

VOLUME V, ISSUE 1, FALL 2018



Rootstalk, Fall 2018

Volume V, Issue 1

Supported by Grinnell College's [Center for Prairie Studies](#)
and a grant from the College's Fund for Innovation.

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A note on this issue's multimedia features: In order to access all the media in this latest issue of *Rootstalk*—including content featuring embedded sound files—you'll need to download the interactive PDF version (approximately 192 MB) and, once you've done so, open it using the Adobe Acrobat Reader. You'll find a link you can use to download the interactive PDF at the bottom of the page at <https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu>. If you don't already have the Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer, you can download a free copy [here](#).

Regan Golden created the work we're featuring on the cover of this issue ("Prairie Construct #26," Archival Inkjet Print, 36 x 54 inches, 2015) as part of her "Prairie Constructs" series.

Cover design: Mark Baechtel, Jonathan Andelson

Table of contents image: Naomi Clayton

Layout: Jonathan Andelson, Mark Baechtel



"PRAIRIE CONSTRUCT #9," ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 36 x 54 INCHES, BY REGAN GOLDEN, 2015



PHOTO COURTESY OF JON ANDELSON

Publisher's Note

BY JON ANDELSON

Rootstalk is a publication of Grinnell College's [Center for Prairie Studies](#), whose three guiding principles—as it says on our letterhead—are *community, sustainability, and place*. By definition then, we at *Rootstalk* are interested in community—its meaning, its shape, and our ability to keep it healthy. What experiences create a feeling of community? What goals can bring a community together? What strains can divide a community? What role do memory and tradition play in maintaining a community?

This issue of *Rootstalk* offers several pieces of content that address such questions. The short essays by Bridget Brandt, Sam Cox, Randall Hotchkin, and Allan and Shirley Moyer in fact came out of a writing workshop, centered on defining community, which we held last spring as part of a class at Grinnell College co-taught by *Rootstalk*'s editor, Mark Baechtel, and myself. The students in our class first took their own writing workshop, facilitated by noted northeast Iowa writer and publisher, Robert Wolf (whose new book, [Building the Agricultural City: A Handbook for Rural Renewal](#), is reviewed in this issue by Fred Kirschenmann). Bob, who has led writing workshops around the country, had each student share a personal story with the class. These oral stories became the basis for writing, as Bob coached each student in finding their voice and creating an engaging narrative structure. Next, we invited residents from the [town of Grinnell](#) (where Grinnell College is located) to participate in the class for several sessions. Each community member was paired with a student, whose task it was to help them in the way Bob had helped the students. The stories that came out of

Some words—*bank, government, weather, gun*—give off a decidedly ambivalent vibe. It all depends. Others are more clearly negative—*pollution, debt, cult*—or positive—*love, warmth, faith*. For me, the word community is in the “positive” category.

I would rather not get into the definition game; books have been written about it. Maybe we can get away with saying, “you know community when you see it.” In any event, for most people, most of the time, community conjures thoughts and feelings that are good, supportive, comfortable. Those who find it suffocating to live in places where the person next door knows too much about them will generally not complain about community; instead, their complaint will center on small towns, on nosy neighbors, or on not having enough to do. In fact, we often hear and read laments about the decline of community feeling in the contemporary world. Most of us think it's good to live in a place that has a community feel about it, whether that place is an urban neighborhood, a rural church parish, or a village.

these sessions provide glimpses of the community feeling in Grinnell. We decided to include in this set a photo essay by one of the students in the class, Katie Hess, as it deals with an after-school arts program in Grinnell.

There are other content-pieces in this issue which deal with community. An essay from [Mary Kay Shanley](#) explores the evolution of newspaper obituaries as an expression of community life. [Joshua Lockyer](#) tells us about the [Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage](#) in northeast Missouri—an intentionally-formed community whose residents are transforming a piece of former farmland into a space where they can collectively realize a new vision of society, in the process finding ways to dramatically shrink their collective carbon footprint. An autobiographical essay from [Dartanyan Brown](#) begins in the Mahaska County, Iowa, coal mining town of [Buxton](#), a racially integrated community where his grandmother was born. Her experience there shaped Dartanyan's sense of community throughout his life.

Not all of the content in the fall issue deals with community, but—as usual—all of it deals with life in the prairie region, which we like to think of as a wider community of readers. We hope you enjoy everything in the issue, and we hope that what you see here provokes you to frame your own thoughts about what it means to live in concert with other humans. Let us hear from you. For guidelines on sending us your work, click this [link](#). 🌿



THE GRINNELL COMMUNITY GATHERS AT THE COLLEGE'S CONARD ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH AREA ([HTTPS://WWW.GRINNELL.EDU/ACADEMICS/MAJORS-CONCENTRATIONS/BIOLOGY/CERA](https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/majors-concentrations/biology/cera)) TO CELEBRATE THE NATIONAL WATER DANCE IN 2016.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS



PHOTO COURTESY OF
VINCENT BENLLOCH

Vincent Benlloch is a recent graduate of Grinnell College, where he earned a degree in Philosophy and Political Science. Having made a recent move to Montana, he's been spending his first year in the Northwest working for the Missoula County Self Help Law Center and learning the perils and pleasures of fly fishing.



PHOTO BY JON ANDELSON

Francess Dunbar is a third year student from North Miami, Florida majoring in English with a concentration in Global Development Studies. She enjoys learning more about the prairie region and how global foodways and industrial agriculture has affected the region. Her favorite prairie flower is the blue aster.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMA
HEIKKINEN

Emma Heikkinen is a second-year student at Grinnell College with a secret intended major. She likes English classes and libraries and design. She works as an editor for [The Grinnell Review](#) and seasonally as a thrift-store cashier at home in Washington State.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS (CONTINUED)



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAIT MOHR

Cait Mohr is a fourth-year Philosophy major at Grinnell College. They're from originally from Florida, but prefer Iowa's abundance of DIY music scenes, ghost hunting organizations, and decaying suburban shopping malls. In addition to working at Rootstalk, they've also worked as an archivist at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, a sex educator at the College's SHIC (Sexual Health Information Center), and an editor at Grinnell College Press. They hope to continue working in publishing after graduation, as well as visit the World's Largest Truck Stop off I-80 at least three more times.



"THE EL," 12" x 60", OIL ON CANVAS, BY JANE PRONKO, 1987

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PHOTO BY JAN GRAHAM

Mark Baechtel received his B.A. in print journalism from [The American University](#) in Washington, DC, and his M.F.A. in fiction-writing from the [Iowa Writers' Workshop](#), where he was selected as an Iowa Arts Fellow. He has nearly 30 years of publishing experience, and is author of [Shaping the Story](#), a textbook guide to short-story writing (Longman, 2003). He has taught at the University of Iowa, Grinnell College and various art centers, as well as working as a professional book editor. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines, journals and anthologies, nationally and internationally. He is currently polishing the stories in a collection of short fiction, titled *What Moves and What Is Still*, and is at work on a novel titled *Renovation*.

Editor's Note:

Eight Million Stories

BY MARK BAECHTEL

Back in the late 50s and early 60s, there was a cop show called "Naked City" on network TV. Each episode always ended with a narrator's voice intoning the same line: "There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them."

I'm thinking about this phrase—particularly the *eight million stories* part—as I assemble the essays for this issue of *Rootstalk* which community members in Grinnell, Iowa, worked up with Jon Andelson, me and our students in the community writing workshop we convened last spring. Our workshop's participants included small-town politicians, a retired teacher, a social worker, a pair of retired farmers, a professional woodworker, a coffee shop owner, and one of the town's barbers. While the stories they produced didn't quite add up to eight million, they were striking nonetheless for their variety, depth and poignancy. None of our workshop participants were professional storytellers. And yet, by turns, they shared passages from their lives that were warm, funny, instructive, touching, and—to use a word that's much-overused these days—*diverse*. I was surprised.

As I think of it now, though, I shouldn't have been. Having grown up myself in a town with fewer people in it than Grinnell's 10,000, I know better than to sell my neighbors short. I guess I'm as guilty as the next person of putting my head down and focusing only on the next step rather than the landscape that's opening up around me.

Sitting at the table with these people was not a little humbling. I'd known some of these folks for years, and I figured I knew them pretty well—well enough, anyway, to call them *neighbors* if not *friends*. And yet, many times during our workshop, in response to something

one of the participants shared, I felt like saying: *I had no idea....*

I daresay I'm not alone in this. Most of us are in a great hurry to do what we need to do to live our lives. We don't talk to each other, or if we do, too often we don't really *listen* to each other, because (we tell ourselves) we don't have time. We've got to get to work, got to fill our gas tank, got to pick up the kids from school, got to hustle home to fix dinner, got to tick off the myriad of items on our to-do list.

That's just modern life, right? Fast-paced and all-consuming in all its particulars. Sitting and listening during this workshop, though, I was reminded that this ought not to be considered the natural order of things. I shouldn't assume I know everything that's important about *anyone*, not even my friends and neighbors.

Once in a while, if I'm lucky, I receive a kick-in-the-pants reminder of this truth. If I remember to exercise good judgement, keep my ears open and pay attention, I am privileged to hear the sorts of stories my neighbors told on those afternoons we convened in Grinnell's

Drake Community Library. In towns like Grinnell, across the prairie region and across the country, we too often pass each other by without sparing each other a glance. And yet—as our workshop experience showed me—if we slow down for an afternoon, or even for a minute, how much we have to say to each other!

In Whitman's "Song of Myself," he told us: *I am large. I contain multitudes*. It is salutary to be reminded that this is true, not just for poets, but for all of us. I need to remember who's selling me coffee, who's cutting my hair, who's teaching my children, who's caring for my town's afflicted, who's growing my food, and making sure the police get paid and the water that flows from my tap is clean. The people who do all these jobs are "just" my neighbors, but their lives are as rich, complicated, intense and urgent—as big—as mine or anyone else's, no matter the size of the town or the city or the acreage they call home.

It's quiet out here on the prairie, but that quiet is deceptive. *We are large. We contain multitudes.* 🌿



PHOTO BY JON ANDELSON



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIDGET BRANDT

Bridget Brandt grew up and went to school in Mankato, Minnesota, and is a graduate of [Mankato State University](#). She and her family have lived in [Grinnell, Iowa](#), for the last 28 years. For 25 of those years she taught reading and American history at Grinnell Middle School, retiring in 2015. She enjoys reading, riding her bike, traveling to quiet windswept places, and spending time with her family, especially her seven grandchildren.

A Place to Call Home

BY BRIDGET BRANDT

Twenty eight years ago, on a cool August evening, our family—consisting of my husband David and me, our three kids Josiah, Katie, and Nathanael, and a hound dog—turned a huge corner in our lives and, with great anticipation, pulled off Interstate 80 at mile marker 182 to begin our life in Grinnell, Iowa. A few weeks earlier, my husband had received a call to be the new pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church, a small church north of the high school, with cornfields in its backyard. We knew little of Grinnell, only that it was sandwiched between Iowa City and Des Moines, it had a small, world-renowned liberal arts college located in it, and it was a half-day's drive from Grandma's and Grandpa's house.

On our family's second day in Grinnell we walked to the public library. This was something we did wherever we moved because we learned that you can tell a lot about a community by its library, especially considering what it offers children. As we drew closer, we could see some kind of activity on the front lawn. Old and young were at tables folding multi-colored paper squares into paper cranes. One thousand of them. I have always remembered the date: August 6, 1990, the 45th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. The staff at the library offered this activity in order to teach children about this tragic event in world history, but in a way that gave them hope. It became our first memory of living in Grinnell. After joining the activity and making our cranes, we walked into the beautiful library with its rich, warm wood and its smell of thousands of books.

We loved the glass floor in the upstairs stacks and the glass ceiling one saw looking up from below. Through the time to come, we would return again and again to enjoy this treasure in Grinnell.

As we settled into our new life, we slowly began to discover the things that made Grinnell seem a special place to us. Through my husband's job as pastor, through mine

teaching 5th grade at Grinnell Middle School, and through the friendships our kids, Nathanael, Katie, and Josiah, formed at school, faces around town began to have names. We started learning the stories of the people who live here, and they began to learn ours. We developed friendships that would last a lifetime and that have made our lives so much richer and more joyful.

For instance, there was the day when we were walking to Merrill Park, just down the street from where we lived, and saw a little boy about four years old crouched down on the sidewalk with a bowl full of water. He looked to be about our son's age, so we stopped to talk with him for a little while. When we asked him what he was doing, he responded, "Drowning ants." Our son had just met the boy who would be his best friend growing up. They bonded through riding bikes, playing baseball, playing their instruments in marching band, running cross country. Later, that boy was a groomsman in our son's wedding. We still laugh remembering that day. No other place on earth has Hamburger Hill, which is the spot on the golf course where kids go sledding in Grinnell on sparkling white winter snow days, or Dari Barn, where chocolate ice cream in a cup with crunch makes any day in summer a holiday. Where else can you hear the sounds of a bagpipe band coming from the neighbor's backyard, or attend world class music concerts and sporting events at Grinnell College with no admission fee? And—maybe the best thing—students from around the world who teach us of the culture of their home country and, in return, take something of

Grinnell back home with them.

This past October my husband and I were in a small church in Cape Breton, in northern Nova Scotia, to attend a Celtic service called 'The Blessing of the Kilts.' I

had just signed the guest book with our names and hometown, when a lady breathlessly approached me and asked,

"Are you from Grinnell, Iowa?" When I responded that yes, we were, she took my hand and said that her husband had graduated from Grinnell High School and Grinnell College and had just been in Grinnell the week before to attend the high school homecoming parade celebrating his 50th year class reunion. She was so hap-

Our daughter's friends, who are scattered around the country, call Grinnell a 'rubber band' community. No matter how far away you go, you always want to come back to Grinnell. To come back home.



KATIE BRANDT (LOWER RIGHT CORNER, WEARING HEADBAND), PERFORMING AT THE IOWA STATE MARCHING BAND FESTIVAL IN HIGH SCHOOL

py to talk to us and introduce us to her husband. After visiting with them for a while we learned that he had grown up in the house next door to where we live. Whispers of Grinnell seem to follow you wherever you go.

Our children have let us know that we can never move away from Grinnell, because they always want to come back here. Our daughter's friends, who are scattered around the country, call Grinnell a 'rubber band' community. No matter how far away you go, you always want to come back to Grinnell. To come back home.

Last September our son came home to celebrate his 40th birthday. When we asked him what he would like to do, he said he wanted to get his childhood buddies together and play Home Run Derby down at Merrill Park, where they had played so often when they were kids. We collected several buckets of the baseballs we had carefully stored away in our basement, grabbed a few of the old baseball gloves, and headed to the park. Our son drove down from Cedar Rapids that morning; others



DAVID BRANDT, COACHING LITTLE LEAGUE, SON JOSIAH (THE HATLESS CATCHER) AND HIS TEAMMATES LISTEN TO A PEP-TALK

came from Ankeny and some from down the road or around the block. They came now with their own sons. For a morning we watched them run and hit and laugh and throw, transported to a more carefree time: being 13 years old on a beautiful blue-sky September day.

