldom stretch back further than our great-great-grandparents. Most of us don't live where we were born, and that can make us feel a bit unmoored. I grew up just west of Denver, Colo., with a father born in nearby Brush and a mother from a South Dakota farm. But go back two more generations and you're in Europe — Sweden, Denmark, England. The same is true for Contributing Editor Michelle Nijhuis. In this special books and essays issue, she describes how she gained a stronger sense of home by delving into local history, learning about those who lived on her Colorado mesa long before she saw it.

But even as some of us seek to know our home ground better, it is shifting beneath us, faster and faster. As climate change takes hold, seasons and landscapes are no longer reliable. Here in western Colorado, huge groves of once-green aspen now stand dead and brown. Snow disappears from mountaintops weeks earlier than it did. Writer Ana Maria Spagna notes similar disruptions near her Washington home, with melting glaciers and destructive winter rains.

Most of us have had to adapt — to change ourselves, however subtly, to better fit the place we live. Now our home is also changing, becoming something we may not recognize. We'll have to adapt in ways we can't even predict. And yet we can still love where we live, saying with essayist Christopher Cokinos, "Here, in the West, we know ourselves to be home."

—Jodi Peterson, associate editor

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BOOKS AND ESSAYS: An *HCN* Special Issue

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DEPARTMENTS

COVER Aurora borealis over Moose Creek cabin in the White Mountains National Recreation Area, Interior Alaska.
© PATRICK J. ENDRES/ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS.COM

CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Brown, temporarily headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, graduated from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism in May.


BROWN

John Calderazzo has written for *Audubon, Orion, North American Review* and many other magazines. He teaches nonfiction writing at Colorado State University.

Greg Campbell is an award-winning journalist and author based in Fort Collins, Colorado. Greg's new book, *Flawless; Inside the Biggest Diamond Heist in History*, will be published in the coming months by Union Square Press.


CAMPBELL

Christopher Cokinos is the winner of a Whiting Award and lives in Nibley, Utah.

Melissa Hart is the author of the memoir *Gringa: A Contradictory Girlhood* (Seal, 2009). She teaches journalism at the University of Oregon.


COKINOS

John Moir, author of *Return of the Condor*, is an award-winning writer based in Santa Cruz, California.

Chérie Newman writes, reads books and produces radio in Missoula, Montana.


HART

Michelle Nijhuis is a contributing editor of *HCN*. Her work appears in *The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2009*, edited by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Jodi Peterson is *HCN*'s associate editor, and editor of this special issue.


NIJHUIS

Hillary Rosner's articles on science and the environment have appeared recently in *Newsweek, Popular Science, OnEarth* and *Audubon*.

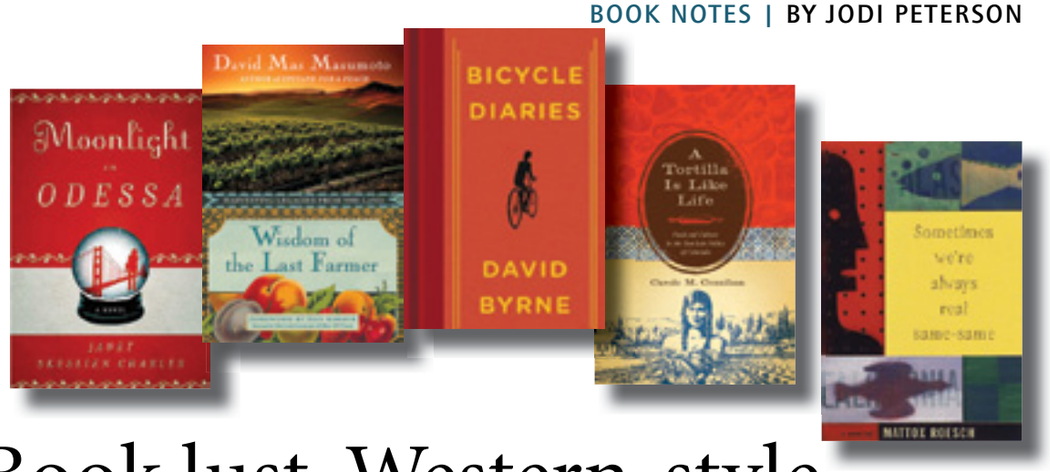
Jeremy N. Smith writes about books and other subjects at jeremynsmith.com. His stories and essays have appeared in *Audubon*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and other publications.


SPAGNA

Ana Maria Spagna lives and writes in Stehekin, Washington. Her next book, *Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus: A Daughter's Civil Rights Journey*, comes out in March.


WATERS

Don Waters is the author of the award-winning story collection *Desert Gothic*. He lives in New Mexico.



Book lust, Western-style

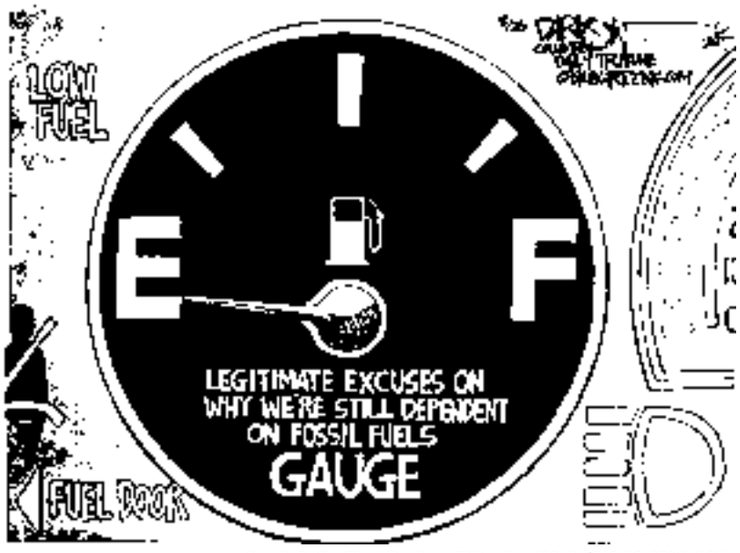
This fall looks to be one of the best in a while for new book releases. 2008 was a disastrous year for the publishing industry (as it was for many others), and publishers are now hoping for redemption with a strong fall lineup. Big-hit writers like Pat Conroy, J.M. Coetzee, Alice Munro, Wally Lamb, Richard Powers, Margaret Atwood, Michael Chabon and Lorrie Moore all have new titles coming out. And there are also a lot of worthwhile books either on Western subjects or by Western authors, some well-known, some not-so-well-known. We've listed some recent and upcoming books alphabetically by the writer's last name.

NONFICTION, MEMOIR, BIOGRAPHY

Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing, Edited by Frances Payne Adler, Debra Busman and Diana Garcia, University of Arizona Press, October • **Trinity**, Charles Bowden and Michael Berman, University of Texas Press, October • **Bicycle Diaries**, David Byrne, Viking, September • **Robert Redford**, Michael Feeney Callan, Knopf, November • **A Tortilla Is Like Life: Food and Culture in the San Luis Valley of Colorado**, Carole M. Counihan, University of Texas Press, November • **The Other Side of the Fence: American Migrants in Mexico**, Sheila Croucher, University of Texas Press, October • **A Year on the Wing: Four Seasons in a Life with Birds**, Tim Dee, Free Press, October • **The National Parks: America's Best Idea**, Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, Knopf, September • **The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America**, Timothy Egan, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, October • **Got Sun? Go Solar: Harness Nature's Free Energy to Heat & Power Your Grid-Tied Home** *(second edition)*, by Rex A. Ewing and Doug Pratt, PixyJack Press, September • **Been Doon So Long: A Randall Grahm Vinthology**, Randall Grahm, University of California Press, November • **No Place Like Home: Notes from a Western Life**, by Linda M. Hasselstrom, University of Nevada Press, September • **Historical Atlas of the American West**, Derek Hayes, University of California Press, October • **Tony Hillerman's Landscape: On the Road with Chee and Leaphorn**, Anne Hillerman, HarperCollins, October • **Greening Cities, Growing Communities: Learning from Seattle's Urban Community Gardens**, Jeffrey Hou, Julie M. Johnson and Laura J. Lawson, University of Washington Press, October • **Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman**, Jon Krakauer, Doubleday, September • **Wisdom of the Last Farmer: Harvesting Legacies from the Land**, David Mas Masumoto, Free Press, August • **Silk Parachute**, John McPhee, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, March 2010 • **Wild Comfort: The Solace of Nature**, Kathleen Dean Moore, Random House, March 2010 • **What We Love Will Save Us**, David Oates, Kelson Books, September • **Voices of the American West**, Corinne Platt, Meredith Ogilby, William Kittredge; Fulcrum Publishing, September • **Dirty Water: One Man's Fight to Clean Up one of the World's Most Polluted Bays**, Bill Sharpsteen, University of California Press, January 2010 • **Jackrabbit Homestead: Tracing the Small Tract Act in the Southern California Landscape, 1938–2008**, Kim Stringfellow, Center for American Places, October • **The Mutineer: Rants, Ravings and Missives from the Mountaintop, 1997-2005**, Hunter S. Thompson, Simon & Schuster, September • **A Lawyer in Indian Country: A Memoir**, Alvin J. Ziontz, University of Washington Press, August

FICTION

War Dances, Sherman Alexie, Grove Press, October • **Borderline**, Nevada Barr, Putnam, April • **Davis Country: H.L. Davis's Northwest**, edited by Brian Booth and Glen A. Love, Oregon State University Press, October • **Crossers**, Philip Caputo, Random House, October • **Moonlight in Odessa**, Janet Skeslien Charles, Bloomsbury, September • **The Journal of Antonio Montoya** (re-release), Rick Collignon, Unbridled Books, August • **The Girl Who Fell from the Sky**, Heidi W. Durrow, Algonquin, February 2010 • **La Ranfla and Other New Mexico Stories**, Martha Egan, Papalote Press, September • **Other Resort Cities**, Tod Goldberg, OV Books, October • **Spoon: A Novel**, Robert Greer, Fulcrum Publishing, October • **This Is Not Your City**, Caitlin Horrocks, Eastern Washington University Press, November • **Ray of the Star**, Laird Hunt, Coffee House Press, September • **Gloryland**, Shelton Johnson, Sierra Club Books, September • **Other Men's Horses**, Elmer Kelton, Forge Books, October • **The Lacuna**, Barbara Kingsolver, HarperCollins, November • **The Longshot: A Novel**, Katie Kitamura, Free Press, August • **Rhino Ranch**, Larry McMurtry, Simon & Schuster, August • **The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight**, Gina Ochsner, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, February • **Putrefaction Live**, Warren Perkins, University of New Mexico Press, October • **Inherent Vice**, Thomas Pynchon, Penguin, August • **Sometimes We're Always Real Same-Same**, Mattox Roesch, Unbridled Books, September • **Best of the West 2009: New Stories from the Wide Side of the Missouri**, edited by James Thomas and D. Seth Horton, University of Texas Press, October • **Half-Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel**, Jeannette Walls, Simon & Schuster, October □



JOHN DARKOW, COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE, MISSOURI/CAGLECARTOONS.COM

PASS ON GAS

I find it unfortunate that Randy Udall has suggested that natural gas, a fossil fuel, can save the world (*HCN*, 8/17/09). The implication is that the relatively recent discoveries about how to better exploit shale gas will be sufficient to meet a substantial part of our energy needs. The article gives citizens a false sense of security that leads them to ignore the really serious issue of climate change.

According to Naturalgas.org, the U.S. has an economically recoverable gas resource of about 1,800 trillion cubic feet, of which only about 270 trillion cubic feet (15 percent) is shale gas. Assuming that the U.S. currently consumes 24 trillion cubic feet/year, this amounts to a 75-year supply at present consumption rates. However, if natural gas is to meet current demand and additionally displace other fossil fuels, gas consumption will have to increase at an accelerated rate. At a growth rate of 5 percent, 1,800 trillion cubic feet would be consumed in about 32 years, not 75.

The more important issue is how we will deal with climate change. It is true that natural gas-fired combined cycle electrical generation produces approximately one-third the carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour as does coal-fired electrical generation. Natural gas is a great "bridging" fuel as we move away from coal. However, it is still a fossil fuel that will be pumping carbon into the atmosphere. The only sensible way to deal with climate change is to reduce consumption to the point that renewables (wind, solar, possibly geothermal, and biomass if done correctly) can meet our energy needs.

Jerry D. Unruh
Manitou Springs, Colorado

THE LODGEPOLE HEGEMONY

Hillary Rosner's article puts undue emphasis on the negative aspects of the pine-bark beetle infestation affecting forests around the West (*HCN*, 8/17/2009). While it is a difficult adjustment for many of the area's residents and the cause of a few tragic deaths, this event has many positive aspects as well. In my view, it is a restoration toward ecological balance. Many species of plants and wildlife will likely benefit from the toppling of the lodgepole empire, including aspen, huckleberry, forest understory plants, cavity-nesting birds, elk, moose, bear and others.

Rosner portrayed the dense stands of lodgepole pines as the product of natural forces. Natural processes would have created a much more diverse forest; it is forest mismanagement that favored such dense single-species stands. The forests of the Fraser Valley will likely be healthier and more diverse in 15 years than they have been for the past 50. While our aesthetic sensibilities may be offended by the red needles, many seedling aspens are taking advantage of the light filtering through barren branches. These seedlings are already working toward reclaiming these areas from the lodgepole hegemony.

J. Sky Orndoff
Helena, Montana

BEEF: IT (SHOULD BE) WHAT'S FOR DINNER

The reference in Andrea Appleton's review of *A Righteous Porkchop: Finding a Life and Good Food Beyond Factory Farms* (*HCN*, 8/03/09) to the "soil erosion and desertification intensive grazing can cause" is technically and ecologically incorrect. Modern, progressive ranchers follow a management scheme called intensive grazing that results in increasing the organic content of the soil, increasing the plant cover, and the diversity of the plant and animal community while decreasing erosion. This is accomplished by controlling the cattle and monitoring the land.

Next, I would take issue with her implication of the obviously superior environmental benefits of "eating low on the food chain." Intensive grazing allows us to produce high-quality food for humans by capturing solar energy and converting it (via photosynthesis) into red meat. This is accomplished with no tillage, fertilizer, spray, irrigation or petroleum-burning equipment. Meat may in fact be higher on the food chain than veggies and rice, but I doubt many items in the organic produce aisle are grown with as little environmental impact as our beef.

If the public really wants to support agriculture that is low-impact and sustainable, perhaps they should go out and order a grass-fed steak.

John Marble, Heart Z Ranch
Crawfordsville, Oregon

A WIN FOR THE GIPPER?

Though there has been widespread praise in some quarters, I find it difficult to muster much enthusiasm for Sen. Tester's Forest Jobs and Recreation Act described in "Two Weeks in the West" (*HCN*, 8/03/09). Perhaps a historical anecdote will help explain.