For us, Grinnell indeed lives up to its slogan, the "Jewel of the Prairie." How fortunate we've been to live in such a special place. 🌿



GETTING THE TEAM BACK TOGETHER: COACH DAVID BRANDT (FAR LEFT) IS JOINED (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) BY ANDREW CARR, DAN CARR, THE BRANDT BROTHERS JOSIAH AND NATHANAEL, AND WILLIE STEWART



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALLAN AND SHIRLEY MOYER

Allan Moyer was born in 1930 at home in [Poweshiek County](#) in Iowa. He was the middle child in a family of thirteen children. He grew up in the country and moved to Grinnell in 1944. He graduated from high school in 1948 and worked at Central Market cutting meat until he joined the Navy in 1951. In 1958, he married Pat Thigh, and they raised three children. His wife Pat passed away in 1973. Three years later, he met and married Shirley Selle in 1976. For a short time, he worked at Donaldson's in Grinnell, but he's farmed the majority of his life before retiring in 2016.

The Hottest Car in Town

BY ALLAN MOYER

Hotrods. The pastime of cruising your pride and joy down Main Street, racing to impress the hometown crowd, is a lost art of a long gone era in Grinnell, Iowa.

High Octane Beginnings

I lived in the country and graduated from the eighth grade at Ewart School. I then moved to Grinnell with my folks. A second-hand bicycle was the incentive to attend high school. Before I ever got my license, I drove with my parents to "Seven Mile Corner," and a patrolman came along and stopped us. He said I was a good driver, but I was too short and, of course, had no license. He gave me a five dollar fine, which my father paid. In 1945, five dollars was quite a bit of money! When I finally got my license, I was restricted to sitting on a pillow when I drove.

During high school, I bought a motorbike, which would reach upwards of 50 mph, but I didn't get my first "hot car" until I graduated in 1948: a 1932 Model B Ford, black. I had to pay for the car myself. Once outta' high school, I worked at Central Meat Market for \$30 a week cutting meat, and that's how I paid for it. The Ford had a V8 engine and spare wheels in each of the front fenders. At that time it was one of the fastest cars in Grinnell, and I thought it was real cool.

Back then everybody would be downtown, just messing around. The girls would walk the block and the boys would "scoop the loop," driving real slow to show off their cars. We used to race anyone we could those nights. This was after people got done with work, because, you see, everybody worked back then. You'd see

somebody, pull up beside them and then ask if they'd wanna race. Chances were the other guy would be driving the other way, and you'd just stop in the middle of the road and decide where you'd race to. Then, you'd go out to the edge of town, line up and take off, ending at Seven Mile Corner on the other edge of town. The Seven Mile Corner was the intersection of Highway 63 to Tama and Route Six to Malcom, a local landmark. The girls were young and silly and they'd always be two or three together. You'd always have buddies in the car with you. It was never a one-on-one thing. My friends would be rooting for me in the back of the car. We lost very few races in town.

Hot Hand

I think we only had around three or four police then. The chief at the time was Glen Bell. I knew two of the local police pretty well. They drove Pontiacs and always rode two in a car around town. Once in a while they would even play "ditchum" with us, with them "chasing" us around, but more often than not, we would end up "losing" them. Caution, do not try this at home kids!

One officer lived two blocks down from me: he seemed big and intimidating back then. But he was about as close to being a buddy and as friendly as you could get, at least for a police officer. He knew what I did with my car. One time he caught me as I was racing my friend Jerry from this little hamburger joint, over where Lincoln Bank is now, and up Sixth Avenue. He caught me right about where the new library is. Jerry's dad had just got a new Oldsmobile. And the cop teased, "You've got a pretty poor car to be racing that new Oldsmobile," and I said, "Well, I bet I could take you!" And so we raced out to Seven Mile Corner. They couldn't go all the way out of town, but they'd go out at least three-quarters of a mile out of town to Lang's Dairy. Oh, I beat them a couple times. The officer wouldn't really say anything when I'd win. Makes sense, since if word got out they were

racin', they'd probably be in big trouble. All he knew was that I had the hottest car in town.

Unfortunately, "the hottest car in town" eventually came to an end. The car was light in the rear-end, which made it possible to slide it around corners fast without upsetting; however, the car had one big drawback: it was very hard on transmissions. You had to replace the transmissions at least half a dozen times, so it got to be almost second nature. Transmissions cost five dollars. That was a lot of money for back then, as I've already said. You'd have to go to the junkyard to get a replacement. It had to be a Ford transmission. Fortunately, the local junkyard kept me in good supply. A friend and I could change one out in two to three hours.

Old Sam Berman ran the junkyard. I knew him real well, and he'd chatter like a chipmunk, but he knew what I wanted when I came. He didn't give me no dis-

count; just wanted his five dollars. He'd have probably let me have it on credit, though, if I asked. The junkyard used to be over where the Fareway food store is now, near a warehouse for Meadow Gold ice cream, where they loaded into and out of trucks. The junkyard would buy old cars, iron and metal scraps, even animal hides. Back then they moved it all by hand or with trucks; now they've got big cranes.

After two years the front frame finally broke, and I had to junk my beloved car out. The body ended up in my brother-in-laws hog lot! Truly

a sorry end to my first car.

However, I didn't lose my love for speed and danger as I raced a stock car, over at the Newton [Iowa] race track for two seasons.

High Stakes

Back in the day, we'd race out in Newton where they had a fifth-of-a-mile track. I raced my friend's Chevy for him. It cost money to enter. They had prize money, and they charged people to come and watch. It used to be a pretty big deal; over a hundred people

The officer wouldn't really say anything when I'd win. Makes sense, since if word got out they were racin', they'd probably be in big trouble. All he knew was that I had the hottest car in town.

would be in the bleachers on every Saturday night. We'd work on it all day Saturday and then that night go and race. We'd fixed it back up again Sunday so it'd run. Eddie Anderson, who had a body shop in Grinnell, even raced in big time races like the one at the State Fair, with actual race cars. I never did win much, and I even rolled my car once, but it was a lotta fun back then and a lotta folks did it.

A Family Affair

My mom took my car to go visit a friend once. Since those 'hot cars' had manual brakes, you had to use your head and know what's ahead of you. It didn't have no hydraulic pressure, so it was almost as good as just

dragging your foot to stop. You'd burn rubber taking off, but you couldn't really stop it. Well, she backed out of the driveway, and before she knew it she was halfway across the railroad tracks! She never asked to borrow my car again after that. The engine was also pretty loud. You'd take the muffler off and stick a straight pipe on it, but the cops didn't like that—kinda like my pickup sounds now—I always talk about fixing it, but my wife likes the sound.

My grandson used to pull up beside us sometimes in town and we'd race as best we could. I didn't lose many of those either, even when I was racing him with my pickup. Fortunately, I don't get it by the police at all now. Don't think they ever got any trouble with me. 🍀



A 1932 Model B Ford. PHOTO COURTESY OF WHEELSAGE.ORG (http://en.wheelsage.org/ford/model_b/31380/pictures/213942)



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLAN AND SHIRLEY MOYER

Shirley Moyer was born in 1933 at home in [Jasper County](#), Iowa. Her father lost his farm in the Great Depression, after which she, her parents and her sister lived on rented farms and moved often, looking for a better farm. Her family farmed with horses. She graduated from Newburg High School in 1951 and married Wayne Selle in 1952. They worked his parents' farm south of Grinnell and had four children, two of whom died around nine years of age from Cystic Fibrosis. Wayne died in 1972. She met Allan Moyer, and they were married in 1976.

Pony Rides, Vice-Presidents and Weddings in the Rain: Welcoming the World to Our Farm

BY SHIRLEY MOYER

I have been blessed to live in the country all my life. To see the sun set in a blaze of glory, orange, pink and red; to smell the new mown hay; to hear the first frogs croak in the spring... all are treasures.

The decision to share this wonder began when a preschool teacher in Newton was looking for a farm to bring their children to visit. It was the beginning of years of fun.

At our farm, we milked cows, raised feeder pigs, and had beef cattle. Before the present ideas of "safe" food, we served milk straight from the big stainless steel cooler and deviled eggs from our hens.

Gathering eggs was the kids' favorite. We cautioned them not to reach under setting hens. One little boy stood too close to the nests and was pecked on his nose. He cried and cried, and he probably hates chickens now!

Bottle feeding baby calves, goats or lambs was also a fun challenge for teachers and children. There were baby animals of every kind to hold: chicks, ducks, kittens and rabbits. With chicks hatching, there was shredded paper to jump and play in.

Carrots or apples were offered as treats for the donkey, deer, and llama. We even had an unfriendly emu. Peacocks entertained with their large beautiful tails spread as they strutted about. There were quail too.

Weiner roasts or snack lunches were enjoyed down in the timber, which was reached by hayride. The ride was pulled by tractor or a team of two big black Percheron horses.

A typical wooden outhouse was provided in the timber with mixed reactions. The girls were reluctant to venture in. Spiders you know! The boys on the oth-

er hand loved it and tried to peek through cracks when the girls went in.

Walks through the hickory and oak trees followed lunch, with flower picking among the birds, hawks soaring above, and chipmunks scurrying to hide. Exploring crawdad mud volcanoes by the stream was especially fun.

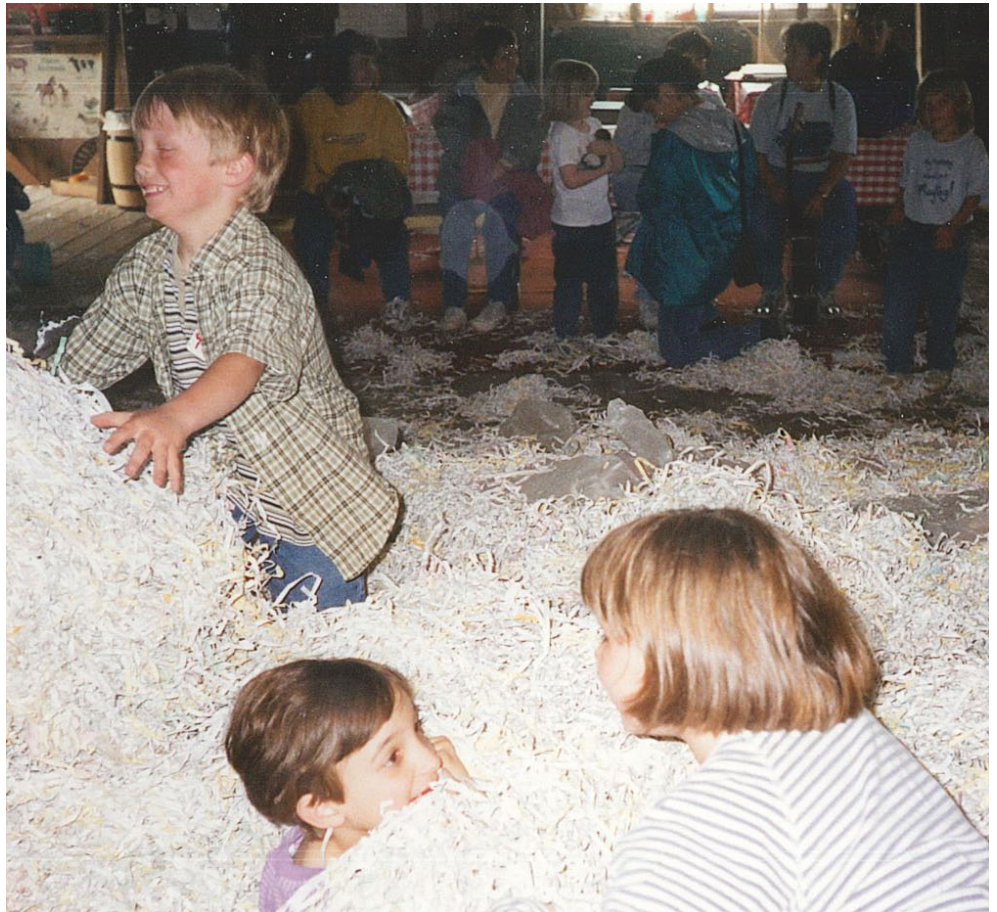
On one occasion in the timber, the neighbor's bull had appeared on our side of the fence. The teacher and I were driving him back while a high school boy remained with us. He stayed behind us shouting, "I'm behind you, I've got your backs."

"Yeah right," we both thought, but the moral support was appreciated.

We typically divided the children into three groups: one rode ponies, one gathered eggs, and the other group fed animals and went to the hay mow in the barn. Pony rides were complete with cowboy music and no lines to wait in, except for the rides. Children would not go play on the big hay bales for fear of missing their ride.

Two geese roamed the barnyard. Two grandmothers brought their very little granddaughters to see the animals. They had known my husband for a long time, and they visited as we toured. One of the geese grabbed the littlest girl by the seat of her pants and would not let go! I was frantically trying to reassure her, while the adults were laughing and taking pictures of her. When we see them now, they all still laugh about the goose story.

Handicapped adults and children were also visitors to the farm. After visiting with the animals the children would often smile and try to talk to the delight of their teachers. Animals were good therapy, especially the ponies.



CHICK-HATCHING TIME AT THE MOYERS' FARM ALWAYS MEANT THERE WAS SHREDDED PAPER FOR VISITING KIDS TO JUMP IN

There was also a wedding, a church service, a square dance Christmas in the barn, as well as performances by various music groups.

Before the holiday season, the Rev. David Brandt [see "A Place to Call Home," by Bridget Brandt, also in this issue] approached us with the idea of a Christmas Service in the barn. We thought it was a great plan and moved forward removing all the kiddy things possible. We made a pen for lambs, a cage for a rooster and disguised a llama as a camel at the bottom of the ramp. Weather was good and a few heaters made it comfortable. The rooster crowed repeatedly through it all, and that was what people remembered. We enjoyed this for three years, I believe, but the last year it was very cold and that cold put an end to a nice part of our memories.

The wedding came about from a request from our granddaughter, who wanted a Western wedding in the



KITTENS IN THE HAY MOW

barn. Her fiancé had friends in Missouri who brought their horses and camped in the timber. Their job was to park cars. The rehearsal dinner was a fancy chuckwagon dinner in the timber where the cowboys were camping. Everything went well, and the service was very nice. The large crowd sat across the haymow and our friends sang all the wedding music accompanied by guitars. The weather was perfect, but when they walked down the ramp from the barn a large black cloud was in the west. The wedding party rode on our hayrack pulled by our black Percheron horses to the American Legion Post building across Highway 146 [in Grinnell].