In 1988, both houses of Congress passed a Montana wilderness bill that protected 1.4 million acres. However, a coalition of mining, agricultural, ranching and timber groups convinced President Reagan to veto the legislation. Reagan stated at the time that he wanted to put only half of that acreage into permanent wilderness status.

Unfortunately, Tester's legislation basically grants Reagan's wish — protecting less than 700,000 acres. Not only that, but most of the forest designated as wilderness doesn't need protection from logging anyway, since it largely consists of high elevation, low value trees. Furthermore, Tester's bill opens up to logging many roadless areas that are presently protected.

It's sad to consider how far backwards we have come. Some may be smiling — including our anti-wilderness former president — but don't count me among them.

Jim Rogers
Polson, Montana

THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BABY FEET

Michelle Nijhuis's essay "A Tenderfoot in Taos," about the mom, the baby and the concerned drunk in the park, made that issue more human (*HCN*, 7/20/09). Thomas Merton wrote: "I think the chief reason we have so little joy is that we take ourselves too seriously." People who are really concerned about what happens to this place deal with some pretty heavy issues. That little essay lightened things up a bit for me. I am glad she still thinks of New England as home. Emerson and Thoreau would be pleased.

Russ Brenneman
Westport, Connecticut

LAWSUITS OF LAST RESORT

"Thinking Outside the Timber Box" discussed the Center for Biological Diversity's efforts to restore northern Arizona's once-stately ponderosa pine forests (*HCN*, 7/20/09). Our memo of understanding with Arizona Forest Restoration Products does not waive the Center's right to appeal or litigate Forest Service decisions. It instead promotes high-quality ecological restoration projects to preclude the need for appeals and litigation. Toward that end, the Center is working with the Forest Service, the small-diameter industry and other stakeholders to design strategically placed ecological restoration treatments to conserve native biological diversity and safely re-establish natural fire regimes across Arizona's Mogollon Plateau.

Taylor McKinnon
Public Lands Campaigns Director
Center for Biological Diversity
Flagstaff, Arizona

Send letters to the editor to Editor, HCN, P.O. Box 1090, Paonia, CO 81428, or editor@hcn.org. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

Our best idea

Dayton Duncan was an impressionable 9-year-old when he made his first journey into the West's national parks. He had the kind of life-changing experience that many people have enjoyed in the parks. Beginning Sept. 27, it will pay off in 12 hours of evocative public television, exploring how land conservation is often inspired by personal passion.

Duncan's adventure began in 1959, when he went on a family car trip from his Iowa home. He and his parents and 12-year-old sister roamed the mysterious Badlands of South Dakota and saw the beautiful Grand Teton and Rocky Mountain parks. In a desert canyon in Dinosaur National Monument, part of the parks system, he slept on a Green River sandbar. Arriving in Yellowstone a couple of days after an earthquake killed 28 people, he saw how the lethal mudslides had created a shimmering new lake.

It was the only significant vacation Duncan had while growing up (his family wasn't well off), and he says it forged "a very powerful emotional connection" between him and the parks. The memories lingered even as he went east for college, settled in New Hampshire and worked as a staffer for Democratic Party leaders. Eventually he shifted to writing books and documentary films, often working with a neighbor, Ken Burns, the leading public-TV investigator of our national history.

Duncan has collaborated with Burns on wide-ranging documentaries whose subjects include the Civil War, baseball and jazz. But Duncan remained fascinated with the West. He wrote at least six books on the region as well as the script for Burns' blow-by-blow account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. And he was co-writer of *The West*, Burns' sweeping 12-hour series on the European-immigrant takeover and its toll on Native Americans. (Both documentaries debuted in the mid-1990s and are available on DVD as well as in regular rebroadcasts.)

For the last 11 years, off and on, Duncan has worked on the culmination of his first trip to the parks — a documentary on the history of the park system, or as Duncan describes it, "the arc of the national park idea, which began in the West." He enlisted Burns and they've been filming ***The National Parks: America's Best Idea*** for six years, ranging from Florida to Alaska with major stops in the iconic Western parks.

They highlight many historical photos and figures, including Wallace Stegner, the Western writer who coined the "best idea" phrase. Yet their findings about the West's conservation politics are still relevant these days.

As Duncan says in an interview, this "uniquely American idea" took hold first in the West (with the establishment of Yellowstone in 1872) because our region had the wildest remaining landscapes. It came from a combination of early enthusiasts such as John Muir in Yosemite, crass business interests (railroads hoping to benefit from tourist traffic) and national pride (Europe had the Parthenon and the Louvre, but our nation had spectacular natural scenery).

The idea was democratic: Congress and presidents preserved the parks for the general public. Even so, locals often objected, fearing the parks meant too much federal control. Duncan sums up the stages: "Local resistance at first, then grudging acceptance, then (as Arizona did with the Grand Canyon) they put it on the license plates."

"People from all walks of life fought long, lonely and difficult battles" to establish parks, Duncan says. They include George Melendez Wright, a Hispanic naturalist who spent four years in the 1930s driving 11,000 miles assessing wildlife in Western parks. He pushed park managers to stop killing predators and feeding garbage to bears, to "preserve wildlife in (a) natural state."

Early tourist at Glacier Point, Yosemite National Park, c. 1902. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The park idea has become popular — Yellowstone set a record with 900,515 visitors in July alone. Modern threats include uranium mining in Grand Canyon's watershed and the slaughter of Yellowstone bison that stray onto national forest.

Duncan revisits Western parks frequently with his wife, Dianne, and their two children — repeating the "formative experience" he had as a kid. Many families do the same "intergenerational handoff," he says. Parks are a touchstone — landscapes preserved as well as possible even as the rest of the world is wrenched by all kinds of changes. **Conservation doesn't just happen, Duncan concludes; it requires advocacy year after year.** □

"The Obama tags? We'd buy some of those."

—Rex Rammell, a fringe Republican campaigning to be Idaho's governor, imagining that Idaho would issue hunting licenses for shooting President Obama. Many Republicans criticized him for saying so during an Aug. 25 appearance in Twin Falls. He said he was joking and the publicity would help his campaign.

SNAPSHOT

Peril in the parks

Early August: A woman and her young son are stranded for five days in a remote corner of Death Valley National Park in 117 degree-average heat; the boy doesn't survive. Late August: Two climbers fall in Grand Teton; one is airlifted from a ledge by helicopter.

The National Park Service is involved in thousands of search and rescue operations each year, at a cost of millions of dollars. Between 2004 and 2008, parks in the agency's three Western regions accounted for about 57 percent of the agency's search and rescues on average, and about 86 percent of its overall search and rescue costs, thanks to their popularity and challenging environments.

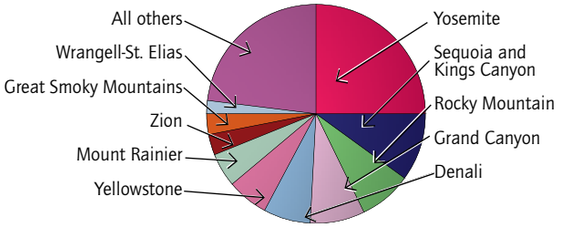
Although folks often get into trouble because they aren't adequately prepared, the Park Service generally doesn't charge for rescues. Doing so would introduce complex liability issues and could discourage people from seeking help when they most need it.

—Sarah Gilman

National parks with the most expensive average search and rescue (SAR) operations, 2005

Park	Total SAR operations	Average cost per SAR
Wrangell-St. Elias (AK)	4	$29,310
Denali (AK)	19	$18,345
Mount Rainier (WA)	26	$9,100
Sequoia and Kings Canyon (CA)	79	$6,027
Yellowstone (WY)	52	$5,339
Yosemite (CA)	231	$5,317
Canyonlands (UT)	20	$3,662
Zion (UT)	43	$3,253
Rocky Mountain (CO)	168	$2,478
Great Smoky Mountains (TN)	63	$2,110

Breakdown of total NPS SAR costs (about $5 million), 2005



NPS rescue breakdown for all parks, 2004-2008

3,380 operations per year, on average
$4.5 million spent on rescues per year, on average

Age of rescue subjects

0-12	10.4%
13-19	12.8%
20-29	20.3%
30-39	15.6%
40-49	13.0%
50-59	11.5%
Over 60	8.2%

Gender

Male	49.9%
Female	28.8%
Unknown	21.4%

Most common contributing circumstances

Insufficient info/Error in judgment	20.5%
Fatigue/Physical condition	17.0%
Insufficient equipment/clothing/experience	12.9%

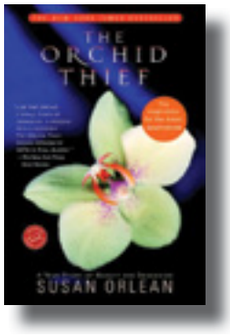
Most common activities leading to rescues

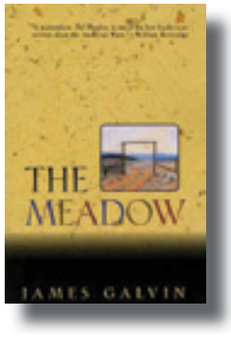
Hiking (day and overnight)	44.6%
Boating (both motorized and nonmotorized)	23.4%
Swimming	15.9%

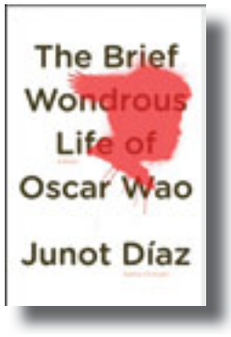
SOURCES: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORTS, 2004-2008; TRAVIS HEGGIE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA ADJUNCT PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE GREAT PLAINS INJURY PREVENTION RESEARCH INITIATIVE; HEGGIE, TRAVIS W., PHD, MICHAEL E. AMUNDSON, BS. "DEAD MEN WALKING: SEARCH AND RESCUE IN U.S. NATIONAL PARKS." *WILDERNESS & ENVIRONMENTAL MEDICINE* VOLUME 20, ISSUE 3, PG. 244-249. ILLUSTRATION: SARAH GILMAN.

J.P. STRICKLER/ISTOCK

Books for lonely times







I grew up in a family of seven in a one-bathroom house, a ratio of humans to toilets that more than one of us kids used in college-application essays as proof of our ability to problem-solve. The walls were thin, and voices carried. Someone was always playing the piano. When we traveled, we ended up tangled in each other's limbs in the family van. We could not escape each other, even when we tried.

It is because of that growing-up, maybe, that I love to tie my bootlaces and head off alone for a day or a week into quiet country. I worked as a backcountry ranger because the job required solitude, and I once chose to spend the better part of a year holed up, hermit-like, in a cabin hours from anywhere. Sweet and rare, those solo moments, watching the day's last light fading on a far-off ridge.

But my sense of solitude is prone to quicksilver shifts into loneliness — perhaps another result of having grown up in the constant company of a sprawling brood. The absence of others becomes a heaviness. Evenings in camp that at first felt kind then bleed into night, a long yawn of time pressing against the thin walls of a tent.

A friend says he was saved from this sort of loneliness by a book — a thin volume of essays that kept him company during a long night at the bottom of a deep Utah canyon.

Books are my defense against loneliness, too, and I always carry more of them than I could possibly read, zipped into plastic bags against the rain. Here in no particular order are some voices that I have relied on for company during long nights under wide skies.

The Orchid Thief by Susan Orlean, 1998. Although it's filled with damp heat and alligators, this is no nature book. (In my experience, most nature-writing books are not the best thing to read when you're lonely in the woods.) If you learn anything about orchids from Orlean, it will likely be by accident. She's writing about a subculture of obsession, and about her own envy of the ability of one barely likeable man to become unhinged with passion.

River Teeth by David James Duncan, 1995. Duncan is best known for his first novel, *The River Why*, a long gymnastic coming-of-age tale involving fish and philosophy. *River Teeth* is something else entirely. Named for the last part of a tree to disintegrate in water — the stubborn pitch-filled knots, where branches once met trunk — it's a series of vignettes capturing those moments in life that remain vivid after the rest have faded. Some are true, others fiction. All are tiny punches to the gut, crafted with Duncan's rare twin senses of humor and wonderment.

Random Family by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, 2003. LeBlanc spent more than 10 years following two women and their families in the Bronx. Their struggle with drugs and violence reads like a novel, but there is no better textbook on the prison of poverty.

The Meadow by James Galvin, 1992. Lyrical, ragged, hardscrabble: That's how critics describe this story about a piece of land in the Neversummer Mountains, on the border of Colorado and Wyoming, and the people who inhabit it over a century. Galvin is a poet who teaches at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, and the language in *The Meadow* is so lean and gorgeous that it's as much poetry as prose.

Levels of the Game by John McPhee, 1969. Pulitzer Prize-winner McPhee has written 30 books, and in each one of them, readers are treated to the companionship of a warm, smart writer with an unmatched ability to find meaning and wry humor in the details of things. In *Levels of the Game*, McPhee narrates a tennis match between Arthur Ashe and Clark Graebner. Proceeding point by point, the game becomes a window into the lives of the two players and into the state of race relations in America.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz, 2007. The breathless story of one smart, sad boy and his cursed efforts to overcome geekiness and win love becomes, in Diaz's hands, a multigenerational family saga and an utterly digestible history of the Dominican Republic.

There are countless others, of course. Tracy Kidder's **Mountains Beyond Mountains** about do-gooder doctor Paul Farmer. This year's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, **Olive Kitteridge**, by Elizabeth Strout. Fiction or nonfiction, poetry or prose, it doesn't much matter when I turn to words for companionship in the woods — as long as there is a genuine voice, a heartbeat other than my own. □

The sky is a crowded attic

An interview with novelist Andrew Sean Greer

Novelist Andrew Sean Greer is the author of The Story of a Marriage, The Confessions of Max Tivoli, The Path of Minor Planets, *and the short story collection* How It Was For Me. *Among other honors, Greer has won the PEN/O'Henry Prize for Short Fiction and the California Book Award. He was born in Washington, D.C., has lived in several places in the West, and now resides in San Francisco.*

Both The Confessions of Max Tivoli *and* The Story of a Marriage *take a historical San Francisco as their setting. For Max Tivoli, the city's 1906 earthquake mirrors his own oft-broken heart. For Pearlie Cook, protagonist of* The Story of a Marriage, *life as the lone African-American housewife in the 1953 Sunset district grows harder when she suddenly doubts how well she knows her husband, a veteran of World War II.*

High Country News *correspondent Jeremy N. Smith talked with Greer about the importance of setting in his fiction. This interview has been condensed and edited for readability.*

HIGH COUNTRY NEWS There's a wonderful quote by the Livingston, Mont.-based novelist and critic Walter Kirn. "Setting is key," he says. "We believe in places in a way we don't believe in people." Your novels and stories often contain historical backdrops and fantastic elements — for example, *Max Tivoli* describes a man aging backwards — made utterly realistic by lyrically described settings.