The bride's parents and the cowboys rode horses and accompanied them. The local police stopped traffic at the corner for them to cross. The wedding party had a large umbrella, which they ended up needing because it rained and poured all along the way.

Thankfully, they were dry, but Allan and I were soaked. When we arrived at the Legion, the electricity was off so we came home to get candles and leave the horses. A buffet meal was in full swing when we returned and eventually the electricity came back on. A memorable event to say the least!

Finally, when Al Gore was a presidential hopeful,

there was almost a visit to the farm. The whole family had background checks and the Secret Service arrived in black cars. We were all quite impressed. They checked everywhere for sniper hiding places, even the attic in the house. Unfortunately, the final decision arrived when not enough telephone access could be available to accommodate their needs. A big adventure, anyway.

Occasionally we hear from a mom or dad who visited our place as a kindergartner, and they tell us about how

their kids also enjoyed a visit to the farm. Many friends, relatives, and neighbors made this all possible and are fondly remembered by all our family. We haven't had school visits for many years now. Almost all the animals have been sold off, but there is still a donkey and a mule. They just seem a part of the place. And, of course there are always cats milling around and hens in the chicken coop out back.

So many memories return when writing this story.... 🌿



PHOTO BY JON ANDELSON

Sam Cox is the proprietor of the [Saints Rest Coffee](#), one of the fixtures of daily life in Grinnell, Iowa. An Iowa transplant at a very young age, she was raised in Grinnell and graduated from Grinnell High School. She attended college and returned to Grinnell to raise a family. About the town, she says: “I love this community and all of its colors! It has more depth than people may see and what a great place to raise a family. So here I am.”

A Child's First Taste of Freedom

BY SAM COX

It was Halloween eve—or Beggars’ Night, to all of the little kids of the time—in my small Iowa town. It was a beautiful and warm autumn day. The sun was shining, still high in the sky, leaves were on the ground and though the grass had lost some of its beautiful green luster, it seemed to us as if the summer of 1978 was still going strong. We lived in an older neighborhood. A little one-block street that continued on the other side of the tracks and was bordered by the cemetery. A mix of ranch homes and two-stories; most of them older and in various states of age. A very quiet street that you didn’t turn down unless you lived on it.

On this day, as on so many others during my youth, Penny, my older sister, was my companion. We were going to go trick-or-treating, and we were teaming up with our cousins and rural country counterparts : Jimmy and Donnie. Jimmy and I are the same age, though I am the youngest of three siblings and Jimmy is the oldest of three siblings. Jimmy and I often played together in our early childhoods, and we attended our first day of kindergarten together. I’m sure the four of us were an interesting sight: two blonde-haired blue-eyed boys and two brown-haired blue-eyed girls.

I have no idea what our Halloween costumes were that year. As was true with most children in our small modest neighborhood, most often our costumes were homemade. My guess would be that we were a clown, or a hobo, or a politically incorrect Indian. All I know for sure is that our instructions were to stay together and be home by dark.

It took a community to keep kids safe back in the day. Everybody was so much more cohesive, or aware of our little world. We certainly followed instructions that evening, and stayed together, because little kids are pri-

marily pack animals. I don't think there was a lot of planning; clearly, we knew where the best candy was in town. We all knew where to go. It just comes from growing up in your neighborhood, just learning and being aware.

Can you imagine? There was no “don't talk to strangers,” no “hold hands;” no cell phones, no hovering parents. We were free. I think that stays fresh in any person's mind: the first time they get to venture out on their own. I'm sure every child can remember their first outing without their parent, and the sense of freedom that came with it. I can remember that it was just very exciting; something that has remained stamped in my mind: my first opportunity to act like a young adult. Our parents were trusting us to take care of ourselves.

I still live in this picture-perfect little town, where I run the Saints Rest coffee shop, and today, I have kids that walk to the coffee shop for the first time by themselves. Because I know the kid, I can ask their parents a week later, and they will be like, “Oh yeah, that was their first outing.” You know, if you're that kid, you remember that. I don't know how you wouldn't remember that.

I just talked to someone recently who said, “You have a very charming town,” though—if you've grown up here your whole life—I don't think you necessarily see that. The picture is a bit more complicated than it seems to be on the surface—a fact that's made clear by a recent movie, “Saints Rest.” The movie was made by an alumnus of the College here; it's centered on my coffee shop, and it brings the sense of complication to the forefront. This is just a small town—kind of sheltered, which is why there's a false feeling of safety. I'd say we're slower, not only in pace, but just behind the times. Back then—I can tell you—my family was so far behind. I remember getting television when everyone already had it.

So, anyway, there we were on the western-most street of town, running full-speed away from our little neighborhood, pillow cases in hand and gleeful deter-



PHOTO BY INGO RICKMANN THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KINDER_FEIERN_HALLOWEEN_-_2004.JPG)

mination on our faces.

We didn't do anything naughty; naughty was five years off, when I'd TP houses, and do other nasty, naughty things. That night, we were really focused on candy. Who has time to dilly-dally when candy is all you really want? No, that night, as we ran down the street, it was candy, candy, candy.

First, we headed north to the “rich” neighborhoods. Big fancy houses with beautifully manicured yards, nice sidewalks and porch lights that beckoned to us. These houses always had the best candy, sometimes even full-size bars! Not an apple in sight.

There was only one guy that I can remember who decorated his house. His name was Jim Haines. He had a cemetery in his front yard, with smoke, and lights, and he dressed up—I want to say he was a werewolf, or something—he scared the crap out of us. We ran, screaming, and I don't think I got any candy. Decorating back then clearly wasn't as dominant as it is now. Not even close. I don't have any memories of that; I barely have memories of Christmas lights, as a kid.

Anyway, after heading north, we would head east, then south and then back home. Funny that I don't remember coming home that night. I simply remember the leaving. But I do remember our pillow cases getting heavy. I remember a few bits and pieces; but nothing as clear to me as running away from our house and into the beautiful unknown. 🍂



PHOTO COURTESY OF RANDALL HOTCHKIN

[Randall Hotchkin](#) served as an Air Force Medic in Balad, Iraq from August 2004 to January 2005. He was a Technical Sergeant at the time, but retired as a Master Sergeant in 2013 with a total of 26 years of service, with over 22 of those on active duty.

Healing the Smallest Casualty

BY RANDALL HOTCHKIN

We arrived in Iraq under the cover of darkness. We were a large deployment group from Wilford Hall Medical Center, Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. Many of us knew each other, but to say we were well acquainted would be a stretch. After all, Wilford Hall was the largest medical facility in the Air Force. The range of relationships prior to our deployment was all over the map, much like the range of backgrounds and hometowns that make up every military unit. We'd been trained and trained well, but would that be enough? How would we perform in a high tempo mass casualty environment? It was August, 2004, and we were entering a war zone, specifically Operation Iraqi Freedom.

We were assigned to the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Squadron located on [Balad Air Base](#) forty miles north of Baghdad. We had every function of a civilian hospital including surgical capability, radiology, pharmacy, supply, logistics, and so on, all housed under rows of canvas tents connected by one long, main hallway. Each tent that extended perpendicularly from the hallway housed a different section of the hospital. I was assigned to the Medical/Surgical Ward, which was actually housed in three of these tents.

Iraq was very different from the small Iowa town where I was raised, right down to the very soil. Iowa is known for its fertile fields while the soil in Iraq more closely resembled baby powder with a slightly tan tint to it. In fact, everything in Iraq had a tan tint to it, the sand, the tents, our uniforms, everything. The lush green rows of crops that grow in my home state were nowhere to be seen there.

Throughout my training, I'd tried to prepare my-

self for the wounded American and coalition forces that we might care for. What was surprising were the number of civilian and quite possibly enemy combatants that we would be expected to treat. And it was these patients that we would see for much longer periods of time. Aeromedical evacuation or “aerovac” was so efficient that we rarely saw the same American casualties for more than a shift or two. More often than not we’d return for our next shift hoping to check on the status of a patient only to discover that they had been Aerovac’d out to Germany or even stateside. It was one of these Iraqi patients who would steal our hearts and become a ray of light in the darkness.

His name was Sajad, and he was already a resident of the hospital when we arrived. We guessed he was somewhere around four years old, but no one knew for sure. An Army patrol had found him in a local village. His leg had been badly burned and had healed in a flexed position, making it impossible to straighten. No one knew how or when his injury had taken place, but what was certain was that this little guy would never walk again without surgical intervention. Even with cultural and religious barriers, it was communicated to the boy’s family that our facility could help and they consented. He began a series of surgeries where the scar tissue that bound his leg was cut away and replaced with layers of skin from his little back. I’m not sure how many surgeries he had endured prior our arrival, but he had not yet walked.

We all enjoyed caring for Sajad. When he was coming out of anesthesia following one of his procedures, we’d hold him until he awoke and was reacquainted with his surroundings. I doubt that I’d take to the diet most Iraqis live on, but I do believe Sajad was quite pleased with what he tasted of ours, especially candy. He would devour anything put in front of him, and there were plenty of care packages to share. I’m not sure I’d ever seen a belly swell like his did after one of his binge sessions. This, as you might expect, led to the least enjoyable aspect of caring for Sajad, as he was still dependent on diapers. We finally had to hang a sign above his bed stating in large block letters, “PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE CHILD!!!”

After each surgical procedure, Sajad’s leg would

be in a hard cast or some sort of splint to keep it immobilized. Walking with a bent leg was impossible, but teaching him to walk with straight, stiff leg was going to be a challenge. Someone found one of those round baby walkers with wheels that he could sit in and this worked amazingly well. Sajad was off and running. It meant he required much more supervision, but it was a joy to see a child play, especially in the environment we were surrounded by. We couldn’t help but wonder whether this was his first time experiencing this kind of freedom.

We worked on weening him away from the walker. We would often stand him up and toss a soccer ball at him. Prompting him to kick it back. This was quite effective at working on his balance and agility.

I definitely knew that many of those I was serving with were extremely fond of little Sajad. Who could blame them? He was as cute as could be. He smiled constantly and rarely fussed. One of the fondest memories I have was one of those moments when you hear a new word or words from a youngster, and know he or she understands the proper use of that vocabulary. Obviously, there was a language barrier between us, but one day I was holding Sajad and out of nowhere he gave me a big hug, smiled and said “I love you.” My heart absolutely melted.

We all wanted to see him progress, but I don’t think we correlated this with him leaving us. After all, he’d been with us for the majority of our deployment. It only seemed logical that we’d be able to keep him. Sajad’s family had only visited a few times in the more than two months he’d been with us. We often wondered if they’d abandoned him. I was so convinced of this, and was certainly so attached that I actually had my First Sergeant contact the U.S. Embassy on my behalf to look into my adopting Sajad. They made it clear that that scenario was not possible. I now believe that his family probably had transportation or financial obstacles that kept them away.

Our feelings for Sajad were never clearer than they were on the day we learned his family was picking him up. Word spread through the hospital like a wildfire. I rushed to his bed as soon as I heard. There was a group of around half-a-dozen medical personnel there, which was about half-a-dozen more than were needed, but we

all wanted to say goodbye. The mood that followed was worse than anything we'd experienced to date, and we'd experienced a lot. We'd set records for the number of casualties aerovac'd out of the area of operation, so you can imagine the level of carnage we'd been exposed to. Our affection for our little mascot was clear and became even clearer a few weeks later when Sajad returned for a follow-up. Again, the news flew through the facility, and again I raced to find him. When I located him, he was surrounded by staff members and of course, eating. When our eyes met, he lit up and his big smile met mine.

There's one memory in particular that connects the life I led in Iraq with the life I am leading today in my home town. I was one of the higher-ranking personnel in the hospital, and functioned as a shift supervisor. Those who worked for me had specific patients to care for, and duties assigned to them. I had much more flexibility, which allowed me to spend more time with Sajad, and I'd often carry him with me as I made my rounds. One day I noticed his hair was getting a little shaggy and decided a haircut was in order.

As you might imagine, this mission had a high chance of failure. After all, no one can predict how a child will behave in a barber chair, and that's without a language barrier. Sajad seemed to trust me. I guess we'd bonded pretty well by this point, but honestly, I'm sure he was ready for a change of scenery. So, I loaded him up in the Hummvee, buckled him in the passenger seat and we were off to the barbershop. I don't remember now if he gave me much trouble in the barber chair, but I do remember holding him in my lap as the barber did his thing, and I remember working up quite a sweat doing it. He was sure a hit with everyone we encountered

that afternoon. Smiling and greeting them all, bringing a smile to their faces as well. He certainly looked sharp with that new cut and it seemed he knew it as well.

It's interesting to note that, many years later, retired from the Air Force, I find myself back in my hometown, cutting hair in my own small-town barbershop. I had a friend once tell me that she thought it was really cool that I had joined the military like my father, and was now doing hair like my mother, who was a beautician. I'm fine with where things ended up. There aren't many things you can do in life that give you immediate gratification from your work, but I have that privilege.

There are probably many things that shape a man and who he will become. I like to think we had a variety of missions while in Iraq but most important to me was the healing of hearts and minds. Hopefully, little Sajad will never don a suicide vest or detonate a vehicle born IED (Improvised Explosive Device). Hopefully, he shares his memories with friends and family of the nice Americans that made it possible for him to walk. In a perfect world, I imagine him as a community or national leader, work-

ing to erase the hatred that seems so prevalent in his culture.

These days I get to turn folks of all ages around to unveil their new haircut and see their initial response. Fortunately, that response is usually positive. Many times, the customer is a young boy who can't hide the pride he feels in how he looks. Much like little Sajad on our barbershop adventure that sunny day in Iraq. 🍃



PHOTO COURTESY OF RANDALL HOTCHKIN



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAITIE HESS

Kaitie Hess is a fourth year student at Grinnell College studying anthropology with a concentration in global development studies. She is really interested by the concept of community, especially in regards to youth working together to make community change. Kaitie worked at the Grinnell Area Arts Council from spring 2016 to spring 2017, where this photo essay takes place.

What Do You Think Community Is?

BY KAITIE HESS

The [Grinnell Area Arts Council](#) (GAAC), located in the heart of downtown Grinnell, Iowa, is a community center that hosts exhibits, concerts, plays, celebrations, and classes. Of particular interest to me this past spring was “Studio 6,” the Arts Council’s Monday-through-Thursday after school program that attracts approximately 20 to 25 students. The kids attending Studio 6 come from different backgrounds in the town, and adult artist/mentors guide them in working with one another to create pieces of art that reflect their cohesion as a classroom.

During the spring class I was involved in, the Studio 6 kids worked on a myriad of art projects. Sometimes they paved their own paths in personal, individual projects; sometimes they worked together to create something great and grand. In response to this issue’s theme of community, I decided to explore how the children of the Studio 6 classroom could represent their own definition of community in a mural. I reached out to GAAC staff member/teachers Katie In and Alesia Lacina and told them I was interested in doing a project. They excitedly agreed to spearhead a mural project where Studio 6 students would create an image that reflected what community meant to them. Within weeks, we created mural-esque scenes on the classroom walls, and unleashed the kids to create.