ANDREW SEAN GREER When I first came to Montana in 1994 — and I moved there from New York City — I was perplexed about what everyone was talking about when they mentioned a sense of place. When you live in East Coast cities, it's not what you think about. New Yorkers don't look up at buildings. They look at each other. (Laughs) Coming out West, I realized for the first time how much you have to work with, and how rich setting can be in terms of metaphor.

HCN I think of the early scene in *The Story of a Marriage* when Pearlie re-encounters her first love and future husband, Holland, in San Francisco after World War II. "The wind stopped, as if, like Holland, it did not recognize me," you write. "We stayed for a moment in the oyster-colored air." That description of wind and fog paints the entire scene in sepia.

GREER I moved to San Francisco in 1998, and fog is something you notice every day. It goes from warm and sunny to a film noir movie within minutes. It's nice that fog is particular to San Francisco. As a descriptor, it can be joyous or depressing or quiet. For *The Story of A Marriage,* I needed Pearlie to have very few choices in her life. Fog was ideal to make her world quiet and isolated. Later I take her out to Marin County, where it's golden and sunny, and the reader, I think, experiences with her a kind of joy and relief.

HCN Pearlie is born in Kentucky, then moves West. "On the bus ride to California, I studied the mountains' ascent into a line of clouds and saw where, as if set upon those clouds, even higher mountains loomed," you write. "I had never seen a sight like that in all my life. It was as if the world had been enchanted all along and no one told me."

GREER That paragraph is precisely my reaction when I first came to Missoula in 1994. I had no idea what Montana would be like. This is embarrassing, but I remember standing on the Higgins Avenue bridge and looking at the sunset and kind of being terrified at what I saw. This is a very New Yorker response, but it was way too beautiful. I had never felt before that bond with nature. For the first time, I really confronted place description. I had to figure out how to be specific to these settings and not just make a list of weed varietals.

HCN Do you remember when you started setting stories in the West rather than the East?

GREER It was when I lived in Seattle right after grad school. It started with the first sentence of the first story in my short story collection, *How It Was For Me*.

HCN "The sky is a crowded attic."

GREER There you go. The sky! That's a description that would never work in New York. There the sky is all one thing. It's uniform. I had never seen that thing you see from the Higgins Avenue bridge, where you have three different sunsets going on at once: tiny little clouds here and then enormous cumulous clouds there and then, over there, it's raining. There's so much more in Western settings to lean on. In Saul Bellow, that great Chicago writer, you get Chicago, but through personality and going through a lot of office doors, not through place description. Out West, you can lean on the environment. You can describe the sky and it comes off.

HCN Now that you've lived here 15 years, do you consider yourself a Western writer?

GREER I do in that there is a history in the West of people moving west until they find a place that suits them. So each of these people is some kind of pioneer. They settle to their own level. Those are the people I'm interested in. It's the best landscape for visions. □

"What if we really took seriously the idea that the world is sacred, really. Imagine that. If the world is sacred, what the hell are we doing, standing around while it vanishes before our eyes?"

–Kathleen Dean Moore

ERIN E. MOORE

Kathleen Dean Moore and her husband, Frank, in waters near Alaska's Inside Passage. **Facing page, a Pacific loon.**

When reverence isn't enough

A visit with philosopher and writer Kathleen Dean Moore

I have come to believe that all essays walk in rivers.
Essays ask the philosophical question that flows through time
— How shall I live my life?

—Riverwalking

Mid-June, on a thinly populated island in southeast Alaska:

Pop! Pop-pop-pop!

Seaweed polyps burst under my rubber boots — boots that Kathleen Dean Moore and her husband, Frank, have lent me so I can explore the shoreline with them on this low-tide morning. Still, I slip a little with every step. Same for my wife, SueEllen, who's walking nearby with Kathy, their heads down, trolling for whatever wonders the icy water has left behind.

Everything's slimy, shiny, newly exposed. Steaming, almost. It could be that morning, long ago, when salty life first hauled itself onto land.

Sponges cling to dripping rocks like spatters of luminous-orange paint. Purple-black mussels cluster by the thousands. In the space of 10 feet, I see a slender blood star, the ziggurat bodies of whelks, jumbled curtains of kelp that resemble giant linguini ribbons.

Mosquitoes and gnats dive and buzz. I squat next to Kathy, who's examining a sea slug that looks like a melting piece of watermelon. This is just the kind of moment she writes about in her essays and books, the sound and movement of water and watery creatures swirling everywhere.

"God, so many kinds of life," I say.

"*Exactly!*" she says with a smile. And though the sky is turning to lead, her blue eyes sparkle.

KATHY AND FRANK may have forgotten the bug juice, but not the bear spray. Though we're within sight of their cabin, they each pack a black canister of protection. When I suggested to Kathy, weeks ago, that SueEllen and I could bring our tent and sleep outside, she replied, "No, you won't. Too many brown bears." On one forest trail, we've already run across tracks wider than my outstretched hand.

Now, poking in tide pools away from the dark trees, I keep looking up and off, while Kathy and Frank take turns shouting "Hey-YUP!" It occurs to me that times like this, which crackle at every step with the potential for real danger, have pushed me into the state of mind that our best nature writers bring to the world, all their senses on high alert, their souls open, vulnerable, waiting, waiting.

Writers, I mean, like Kathleen Dean Moore.

In clear and lyrical prose, she celebrates the incredible stories, human and more-than-human, unfolding all around us. In books of personal essays such as *The Pine Island Paradox* and *Holdfast: At Home in the Natural World,* she looks hard at our exuberant, troubled and fast-changing world, and our role in it. Then she does something that separates her from many other fine observers and aligns her with

her hero, Rachel Carson. She challenges us to *do something* about it.

"The times call for 'applied reverence,' " she said in a recent talk. "Reverence is not enough. Standing in witness to the beauty of the world, as it gets sucked down and bulldozed over and ground down and irradiated, poisoned, paved, is not enough.

"What if we really took seriously the idea that the world is sacred, really. Imagine that. If the world is sacred, what the hell are we doing, standing around while it vanishes before our eyes?"

MOORE TEACHES at Oregon State University, where she's distinguished professor of philosophy and university writing laureate. She's also founding director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word, a kind of eco-think-tank that, among other activities, brings writers, scientists and activists together in the field to mull over compelling environmental questions.

Moore's first book grew out of her philosophy training — and a scolding she received from her graduate school advisor, who told her that her first choice for a dissertation, about rethinking our legal and moral relationships with water, was just not the kind of thing that philosophers did. So she turned her attention to the nature of forgiveness and reconciliation, and published *Pardons: Justice, Mercy, and the Public Interest* with Oxford University Press.

Later, after publishing several critical-thinking textbooks, she formed a writing group with an OSU colleague, taught herself the art of the essay, then used her knowledge of philosophy to revisit the topic of our moral relationships with water and the greater natural world. She is not easily deterred.

Riverwalking: Reflections on Moving Water, writes Bill McKibben, points toward "a new kind of nature writing, one where the outdoors is in dialogue not only with our inmost souls but with our families, our relationships, our lives."

This deep connection to family and other people and creatures beyond the self — the traditional Solitary Writerly Self — starts with the book's first sentence: "For as many years as I can remember, I have walked in rivers. Each Sunday afternoon, through all the summer and winter Sundays of my childhood, my father led nature walks through the beech-maple forest at the bottom of a valley that divides the suburbs from the western edge of Cleveland … He was the Rocky River Park naturalist — walking briskly … carrying a tame crow on his shoulder, lifting rotten logs to find salamanders. …"

So Moore and her sisters walked the river along with him, while their mother, Dora, the science curriculum coordinator for the local school system, prepared refreshments back at the museum. Kathy likes to call her parents "professional teachers of wonder."

In her essay, "Refrigerator Fungus," she remembers her dad lying in ditches for hours, snapping close-ups of cicadas or dung beetles, while passing cars screeched to a stop. "… The occupants would spill out, sure they had discovered a corpse. Before long everyone would be on their stomachs, watching beetles mate tail-to-tail, while my sisters and I sat in the grass, dying of embarrassment."

She regrets that her dad didn't live long enough to enjoy this Alaskan phase of her life, though the legacy of heightened curiosity runs through her two children. Like their parents (Frank is a recently retired OSU biologist), each is a university professor, Jonathan in aquatic biology, Erin in architectural design.

Kathy jots down ideas in a composition notebook whose cover is laminated with a color photo of her, Frank, Jonathan, Erin, their spouses and toddlers, almost everyone wearing fleece or Gore-Tex. One afternoon, after we've feasted on Dungeness crabs caught that morning, Kathy shows me a desk that Erin built for her, and Frank points out the wire deck railings their daughter also designed.

Members of Moore's family appear in almost every essay of *The Pine Island Paradox* and in much of her other writing. In this way, she's the opposite of Edward Abbey, the "Cactus Ed" whose book *Desert Solitaire* neglected to mention that his young wife and infant child happened to be sharing his trailer in what was then Arches National Monument.

This inclusiveness is by design. Kathy's friends and family members underscore Aldo Leopold's belief that, just as ecology is the science of connection, so "all ethics … rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts."

It is also Moore's reply to centuries of Western philosophy. She believes that our great thinkers have spent far too much energy parsing distinctions between ideas, between humans and other living things, between the mundane and the sacred, and not given nearly enough effort to pointing out commonalities.

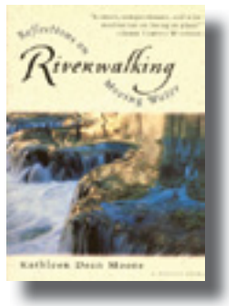
In other words, they've pushed humans *away* from nature. For the sake of nature and ourselves, Moore wants to bring us all back in.

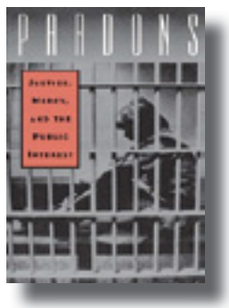
AT THE KITCHEN TABLE, Kathy tells a funny story about the mating behavior of Famous Writers at a conference she once attended. Then she turns serious again and describes two of her forthcoming books. The essays in *Wild Comfort: The Solace of Nature* explore "the wild earth's power to move us from sorrow to courage and hope." With co-editor Michael P. Nelson, she's also just completing *For All Time*, a collection of pieces by prominent thinkers and public figures, such as Pope Benedict XVI, on our obligation to the future in light of global climate change. This is "the work of redemption," Kathy says. She quotes theologian D. Elton Trueblood, saying that a person "has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit."

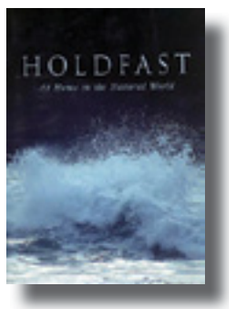
We're whooshing along in deep water in the *Kitsap*, Frank at the wheel, navigating with the casual expertise he learned as a boy sailing on Lake Erie.

A splash alongside us, then another. Dall porpoises! Two — no, three! — rocketing ahead, playing or maybe hunting fish startled by our speed. Silver bubbles stream down the length of their bodies, turning them luminescent as they braid the water, slipping over and under one another. Kathy stands beside Frank, grinning, her blonde hair whipping in the wind.

Watching her, I'm reminded of the final words of her essay, "The Maclaren River." Kicking about an Alaskan lake in an old inner tube, she notices a loon: "… what makes the loon a hero in my eyes is that sometimes, on clear nights … the loon lifts itself with strong wing beats to stand almost upright on the water, raises its head to the sky, and lets loose with wild, maniacal laughter that rolls across the pond and bounces, yowling and exultant, against the farther shore." □







BIRDIMAGES, ISTOCK

Timothy Egan's Western odyssey

When he was a young man, Timothy Egan discovered two things: He loved to write — and he was enthralled with the Western landscape. Egan combined these two passions into a journalism career that has spanned nearly three decades. After getting his start at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, *he went on to spend 18 years reporting on the West for the* New York Times. *In 2001, he shared a Pulitzer Prize as part of a team of* New York Times *reporters covering race in America.*

Egan is the author of five books about the West. In 2006, he won the National Book Award for nonfiction for The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl.

High Country News *correspondent John Moir spoke with Egan about his writing and the West. This interview has been condensed and edited for readability.*

HIGH COUNTRY NEWS The dedication in your book *The Good Rain: Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest* reads: "To my mother who always said, Stay West, and then showed me why." What was it that your mother showed you?

TIMOTHY EGAN My mother loved the outdoors. When I was a kid, we'd go on walks where she would sing the praises of nature. She'd say: "Look at this mountain lake, look at this great view." She was the best proselytizer for the Northwest. Although she wanted me to travel and to see the world, she said, "You're going to go all over, but you'll see there is no better place than here."

HCN How did you turn your early love of writing into a journalism career?

EGAN I always worked at the high school paper and the college paper. I liked mixing it up with journalism; I liked being part of the public policy debate. I got my journalistic break with the worst oil spill in American history — the grounding of the *Exxon Valdez*. I was then stringing for the *New York Times* when they asked me to rush to Alaska. I was there 10 days or so, writing for page one every day, staying in a fisherman's spare bedroom. In the midst of this flurry, I asked for a raise. They said they would do me one better and hired me.

HCN How do you approach writing about the West?

EGAN Writing for the *New York Times* forced me to look at this region through an outsider's eyes. I had always taken everything for granted, as most of us do. It made me pull back and ask: What interests the rest of the world? And then I realized that, my God, there are all these wonderful stories here.

Timothy Egan SOPHIE EGAN

HCN In telling these stories, you have written that in the West "the basic struggle is between the West of possibility and the West of possession." What are the origins of this conflict?

EGAN This battle goes back to Teddy Roosevelt and before: Who is going to own Western land? Roosevelt's idea — and his cousin, Franklin Roosevelt, had the same idea — was that the land belongs to the people. It defines us as Westerners to have all this public land. In opposition to this is the Western individualism myth where you let people get their piece and do what they will with it. If you look at Western history, you'll see this theme (of possibility versus possession) going through most of our stories.

HCN How do you see this dynamic playing out nowadays?

EGAN I think the battle for public sentiment on the value of national forests, national parks, clean water and wilderness — areas that are largely left alone and unmuddled — that battle has largely been won in favor of people who want to preserve open space and scenery. But here's the wild card: We are in the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, and a lot of things get thrown out the window. In the past, when pollsters asked, "Are you in favor of preserving the environment even if it comes at the risk of the economy?" that question was always answered by a majority putting environmental concerns over the economy. Now, for the first time since they've started asking this question, the economy has come out ahead.

HCN The theme of environmental calamity runs through many of your books. Do you see parallels between a story such as *The Worst Hard Time* and what is happening now in the West?

EGAN I was drawn to the Dust Bowl story because it was a perfect fable of the earth. It was an exact example of what happens when you push nature and nature pushes back. As long as the grass was there, it didn't matter how much the wind was blowing or how many droughts they had. But, in literally 10 years' time, farmers overturned a huge amount of ground. In the story, I quote a Native American looking out at the desolation; he turns to his son and points to where the grass was overturned and says, "Wrong side up." And that's the story of the Dust Bowl in its essence: wrong side up. There's a parable quality to it that I was really attracted to. It's funny, I didn't see it as a global warming precursor, but people who read the book, mostly young people, started to talk to me about that.