I went to two Studio 6 classes in which students produced two separate murals. Both had similar initial prompts, beginning with the depiction of large trees). Before we started the project, though, I talked with the students to help guide what this mural would look like.

We prompted the students with questions like, “What do you think community is?”

Interestingly, the two classes’ differing concept of community was reflected in their answers, discussions, and later in the murals they created. The first class’s discussion emphasized sharing, peace, and caring for others. The second class’s mural centered on the kids’ ideas about who community members were, and explored the theme of working together. This group continually

mentioned firefighters, police officers, and the idea of working together to “make something.”

Using images of the students’ work and quotes from their commentary on community as they worked, I’ve traced this project from its beginnings through the finished project. 🌿



“‘COMMUNITY’ MEANS WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE SOMETHING.”

“THE ROOTS IN THE MURAL SHOW THAT WE LIVE TOGETHER AND
WE WORK TOGETHER.”



“‘COMMUNITY’ MAKES ME THINK ABOUT MY FAMILY.”

“‘COMMUNITY’ IS KINDNESS.”

“WE HAVE AN OUTER COMMUNITY—SCHOOL, THE TOWN, PEOPLE I SEE AT THE SUPERMARKET—AND AN INNER COMMUNITY [THE SPEAKER HUGS HER FRIEND].”

“WE HELP EACH OTHER IN A COMMUNITY. ‘COMMUNITY’ IS PEOPLE—FIREFIGHTERS, POLICE OFFICERS, AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO WORK TOGETHER TO HELP.”

“I’M MAKING A RAINBOW BECAUSE IT MAKES ME HAPPY AND COMMUNITY MAKES ME HAPPY”

“‘COMMUNITY’ IS SPECIAL BECAUSE IT’S MY HOME.”





PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY KAY SHANLEY

Mary Kay Shanley began her career with the Des Moines Register back in the day when you rubbed shoulders with Pulitzer Prize winners. She moved from there to the world of books, including one best-seller. An Iowa Author of the Year, Mary Kay teaches in the University of Iowa's Summer Writing Festival and is a Humanities Iowa presenter. Also, she and Diane Douiyssi co-lead reflective writing retreats.

On the Changing Nature of the Obituary

BY MARY KAY SHANLEY

I spied the tee-shirt amidst a plethora of choices online one evening while looking for a gag gift for one of our adult children. I've never been much of a tee-shirt person myself, believing that one's chest and back serve higher purposes than sending messages via a cotton sandwich board. Although, to be honest, I did buy myself a tee-shirt the first day of each of my 17 RAGBRAIs. They've become badges of accomplishment albeit a little ragged from the wear. Curiously, this particular tee-shirt I stumbled upon spoke to me in an ethereal manner. Connecting with whatever spirituality I harbor someplace or another within my being. A deeply personal spirituality that didn't manifest itself until the kids left home and I finally had time to think. This tee-shirt's message was simple:

I INTEND TO LIVE FOREVER
so far, so good

I knew immediately and innately that I must own it. Machine wash, warm, inside out with like colors. Only non-chlorine bleach. Tumble dry medium. Do not iron. Do not dry clean.

By the time I had wandered into my 50s, the notion that I might live forever (and ever) had quietly emerged from somewhere, taking on form and substance. I acknowledged its quirky presence, neither discouraging such a possibility nor questioning why I might be the exception. Rather, I've always tended toward a come-what-may approach. If it works, fine. If not, okay. There are other paths all over the place, just waiting to be trod. Which paths we choose, which direction we go now, which direction we go later, blend in to become our personal footprints in the sand. And

while the elements—wind, rain, water, snow—sooner or later erase physical footprints, the history of who we are, where we come from, what we accomplish and, ultimately, what we leave behind, melds into the universe.

For a very long while now, we humans have been packaging up our past, putting bits and pieces of our decades into sentences and paragraphs to become obituaries for the newspaper and the funeral home, for family, friends, and for posterity. Having the last word, so to speak. And for so many reasons, that is extremely important.

The obituary dates back to the early 16th century, its journey to now riding a wave of rich history. An obit is not a biography; that's an account of someone's life and is written by another person. Nor is the obituary an autobiography; that's an account of someone's life written by the person who's living it—obviously up to a certain point. Nor is it a memoir; that's an historical account or biography one writes from personal knowledge or special sources. It tends more toward the story-telling vein.

Obituaries, gathered collectively and over time, embody our historical journey as a people, as well as our personal family history. From these “short stories” we can come to appreciate the roles generations have played in our past.

The word “obituary” comes from the Latin *obit*, meaning death. Brief announcements of death were published in America as early as the 16th century. But not until the 19th century, and following a lead from the British, our obits became more detailed accounts, appearing with regularity in the press.

At the time of the Civil War, obituaries for soldiers often included sentiment and religious overtones. This is also when embalming began to find favor because it meant bodies would arrive home intact. Toward the end of the century, “death journalism” emerged. Obituaries in both England and the United States focused on the graphic and often morbid details of the person's death, a trend that continued into the 20th century. Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901-1909, died in his sleep at age 60. His obituary in [*The New York Times*](#) led with an elaborate description of the blood clot that “detached



PHOTO BY EMILY MAMRAK

itself from a vein and entered the lungs.”

For a short while, obituaries in verse form had their day in the sun. Consider “A Tribute to Guy Swain,” a Delaware, Ohio, man who fell to his death while trying to chase a raccoon from his tree one night:

A precious one is gone,
A voice we loved is still,
A place is vacant in our home
Which never can be filled.
O Guy, it seemed so bad,
The way you had to go.

It wasn’t until the latter part of the 20th century that obituaries began to routinely recognize ordinary people as well as the aristocracy. I’m in the “ordinary” category, and probably most of you are as well. Because of this shift to us everyday people, anybody can die and the obit can appear in the newspaper.

Initially, these obituaries included a notice of death, an account of the person’s life and information about the upcoming funeral. A family member either submitted that information to the funeral home or filled out a form provided by the funeral home. This was then sent to the newspaper office where a professional journalist—almost always a cub reporter—wrote the obituary and a professional proofreader checked it for errors. In the *Des Moines Register’s* newsroom, for example, this good-to-go copy then traveled to the composing room, then on to the pressroom. Mistakes were almost non-existent.

I launched my journalism career in 1965, at the *Register*. Back then, the only newspaper in the United States with more Pulitzers was the *New York Times*. Heady stuff, but new hires were still newbies. Gals wrote weddings, engagements and club news; guys wrote weather, obits and entries from the police blotter. For about a year, actually. After that, if you were still upright and mobile, you could stop worrying about getting axed by the managing editor and start writing real articles.

The latest winds of change, as far as obituaries are concerned, have been fanned by Social Media’s penchant for putting everything on the table. Dubbed the “Personalized Obituary,” they’re now written by a family member, a friend or even the deceased person, obviously ahead of time. Funeral homes, as well as the Internet, provide a plethora of information and assistance. Today, factual information, as well as insights into the life of the deceased, have become the norm. Once written, obituaries are sent directly to the newspaper’s advertising department for layout and design. Nobody proofs what you’ve written so no errors are corrected before press time. Hence, people: be meticulous with your submissions.

The latest winds of change, as far as obituaries are concerned, have been fanned by Social Media’s penchant for putting everything on the table.

Another change: When we “regular folks” began writing our family obituaries, the first eight lines were often free-of-charge. That’s not the case anymore, so *caveat emptor*. Know cost-per-word for copy and cost-per-size of photo. The obituary has become a reliable source of income for newspapers.

That said, for some people, paying for even a short obituary can become a huge issue. Funeral directors may suggest the family run only the Basic Death Notice in the local newspaper. Then, the family may post a more comprehensive obituary on the funeral home’s website. Funeral homes generally pay to have their logo and website included with these obituaries, so the family may not incur any costs.

With the increasing popularity of social media in the early 2000s, news organizations began selling obituaries to online sites such as legacy.com, the largest commercial provider of on-line memorials—probably in the universe, but I haven’t checked. Even if no funeral is looming large in your family’s near future, look at legacy’s homepage. It’s a mini-magazine of stuff to read: how to write an obituary that will preserve your loved one’s life in story—how to prepare for a traditional Muslim burial—an opportunity to search for obituaries by newspaper—remembering Andrew Wyeth on his 100th birthday. The offerings, like the Internet itself,

are endless.

In case you haven't noticed, Social Media has also conditioned us to share information with complete strangers. Hence, sites like [obitkit.com](#). Its creator Susan Soper says, "We're more open and apt to have a sense of humor rather than denial about death. People want to celebrate someone for who they are, not for some cookie-cutter person."

And Social Media have conditioned us to laugh out loud. In 2007, [Multimedia Tributes](#) posted a video-obituary from the *New York Times* that included an "appearance" by the newly deceased Art Buchwald, a [Washington Post](#) columnist and a two-time recipient of the Pulitzer Prize. In the first frame of the video, the 81-year-old humorist addressed viewers with a giant grin and said, "Hi, I'm Art Buchwald, and I just died."

On to the more serious side of the form, Portraits: 9/11/01: The Collected "[Portraits of Grief](#)" from the *New York Times* emerged from superior reporting. Three days after the attack, a half-dozen *Times* reporters began working from a stack of 100 missing person fliers collected from points around the World Trade Center site. They crafted profiles—stories containing short but signature details of the lives they strove to present. The portraits transcend race, class and gender lines, telling stories of the old and the young, praising their individuality while cutting through their differences to capture the poignancy of their shared similarity: life cut short in an American tragedy. Eventually, "Portraits" grew to more than 1,800 profiles.

Today, the obituary's format is as loose or as tight as the family sees fit. Some obituaries still fit into the proper constraints of etiquette. Others wander outside those lines and, truth be told, can be downright entertaining. Consider the following:

When retired wood-plant manager in Klamath Falls, Oregon, died, his grandson wrote the obituary. The young man included comments about Mr. Brockey's penchant for ordering gadgets and clothing touted

by TV pitchmen on the [QVC cable shopping network](#): "QVC lost a loyal customer on Sept. 28, 2016."

After Allen Lee Franklin died in a motorcycle accident in Virginia, his brother included this in the obit: "His family constantly warned him about the dangers of riding motorcycles, but he was incredibly stubborn. Allen was a wonderful young man and was loved by everyone he met, despite his incessant need to argue with anyone about everything. He was probably the biggest tightwad in the Mid-Atlantic Region."

Dan A. Wilson of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, died in June 2017. He'd already written his own obituary, obviously in first person. It was full of one-liners: "I crammed a four-year education into seven years." And: "[Morning-side College](#) is a Methodist school where I was forced

to go to the chapel every week, take one religious course each semester for two years. The religion nearly turned me into an atheist". And: "There will be no internment [sic] since I'm going to be cremated. If you want to see me, you have to come by the house where Donna will have me displayed somewhere."

Whoever wrote the obit for David Schlang of Scottsdale,

Arizona, lauded the man for his generosity and athleticism, also mentioning that he was a bit of a pack rat. "He left behind a lot of stuff that his wife and daughters have no idea what to do with. So, if you're in the market for golf clubs, golf balls, general sporting equipment, random electronics, CDs, cassettes and LPs, you should wait an appropriate amount of time, and then get in touch with us."

After Noah Sagan of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, died of a drug overdose, his mother was determined to pay tribute to her son's sarcastic humor thus: "He loved the Pittsburgh Penguins, playing videogames, our dog Lizzy, and chicken. He hated lifting weights, but did it anyway, then had a cigarette."

Then there's Bill Maurer's obituary. Bill was managing editor of the *Des Moines Tribune* and co-managing editor of the *Des Moines Register*. His 2011 obit

Some obituaries still fit into the proper constraints of etiquette. Others wander outside those lines which, truth be told, can be downright entertaining.

was written by friend Michael Gartner who has been Page One Editor of the *Wall Street Journal* and, later, editor and president of the *Des Moines Register*. Michael opened the obit thus: “Bill Maurer’s goal was to live to be 113. He didn’t make it.”

Robin Kline of Des Moines, Iowa, a culinary professional, crafted her 95-year-old mother’s obituary. I’d never met her mother, but after reading the obit, I knew the woman by the passages:

“Irene grew up on the diversified family dairy farm, baking pies for threshing crews, gathering eggs from the hen house and every autumn helping butcher and process hogs and making gallons of apple butter for the family table.

“In college she became skilled in the campus bakery, and fondly remembered making doughnuts for student breakfasts in the wee hours of the morning.”

“When she and her husband moved to Chicago, she enjoyed discovering the adventures of the metropolis especially the many different ethnic neighborhoods and restaurants that offered new flavors, dishes and cuisine.”

“Later, she led a team of foods teachers, introduced international foods classes to students and broke with tradition by teaching boys’ food preparation classes”.

With this approach, readers learn not only what a person did but also who the person was. Such information-based storytelling weaves a sense of the local public into our history.

And recently, a friend shared that when her nephew, J. T. Sleyster, a college student in Wisconsin, died by suicide, there was no obituary. Within 12 hours of his death, the word was out on Facebook. “The first post I saw was, ‘Rest in Peace, J.T.’” his mother, Ann Wheeler of South Carolina, recalls. “That post showed up on my Facebook page because I was Facebook friends with my son. But it wasn’t me who saw that post first.”

After seeing the numerous posts about his death, with people asking for more information about the ser-

vice, two days later the family posted information about what had happened, followed with a post requesting photos for a video. The final post provided information about the visitation and funeral, including a request that people wear flannels to the service since J.T. grew up in Minnesota.

“I do wish, now, that there would have been an obituary, too,” Ann says. “You want some of that tactile information to remain. But it just went so fast.”

Two more points to consider. First, until recently, including cause-of-death was required for publication. Not so today, although I believe a solid argument for inclusion remains. For example, the 1997 obituary for Orville Marlow, from Perry, Iowa, listed cause of death as complications of Parkinson’s disease. In fact, the funeral director’s wife had been passionate about including the

information. Since Mr. Marlow had run a gas station during part of his career, she wondered about a possible link between his work and Parkinson’s. She thought such information in his obituary might be useful for research purposes.

Back when Mr. Marlow had been diagnosed, his children asked the neurologist about hereditary factors with Parkinson’s. The doctor had thought that wasn’t likely. Some years after his death, though, the family learned that Mr. Marlow was likely part of a “cluster,” as three of

his cousins had Parkinson’s as well. Recently, his son-in-law, a genealogist, found an obituary for Mr. Marlow’s half-brother, whom the family had never been aware of before. He, too, had died of Parkinson’s. Such historical knowledge for future generations is lost without including cause of death in an obituary.