MIKE NORTON/ISTOCK

Mount Rainier — opening scene for Timothy Egan's book *The Good Rain* — reflects in Tipsoo Lake in Mount Rainier National Park.

HCN Water is another all-important Western resource that pits powerful interests against one another. You — and many others — have said that "water flows uphill toward money."

EGAN It's true. You can't write about this land and not write about water being the destiny changer that it is. About 10 years ago, I was interviewing some Enron executives before that company went bankrupt. They were starting to buy up private water supplies. This is when they were at the height of their hubris and controlling the energy world and had all of these politicians in their pockets. They were actually buying some municipal water supplies and saying, "We'll privatize it." I remember interviewing this Enron exec and saying, "Water? What are you guys doing in water?" And he said to me, "Water is going to be to the 21st century what oil was to the last century."

HCN The West is not the only place to face conflicts over land and water usage. In 1997, you and your family spent most of a year living in Italy. What did your time in Italy teach you about the West?

EGAN We lived not far from the Apennine Mountains, and you could see pieces of land that were largely unchanged, where sheepherder families had been running sheep for a thousand years. What I learned in Italy is that here's a country much older than ours with a much (denser) population and a much more chaotic political situation. But they understand the countryside has usefulness to them. For the most part, Italians have made peace with their land. If you live in the city, you go for your *passeggiata*, which is your walk, on Sunday in the country. You get your food from the country. The Italians understand that they have a relationship to the land outside of the city. It's a practical relationship, one born of utilitarianism. I'm not saying Italians are perfect, but they've figured out a compact with their land. So seeing that made me realize that the population is not the problem in the West.

HCN Could you give us a preview of your new book, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America*, which will be published in October?

EGAN It's the story of the largest forest fire in American history. The fire itself was extraordinary. It created hurricane-force winds, and it burned 3 million acres in 36 hours. But what drew me to the story was the drama of the fire set against a larger story of conservation.

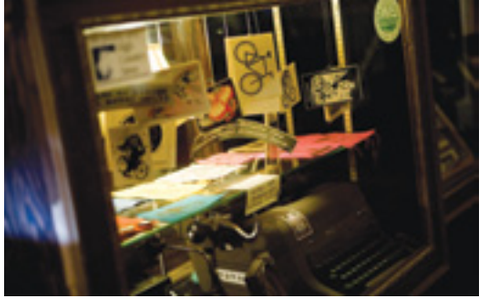
I never realized how much our public-lands legacy was threatened early on. My thesis is that this huge fire essentially saved public lands by making heroes of Roosevelt's young Forest Service. It was a radical idea, promoted by Roosevelt and his chief forester, Gifford Pinchot, to set aside more than 200 million acres of public land — but it was opposed by Gilded Age forces and many Western politicians. After Roosevelt left office in 1909, support dwindled. Then came the fire, making martyrs and heroes of the 100 or so people who died in a blaze that burned an area the size of Connecticut. But, ironically, the Forest Service then took away the wrong lesson — to try and snuff all wildfires, a tragic course, which led to much buildup in fuel and catastrophic burns, and a firefighting-industrial complex such as we have today that spends billions of dollars. So this fire is very much with us a century later — in good ways and bad.

HCN You are a prolific writer, and *The Big Burn* is just the latest in your growing body of work on the West. How do you keep the words flowing?

EGAN I come from a blue-collar background. I've worked on a farm, bucking hay bales. I've worked at an aluminum factory. So when I finally started to make it as a writer, I didn't sit around and wait for the muse to strike. During my years working as a national correspondent for the *New York Times,* I traveled nearly 50,000 miles a year — all over the West. My constant companion was Norman Maclean's book, *A River Runs Through It.* If I was on deadline and stuck, I'd just open it up and read a couple paragraphs. Things flowed easily from there. □

"It defines us as Westerners to have all this public land. In opposition to this is the Western individualism myth where you let people get their piece and do what they will with it."

—Timothy Egan



Bicycles, books and beer

How a man with no plan built a community around literature and social activism

Somewhere in the middle of a long explanation about how the Zen of bicycles and the transcendentalism of agriculture are central to the high literature-slash-activist mission of his publishing company, Todd Simmons' train of thought finally pulls out of the station, leaving him on the platform staring after it.

"Is this even making any sense?" he asks after a pause. "Bicycles? Agriculture? What am I talking about?"

He sighs and then smiles, running his hands over the sandpaper start of a blond beard. Dressed in a T-shirt, shorts and an ever-present short-brimmed bicycle cap, the 33-year-old sits in the corner of his claustrophobic office, surrounded by cardboard boxes and overflowing bookshelves.

"At times I can see how it all works," he says, "and at other times it's like, 'What's going on?' "

The "it" in question is Wolverine Farm Publishing, a grassroots imprint that Simmons runs from the back of a coffee shop and used book store in Fort Collins, Colo. On the surface, it wouldn't seem that hard to describe. Since 2002, Wolverine Farm has held a quirky niche dominated by its flagship publication, the *Matter Journal*. Each issue of this biannual literary/art journal centers loosely around a theme — land, transportation or fuel, for example — and features 30 to 50 contributors. Most are Western authors, artists and photographers, who range from the well-known (Laura Pritchett, Laura Resau, Teresa Funke) to those just finding their voices.

"That's one of the virtues of *Matter*," Simmons says. "There's a lot of diversity. There's a common foundation under all of these writers, but they're certainly interpreting the world as individuals."

BUT WOLVERINE FARM does more than publish a journal. Its wide-ranging, practical commitment to environmental stewardship, ecological sustainability, preserving wild lands and fostering communities is evident in everything it does. Sales of donated books at the Matter Bookstore provide the organization's financial backbone. Inspired by its founder's (and readers') love of bicycles, the company has begun publishing a line of bicycling almanacs called *Boneshaker*, and it prints a free guide to local community-conscious businesses called the *Great Ecstatic Reporter*. It also recently launched a news-oriented Web site, matterdaily.org.

When *Matter* first appeared in book format (it started as a tabloid), local writer Evan P. Schneider reviewed it. "I wrote that it has very good intentions and aspirations," he says, "but it didn't seem to have a cohesive direction." Schneider didn't realize that this was mostly by design. "We were kind of the 'pissed-off young (but) not-getting-any-younger people' who really wanted to make a change and do something more direct than sitting in a meeting talking about mission statements," Simmons says.

Still, Schneider was impressed enough to contribute to subsequent issues and to offer to help edit them. The chance to be published was only part of the attraction; he responded to Simmons' underlying call to action. "Overarchingly, Todd's vision is very, very magnetic," says Schneider, who, as the editor of the *Boneshaker* books, is one of Wolverine Farm's few paid employees. "He has the ability to attract people to him who want to do good in the community."

Simmons describes his small legion of volunteers as something of a rapid-response task force, a squadron of hippie bicyclists who are as well-schooled in literature and activism as they are in agriculture and bike repair. They do everything from running the bookstore's cash registers to assisting with literacy outreach programs to helping local farmers recover from natural disasters. In recent years, they've worked with Save the Poudre, a group fighting a proposed reservoir, and helped run Wolverine Farm's "Project Sweatshop," which teaches children about farming. They've rallied support for an ordinance to allow residents to keep backyard chickens, and organized bike parades to encourage alternative transportation and healthy living.

"Sometimes you feel like you don't know why you're out there helping out," says 22-year-old volunteer Grant Souders, who pitches in at the bookstore and helped replant hail-damaged crops at a community-supported farm this

Todd Simmons, left, and scenes from his Matter Bookstore (clockwise from center left): bicycle art; the display counter (top); longtime patron Jim Morrow in the Matter Bookstore stacks. TODD NEWCOMER

summer. "But after working on the farm and seeing the bookstore grow and have a positive effect on the community, it makes it worthwhile."

SO FAR, Wolverine Farm's success has been modest, but in the words of Gary Wockner, a board member as well as a contributing writer and volunteer editor, it's "organic, evolving and financially solvent." The company prints 1,000 to 1,500 copies of each issue of *Matter* and *Boneshaker*, and sells enough to finance the next batch. Bookstore sales make up any shortfalls and pay the salaries of Wolverine Farm's four employees (the journal's contributors aren't paid). *Matter* is on the racks in such esteemed outlets as Portland's Powell's Books and San Francisco's City Lights, but most copies are sold close to home, in Fort Collins.

That location has helped the company flourish. While most northern Colorado communities have older, more conservative populations, Fort Collins enjoys a healthy blend of college students, young families, entrepreneurs and retirees. These disparate groups intersect at The Bean Cycle, the bohemian coffee shop that shares space with the Matter Bookstore in the heart of the city. There, Blackberry-tethered businessmen stand in line behind dreadlocked street urchins, and neither seems to notice the contrast. The open, high-ceilinged space is chock-full of colorful couches, a scattering of tables and an old standup piano that invites impromptu performances. Toward the front of the store is a counter piled with literature, fliers and bulletin board pin-ups promoting Wolverine Farm's various issues and causes. The bookstore occupies the back, with its well-thumbed titles crammed onto shelves lining nooks and crannies and the walls of a loft filled with more tables and chairs. The eclecticism is perfectly in keeping with Simmons' interest in what he calls "the tension of borders," a concept that explains Wolverine Farm's vision as well as anything.

"Choosing Wolverine Farm as the name, I don't know if I thought about it consciously at the time, but I have a personal interest in … the beauty of the tension of borders, where the disparate worlds collide," Simmons says. "There's something wild like a wolverine and something settled like a farm, that's where those worlds meet."

NOT ALL THE TENSIONS have been easy to accommodate. Simmons came to Fort Collins in 2002 after quitting a National Park Service job, disillusioned by the agency's goal of conserving land while promoting recreation. For Simmons — who grew up reading Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey and Aldo Leopold — the tension between those competing aims crossed into hypocrisy. In his brief two-year tenure, he worked in 14 parks from Mount Rainier in Washington to Biscayne National Park in Florida, specializing in park visitation and recreation. "I knew I couldn't fit in there," he says. "Maybe that's what hurt so much — that the parks were so gorgeous and they needed so much management."

So Simmons embarked on a new path, one blazed by the Beats, another group of writers he admired. He built a yurt, strapped it to his Ford Escort and hit the road, eventually camping in a friend's backyard in Fort Collins where he released his frustration old-school style, on a typewriter.

"It's horribly cheesy," he says, "but it's all true. ... I've always turned back to writing when I came to loose ends. When I didn't know how to make sense of the world, I would always try to work it out. I never thought about making a career out of it."

In fact, it seemed at times as if he actively avoided making a career out of it. The ways he dreamed up to share his ideas sometimes edged into eccentricity. He asked the New Belgium Brewing Co., a Fort Collins mainstay that promotes bicycle culture as much as the microbrews it produces, to be his sponsor: He wanted to bike around the state like a wandering minstrel, giving impromptu readings.

Ultimately, he spent his modest nest egg launching

Matter Journal, primarily as a forum for his work and that of some likeminded friends. After three issues, the people he started the venture with moved on, and Simmons had to eke out a living serving coffee and working odd jobs. But when he first published *Matter* in book format, hundreds showed up for the release party. "It was an unparalleled experience," Simmons says, and it inspired him to scrape his way toward the next issue.

He opened the bookstore in 2005 "with zero dollars" and a lot of wishful thinking. Within six weeks, he says, hundreds of people had come through the doors to both donate books and buy them. Just this year, Simmons secured nonprofit status for Wolverine Farm, giving the venture more funding opportunities. These days, working with New Belgium, it sells more books through the brewery's Tour de Fat (a 12-city bike and beer celebration) than at any other outlet.

WITH THE FINANCIAL PRESSURE eased, Simmons is now focused on the future. Next year, he plans to publish an Edward Abbey-inspired issue of *Matter Journal*. He wants to start publishing single-author books and build a community around the nascent Web site.

The seemingly schizophrenic nature of Wolverine Farm doesn't faze its founder or its board members. "We sit there in board meetings just sort of twisting our heads, not knowing where it's going to go," Wockner says. "But it's working. Todd likes to keep it small and funky and on the edge. If it had a permanent funding source and a mission statement that he was required to adhere to, he probably wouldn't last much longer."

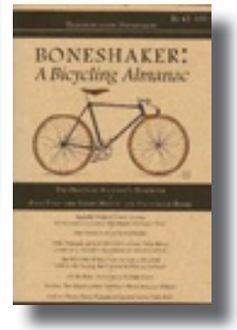
Simmons likes to say that the real credit belongs to those who make changes themselves. It's never long before someone still slightly sweaty from a bike ride pokes a head in the office door, looking for a chance to help out. There's plenty to do, whether sorting newly donated books or organizing a poetry slam.

"It's not the Todd Simmons show," he says. "Countless people have aided and abetted all these operations. I don't know what people see on the outside, but at the core it's driven by a true desire to make a positive impact on the world. A lot of things we do are cut-and-dried: book publishing, literacy outreach.

"But," he adds with a smile, "we tweak it enough to make it just a little bit crazy." □

"If (Todd Simmons) had a permanent funding source and a mission statement that he was required to adhere to, he probably wouldn't last much longer."

–Gary Wockner, Wolverine Farm board member



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***Portrait of a Residential School Child*, acrylic. gold leaf on canvas, 2005 (left), *The Spirit Needs No Eyes, Klatle-Bhi*, red cedar, acrylic, horsehair, 2007 (right).** IMAGES COURTESY D&M PUBLISHERS

Challenging Traditions presents the work of 40 celebrated artists of the Northwest coast. These painters and sculptors maintain their cultural traditions while integrating contemporary concepts, and their work is part of a powerful resurgence of Native American art. Ian Thom, senior curator at Vancouver Art Gallery, interviewed each of these dynamic and innovative artists, and his observations on their philosophies, careers and working methods accompany more than 100 color photographs of significant pieces.

CHALLENGING TRADITIONS: CONTEMPORARY FIRST NATIONS ART OF THE NORTHWEST COAST By Ian M. Thom, 186 pages, hardcover: $65 Douglas & McIntyre, 2009.

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Fall break

We publish 22 issues a year, and our next publishing break is in mid-September. Look for the next installment of *HCN* around Oct. 12.

ROMPIN' READER POTLUCK

... in Paonia. We're bringing back an old favorite: the *High Country News* community potluck at Paonia Town Park! This year, our fall board meeting takes place in *HCN*'s western Colorado hometown during the same weekend as the Ninth Annual Mountain Harvest Festival (mountainharvestfestival.com). *HCN* will join the weekend's events with a bang of a cookout. Bring a side dish to share (burgers and beverages will be provided) and join us at the Paonia Town Park from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26. To RSVP or for more information, contact Development Associate Alyssa Pinkerton: e-mail alyssap@hcn.org or call 970-527-4898. Hope to see you there!

VISITORS

What's more fun than summer camp? Geology field camp, of course. University of Michigan students **Christine Doman**, **Liz Bunin** and **Sarah Mandlebaum** dropped by Paonia on their roundabout way back from Jackson Hole, Wyo., where Christine and Liz attended Camp Davis. They took geology mapping courses and studied under the stars before meeting up with Sarah and road-tripping through Utah and Colorado.

Mary Alice Evans brought her visiting grandson, **Zach Tuthill**, by our office. "I'm probably one of the oldest subscribers," said Mary Alice, who has been reading the magazine since 1975. She remembers when several of our staffers were hurt in a car accident, back when the paper was headquartered in Wyoming, and the subsequent outpouring of reader support that became the *HCN* Research Fund. She has lived all over Colorado but now resides just down the road in Crawford with her daughter and son-in-law. Zach lives in Laramie, Wyo.

From nearby Salida, Colo., came **Charlie** and **Becky Goff** with their niece, **Beth Moore**, from Philadelphia. The longtime subscribers used fruit-picking as an excuse to stop by Paonia, they said. While here, they also loaded up on free books from our stash of extras, and tried to convince their niece, a history major, to apply for an internship. We hope she'll listen to her aunt and uncle.

Matthew Symonds, another longtime subscriber from way back in 1975 — "I was ticked off when the paper moved from Wyoming to Colorado in 1983" — and his wife, Joan, dropped in on their way to Laramie, Wyo., from their home in Farmington, N.M. We grilled Matthew about his checkered past as a roughneck on oil rigs, a curious choice of summer job during the 1960s, since he'd just graduated from a Quaker boarding school back East. But he clearly loved it, and worked on rigs off and on for almost 20 years while becoming a petroleum engineer. He said the most dangerous time on a rig occurred during the early days, when a man's ignorance could get him killed. Inexperienced workers like himself, he said, were called worms or weevils, a holdover from the '20s and '30s, when farmers left their busted cotton farms for the oil fields. "You were always judging your fellow workers," he recalled. "They held your life in their hands." Now a financial advisor for Raymond James, Matthew says he'd long gotten over *HCN*'s move to Colorado, and even though the magazine has changed its shape and look several times, he reassured us, "I find I always like it."

Visitors from University of Michigan, from left, Christine Doman, Liz Bunin and Sarah Mandlebaum. CALLY CARSWELL

OOPS

In the Aug. 31 "Heard Around the West," the elk photo was mistakenly attributed to Greg Woodall. It was actually sent to us by reader Lin Lawson of Chandler, Ariz. Sorry about that, Lin.

—Jodi Peterson and Betsy Marston for the staff

Township 13 South, Range 92 West, Section 35

Elizabeth Foote was a homebody, and her home was on a high-desert mesa in western Colorado. Her house had a wide-angle view of the West Elk Mountains and overlooked a river valley and the raw, ambitious small town of Paonia. The mesa was sun-baked in summer, alternately snowy and muddy in winter, and windy all year round.

Elizabeth's father, George Foote, bought the land in 1907, when Elizabeth was 8 years old. The government had broken its treaty with the Utes a quarter-century earlier, opening most of their Colorado reservation to eager settlers. The choicest parcels of land in the river valley were already claimed, but cheap, promising acreage remained.

George registered a claim to 200 acres and cleared the scrubby juniper trees and sagebrush from the mesa top. He pried a small mountain of rocks from the hard ground, dug irrigation ditches to water his crops, and planted hay. He also championed the local fruit industry — the valley became known for its cherries and peaches — and dealt energetically in real estate, earning a reputation as an aggressive businessman. Before long, his homestead became known to its neighbors as Foote Fields.

The valley was remote — the nearest sizable city was 70 miles away, and in 1910, there were only nine cars in town — but life was busy. Elizabeth and her three younger sisters could go to sledding and skating parties in the winter, to ice-cream socials and baseball games and the marble-topped soda fountain in summer. The circus came to town, and the Kit Carson Wild West show; the annual chautauqua brought mind-readers and magicians, violinists and organists. But people said that Elizabeth was happiest home on the ranch. With her mother, Mary, and her sisters Barbara, Antoinette and Susan, she helped irrigate the fields and raise the cows. Sometimes, one of the girls would ride a Shetland pony around the mesa, their baby brother Dan propped in front of her on the saddle.

With the rest of the valley, the Footes likely battled measles, bedbugs, spring freezes and hailstorms. Following a run of disastrous fruit crops in the teens, so many people left town for better prospects in California that 30 former neighbors gathered for a picnic in Long Beach. But the Footes stayed on the mesa, perhaps buoyed by canny land deals, hard work, stubbornness, or a dose of each.

Elizabeth had her bold moments; in 1918, her senior year in high school, she played a bit part in a Civil War drama at the local opera house. She and Barbara both graduated later that spring, and their class pictures show girls with light, wide-set eyes and wavy, softly gathered hair. Barbara, a year younger, looks directly at the camera, a half smile on her face. Elizabeth looks slightly away from the lens, her face serious. It was a sad year; dozens of young men in town had volunteered or been drafted for the war in Europe, and the Spanish flu would soon burn through the valley, killing many.

Some graduating seniors left for college, some for teaching positions. Some signed on for the last months of the war. Some got married. But Elizabeth simply went home to the mesa and resumed her chores.

Six years later, on a nearly moonless night in late July, she disappeared.

WHEN TWO COLLEGE BUDDIES from Oregon happened upon the mesa in 1993, they knew nothing of the Footes. The land was too hot and too cold, too windy and too dry, they thought, but it was quiet and had marvelous views. And without irrigation rights, wells, houses or pavement of any kind, it was cheap. They pooled their money with three other friends and bought 80 acres.

The friends each chose home sites and built their own houses, two from straw bales, one from mud blocks, one with a wall insulated by old refrigerators. They formed a loosely bound commune, founded on a common dream of getting off the grid and back to the land.

One of the Oregon boys built his bachelor pad in a sheltered spot, a hollow serenaded by coyotes. When I met him, five years after he and his friends had signed the deed, I fell for him — and then for the mesa. The place had a spare, spiny beauty that I loved, and the scattered houses overflowed with do-it-yourself charm. I moved to Foote Fields, and I was thrilled.

We got married in the mesa's open field, and in the years that followed, we built friendships and accumulated shared histories. The land allowed us to live in a way that roughly matched our beliefs: Our power came from the sun, our drinking water straight from the sky, our vegetables from down the road. For me, the land provided the tranquility — and the low overhead — I needed to start and sustain a writing career. Though I traveled often, and enjoyed the time away, I always returned to the mesa with a sense of relief.

But a thread of ambivalence began to wind through my mind. I wondered if our life on the mesa was really as easy on the land as we liked to believe. I wondered if I was just hiding out from a more conventionally middle-class destiny in this addictively gorgeous place. I looked around the light-filled little house my husband had so lovingly built, and wondered if we were getting too old to have a composting toilet, mismatched thrift-store dishes, and a used futon couch.

When I got pregnant and had a baby girl, I finally understood my nagging dissatisfaction. I had come here for an adventure, for a romantic experiment in minimalist rural living. Ten years later, what I most wanted was a home. My grandparents grew up in Holland and the farmlands of Virginia; my father grew up in England and North Carolina; I grew up in New York state and, in a fit of wanderlust, moved to Oregon for college. I now lived more than 1,800 miles from all the ancestors I knew about. I didn't have much of what my Southern relatives called a "home place," a place where I knew the local dialect and the history of the land and the shapes of all the family trees. There was no one place I was comfortably *from*.

Could this dried-out, weedy mesa, with its scenic vistas

The high desert mesa above Paonia, once home to the Foote family. JT THOMAS

and jumble of homemade houses, become my home place? I wasn't sure. Still, it seemed important, as it never had before, to do some geographic genealogy, and learn who and what had preceded us here. I wanted — suddenly needed — to know who had found a way to call it home.

So I dug into the very local past. I toured nearby petroglyphs, cracked open the heavy cloth-bound volumes of property records at the county courthouse, whirled through rolls of microfilm at the library.

I learned that for hundreds of summers, the Utes had used the mesa — and the mountains and valleys around it — as hunting and gathering grounds. They probably camped here in family groups, cutting juniper logs for wickiup poles, gathering grass seeds for flour, following trails into the peaks. I learned about Guy Hammond, a gregarious cattleman from a pioneer family who had owned the mesa in the 1920s and '30s, and used it as spring pasture for his herd. I learned about his wife, Lena Read Hammond, an Easterner who played the piano, grew her own hops to make yeast, and rode the range with her husband — first sidesaddle, then in a divided skirt, and finally, on the occasional camping trip, in overalls.

And I met Elizabeth Foote.

JULY 28, 1924, DAWNED warm and sunny, with a hint of rain in the distance. Early that Monday morning, George and Mary Foote must have realized that their oldest daughter was not in her bed. They knew Elizabeth was prone to sleepwalking, so they probably looked upstairs and downstairs, hoping to find her curled up in a corner. Maybe they sent young Dan, who had just turned 12, into the nearest fields, to see if his sister had wandered outside in the night. Nothing.

I imagine the Footes kept looking for a while, hoping Elizabeth would come strolling out of the junipers, rubbing her eyes. Maybe, after an hour or so, George rode his horse down the mesa and over the canal to the closest house, where he put out the word that his 25-year-old daughter Elizabeth, dutiful Elizabeth, was missing.

The canal. The Fire Mountain Canal was a local wonder, a 31-mile-long, 10-foot-wide irrigation ditch that snaked around the border of the Foote land. In 1896, when the town was little more than a decade old, dozens of farmers and hired laborers had begun shoveling and dynamiting their way along the mesas on the north side of the valley, slowly carving a three-foot-deep trench into the rocky, close-packed hillside. Local farmers had even labored through the winters, waiting for thaws to melt the snow and soften the ground. The canal took five years to complete, but when it was done, it was by far the largest irrigation ditch in the valley, an artery of river water that turned 10,000 acres of desert into productive farmland.

That Monday morning, more than 40 neighbors joined the search for Elizabeth. 1924 was, in many ways, a furtive, nasty year in the valley. Prohibition was in full force, but rumors circulated that booze "flowed as free as water" in town. Marijuana made a local appearance ("The weed, converted into cigarettes, is declared to have a more powerful effect than the rankest moonshine liquor," wrote the scandalized editor of the local newspaper, in what may have served as an unintentional advertisement.) The night before Elizabeth disappeared, the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan had burned a cross on the hill above Grand Avenue as a warning to bootleggers, drawing a

But home — no matter where we happen to find it — is just as beautiful and dangerous and changeable as anywhere else, as full of mysteries and restless souls.

An abandoned present-day house at Foote Fields. JT THOMAS

curious crowd from the chautauqua festivities.

The search party might have included coal miners and cattlemen, Klansmen and immigrant fruit-pickers. They must have been used to ignoring disagreements in the face of emergencies, for life-threatening misadventures and illnesses were common. People fell from their horses and from stacks of hay, were lost in snowstorms, and got into bloody buggy wrecks and car crashes and knife fights. They died in coal mine cave-ins and contracted diphtheria, smallpox and typhoid.

So the searchers were likely accustomed to assuming the worst. They might have reassured a distraught Mary Foote, telling her that Elizabeth was sure to turn up by midday. Led by George Foote, they might have combed the mesa, marching through hayfields and juniper scrub, feigning confidence that Elizabeth had suffered nothing worse than a sprained ankle and a bad scare. But as the morning dragged on, and the July sun grew hotter, the searchers probably admitted to each other what they had all been thinking. It was time to drain the Fire Mountain Canal.

By the end of the day, I imagine, the job was done. The diversion gates upstream were closed, and the proud canal was an empty, muddy trench. Yet there was still no sign of Elizabeth Foote.

ON TUESDAY MORNING, an elderly man by the last name of Peterson was walking alongside the canal, well downstream from the Foote homestead. Maybe he was taking his usual morning constitutional, or maybe he was wondering why the canal had suddenly gone dry. He saw a large, wet bundle lying among the rocks at the bottom of the ditch, and as he came nearer, he was horrified to realize that it was a body. Frightened, he went no closer but rushed to a nearby house, where he told rancher Arthur Purtee what he had seen.

Purtee recruited some neighbors and led them to the canal, where they gathered up the bloated body of Elizabeth Foote. Since her disappearance two nights earlier, she had floated eight miles from home.

The county coroner ruled the death a suicide "due to a temporary derangement," but the family disagreed. Elizabeth had been clearing a plot of land near the canal on Saturday, and George and Mary Foote believed that on Sunday night, she had dreamed of her work, risen from her bed, and walked several hundred feet to the edge of the canal in her sleep, determined to turn water on to the newly open ground. When she fell into the frigid canal water, family and friends said, the shock must have stopped her heart, or caused her to panic and drown.

The funeral service was held two days later, on Thursday morning, at the Foote home on the mesa. They buried Elizabeth in tiny Bethlehem Cemetery, a short walk from Foote Fields and the Fire Mountain Canal.

Just a few years after her death, the Footes sold the corner of their land that I live on today. George, Mary and their daughter Barbara stayed in the valley; Susan married and moved to California, Antoinette to Denver; Dan fought in World War II, then moved to southern Idaho. Today, George, Mary and Barbara are buried beside Elizabeth; Dan, the baby of the family, lies nearby next to his wife. Close by the Foote graves are the plots of friends and neighbors: the Hammonds, the Frys, the Roatcaps, the Bruces. On that long-ago Monday in July, many here must have helped search for Elizabeth.

I ask around town, but few people remember any stories about the Foote family; most barely remember the name. No one remembers any talk of Elizabeth, the home-loving girl with the serious face. So many people drowned back then, old-timers tell me. Babies fell into irrigation ditches, skaters slipped into icy reservoirs, houses washed away when the river suddenly changed course. Elizabeth was just one of many who vanished. Only she knew whether she fell, or whether she jumped.

One afternoon this past summer, Glena Ballentine, a descendant of one of the valley's pioneer families, unlocks the town museum for me. While I search the files for scraps about the Footes, she thumbs through an autograph book, donated by a local high school graduate, and hands it to me. The open page reads:

Ashes to ashes
Dust to dust
If the Devil don't get you
St. Peter must

Yours as a classmate
Dan Foote 1930

"YEP, I'M THE LAST ONE who knows nothing about nothing," jokes John Morrell when I call him. His family owned the mesa land for three decades, beginning in the 1940s. His grandfather, also named John Morrell, used it as spring pasture for his cattle, as Guy Hammond had, then deeded it to his son Jack for "love and affection and other considerations." The younger John began helping with ranch chores when he was 6 years old, just big enough to ride a horse. But when he graduated from high school, there was little money in the cattle business, so he began a career in the local coal mines. John and his wife, Charlotte, now live less than two miles from the mesa top, in a house with a similar view of the mountains.