Also to consider: Obituaries have the power to make public statements. In 2017, Ethan Sergei Neubauer, 19, of Urbandale, Iowa, took his life after struggling with depression, anxiety, PTSD and survivor’s guilt related to a tumultuous childhood in Russia. His (adopted) mother who, years before, had worked for the Associated Press, wrote a powerful obituary detailing the

[R]eaders learn not only what a person did but also who the person was. Such information-based storytelling weaves a sense of the local public into our history.

journey of Sergei's short life. He'd first met Mary and dad Larry Loss through Camp Hope when he visited Iowa as a youngster. The couple joyfully adopted him. Sergei thought Mary to be very tall and found Larry's hair to be quite white, but they seemed nice, laughed a lot and had great dogs. Sergei played soccer, lifted weights, loved nature, graduated from high school, and was interested in psychology and social work. He was able to mask his own pain by keeping the focus on others as well. At the end of the obituary, Mary made a public plea for policymakers to recognize the toll of mental illness caused by legislative underfunding. The obit concluded with four messages to others who struggle with the disease:

1. If you need help, ask for it.
2. Seek to build others up, not tear them down.
3. Avoid drama. It does no good.
4. Recognize small moments of joy, for they happen all the time.

Peggy Huppert, executive director of the Iowa chapter of the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), sees Neubauer as a shining example of someone who turned personal tragedy into social change. "Less than six months after Mary Neubauer wrote the obituary," Huppert says, "she was standing beside the Governor at the bill signing ceremony for a major mental health policy bill she'd helped pass."

So, back to my tee-shirt. It is comforting to know that, overall, life really is "so far, so good." That said, let me note that I never want to hold the record for being the world's oldest living person. According to the [Gerontology Research Group](#), right now that record belongs to Violet Brown, a 117-year-old Jamaican woman. Nicknamed "Aunt V," she and her husband worked as cane farmers, and Violet credits that hard work during her younger years for her longevity. She was baptized 104 years ago, has a 97-year-old son and has been going to church for more than a century.

"I feel good, I feel happy to be the oldest person (in the world)," Brown told the [Jamaica Observer](#). "I did not feel I would become the oldest person; I feel I would pass long ago. Thank God for whatever He has given to

me."

In today's sometimes contentious world, Violet's positive comments are laced with grace and wisdom. And that's enough for me. 🌿



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN WHITTAKER

John Whittaker has been teaching [anthropology](#) at [Grinnell College](#) since 1984. He is mostly an archaeologist, but says that all people, living and dead, are of interest to him. About his practice of flintknapping—the making of stone tools using traditional methods—John says: “Experiments with ancient technologies are fun, inexpensive, and tell us a lot about what we want to know about the past. [Flintknapping](#) allows us to recognize artifacts, interpret their past uses, and examine their place in the ancient world. Flintknapping also happens to be an enjoyable craft, practiced by all our ancestors at one time or another.”

Worthless Rocks

BY JOHN C. WHITTAKER

I’m an archaeologist, so I get calls occasionally: someone has an artifact they want me to look at. Usually it’s an ‘arrowhead’ they have just found, or a collection made over the years or inherited from granddad. I don’t encourage people to collect artifacts without documenting location, because this removes them from the site and diminishes the chances that they can tell us anything about past people. Nevertheless, I try not to sound too self-righteous about archaeological ethics when I talk to a friendly member of the public. I always enjoy looking at someone’s artifacts, even if I secretly lament the loss of knowledge when objects are removed from their original contexts. I can usually make a friend and tell them something they find interesting. “See the beveled edge on this one? That means it was probably resharpened—some of these big arrowheads were actually spear and knife points.” And so on. Archaeologists



ARROWHEADS MADE BY THE AUTHOR FROM A VARIETY OF STONES, USING ANCIENT TECHNIQUES. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN WHITTAKER



OLD “ARROWHEADS” FROM THE COLLEGE’S FORMER PARKER NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, ALONG WITH RIVER-ROLLED FLINTS THAT LOOK LIKE ARTIFACTS. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN WHITTAKER

need to talk to the public, not only because support for archaeology ultimately comes from them, but because many great archaeological finds were made by the farmer, the construction worker, or the curious kid who happened on something unusual and told “the authorities.”

Sometimes the find is “big bones.” My heart beats a bit faster when I hear that, because Ice Age mammal finds are not impossible in Iowa. When foundations were being dug for one of the downtown stores in Grinnell in the late 1800s, pieces of mammoth tusk turned up. They were displayed in the college’s Parker Museum of Natural History, a rather fine small collection that was allowed to deteriorate through the 1950s and eventually bulldozed into the ruins when an unusually stupid administration tore down most of our attractive 19th Century buildings. Most such Pleistocene animals (not administrators, but such things as mammoths, camels, and giant ground sloths) lived before people populated North America, so properly speaking, they are not archaeology. But they are still interesting, and there is always the possibility that a mammoth might be late enough to have been the prey of a Clovis hunter 13,000 years ago, which would make it rare and import-

ant archaeology. However, a quick glance at the bones usually tells me that we have found the last resting place of Dobbins the forgotten workhorse or Daisy the elderly milk cow, disposed of in a pit in the pasture, forgotten by the generations after granddad.

One morning as I arrived early at Grinnell College’s Goodnow Hall, where I have my office, a uniformed police officer climbed out of his cruiser and accosted me on the steps.

“Are you Dr. Whittaker?”

I felt the twinge we all do when confronting the legal authorities, but as far as I could remember I hadn’t done anything criminal, illegal, or even publicly embarrassing in the last few weeks, so I admitted my identity.

“Someone said you’re the archaeologist. A hunter found some bones we would like you to look at.”

Wow, my own episode of CSI Grinnell! Human identification isn’t my field, but there are indeed anthropologists who specialize in forensic investigations, and I did have basic human skeletal training with one of them, long ago in my graduate student days. Inside my office we opened a box with the faint fragrance of decay to reveal a set of long narrow bones held together

by some remnants of flesh and sinew. I was only slightly sorry to be able to tell the officer immediately that this was not a human hand, but what was left of the upper paw of a large mammal. A quick visit to my drawers of animal specimens confirmed this: Dog. At least the police would not have to waste time searching a crime scene for the rest of the body.

Not long ago I was asked to look at another artifact collection. As usual, someone had called the department, where our administrative assistant passed her on to me. The woman seemed nice on the phone, and said she had a lot of 'old Indian stuff'. She lived on a local farm, but now had to sell the farm and move, and wanted her finds properly cared for.

I applauded the idea. Most artifact collections, without any specifics about where they were found, are largely useless except as teaching specimens. A collection from one specific small area, however, could inform us about an important site that should be investigated or preserved, or might at least represent the range of different periods and people who had once occupied that little river valley. Such collections, with documentary information, are valuable and should be preserved. I asked the caller what she had. "Oh, lots of arrowheads, all sorts of tools, some pottery." This was encouraging. You never know what people may have found, and some very odd things get called artifacts, but who could fail to recognize arrowheads?

We made an appointment, and I drove several miles out of town, past grain elevators, through the corridors of endless cornfields, over a shaky bridge crossing a small stream, to a run-down farm, far from anything. A crippled windmill swung in the breeze that whistled through gaps in the silos and shook the rotting shingles on a leaning barn. The house was shabby but I've seen worse. I was greeted at the door by a hideous but placid pit bull, who was pushed aside by an indifferent cat, followed by a run-down looking woman about my age. She introduced herself as Selma. A bit overweight,

stringy hair, dressed in a worn nightgown and puffing a cigarette—one of Iowa's rural poor. Selma welcomed me through an entry that was cluttered with dog and cat bowls and muddy shoes, led me past a kitchen, and into the sitting room.

"The kids are gone now," she said, nodding at an age-graded series of fading high school photos. "Hope you're not allergic to cats."

As I sat on the hairy sofa and submitted my knuckles to the bulldog's tongue. I felt a certain kinship with Selma: the room was messy but clean, and she plainly suffered from the collecting bug. Stacks of magazines, a large hoard of Tupperware, a few too many pieces of furniture.

My impressions of the room are vague because my attention was focused on the large coffee table, on which was spread her collection of "artifacts." My spirits sank.

In front of me, in tidy rows, was the ugliest collection of worthless rocks I have ever seen. And I speak as one who likes worthless rocks.

These are the finds that try my soul. Selma had asked for my professional expertise, so I wouldn't lie to her, but I didn't think she was going to want to hear what I had to say. There were at least 200 little lumps of

limestone and misshapen bits of gravel. I took slight comfort when she said, drawing deeply on her cigarette and coughing a bit, "I haven't been able to get out and find more since the cancer."

I was sorry for her health problems, but I certainly did not regret the lack of more 'artifacts.' I spent a slow hour looking seriously at each miserable mineral, trying to be polite and encouraging, trying to educate a bit. Friendly Archaeologist: "Oh look, that's a nice fossil, probably a bit of horn coral," and "That one is a piece of granite brought down south by the glaciers, see how it's polished on one side."

Selma picked up one of the rocks: "See how this fits my hand? Your thumb goes right here. I bet they used this for scraping hides."

I restrained an eye-roll. They always say that. If a piece of rock fits the finder's hand, however dull, or ragged, or irregular, or boring, or natural and untouched by human hands it may be, the would-be expert is convinced that they know how it was used. To be fair, some archaeological interpretations are not much more sophisticated, though we DO usually know the difference between a rock and a tool. At some level, though, all artifacts take their glamour from this kind of thinking. Whether you are an academic like me or a farmer like Selma, understanding an arrowhead connects you in some way with that interesting, vaguely imagined ancient life, when monsters such as mammoths ruled the earth, when humans fought for survival with their wits and simple tools.... You would not believe what appears on ebay as a 'genuine Indian thus-and-so.' But that is another story.

Gritting my teeth, I worked my way across the table with Selma, one pebble at a time.

Selma: "Here's a really nice arrowhead."

Me (mentally pulling my hair): "Uh, well, actually... I think it's a bit of slate. That stuff sometimes breaks

with straight edges like that. It doesn't really seem to have been worked on at all. But this one, this shiny stuff is chert, which is what the Indians did make tools out of. See how it fractures with a sharp edge...."

It was a long and dreary slog, and she just wouldn't have any of it. I kept remembering the man who had approached me once with a "Neanderthal necklace"—a group of purely natural fossil bits—who left my office in a huff. Then there was the man who kept trying to publish papers on his collection of obviously faked nineteenth century "ancient carvings," and maintains that the academics are suppressing his great find.

Finally I made my excuses to Selma: "Gotta get back and get ready for classes. Thanks for showing me your stuff..."

We parted on good terms. Although we really didn't do much for each other, I like to hope that I left her feeling that academics aren't too stuck-up to talk to citizens, even if we must be kinda stupid. At the door she closed the episode perfectly. "I do want my stuff taken care of. Do you think anyone at the [Meskwaki Tribe](#) would be interested?" 🌿



THREE POINTS MADE BY THE AUTHOR, ALONG WITH RIVER-ROLLED FLINTS THAT LOOK LIKE ARTIFACTS, AND GRAVEL. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN WHITTAKER

Mammals of the Prairie: American Mink

Neovison vison

The **American mink** is a semi-aquatic animal endemic throughout much of North America. A member of the *Mustelidae* family, it is related to the otter, badger, marten, weasel, ferret, and wolverine, and like them is an aggressive carnivore, hunting rodents, fish, crustaceans, frogs, and birds. Male minks measure from 13 to 18 inches in body length, and weigh one to three pounds, while females usually measure from 12 to 15 inches and weigh between one and two pounds. The mink's long streamlined body allows it to enter the burrows of prey and helps to reduce water resistance while it's swimming.

Though Mustelid species vary greatly in size, minks are typically small animals with short legs, short round ears, and thick fur which tends to be various shades of tawny, from dark to light, with color very evenly distributed over the body and a white chin and lower lip.

Vocalization: The American mink has a variety of sounds in its repertoire, including screams, whining peeps, hisses, squeals, grunts, and cries, and even a sort of "quacking bark."

Click the icon to the right to hear an audio recording of mink vocalizations, as posted by "Mink in My Home," on [Youtube](#).



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEN SAUNDERS II, TAKEN MARCH 18, 2016, AT OTTER CREEK MARSH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA IN TAMA COUNTY, IOWA



Roots Talk! Podcast Episode 5:

“What Local Foods Really Cost”

A Podcast Interview with University of Iowa Associate Professor Brandi Janssen

In the fifth *Roots Talk!* podcast, Rootstalk editors Eva Gemrich and Dru Greenwood interview [Brandi Janssen](#), a Clinical Associate Professor for University of Iowa’s Occupational and Environmental Health Department. Janssen has been committed to helping consumers better understand the complexities of sustainable agriculture, and visited Grinnell’s campus last Spring to give a comprehensive talk about some of her findings. During her presentation she debunked many of the myths we as consumers embrace concerning how healthy and safe the local foods movement really is. Farming is an incredibly strenuous occupation and unfortunately many of the economic, physical, and mental stressors farmers endure are not acknowledged by the very people consuming the fruits of their labor. In order to fully understand the labor that goes into bringing crop from farm to table it is imperative that we learn about what goes on behind the scenes. Janssen goes into detail about the process of accessing labor, how farmer and farmer’s market relationships work, and the alarming ways in which agricultural labor puts farmers at high risk for mental and emotional distress.



PHOTO BY LEIN’ALA VOSS



**Click on the icon above to hear an audio recording of
Episode 5 of *Roots Talk!***



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSHUA LOCKYER

[Joshua Lockyer, Ph.D.](#) is Associate Professor of Anthropology at [Arkansas Tech University](#) and co-editor of *Environmental Anthropology Engaging Ecotopia: Bioregionalism, Permaculture, and Ecovillages*, published as part of the Environmental Anthropology & Ethnobiology series by [Berghahn Books](#). He is on the Boards of the Center for Sustainable and Cooperative Culture at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage, the [Communal Studies Association](#), and the [Center for Communal Studies](#) at the University of Southern Indiana. He has been studying environmentally-focused intentional communities for almost 20 years, including working with Dancing Rabbit over the last ten years. He is working on a book about the commons at 80-year-old [Celo Community](#) in western North Carolina.

Community, Commons, and Ecological Restoration at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage*

BY JOSHUA LOCKYER

They approached land as a commodity that could be owned, a raw material to be manipulated for producing surpluses that would increase personal wealth. This approach is significant because it assumed transformation of the land and its native communities into something defined as useful—a transformation that occurred [on the prairies] more intensely and completely than in any other [ecosystem]. ... settlement-era land speculators applied the same ethic to town development schemes across the [prairies], in hopes of reaping fabulous profits.

While agricultural profits soared and towns coalesced, ... game was depleted, large trees were cleared, native pastures were decimated, waters were sullied, and soils were washed downslope and downstream ... For the most part, these environmental costs went unrecognized or ignored

Cornelia Mutel, *The Emerald Horizon: The History of Nature in Iowa* 2008:15-16.