Elizabeth Foote (marked with an asterisk) in a Paonia High School class picture. Below, Elizabeth's tombstone in the Bethlehem Cemetery. Bottom, the author and her daughter, Sylvia. JT THOMAS

John says that the Foote house was torn down long ago, but he remembers seeing its rock foundation as a boy, and tells me that I should still be able to find some remnants of the place. He gives me rough directions: right side of the road, east end of the cross ditch, middle of the old hayfield. One morning, I follow the shallow irrigation ditch, now little more than a shadow in the weeds, until I reach the spot, which turns out to be just steps away from where my husband and I got married. But aside from a suspiciously straight groove in the dirt, I can find no sign of the Foote house — no foundation rocks, no debris, nothing. In just a few decades, it seems, the house has completely disappeared. I stand on the flat ground where George Foote might have dreamed his entrepreneurial dreams, and Elizabeth Foote might have, fatally, dreamed of irrigating her plot of land. I look to the west, where an overgrown gully leads downhill to the Fire Mountain Canal.

WHAT HAD I BEEN LOOKING FOR in my stack of old deeds and newspapers? Even I didn't quite know. Maybe I'd hoped to find a wise grandmotherly figure, someone I could imagine advising me about diapers and baby food and all the demands of new motherhood. Or a farmer with a yen for world travel, someone whose example would help me stitch together my love of the quiet mesa and my longing for far-flung adventure. Instead, I found an uneasy ghost.

The holes in my history of this place are enormous. I have only a few clues to the individual lives of the Utes who summered here. I don't know how Guy and Lena Hammond felt about the land, or if, in the hubbub of their busy days, they paid much attention to it at all. I don't know if Elizabeth Foote really loved her home, as people said, or if, as a young unmarried woman, she felt trapped on this windy hill.

I do know more about the mesa than I did a few months ago, and the knowledge makes me feel both less and more at home. The families who lived here are not mine. This may be my daughter's birthplace, but she has no deep roots here, not in the usual sense. Somehow, though, the life and death and mystery of Elizabeth Foote brings me closer to home, for now I'm one of the keepers of her story.

When I moved here 10 years ago, the mesa looked, to my 25-year-old eyes, like a blank slate, a peaceful place with enough room to install our solar panels and cobble together our dreams. Elizabeth Foote reminds me that we were far from the first — and will be far from the last — to try to make the mesa home.

Our group of friends has owned these 80 acres for a decade and a half, and already most of us live elsewhere, pulled away from our shared land by careers or illnesses or family obligations. We're happy to see one another when we get the chance, but of the original group, only two families remain on the mesa full time. It's still a lively place, and, as in the Foote era, it's brimming with

girls. Our daughter is learning to walk, our young neighbor is reading and writing, and a family with three little girls has moved a yurt onto the property across the road. The evenings are filled with happy shrieks. The grown son of one of our group brings his wife and daughters to visit every few months, and they talk about tearing down his parents' weather-damaged mud-brick house and building a cabin of their own. This land might pass to his generation and beyond, but before long, it will be sold again. Someday, our house will be torn down, too. Maybe, decades from now, someone will look for its foundation.

In my search for a home place, I sometimes catch myself longing for a place of no surprises, a refuge from uncertainty. But home — no matter where we happen to find it — is just as beautiful and dangerous and changeable as anywhere else, as full of mysteries and restless souls.

The Fire Mountain Canal still hugs the base of Foote Fields, and when it fills with snowmelt, its current runs smooth, fat and fast. Sometimes, on summer evenings, I walk along the canal road, my daughter on my back and my husband beside me. I often think about Elizabeth stumbling downhill in the dark toward the cold water, her feet bare, her nightgown too thin to keep her warm. □

WEB EXTRA
Hear an interview with Michelle Nijhuis and see more photos from JT Thomas at **www.hcn.org**

MIKE NORTON/ISTOCK

Living on Glacial Time

Jon Riedel and I stand at a trailhead that leads to Washington's Mount Baker with nine high school students who have come to the Pacific Northwest for a month to learn about climate change. Jon, a geologist at North Cascades National Park, is here to talk about his glacier monitoring program, and I'm along for the ride. We readjust pack straps and scrounge for water bottles as clouds swirl and settle in tall trees. At last we make our introductions and head out.

If you want to stand on a glacier, there are plenty to choose from in the North Cascades. In fact, if I were to start walking from my front porch in tiny Stehekin, 100 miles to the southeast of us, I could stand on one before dark. Ditto for my friend Jon from his home in Marblemount, 40 miles to the east. It'd be a long walk for me — five miles on a gravel road, seven by trail, gaining 7,000 feet, then the dicey part, up and over the ridge to stand on the Sandalee — and a slightly longer one for Jon. He'd have to trudge 20 road miles to a trailhead. Once he got there, though, he could choose from several glaciers — including Sahale, the one his oldest daughter is named after.

Still, whenever Jon and I tried to make a plan to visit a glacier together, our complicated middle-aged lives got in the way. This roundabout journey was the only way it could work. Yesterday I took a three-hour boat ride, then a four-hour drive, to Jon's house. For the chance to learn about climate change, I've left a carbon footprint the size of Yellowstone. Add up the flights the kids took — plus the two group leaders, two documentary filmmakers and one journalist — and that footprint might be the size of Connecticut. I wonder: Is it worth it? Today's plan was to hike to the Easton Glacier, but it's clear from the crummy weather and the inadequate gear the kids have (some are in tennis shoes) that the group will not make it. Jon stashes our ice axes and we set off, hiking through forest and meadow, hemlock and cedar, huckleberries and valerian. We can at least get within sight of our goal.

THE FIRST TIME I saw a glacier up close, I followed a trail out of a book. *Encounters with the Archdruid,* John McPhee's classic triptych featuring David Brower, devotes one section to a hike near Lyman Lake in Glacier Peak Wilderness. One weekend, I backpacked up a long river valley just to camp there. The lake was lovely, of course, but a short walk farther, through a lime green meadow, all heather and wildflowers and patches of snow, I came upon a second lake. Upper Lyman, a translucent jewel-like blue, nestled up against the jaggedy granite peaks, and right there at the inlet — right there! — sat a glacier: vertical slabs of ice, moving imperceptibly like the colliding continents of the past, protruding over the water, breaking off in loud *ka-splashes*, floating white on the blue.

That's when I started to fall hard in love with this place. My partner and I bought land and built a cabin, and from there the changes grew harder to pinpoint. For the next 15 years,

Students involved in the Parks Climate Challenge hike toward the Easton Glacier (left). Above right, Danny Cuevas (Denver, Colo.), Jenny So (Cupertino, Calif.) and Laura Humes (Shoreline, Wash.) photograph a mountain goat on the slopes near Mount Baker. BENJAMIN DRUMMOND

I worked on trail crew and spent most August days clearing brush — waist-high ferns, head-high nettles — within view of a glacier, one or more, white against gray granite and blue sky, hanging out over green valleys, and dripping, always dripping. When did it become clear that they were shrinking? Right away. There was less ice farther up, less ice everywhere. Even though I knew about global warming, even though I tried to make conscious choices — about what car I drove, say, or where my lettuce came from or who I voted for — I still considered climate change just a concept, a vague threat, something that loomed like nuclear annihilation or a meteor striking the earth, only more thwart-able. It seemed so wrong to see it happen with my own bare ignorant eyes.

Jon took a more empirical tack. While I was hacking at brush and notching logs for bridges, he was measuring glaciers, four of them: Noisy, Silver, North Klawatti and Sandalee. The results were unsurprising: They're all shrinking. I'd have been happier to know my eyes were deceiving me.

As we walk through the misty forest, Jon throws out numbers, casual as baseball statistics, for whoever will listen. Glacier numbers: Seventy-five percent of the glaciers in the Lower 48 are in the North Cascades, 312 in the national park alone, at least according to last count; researchers estimate that since the late 1800s, the park has lost 40 percent of its total ice pack. Climate numbers: Over the past 2 million years we've had several long ice ages, with intervening warm periods lasting 10,000 years or so. Now it's been 11,000 years, which means it's time to start cooling, but we're warming instead. The kids nod solemnly. They know this, at least in theory, and they're learning more about it each day they're here.

After three miles and lunch, we reach a stretch of trail atop a lateral moraine. The ground drops steeply at our toes, loose rock and dirt skittering into a wide cobbled creek bed, the space where the glacier used to be. Suddenly the number that stands out most starkly, of the many numbers, is the smallest: 100. That's how long ago the glacier was here — right here! — less than 100 years. It's not hard to imagine how it looked, white and full. Confronting its absence is like staring into an empty swimming pool.

The group settles on rocks along the trail, and Jon begins his spiel: The more the climate warms, the more the glaciers melt, which causes oceans to rise, which causes the landscape to change. As he speaks, climbers scurry past hauling packs the size of Igloo coolers and a wet film settles on jacket sleeves, not quite rain.

When it's time for questions, a student pipes up.

"How did you end up here?" she asks.

She sweeps her arms wide toward the summit hovering in the cloud and tiny rivulets trickling through the meadows, the pink phlox and the green trees, the impossibly gorgeous whole of it. Other kids crane their necks and grin.

All eyes are fixed on Jon.

He took a year off after high school, he explains, and worked in a garment factory for $2 an hour, hard boring work in Wisconsin. During that year he also read a book called *Sand County Almanac*.

"Aldo Leopold," he says. "That book changed my life."

Now the kids nod exuberantly. They know this book, or at least some of them do, and they like Jon's story. No matter what happens, this month in the North Cascades — camping, hiking, canoeing — will change their lives.

Everyone is silent for a moment as the clouds lift and the lower glacier is visible in a swatch of sun: blue-tinged ice and smooth sloping snow and distant jagged crevasses like scratches on a mirror.

Glaciers move. That's what differentiates them from snowfields. The heavy ice on top pushes out the ice underneath, like toothpaste. Even as they are melting, they are moving. The Easton, Jon says, moves five or six inches a day. From here, that's hard to believe. The glacier seems so settled, so permanent, so static. But it's not, of course. Nothing is.

LAST NIGHT, at Jon's house, rare summer sun lit the fluttering leaves of alders and shifted through open glades. When he and his wife bought their land, there was nothing but logging slash and mud. To see the place now, you'd hardly believe it. We toured the fruit orchard, the half-finished greenhouse, the treehouse for his girls, the hard-earned fixed-in-place accoutrements of home. Then we settled on the porch to swap stories.

We talked fire. Gazing up at the thick forest foothills, he described a fire that burned to within a half mile of the house. A neighbor woke him after midnight, claiming evacuation was imminent.

"Tell me about it," I said. Back home on the east side, wildfire acreages have grown like Wall Street bonuses. In the past 15 years, we've watched fires in the surrounding wilderness areas — fires within one windy day of our cabin — burn 500 acres, then 5,000 acres, then 50,000. Part of the problem, foresters tell us, is too many years of fire suppression

It's not hard to imagine how the glacier looked, white and full. Confronting its absence is like staring into an empty swimming pool.

NPS geologist Jon Riedel (above, left) talks to students on the Railroad Grade moraine overlooking Mount Baker and the Easton Glacier while Hannah Lazo (Denver, Colo.) looks at a map of past glacial coverage. Jordan Bell (above, right) from Washington, D.C., looks for the terminus of Mount Baker's Easton Glacier among the clouds. BENJAMIN DRUMMOND

In the North Cascades, Silver Glacier in 1958 and 2006 (left) and Forbidden Glacier in 1960 and 2005. AUSTIN POST (HISTORICAL), JOHN SCURLOCK (MODERN)

If we're really like glaciers, I think, then we advance and retreat, and sooner or later we will disappear.

that allowed the trees to grow too tight, the brush too dense, the forest litter too deep. But part, too, is the changing climate: the lack of winter snowfall that leads to drought, longer summers that allow pine beetles to hatch double broods, and hotter summers that make fires harder to stop. A few years ago, in a fit of civic duty that I sometimes regret, I ran for fire commissioner. Now, fire district volunteers hold weekly clean-up parties around cabins and train for structure protection. We all know the big one will come, the one our best efforts won't stop. All we can do is mitigate.

We talked floods. More and more often, in November, warm rain falls on new mountain snow, and the Skagit and Stehekin rivers leap their banks and splay out into the woods, over roads, sometimes into cabins. You can read the river level in cubic feet per second on an Internet gauge, and those numbers keep going up, too: 15,000, 20,000, 25,000. In the same 15 years, we survived two 100-year floods and one 500-year flood. Our garden washed away each time. The postmaster's cabin swept into the churn. As part of his job, Jon designs bank barbs and grade controls, structures that deflect the force of the water, spread it out. We know more big floods will come. Again, all we can do is mitigate, be flexible, adapt.

The places we love, all of them, are changing fast in ways we never imagined: the broad amber stripe of beetle kill across the hillside, driftwood in the pine forest, blackened snags among the cedars, bears roaming in winter, geese staying year-round. No need to check the Internet gauge to know when the water's rising: Just stand on your doorstep and hear the roar. In response, we're readjusting, recalibrating our expectations and reactions. There's more than a hint of playground exasperation — *it's not fair!* — as the rules shift mid-game. None of it is easy.

Sometimes it's hard not to think in metaphor, to think we're like the glaciers: fixed in place, but elastic. When hard times push down on us like heavy ice, we feel the squeeze, and we move along. We change our ways. The problem lies in connotation, in how astonishingly fast, these days, we have to change. Didn't moving at a "glacial pace" used to mean "slow"?

Finally, Jon and I talked snow, our favorite topic bar none, since we're both avid cross-country skiers. Jon bragged about their winter, how he skied out his front door every day, while over on the usually snowy eastside we hunkered under a stagnant inversion: gray, dry, and bare. Not that Jon's winter was all fun. One night a storm dumped 36 inches of snow. The next day, temperatures rose and the snow turned to rain, bucketfuls, then barrelfuls, six or eight inches. The rain soaked the snow, and the snow started to slide, and his rain gutter sliced off his stovepipe, and water poured into the house. He climbed onto the icy roof to cover the hole with plywood. No big deal, he figured, since wood is not the family's main source of heat. Then the power went out. His family huddled around a heater run by a generator until the storm subsided.

"When you experience these things," I asked Jon, "do you connect it with your work, or is it separate, you know, because climate is not weather?"

Jon's no doomsayer, no exaggerator; he's Midwest-steady and Ph.D.-precise. I don't dare overstate.

"Sure," he answered, even-keeled as ever. "We know that we can expect extreme weather. This is extreme."

I admire Jon for his long view, his knowledge, his reluctance to be histrionic. He's studied climate change, after all, for his entire adult life. In school, his professors taught him how to measure accumulation, how to model melting. Mine taught me to read Chaucer and Shakespeare. Sometimes I think I made a humungous mistake. Then again, imagination isn't a bad trait to nurture in these times. Where would we be, Jon and I, if not for Leopold and McPhee?

BACK ON THE EDGE of the moraine, the city kids shift on the cold rocks and gather their gear. Despite the weather, it's been a good day. They've digested Jon's info, some at least, and they've seen their first marmot, their first mountain goats; they've seen red heather and white heather, trees thick as oil drums. Was it worth it? Maybe. Maybe the experience will prepare them for all the adapting and mitigating they're going to have to do. For now, they're heading down to camp. But I can't go yet. I came to stand on the glacier, and I won't leave until I do.

So I race ahead as the tread changes from dirt to slush, and farther, past climbers' tents and streaks of pink watermelon snow, to the middle of a swooping bowl where at last I can be sure there's moving ice below me. I stand stock-still, thinking about the melting and what there is to know, what I've seen change — the last time I visited Upper Lyman Lake the glacier had shrunk by half — and what these students, who are 25 years younger than me, will see change. I gaze down at the wide green Skagit Valley unfolding toward the horizon. The Cordilleran Ice Sheet covered everything in view a mere 17,000 years ago, all but the highest peaks. Once you start using Jon's eyes, or McPhee's for that matter, the earth looks different, older, shaped clearly as soft sand by a shovel.

If we're really like glaciers, I think, then we advance and retreat, and sooner or later we will disappear. That fact unnerves me. I am, by nature, an expert at denial, hopeful and resigned in equal measures, uncertain as hell. All I know is that, for now, we're still here, holding our ground the ever-changing best way we know how. □

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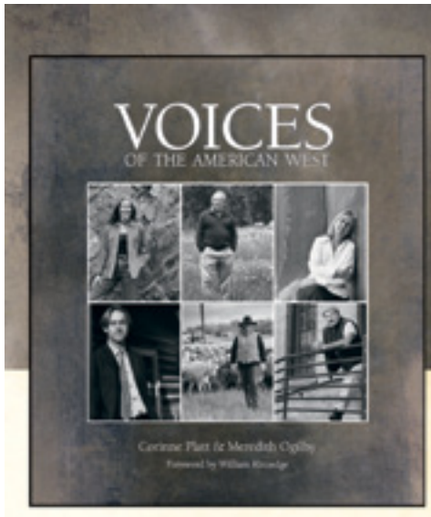

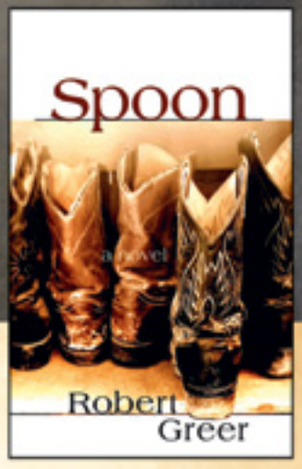

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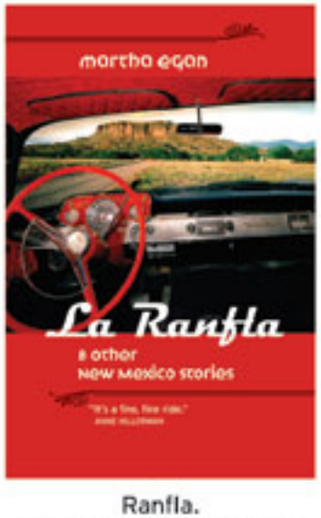

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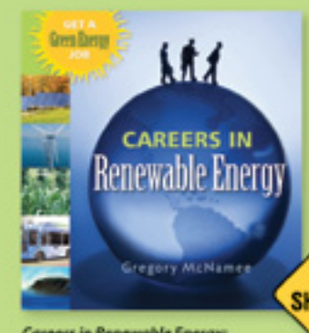

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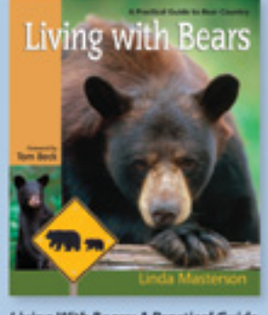

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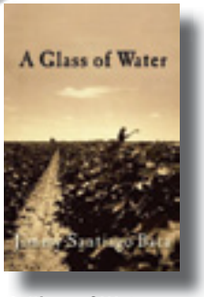
Bordering on injustice



A Glass of Water
Jimmy Santiago Baca
240 pages,
hardcover: $23.
Grove Press, 2009.

The largest kindnesses sometimes come in the smallest forms. The title of Jimmy Santiago Baca's first novel, *A Glass of Water*, is a nod to one such kindness. "Thirst (is) master," he writes of the parching conditions migrant farmworkers endure.

Baca, an Apache/Chicano memoirist, poet and activist, has written a political novel about migrant farmworkers in southern New Mexico, told through the experiences of one immigrant family, the Luceros. After crossing into "the promised land," Casimiro and Nopal make their home inside an old boxcar, work on a farm along the Rio Grande, and have two sons, Lorenzo and Vito. Underappreciated, separated from their country and frightened of INS raids, the Luceros — like many other immigrants — try not to cause any trouble.

The second generation, however, often follows a different path. Lorenzo stays behind on the farm, selling bundles of marijuana to improve their camp's conditions, while his scrappy younger brother Vito "(comes) out of nowhere, a great fighter, and he beat(s) down every opponent of every color." Vito eventually becomes a world-class boxer and "the people's hero."

"Stand up *mojados*, stand up Chicanos!" Vito shouts at crowds that gather to see him.

Baca's image-rich writing triumphs whenever the story returns to the fields, where the view is of "cottonwoods concealing the Rio Grande, a wall of leaves so dense that midday air was blue under its canopy." He knows these fields intimately, including their modern accoutrements, such as the women picking chiles who "lip (sync) while listening to their iPods."

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A Glass of Water adds another strong voice to the growing body of literature on immigration and migrant farmworkers, who are afraid to stand up for their basic rights because the boss could call *la migra,* and deport them before they get paid. But Baca's love for high drama can be frustrating. He bypasses emotional undercurrents in favor of Hollywood pyrotechnics, as when one boxer beats another to death. In order to be heard, it's true that you don't whisper, you shout. But shouting can also cause people to turn away, hands over their ears. Still, Baca should be commended for tackling injustice in his fiction. Perhaps his next book will demonstrate a greater faith in subtlety.

BY DON WATERS

A life unwound

Blame
By Michelle Huneven
304 pages,
hard cover: $25
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

Patsy MacLemoore is a hard-partying 28-year-old who managed to earn a Ph.D. from Berkeley but drank herself out of the running for the most prestigious jobs, landing at a middling college in Pasadena, Calif. It's the spring of 1981 in Michelle Huneven's latest novel, *Blame*, when Patsy comes to in a jail cell. It's happened before, but this time is frighteningly different: She's charged with hitting and killing a mother and daughter in her own steep driveway, in the 1963 Mercedes she wasn't supposed to be driving even while sober. Horrified by the damage she's caused, the lives ruined, Patsy pleads guilty and is sentenced to four years in prison.

Sober and released early for good behavior — she worked on a prison crew, battling wildfires — Patsy settles into a replica of her former life: same location, same job, same friends, but all experienced through a prism of guilt and the puritanical self-discipline she's determined to maintain. Patsy's guilt remains the driving force behind everything she does. How could she ever have children, for example, when she killed someone else's child? She tiptoes through life, trying above all to do no more harm.

Huneven, a journalist and James Beard Award-winning food critic, is a nimble writer. Her characters are the sort that haunt you weeks later. In fact, some of the book's other characters are more vividly drawn than Patsy herself: There's Gilles, the young lover of Patsy's ex-boyfriend, Brice, who looks after her post-prison and provides a glimpse into gay life at the dawn of the AIDS era; Cal, Patsy's husband, who copes with his own losses by helping heal others; and Joey, Brice's niece, who delivers the news that upends Patsy's carefully rebuilt life.

And therein lies Blame's only real flaw. The big plot twist, the news the jacket copy calls a "fall-off-the-couch-with-surprise moment," seems at least somewhat obvious from the beginning. Still, Huneven lets events play out with just the right balance of melodrama and stoicism as Patsy sets about coping with a new reality. *Blame* is ultimately about the way choices stack on top of one another, each shaping the next until they become an entire life.

BY HILLARY ROSNER

Why some men are the way they are

Three recent books of short stories feature complex but credible characters in relationships tingling with tension. Even as they play on well-worn themes — unrequited love, marital discord, moral weakness — the stories in these collections are full of provocative plots and unexpected finales.

The majority are told by or about men. In *Nine Ten Again* by Montana writer Phil Condon, working-class men struggle with war-induced stress, homelessness and painful decisions. The men in Maile Meloy's *Both Ways Is The Only Way I Want It* mostly crave what they can't have: a wife *and* a mistress, grandma's money, the truth about a murder. Many of Kevin Canty's male narrators seem to be on their way out of ennui-infested marriages in *Where The Money Went*.

The title piece of Montana author Canty's collection is a potent short-short story in which a man sits at his kitchen table evaluating the events and decisions that drained his finances: the big house with a swimming pool, the cars, high-end bicycles and skis, vacations, private schools, and, finally, the lawyers. In other stories, a parade of men from Montana to Arizona brood over their relationships. Often, frustration and anger ("Sometimes it seems to me that anger is the engine of a marriage, the power that drives all the other parts") propel them into risky behavior: sex with a friend's wife, drunk driving, ignoring dangerous weather conditions.

As "The Boreal Forest" unfolds to a queasy ending, Canty's narrator sits under a tree, waiting out a snowstorm. He thinks about the possibility of dying, and it puts his pathetic human drama into perspective. "That was the joke:" he thinks, "all the rest of it, Maria (his lover), Catherine (his wife), even Ellie (his young daughter), we had made it all unreal. And this was real, this mountainside, this storm, and it wanted to kill me."

Dicey weather and convoluted relationships also compel many of Meloy's characters in *Both Ways Is The Only Way I Want It*. The title story (whose name is taken from a poem by A.R. Ammons) expresses the sentiment directly, but the men in some of the other stories also want it "both ways." In "O Tannenbaum," for example, Everett invites the wrath of his wife and scares his young daughter during their annual Christmas-tree-cutting outing when he offers a ride to Clyde and Bonnie, a couple stranded in the woods. Although his neck prickles when they offer their names, Everett's decision is motivated by the fact that "this wasn't country where you left people in the snow" — and by lust. The young woman is "the kind of blonde who (holds) sorority car washes." Just his type.

In "Two Step," a brilliantly crafted anecdote about a ménage à trois, Meloy places a pregnant wife and her husband's mistress in the couple's kitchen while the husband races toward home. Alice cries, telling her "friend" about the agony of suspecting an affair without knowing the identity of the other woman. Or does she? "The Children" leaves the reader wondering if Fielding will abandon his beautiful and talented wife for a woman just a few years older than their daughter. As in most of Meloy's work, these stories show that the core of this California novelist's prodigious talent is her ability to tantalize, revealing small but crucial details at critical moments.

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Similarly, Condon's skill with nuance enables him to tackle complex social and moral issues that might derail a writer with less finesse. *Nine Ten Again* features stories about workingmen and their challenges, including war. Chad, the Vietnam veteran who narrates "A Country Voice," knows that his furniture-building therapy, a suggestion from his "VA head-bender," is like trying to eradicate an acre of dandelions with a screwdriver. Terrors from the past — where his buddies disappear in "a giant red sneeze in the jungle" while he fights for a government that "like(s) to start wars, but not to finish them" — saturate his present. Duck, the born-again bricklayer in "Cakewalk," touches his Bible but doesn't open it. His decision to keep quiet about the cause of a coworker's death makes "him wonder if he should ever open it again."

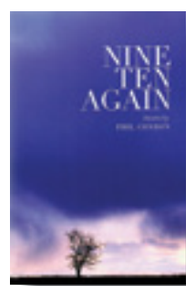
Most of the men in *Nine Ten Again* make their decisions from the middle of a situation — long after the events that shaped their lives have occurred. But for a graphic look at how one boy gets hurled into manhood, turn to the end of the book. "Bridgestone, 1963" is shaped by an unsettling coming-of-age theme. After an appalling incident changes Cane Raone's joyful adolescent obsession with motorcycles into grief and guilt, he seeks respite in the spectacular landscape of western Colorado: "I walked to the window. I wanted to punch my fist through one of the panes, as if that could let all the bad things in the room rush out and disappear in the mountains." The darkness of that one event appears to stain Cane's future. And we are left to imagine how that stain might color his relationships and influence his adult decisions.

Reading the stories in these three collections is like entering a building full of freshly washed windows. They allow us clear (if circumscribed) views into the lives of many different kinds of men and offer a roomful of hints about why they are the way they are.

BY CHÉRIE NEWMAN

Where The Money Went
Kevin Canty
208 pages,
hardcover: $25.
Nan A. Talese/
Doubleday, 2009.

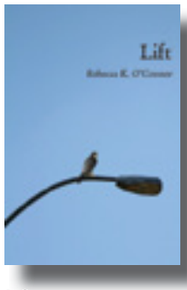
Both Ways Is The Only Way I Want It
Maile Meloy
240 pages,
hardcover: $25.95.
Riverhead, 2009.



Nine Ten Again
Phil Condon
200 pages,
softcover: $17.
Elixir Press, 2009.

Confronting life's essentials

Siesta Lane: A Year Unplugged, or, The Good Intentions of Ten People, Two Cats, One Old Dog, Eight Acres, One Telephone, Three Cars, and Twenty Miles to the Nearest Town
Amy Minato
240 pages, hardcover: $22.95.
Skyhorse Publishing, 2009.



Lift
Rebecca O'Connor
206 pages, softcover: $18.95.
Red Hen Press, 2009.

Every so often, I long to relocate to a metropolis far from my sleepy Oregon hometown and my third of an acre of Douglas firs and screech owls. "Oh, Melissa," chides a friend used to these yearnings. "Just take a vacation and move your couch."

The desire for change entices us. Those who live in the country are intrigued by the city, while urban folks ponder a life closer to the land. This ongoing search for the right place to live is the subject of two recent memoirs.

Amy Minato, in *Siesta Lane: A Year Unplugged*, decides that even her mid-sized leafy town of Eugene presents too much distraction from nature. She heads out to a cabin in the woods, on acreage shared with the residents of several other cabins. "A demure window-speckled wooden house snuggled under the arm of an oak seems to wink at me," she writes of the 10-foot-square building that would become her new home. "I stop walking, stunned with love."

At Siesta Lane, Minato stalks mushrooms and writes poetry. Several of the poems make it into her book, providing a lyrical glimpse into her tranquil mindset. She includes black-and-white photos of her life in the country: the community dinner table, Siesta Lane's battered mailbox and her beloved cabin. Jan Muir's sketches aptly illustrate the great horned owls, marsh wrens and trillium blossoms that populate the land.

Minato meditates on the impossible cold of winter dawn without a furnace, and on the luxury of lowering herself into a wood-heated bathtub. She describes the growing bond she shares with her neighbors and tells charming anecdotes about community dinners. At one point, chocolate cravings inspire her and her friends — far from a market — to create éclairs from cocoa powder and stale graham crackers.