For over century, North American prairie landscapes have been transformed and degraded by industrial monocrop agriculture, urban and suburban development, the introduction of non-native species, and the suppression of periodic fire. Whether we speak of loss of topsoil, the proliferation of invasive species and disappearing native biodiversity, or the spread of urban sprawl and the destruction of natural habitats, Euro-American communities have not managed prairie ecosystems with an eye to their persistence. The use and treatment of the prairies has proceeded under the assumption that productive human landscapes are

*REFERENCES LISTED IN ENDNOTES

constructed by rearranging, eliminating, and replacing natural ecosystem components in pursuit of short-term financial gain (Mutel 2008).

Over the last two decades, the members of [Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage](#) in Scotland County, Missouri, have experimented with a different approach to using and inhabiting a 280-acre parcel of the prairie landscape. These activists' approach to what Gary Snyder and other bioregionalists call "reinhabitation" is grounded in cooperation

among humans, places a high value on ecological processes and other-than-human inhabitants

[Dancing Rabbit's] approach...is grounded in cooperation among humans, places a high value on ecological processes and other-than-human inhabitants of the prairies, and incorporates restoration ecology practices into community life.

of the prairies, and incorporates restoration ecology practices into community life. These 'Rabbits', as they call themselves, are recreating the commons on the prairies and, in the process, building new identities and a new community for themselves. Their efforts stand in stark contrast to state-based and individualized, market-driven approaches to land management that have dominated the utilization of prairie ecosystems in the United States.

The Commons

In 2009, [Elinor Ostrom](#) won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for the decades of work she spent demonstrating that groups of people around the world can and do sustainably manage natural resources by developing and using their own de facto systems of rules and norms grounded in local cultural and ecological contexts. Summarizing the findings of Ostrom and her colleagues, [David Bollier](#) states, "In a commons, the structural pressures to earn money are reduced and the incentives to take into account subtle, long-term factors are greater. As a social institution, a commons is also more likely to care about the long-term sustainability of a resource than the market, because the very identities and cultures of the commoners are wrapped up in the

management of the resource" (2014:110). Ostrom's findings about the commons contradicted dominant Western ideologies articulated by [Garrett Hardin](#) in his influential essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968). Hardin offered a parable of a group of shepherds grazing sheep on a common pasture wherein every shepherd will inevitably increase his number of animals because while the cost of his adding each animal is distributed among all the shepherds, the benefit is his alone. Har-

din's parable suggested that, in the absence of the incentives of individualized private property or the sanc-

tions of centralized government authorities, humans in communities are inherently selfish, short sighted, and incapable of using resources sustainably over the long term.

Hardin's argument was a cogent and relatively recent manifestation of a longstanding line of thought regarding land management. Translated into policy, including the appropriation and enclosure of Native American prairie commons and the increasing scale, mechanization, and corporatization of Midwestern agriculture, this line of thought has led to a century and a half of private and government mismanagement of the prairies. Indeed, it has led to their near elimination and destruction as described in Connie Mutel's masterful treatise on the prairies, [The Emerald Horizon: The History of Nature in Iowa](#). However, the recent history of the prairies is not only one of destruction and mismanagement. In her book, Mutel also documents multiple public and private initiatives to preserve and restore the prairies, but none of them takes the form of the community-based commons approach that characterizes Dancing Rabbit.

In this article, I explore two decades of common property management and community building on the Missouri prairie by the members of Dancing Rabbit. My

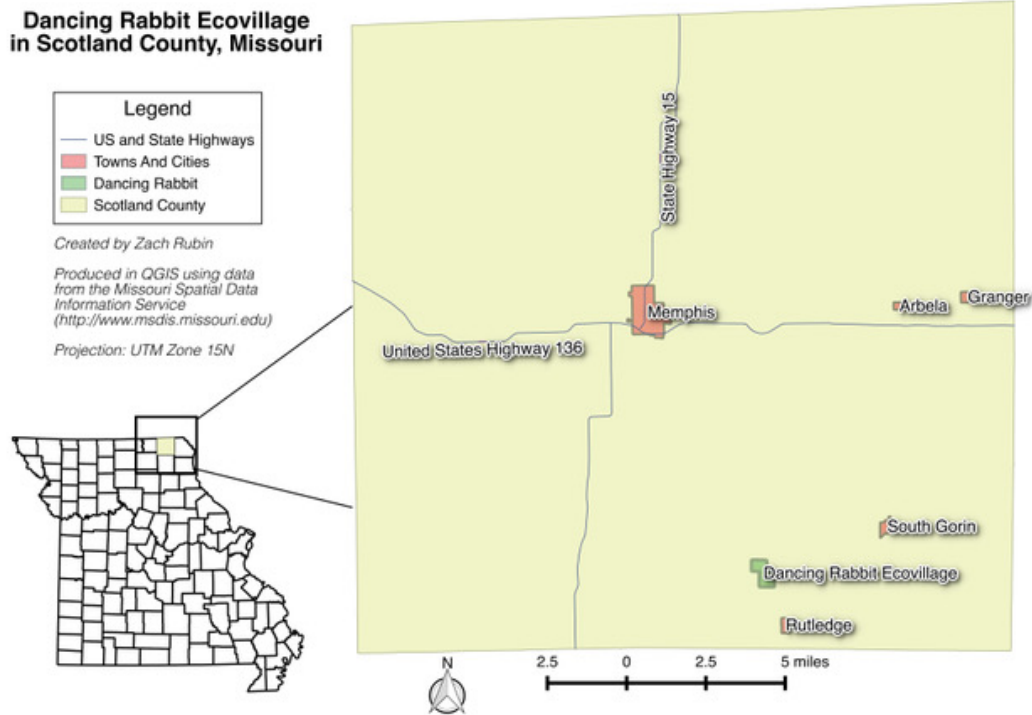


FIGURE 1: DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE LOCATION MAP IN NORTHEASTERN MISSOURI. MAP BY ZACH RUBIN

aims here are twofold. First, I wish to show how a group of ecovillagers is demonstrating that effective commons management is possible today on at least a small portion of the North American prairie. Second, I wish to explore their efforts to simultaneously restore prairie ecosystems and develop productive human landscapes through cooperative stewardship of their collectively held acreage.

Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage

Dancing Rabbit is an intentional community of approximately 60 people, founded in the mid-1990s in Scotland County, northeast Missouri. The nomenclature “ecovillage” is used by many contemporary intentional communities to define their collective identity and indicate their shared commitment to living in more ecologically sustainable ways. The term first appeared in the 1970s, but its popularization is most commonly attributed to a report called “Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities” which was written by Robert and Diane Gilman for the charitable organization [Gaia Trust](#)

in the early 1990s. In that report, the Gilmans defined an ecovillage as “A human scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (cited in Dawson 2006:13). This definition has since been revised and added to multiple times. On its

website, the [Global Ecovillage Network](#), an organization that helps ecovillages around the world network with one another, states that “[a]n ecovillage is an intentional, traditional or urban community that is consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes in all four dimensions of sustainability (social, culture, ecology, economy into a whole systems design) to regenerate its social and natural environment.” In general, deliberate, collaborative, multi-dimensional approaches to living in more ecologically sustainable manners are defining features of ecovillages, especially in more affluent countries of the world.

From the beginning, the Rabbits adopted this mission statement: “To create a society, the size of a small town or village, made up of individuals and communities of various sizes and social structures, which allows and encourages its members to live sustainably. To encourage this sustainable society to grow to have the size and recognition necessary to have an influence on the global community by example, education, and

research”. The community includes the local ecosystem in its definition of the term ‘sustainable’. As the community’s mission statement goes on to state, living sustainably involves living “in such a manner that, within the defined area, no resources are consumed faster than their natural replenishment, and the enclosed system can continue indefinitely without degradation of its internal resource base or the standard of living of the people and the rest of the ecosystem within it.” Deliberately situating themselves relative to both the local and the global, both the human and the other-than-human, is a defining feature of these Rabbits’ commons endeavor.

For the last decade, I have been part of a team of researchers that has been working with the Rabbits to help them assess their progress toward sustainable living. We have done this by measuring their consumption of resources and their experienced well-being, and comparing these measures with those of mainstream American society. Our results indicate that, in many key areas, they are living on about 10 percent of the resources used by the average American, while maintaining about the same experienced quality of life [see [Lockyer 2017](#) for a full analysis and interpretation of our results].

As part of this work, I also turned my attention to the community’s land use and land management practices, along with the ways in which the community is transforming its collectively held landscape. One of the community’s goals is to restore a parcel of degraded farmland as a functioning prairie ecosystem that is able to sustainably provide for many of their needs while also creating habitat for the many other-than-human prairie inhabitants that used to be so ubiquitous here. In this article, I make no attempt to quantitatively measure their progress either at providing for their own needs from their land or at restoring prairie ecosystems; rather, my aim is simply to describe their efforts to steward their land.

Dancing Rabbit’s approach to land management and intentional community-building is what Bollier and others call an act of “commoning”. Like the members of most contemporary intentional communities, the Rabbits are activating the power of social cooperation to build community, achieve goals, and manage resources. Dancing Rabbit’s commons system is manifested via a number of components. These include a community land trust model which replaces individ-



FIGURE 2: DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE GROUP PHOTO. THOSE IN THE PICTURE INCLUDE COMMUNITY MEMBERS, PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS OF JOINING THE COMMUNITY, AND OTHERS WHO WERE PRESENT AS PART OF DANCING RABBIT’S EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAMS. THEY’RE POSING IN FRONT OF THE CARS THAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHARE AS PART OF THE DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE VEHICLE COOPERATIVE. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCING RABBIT



FIGURE 3: DANCING RABBIT'S LAND IN A SATELLITE IMAGE FROM 1995. IMAGE BY EMILY BEAHM WITH GOOGLE EARTH IMAGERY AND BASED ON AN ORIGINAL VERSION BY DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

ualized speculation on land for short term economic profit with collective stewardship of land for long term ecological sustainability. It also includes a community governance system where, through a variety of forums and processes of grassroots democracy, people work together to make decisions about and develop policies pertaining to use of the land they own together.

Dancing Rabbit's land is collectively owned and managed through a 501(c)2 land trust and an associated 501(c)3 research and education nonprofit. Both of these organizations are overseen by a board of directors (on which I serve), but the day-to-day management of land and community rests primarily with the Rabbits who live on the land. The whole community makes decisions and formulates rules concerning land use, including the long-term leasing of individual land parcels to individuals or small groups within the community for residences, businesses, and food production. As their website says: "The land trust model takes land out of the specu-

lative market while still providing an ownership-like option for our members. Each individual or household can lease a small plot of land for a monthly fee. ...Leaseholders do not own their land, but do own any improvements on their land, including any buildings, orchards, gardens, etc. These can be sold to another member if someone leaves the community or moves to a different leasehold. Since members can't sell their land, there is no ability to speculate and land can be a permanently affordable resource..." (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage 2015).

Further, each leasehold is designed and used according to a collaborative ecological design process: "Each new leasehold must go through a community approval process. The community attempts to guide new members through an ecological

design process to make sure they are taking into account both the needs of their household or garden and the effects it will have on their neighbors and our land. Our goal is to allow great flexibility for each member to realize their vision of a sustainable dwelling or garden while also fitting their goals into the larger design goals of the village." (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage 2015). The community balances many priorities in its approach to using and managing the landscape with long term, collective sustainability deliberately taking precedence over short-term, individualized profit.

As the community's population has grown, its governance system has evolved, from full group consensus decision making to a representative village council whose members render decisions and sometimes delegate deliberation to committees, which in turn report back to the council or community as a whole. There is also a land use planning and policy component, over-

seen by a committee that, with community feedback, designs land use rules. In addition, the community reserves several days a year for a retreat where all community members gather to discuss and update community issues, including its relationship with its land.

The overall goal is to give community members ample opportunity to actively participate in manage-

ment of commonly held resources. This is an ongoing process of learning, experimenting, and adjusting their practices to achieve desirable results relative to the Rabbits' overarching mission and goals: "to design a resource-minimizing and community-promoting, pedestrian-scaled village that minimizes our footprint on our land to leave space for agriculture and wildlife habitat."

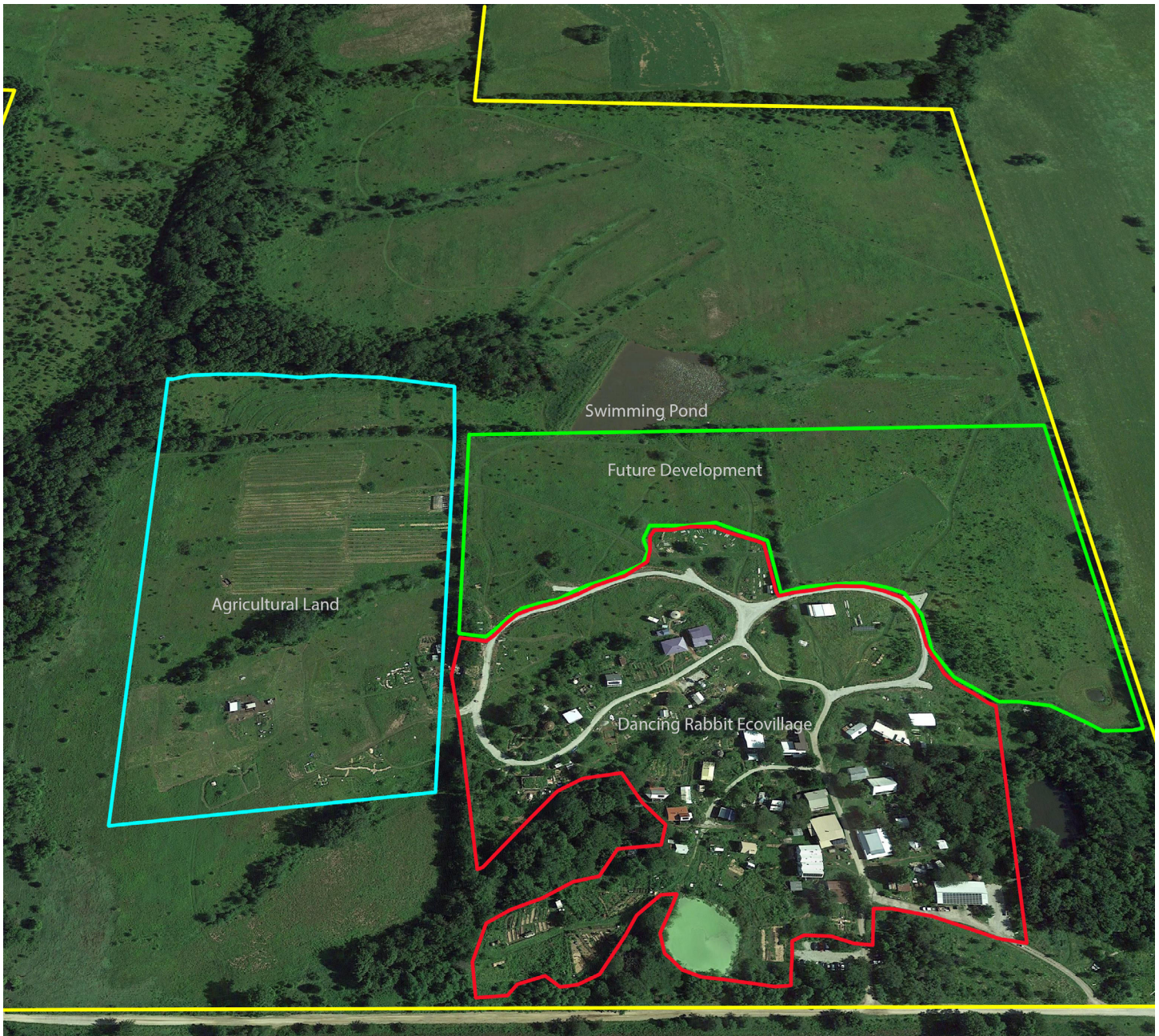


FIGURE 4: DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE LAND USE PLANNING MAP, SHOWING A PORTION OF THEIR 280-ACRE PARCEL AND INCLUDING LAND DESIGNATED FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE URBAN AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. IMAGE BY EMILY BEAHM WITH GOOGLE EARTH IMAGERY AND BASED ON AN ORIGINAL VERSION BY DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

(Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage 2018)

To balance community-building and the meeting of human needs with long-term sustainable land management, Dancing Rabbit has adopted a number of initiatives and areas of focus. These include dense urban design, agricultural production and development, and prairie ecosystem restoration and reforestation.