Minato would gladly stay at Siesta Lane forever. "I've never felt so at home anywhere," she writes, "so right about a place." But when the landlord sells the property, she finds herself forced to move on.

Still, a year spent moving to the rhythms of the natural world has given her new fortitude, and she leaves her cabin bolstered by the solid sense of being at home with herself, wherever she might go.

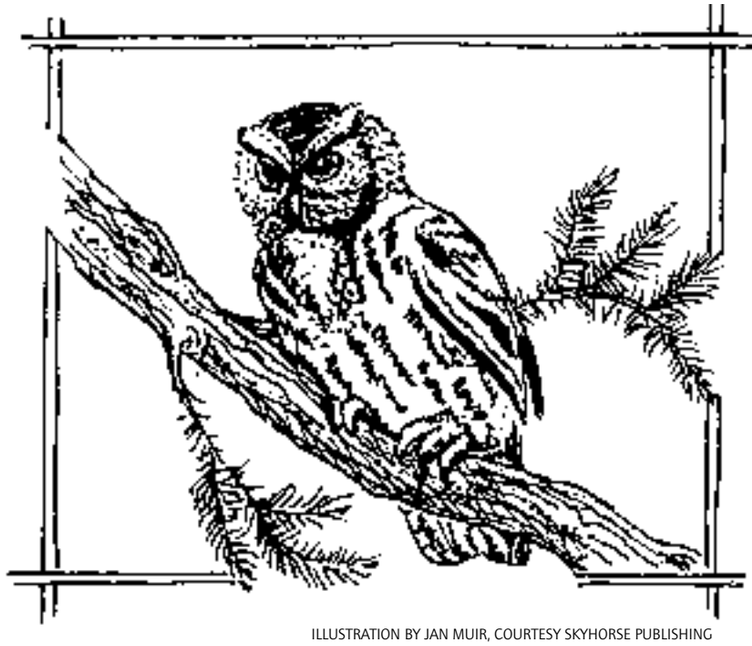


ILLUSTRATION BY JAN MUIR, COURTESY SKYHORSE PUBLISHING

MEMOIRIST Rebecca K. O'Connor, in *Lift*, cares less about her own living situation and more about providing her peregrine falcon, Anakin, with a place to hunt. After O'Connor, a falconer and professional bird trainer, purchased a juvenile peregrine, she began searching for a suitable duck pond away from gunshots and traffic. The bird, intoxicated with exploration, flies away more than once, leading O'Connor all over southeastern California. It is a compelling story.

"I can't help but think that while Hollywood lulled us into a sweet dream of gloriously lit foreign places, most of California's perfection slipped away beneath the concrete of the film industry," she writes of the land she calls home. "Where exactly out here would a falcon want to go?" She eventually discovers the bird perched on a 100-foot pole above buildings and cars.

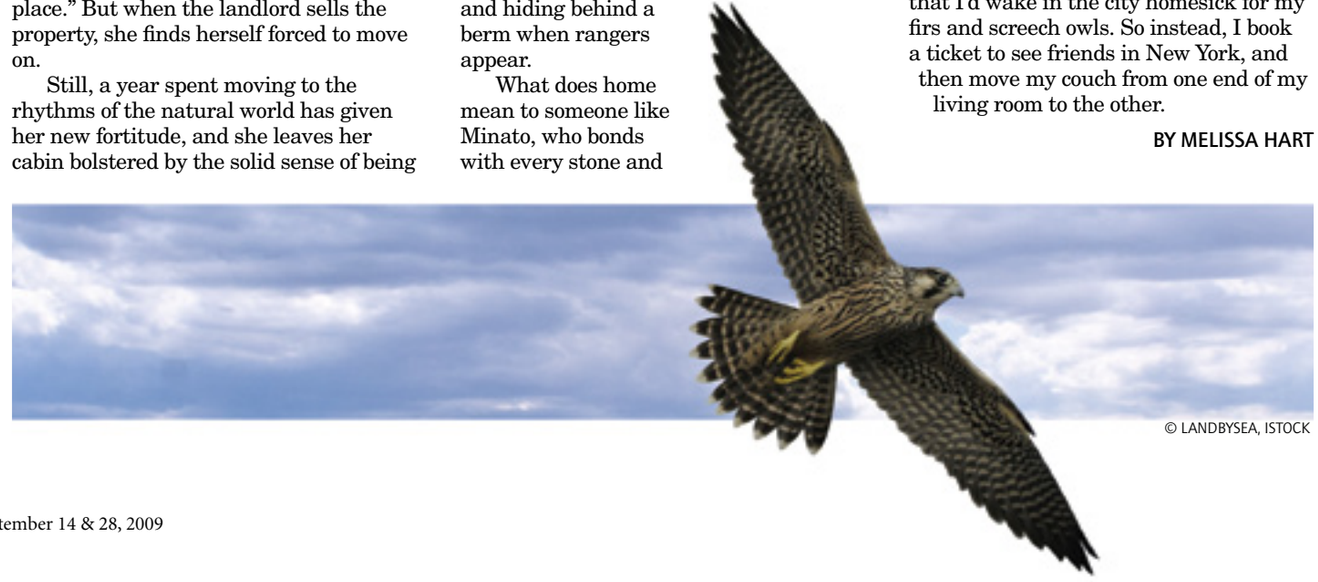
O'Connor finds sanctuary for herself and her falcon at Whitewater Ranch, on BLM land cared for by an aging cowboy called Butch. "Are you hunting my ducks?" he demands. Then he offers his blessing and accompanies the author on excursions with her bird. "Enjoy it while it lasts," he says of Whitewater, and before the book is finished, Butch, too, must round up his cattle and move on. O'Connor stays, hunting with Anakin and hiding behind a berm when rangers appear.

What does home mean to someone like Minato, who bonds with every stone and bird at Siesta Lane, only to be forced to vacate? What can it mean to a peregrine — a raptor that migrates thousands of miles to South America? Readers who waver, as I do, between establishing a permanent home and seeking new adventures are likely to find more questions than answers in these memoirs. But in contemplating each author's search for her place in the world, they may find — or rediscover — their own.

At the end of each book, I found myself filled with new gratitude for my hometown and small plot of land. In *Siesta Lane*, I recognized my own intimate connection with the spiders that stretch webs between the Japanese maples I planted, the Townsend's warbler that annually appears at my suet feeder.

And in *Lift*, I delighted in the thought of the falcon in love with the skies, but returning again and again to the familiarity of its handler's glove. Were I to give in to temptation and take flight, I know that I'd wake in the city homesick for my firs and screech owls. So instead, I book a ticket to see friends in New York, and then move my couch from one end of my living room to the other.

BY MELISSA HART



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Coming home to the cosmos

I often take my time before I leave on a journey. Is this just hesitation? Or do I linger because I love the poignancy of departure? Sometimes I walk about the room before going to the grocery store. Maybe it's just a way to avoid running an errand. Departures suggest regret. Arrivals mean a new thing is under way.

Arrivals back home in the West — those returns — always feel like grace to me. Over the past eight years, I had plenty of opportunities to mull over the nature of travel as I worked on a globe-trotting book about the science of meteorites and the passions they unlock. I started *The Fallen Sky: An Intimate History of Shooting Stars* on the Kansas prairie, still married to a woman I would soon be leaving. But most of the work occurred as I was to-ing and fro-ing from Cache Valley, Utah, the place I moved to in 2002 with my new partner, Kathe. My book "about meteorites" also became a meditation on place and home.

Greenland's remote northwest coast. A chateau in France. The outback. Antarctica. I searched for secrets of science and obsession in those places, and each time I returned to the West, I relearned the truth that your own home, wherever it is, has plenty of wonder, too. Especially when you get to know it not just as a resident, but as a kind of acolyte.

When Kathe and I first moved to Utah, "home" was a small rental house in a neighborhood sandwiched between the mouth of Logan Canyon — from which bursts of wind would rattle our blinds, keeping me awake at night — and the cemetery where poet May Swenson is buried — where these words mark her grave: "I will stand, a tree, here / never to know another spot." In our backyard, I set up my telescope next to an apple tree and looked at the Apple Core Nebula.

We'd only been in Utah for a few weeks when I left for the cliffs of the Greenland coast. There, I found holes in the ground, places where explorer Robert Peary had directed his men to rip out heavy iron meteorites and take them to New York. I returned feeling pulled toward the spectacular scenery of both places, the waters of the Arctic and the waters of the Great Salt Lake, the icecap and the desert, and at the same time missing the Kansas prairie I'd left behind. I was among places, unsettled.

That winter, we traveled to France and visited meteorite sites there. At a Paris museum I saw a black meteorite full of the same chemicals and amino acids that may have helped life take hold on Earth billions of years ago. Kathe and I went to a chateau near L'Aigle, site of a massive meteorite fall in 1803. We touched the Ensisheim meteorite, the oldest meteorite in the Western Hemisphere whose fall can be dated precisely: It dropped on Nov. 7 in 1492.

After we returned to Utah, we moved into a house with four acres and a stretch of river. We realized a few things. Things like: The massive lawn surrounding the house had to go. Things like: The trees along the river, willow, box elder, birch, were in pretty good shape. Things like: Sometimes people will take advantage of you.

All those are stories unto themselves, but here's the lesson I really learned a few months after we moved into our house: I didn't want to leave. Our first spring on this property, in 2004, I finally exhaled. The subtle beauty of the prairie had receded, and I was coming to terms with the relentlessly gorgeous West. Our backyard birds included eagles and dippers. Dry air slipped across our skin, and evenings cooled sweetly. Always, there were mountains. I was getting settled. I was learning the West.

Yet I continued to leave in search of shooting star stories. I visited the Flinders Ranges in South Australia to see a crater whose formation may have sparked the first widespread diversification of life 500 million years ago. I met up with the scientists of the Antarctic Search for Meteorites, and we flew from New Zealand to the ice. I pushed down fear and exhaustion (from my divorce back in Kansas, from the death of a parent and more) and lived in a tent for five weeks, finding meteorites on the polar plateau but little sustenance. I had a breakdown, had to be evacuated and came home — to *this* home, in Utah — ashamed but relieved.

In fall 2008, as I was finishing *The Fallen Sky*, Kathe and I planned to backpack under the Leonid meteor shower in southern Utah at Upheaval Dome. But we were too taken up with to-do lists and welcome domesticity. Leonid weekend passed, cloudy above Cache Valley. As that Sunday went on, though, the sky cleared. Kathe raked leaves. I trimmed branches. We pulled weeds.

All day dippers sang from stones in the river. All day yarrow bloomed. All day the trees were bare, and beyond those branches meteors flared hidden in the light. At day's end, we walked about the yard, tired from chores and a little stunned by the sunshine quiet. We held each other. So how to say this? That it is here we know ourselves to be home? Yes. Here, in the West, we know ourselves to be home. □

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HEARD AROUND THE WEST | BY JONATHAN THOMPSON

COLORADO
At first glance, it seemed like just another mundane story about horse massacres and the role they will play in starting the next American Revolution. Then we dug deeper and learned the details about the ex-CIA agent and his hog-tied co-worker, not to mention the duck-killing dog. Ultimately, we confronted the dark truth of the matter: This was a tale of land-use zoning.

When Trenton H. Parker, 64, of Weld County, Colo., failed to abide by a court order to clean up a bunch of old trailers on his land, he was sentenced to 90 days in the clink. Parker responded in the only logical way: He posted a flier asking for riflemen to help him kill 24 Russian Arabian horses. He also left voice mails at the zoning department, threatening to stab said horses and bash in their skulls on the courthouse steps and other public places. (Parker described the planned massacre as a "Tea Party," which has left us determined not to RSVP the next time we're invited to one.)

"The first horse that we're gonna kill is a beautiful gray stallion by the name of Independence," Parker enthusiastically told the *Greeley Tribune*. "When we shoot him with one shot, make no mistake about it, it will be the first shot of the second American Revolution. You think I'm kidding? You just sit by and watch what happens."

Parker, who ran in but dropped out of the race for the U.S. Senate in the late 1970s as a Colorado Republican and who has been quoted in the tomes of conspiracy theorists (ask him about Vince Foster; go ahead — we dare you) explained that the slaughter was necessary because he couldn't feed the horses in jail. Besides, it would be a great protest of land-use regulations, or at least help to silence any neigh-sayers.

But the revolution has been delayed; Parker went to jail sooner than expected after his bond on an unrelated, earlier charge was revoked. Parker's dog had apparently killed Parker's co-worker's duck, you see, and during a dispute over the matter, Parker allegedly hog-tied said co-worker.

But that's another story.

COLORADO
On the same day, in the same newspaper, another lead caught our eye: "A mysterious, photo-filled cow tongue found buried in a farmer's field near Longmont is only one of many in recent weeks to stir up curiosity across the country."

We live in strange times, my friends.

ARIZONA
The cow that belonged to the aforementioned tongue didn't fare very well except, perhaps, as *carne asada*. But a rather unusual pair of rattlesnakes is doing just fine after a 45-minute surgery at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum outside of Tucson. The two snakes were found as one — conjoined just below the head — at a construction site. The Siamese-twin serpents were taken to the museum, where Dr. Jim Jarchow successfully performed the separation surgery. Museum officials told the press that they expected the snakes to live long and healthy lives.

COLORADO
An adventurous bear in Snowmass, Colo., didn't need surgery, just a ladder. Apparently hoping to do some rad riding, he dropped into the town skate park's bowl. Unable to skate vert, he was then busted down there, with no way out. One can imagine young onlookers confusing him with some shaggy old-school skater, before realizing their mistake. Quick-thinking town parks officials brought a ladder, dropped it into the bowl, and the bear climbed out and wandered off.

TINA WHITE, SNOWMASS VILLAGE ANIMAL SERVICES

COLORADO **And he's climbing a bearway to heaven.**

Though some view skateboarding as a crime, local law enforcement didn't pursue the bear. Other Aspen-area bruins have been less fortunate. Just a week before the skate park incident, a black bear broke into an Aspen home and swiped the owner across the chest before fleeing. The bear was caught trying to break into the same home 48 hours later and was killed by wildlife officers. Meanwhile, over the hills in Vail, a bear broke into a car, bit into the steering wheel, pooped on the seats and deployed the airbags. "My car was shaking back and forth," Jeff Leistad, the owner of the car, told the *Vail Daily*. "The windows were steaming up and the bear was growling pretty badly." Police officers rushed to the scene, opened the car door, and shot a pepper ball at the bear, which then wandered off into the woods.

WEB EXTRA For more from Heard around the West, see **www.hcn.org**.

"Most of the nine board members (of New Mexico's Valles Caldera National Preserve) are businesspeople with **no public-land management experience** ... all have full-time endeavors to attend to besides ... At best, a part-time board runs this national treasure."

Mike Castinado, in his essay "Whose Valles Caldera is it?" from Writers on the Range, www.hcn.org/wotr