Urban Development

As Connie Mutel indicates in *The Emerald Horizon*, the parceling of prairie landscapes into individualized portions for agriculture and urban development has been a key driver of the prairie ecosystem destruction. When Dancing Rabbit acquired its acreage in the mid-1990s, the land was a post-industrial farmscape that had not been farmed for over ten years and included only a few buildings left over from previous decades of industrial farming.

In order to allow the majority of the community's land to heal, the Rabbits agreed to build their community infrastructure on only a small portion of their

land. Current urban development is contained within approximately twenty acres, with plans to expand to forty acres (see Figure 4). In the early years, the challenge was simply to provide housing, but throughout Dancing Rabbit's history, community members have paid attention not only to their physical footprint on their land, but also to the embedded energy contained in the building materials they use. In addition to having a small geographic footprint, houses are constructed using a variety of natural and green building techniques, often incorporating locally available materials such as straw bales, clay, and reclaimed lumber. As a result, a dense cluster of eclectic buildings has grown up on the southeast corner of the land.

Through its land use planning and leaseholding process, the community continues to update and revise policies regarding the use of space, including the placement of foot and cart paths (vehicles are kept on the village perimeter, except under exceptional circumstances, often involving construction), the orientation of buildings to roads and to each other, and the incorporation of green space into the urban area. The overall

aim is to create a densely populated urban village on one small corner of the acreage.

Planning for the development of a commons in a way that considers the needs of both current and future residents is, as the community's website indicates "[a]n ongoing challenge," given "the tension between overarching design and organic growth." The website cites "[the] need to have a plan for the future that holds our values and vision, while also meeting the needs of the current community members. It can be tricky at times to plug each individual's or family's vision into the village plan and still promote the long term patterns for growth we are hoping for." (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage 2015) This tension between growth and devel-



FIGURE 5: RESIDENTIAL BUILDING NAMED "LOBELIA" AT DANCING RABBIT. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

opment on the one hand and sustainable use on the other lies at the heart of the challenge of successful commoning. It will be interesting to see how the Rabbits address this challenge as their community grows over coming years.

Agricultural Development

As the Rabbits increasingly met their needs for shelter during the early years, many of them were able to turn their focus to producing food for themselves and their community. This has entailed rehabilitating land that, while fallow since 1987, was degraded by decades of industrial corn and hog farming. In addition to residential leaseholds, the community has garden leaseholds where people produce food for the households and the kitchen cooperatives they are part of, as well as commercial agricultural leaseholds where people produce food for sale to their fellow community members and residents of surrounding areas. Currently, the members of the village have designated fifty acres for food production, much of which is yet to be developed.

Food produced using standard industrial methods employed on private property, but organized according to policies designed by centralized state governments, has been one of the main drivers of unsustainable use of prairie landscapes. In contrast, Ostrom and her colleagues have documented more sustainable land use practices and food production systems in many successful commons institutions. At Dancing Rabbit, agricultural development proceeds according to models much more in the latter vein than in the former. The

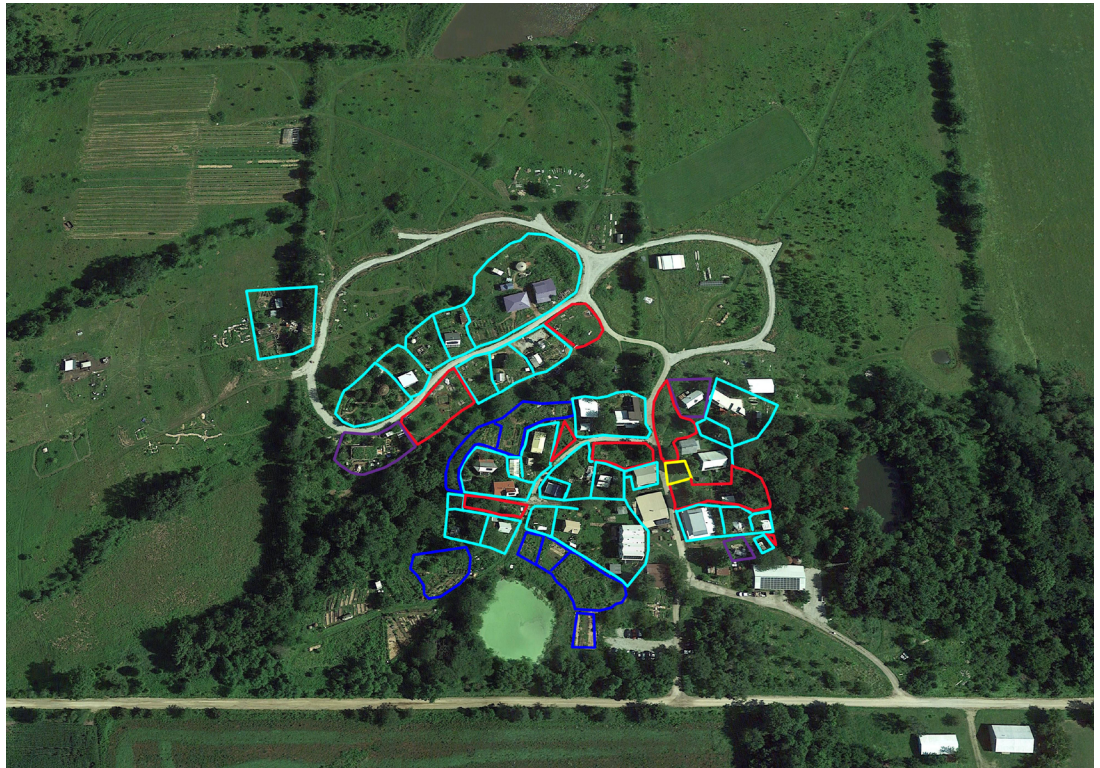


FIGURE 6: SATELLITE IMAGE FROM 2015 SHOWING DANCING RABBIT'S CURRENT URBAN AREA. CURRENTLY OCCUPIED LEASEHOLDS ARE OUTLINED IN LIGHT BLUE AND PURPLE. AVAILABLE RESIDENTIAL LEASEHOLDS ARE OUTLINED IN RED. RESIDENTIAL GARDEN LEASEHOLDS ARE OUTLINED IN DARK BLUE. IMAGE BY EMILY BEAHM WITH GOOGLE EARTH IMAGERY AND BASED ON AN ORIGINAL VERSION BY DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE

scale of production at Dancing Rabbit is smaller and more diverse, often integrating multiple species into a field and sometimes, as in the case of forest gardens, integrating wild and domesticated species into the same plot. Permaculture, a design philosophy for human food production that is based on working with natural forces rather than against them, underlies many Rabbits' approach to food production. While such systems have the direct and immediate benefit of producing food for people, they are also designed with an eye to interconnections and indirect benefits such as fostering habitat for wildlife that may be hunted, and to restoring soil fertility over the long-term.

A small number of Rabbits incorporate rotational grazing into their approach to food production and land management. While many Rabbits choose to be vegan or vegetarian as part of their sustainable living philosophy, a number of them recognize that prairie ecosystems are particularly appropriate contexts for the production of animal protein. They deliberately use



FIGURE 7: RESIDENTIAL GARDEN LEASEHOLD, SITUATED NEAR RESIDENCE AT DANCING RABBIT. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSHUA LOCKYER

animal agriculture in an attempt to mimic the role of grazing herbivores such as bison in the Pre-Colombian prairies. It is here that the Rabbits' approach to food production overlaps with their efforts at prairie ecosystem restoration.

Prairie Ecosystem Restoration

Of Dancing Rabbit's 280 total acres, 160 acres are managed through the federal government's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Administered by the Farm Service Agency, CRP pays farmers and landowners to remove environmentally sensitive tracts of land from agricultural production with the goals of improving water quality, preventing soil erosion, and preventing the loss of wildlife habitat. Most of Dancing Rabbit's efforts at prairie ecosystem restoration are undertaken on its CRP acreage.

Thus, in addition to categories of land specifically set aside for urban development and agriculture, Dancing Rabbit has a category of land labelled 'Prioritized for Ecosystem Health'. Land management which prioritizes ecosystem health is part of the community's efforts to balance the needs of the human and other-than-human inhabitants of their land. According to the community's website, "This is the area in which we will encourage and assist in ecosystem health, stability and resiliency. This area consists of all Dancing Rabbit property not... [designated for urban or agricultural development]. We expect to establish native species, stabilize soil, encourage diversity and control invasive non-native species.... We've planted native grasses on over 15 acres and have been maintaining them

with regular prescribed burns, an essential part of the prairie's life cycle. We hope to rebuild the diversity of plots by replanting patches of the few native wildflowers and grasses that can still be found in northeast Missouri. While we do not work directly on wildlife management of native animals, our land provides a sanctuary from the expanding farms, roads and towns elsewhere." (Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage 2015)

Dancing Rabbit members have undertaken to inform themselves about their land's history and the destructive transformation of the North American prairies in general. The community's common library includes dozens of books focused on related subjects, and the community's approach to healing the land is a frequent topic of conversation. During an interview with me as part of our research project, one community member described a meeting with a long-time local farmer who informed him that Dancing Rabbit's land was "proba-

bly the most over-grazed, over-farmed piece of land in the county.” For many decades, the land was used for industrial scale commodity food production, primarily for corn and hogs, which eliminated most natural components of the prairies and degraded the soil. Studies of attempts to allow prairies to recover from industrial farming show that prairies can be so degraded, they often only further degenerate when left to the natural succession process; prairies require human intervention for successful conservation and restoration (Mutel 2008). Dancing Rabbit therefore desires to actively steward the healing of the land rather than passively abandon it to natural processes of succession. While not all Rabbits agree on the best approach to doing this, the community’s land-use planning committee and Dancing Rabbit’s forums for collective governance provide venues for decision making about the community’s continuously evolving approach to prairie stewardship and restoration, which at this writing includes in-progress restoration of over 15 acres of native grasslands.

Another collective initiative undertaken by Rabbits, with the aim of restoring prairie ecosystem health and expanding native biodiversity, involves reforestation. Original prairies in this part of the country included oak-dominated woodlands, especially along watercourses, where the effects of natural and man-made fire were minimized and where more moisture was available (Mutel 2008). These woodlands were cut back as industrial agricultural fields expanded, starting especially in the mid-twentieth century. Over the years, the Rabbits have planted over 15,000 individual trees of species native to the prairies while also removing invasive woody species by using controlled burns and other methods.

One Dancing Rabbit member who is heavily involved in the land use planning committee has estimated that the community is gaining, on average, an acre of forest each year through the expansion of remnant woodlands and the maturation of tree plantings. This has resulted in some of

Dancing Rabbit’s land falling out of eligibility for the Conservation Reserve Program, as forested land is not in a condition to go back into agricultural production.

During my visit to Dancing Rabbit in the summer of 2018, it became clear that unprecedented drought conditions were driving decisions that would have unforeseen impacts on the community’s efforts at prairie ecosystem restoration. In July 2018, the community granted a neighboring farmer’s request to use tractors to produce desperately needed hay for his cattle from the 160 acres of land which the community had allocated to the Conservation Reserve Program. Some community members were dubious about the impact this would have on their ecosystem restoration efforts, while others suggested that such haying might actually do a



FIGURE 8: COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL LEASEHOLD AT DANCING RABBIT WITH HOOP HOUSE AND VINEYARDS IN THE BACKGROUND. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOSHUA LOCKYER



FIGURE 9: SMALL SCALE, ROTATIONAL ANIMAL AGRICULTURE AT DANCING RABBIT ECOVILLAGE. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCING RABBIT.

better job of removing invasive species than would the community's infrequent controlled burns. Whatever the case, this recent development in the community's relationship with its land drives home two points that I wish to make as I move toward my conclusions.

The impacts of global climate change will undoubtedly introduce unpredictable variables into efforts to restore prairie ecosystems, whether at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage or elsewhere. Furthermore, while the Rabbits do their best to systematically monitor the outcomes of their landscape management endeavors, they are exceptionally busy with making a living for themselves and would benefit from more involvement by qualified scientists who have expertise in these areas. Concurrently, scientists also stand to gain through analysis of what is a living experiment in land management and prairie ecosystem restoration.

Discussion

During two centuries of Euro-American colonization, the prairies were largely destroyed through processes of agricultural and urban development. The community at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage is trying to restore a small portion of the prairies while also producing food and developing an urban area on its parcel of degraded prairie farmland. The community's practices of agricultural and urban development, quite different from those so predominantly employed elsewhere in

the prairie region, are worthy of closer examination and analysis. In its almost twenty years of existence, Dancing Rabbit has made significant changes in the surrounding physical landscape. Through cooperative and individual endeavor, a mostly uninhabited 280-acre tract of degraded farmland has become a patchwork of regenerating prairie ecosystems, a developing urban area, and a variety of edible landscapes. All of these changes have taken place as the community used a land trust model and grassroots democracy to manage its collective relationship with the landscape while conducting an experiment in common property stewardship.

How successful has Dancing Rabbit been in its aims to transform its landscape into a restored, diverse prairie ecosystem while also engaging in productive activities that met human needs? The current answer is almost certainly "only partially." However, just as the destruction of the prairies was a long-term project, so will be their restoration. As a researcher and Dancing Rabbit board member with long-term familiarity with the community, I aim to help develop future collaborative research projects at the community. Such projects may include helping them to monitor ecological restoration—soil testing, grass, flower, & tree species inventories, and wildlife monitoring, among other activities directly relevant to prairie ecosystem restoration. At the same time, we will continue to monitor if and how the Rabbits are able to meet their needs from the land in sustainable ways that lessen their impact on ecosystems elsewhere.

How much food, fuel, fiber, and building materials are they able to harvest from the land, while continuing their efforts toward prairie ecosystem restoration? Can the Rabbits find a sustainable balance between development for a growing community and ecological restoration? Only time will tell, but I hope that ongoing research can lend a crucial hand in helping the community achieve its goals and demonstrate that people in modern western societies can still find ways to cooperatively and sustainably manage the commons. Scientists with relevant expertise who are interested in undertak-

ing research at Dancing Rabbit are encouraged to contact me at jlockyer@atu.edu.

Conclusion

I'd like to close with a quotation from [Wendell Berry](#), a poet, farmer, professor and philosopher who has spent much of his life reflecting on what is required for a healthy relationship between people and land in American culture, and particularly in the agricultural Midwest. Although Berry uses the term 'local culture' in this quotation, I think he is really talking about a 'local commons' such as the one Dancing Rabbit is creating.

The loss of local culture is, in part, a practical loss and an economic one. For one thing, such a culture contains, and conveys to succeeding generations, the history of the use of the place and the knowledge of how the place may be lived in and used. For another, the patterns of reminding implies affection for the place and respect for it, and so, finally, the local culture will carry the knowledge of how the place may be well and lovingly used, and also the implicit command to use it only well and lovingly. The only true and effective 'operator's manual for spaceship earth' is not a book that any

human will ever write; it is hundreds of thousands of local cultures.

Wendell Berry 1990: 166.

Dancing Rabbit is only in the beginning stages of creating its local commons. The community's acts of commoning involve developing knowledge, respect, and affection for its place and its landscape so that it may be lived in "well and lovingly used" across the generations. Conducting research at Dancing Rabbit over the last ten years, I have seen this creation emerging in the way community members spend time deliberately observing, interacting with, learning from, and stewarding both their landscape and their community. I see it in the fact that they often name their buildings after native prairie species that may disappear if their habitats are not restored. But perhaps the best measure of their success or failure in creating a local commons will only be revealed in the actions and choices of the younger generation currently being raised in this community and on its common land. 🌿



FIGURE 10: DANCING RABBIT CHILDREN, HEADED FOR THE SWIMMING POND. PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCING RABBIT.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT AND SARAH KARGOL

Jumping into the Void: Creating a Community Art Center in Oskaloosa, Iowa

AN INTERVIEW WITH MATT AND SARAH KARGOL

In July of 2018, Rootstock Associate Editor Vincent Benloch spoke with Matt and Sarah Kargol, founders of the non-profit [Fine Arts and Cultural Events \(FACE\)](#) of Mahaska County, Iowa, housed at Oskaloosa's [Art Center and Studios](#).

[Matt Kargol](#) is a sculptor and native of Oskaloosa, Iowa, where he teaches Art at the local high school.

[Sarah Kargol](#) was born in Colorado and raised in eastern Iowa. She received her bachelor's degree in studio art from the University of Northern Iowa in 2000, and is an award-winning mixed media artist with artwork in permanent collections throughout the Midwest and Southeast United States and Canada.

Speaking about her process, she says: "In developing my own voice through art, my love for ephemera and all things dusty, forgotten, vintage, and quirky has grown. I create small pieces and individual parts out of these papers, fabrics, and threads from society's past treasures and assembling them together. Layering them with other individual pieces and parts opens up new conversations about some of our shared humanity's weirdest and worst ideas and highlights our beautiful collective movement forward."

Sarah is co-founder of the Oskaloosa Art Center and Studios and serves as the Director of the center, where she coordinates classes and events. She also serves as a board member of Fine Arts and Cultural Events of Mahaska County (FACE), which aims to "provide excep-



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATT AND SARAH KARGOL

tional arts education and opportunities in order to make art accessible and exciting to our community.”

The couple met while at [University of Northern Iowa](#). After spending three years in the South pursuing their artistic careers, they decided to return to Matt’s hometown to raise their four boys.

Upon arriving, they discovered that their new, rural community in the heart of Mahaska County had a void they felt they could fill. We talked with them on a summer afternoon about how they’ve been trying to do just that over the past two years.

Rootstalk: We’d be curious to hear a little more about what’s going on in [Oskaloosa](#) right now for you, what programs you’re offering, and the trajectory for your work.

Sarah: We opened the art center four years ago on the east side of town, and for the most part I think it was a successful endeavor. I know for a fact that Oskaloosa never had an art center before, ever in its history, which kind of surprised me. We opened up a brick and mortar space where we could offer classes and whatnot, and about a year and a half or almost two years ago this space was offered to us by [Musco Lighting](#) [a multinational company headquartered in Oskaloosa]. [Musco CEO] Joe Crookham knew that we needed a better location, something where more residents would know that we have this kind of service available. They renovated this building and donated all their labor and materials, and we opened a year ago last April. It’s just been a killer year. It’s been just amazing. I think people now can happen

by us and kind of discover that we have an art center and find out what kinds of things the art center can offer the community. We have lots of classes and activities, and different events for everybody.

Matt: We have the gallery shows.

Sarah: Yeah, we have a gallery, classrooms, ceramics, and printmaking. This outer space area that we’re in is where we do performances and open mic nights where people can come and do whatever they want on the stage—you know, family friendly.



EVENING AT THE OSKALOOSA ART CENTER AND STUDIOS IN THE TOWN’S HISTORIC DOWNTOWN DISTRICT. PHOTOS BY BRIANA BARTLETT UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

Matt: [Oskaloosa Community Theater](#) comes and performs here.

Sarah: Yes, they do. We also put up a temporary wall where people can come and hang up their art for a night during “Open Wall/Open Stage” once a month. I think that it’s beneficial to get people to put their art in front of people, I think that’s a big step. We’re just super excited about the growth that’s taken place in the last year. Especially with this sculpture tour that’s happening and the things the Art Center is doing, like our involvement with the city as we implement our public art plan.

Matt: We’ve got the sculpture studio that we’re working on getting open too.

Sarah: The art center is expanding, so we’ve been al-

lowed use of another building down the street on A Avenue. That will be our sculpture annex. We’ll be teaching three dimensional classes there like metal fabrication, welding, I’m not sure if we’ll do any woodworking there because of the welding, you don’t want that fire hazard, but we might offer some wood classes, we’ll see. We’re hoping that we outgrow that space quickly and are able to offer glass blowing or move the ceramics classes that way. So more three dimensional that way and two dimensional in this space.

Matt: One of the cool things with the art center and the sculpture annex is that people in the community will not only be able to learn how to do these things, but will then have a facility where they can do these things. It’s really hard to set up a studio yourself. You need equipment that costs a lot and takes up a lot of room. Having that space where people can have studio time and just come and create it will be pretty unique in Iowa. I don’t know if there is another sculpture community or sculpture studio in the whole state.

Sarah: So, that’s our trajectory. We have big plans. Probably bigger than we can chew off by ourselves, and we know that but I think the bigger we think and the bigger we dream, the bigger strides we make here in Oskaloosa.

Matt: I think the biggest thing we need right now is to increase our people-power.

Sarah: Our volunteer base is very small.

Matt: We need more people involved. The more people we can get involved, the more things we can make happen. When we have five to seven people doing every-



A GALLERY SHOW AT THE OSKALOOSA ART CENTER AND STUDIOS. PHOTO BY SARAH KARGOL

thing you can only do so much. If we could get 20 people, that impact just magnifies.

Rootstalk: You mentioned this public art plan. How are you connecting with local funding sources or how are you planning to implement it?

Sarah: When we moved to Oskaloosa we noticed there was kind of an art void. Matt is looking at things from a bigger perspective, I don't know, he's got this huge dream for Oskaloosa. I'm talking huge, like this is going to be an art mecca someday. What he did was he actually sat down and wrote a public art plan for the city's use—but it didn't go that way, so we're holding on to it and using it ourselves.

Matt: There's a lot of elements to it, and really, the sculpture tour is the first step in that. For the sculpture tour we were able to get seed money—grant money from the Golden Goose club here in town—which is a hundred women who put a hundred dollars down each quarter to fund a specific event.

Sarah: It's just a grassroots group of women that just pull their money and then vote on where it goes in their community. For example, we got seed money for the sculpture tour, but the next time I think the police got new body cameras. They fund all types of stuff in Oskaloosa. I think it's a unique group and it's a really amazing funding source.

Matt: Now, the impact on the community is huge. People come to Oskaloosa now and go, wow, this is an art community because there's art around.

We call it the sculpture tour and it really does act like a tour. If someone were to go to each location of a sculpture they would learn a lot about the community because the sculptures are placed in locations where there's significant history. Those are places that you wouldn't go to if



"ANYWHERE BUT HERE," BY NATHAN S. PIERCE

you didn't know there was history there but you start to learn about the community that way. It really helps engage the community and visitors too. So that's the first step.

Sarah: Phase one!

Matt: Phase one. We're looking at murals on buildings, also some street murals. There's just a whole list of stuff that we want to do, but you know, we've got to take it in steps and make sure our funding sources are secure for what we're doing before we add something else to it.

Rootstalk: You mentioned there was an art void here. We're curious—with the schools and the local education system here, how does this connect with education? Do you get any support from either high schools or middle schools, or [William Penn University](#)? Have you been able to draw them in?

Matt: We're trying to draw them in. With me teaching at the high school, I give additional credit for going to art openings and participating in these things. There's art in the classroom and then there's art out in the community that's happening. We do stuff in the classroom and we learn,

and that's great, but then there's this whole art world that we're trying to create here and that we're trying to bring to Oskaloosa. Having those experiences is different than sitting in the classroom. I grew up here and I loved art and I went to school for art, but I went to college having never been to an art gallery. It wasn't available to me. So when I moved back here to teach, that was one of my goals—to make sure these kids can't say they didn't have that opportunity, so that the opportunity now exists.

When we first changed out some of the sculptures we were in the square watching, and there were some people walking down the street and they stopped and were looking at all the sculp-



"CULTURAL PEDESTRIANS," BY SUE QUINLAN

tures and they were talking. I have no idea what they were saying, but that was a conversation that wouldn't have happened otherwise. It sparked something. I don't know if they liked it or disliked it, but that doesn't really matter. The fact is that they were contemplating something that they wouldn't have contemplated before and so their world has expanded.

Rootstalk: We're curious what each of your individual philosophies or approaches to art are both in your practice and in your work in the community? How has that changed or developed as you've been working here?

Matt: Having the support of the art center has made me kind of get with the game a bit more and get in the studio a bit, you know, because it's available. Before I was working out of a one car garage with all my stuff and I couldn't use half of it. Now that I have a space to work it's a lot more convenient.

When we moved here, we'd been in a lot of other towns. We'd been in Clemson, South Carolina but we had a studio in Greenville, SC. Greenville has done a whole re-development based on the arts. It's been rated one of the most beautiful cities in the South, and it is beautiful. They've developed the riverfront with art studios. So there's a hotel and restaurants up above, but it's all studios along the river and it's just beautiful. They've really embraced their artists. They have art walks, they have studio tours, they have all this stuff and coming from an environment where there's a good number of artists to a place where there really wasn't.



"FLIGHT," BY HILDE DEBRUYNE

There's not that community here. That's part of my vision, is that we keep building our facilities up so that artists are going to want to be here. I know when I graduated from college there was no way I could've set up a studio myself. You don't have the resources to do that. But if you could come to Oskaloosa, and you're a sculptor and there's already a studio set up then you can kind of integrate into that. This is a great place to get started. It's fairly cheap to live here, you got a studio to work from, and then we're starting to build that community.

Sarah: My perspective from the art center point of view was a little different. I work with a lot of youth, a lot of young kids. I think that's going to help, you know not immediately, but it's building a population that appreciates art, does art, and knows that it's valuable in all sorts of ways, educationally or emotionally art is just a good thing. I don't want to put down my town here—so be careful with what you write—but I know that Oskaloosa isn't too educated on the arts. And I feel like our focus on education and exposure is going to help. Especially this next generation that's coming up. Maybe [art is] not going to be this foreign thing. The longer we're here, the more of an impact we're going to have. This is a safe space.

Matt: I like to think we've given a home to a lot of kids where they can feel comfortable. There's people, not just kids, that go through all kinds of things in their lives and sometimes the world is kind of cruel and not accepting of people who maybe are a little different. Art is all about being different. We've really found that a lot of the community who sometimes is on the fringe have really embraced the art center and made it their second home. A lot of kids who'll just come and hang out and it's like, "ok, man, that's cool."

I do sculptures so I'm always trying to balance what I do. I like to do big stuff but big stuff is



"ANGLES, SHADOWS, REACHING," BY BILL MCGRATH

hard to move, and hard to sell, and hard to do stuff with. There's constant struggle there when I want to make big stuff but then I realize I've got to make smaller stuff and when I can put it on the wall that's even better because people have space on walls, they don't necessarily have space out in the three dimensional world. So, those are things that always push and pull me with my art. With the sculpture too, I wanted to have a place where I could also show my work. You know, if I can't show my work in my own town then it's a problem. It wasn't necessarily about me, but it was about....

Matt: Going forward, we want to start a residency program because we only can teach so many things to people who are in this community, we only know how to teach so many things.

There's artists doing all kinds of wonderful things, and if we can bring them here for a couple weeks, a month, a few months, however it works out and they could work through the art

There's artists doing all kinds of wonderful things and if we can bring them here...and they could work through the art center... that just exposes our community to more opportunities and more ways of working...

Sarah: It was about a passion!

Matt: I love sculptures, and if I love it, somebody else was going to love it.

Sarah: And people do.

Matt: So we might as well share it.

Sarah: I think that's key to what's going on in Oskaloosa. I don't want to point at one person, but he's been this push for the art center, he's been the push for the sculpture tour, our public art plan. He's been the guy who's like, "this is what we need," so he lights the fire under us, under our board or gives us something to chew on so we can move forward in what we provide the community. So Matt's passion for 3D or metal fabrication or any sort of sculpture really has fueled getting the art center going, this sculpture annex going, the sculpture tour, I mean all of it. I want to say we've all worked together to get this going and up off the ground but Matt's really been the ignition point.

center, teach a class here and there, do their practice, that just exposes our community to more opportunities and more ways of working that we can't necessarily give them right now. I do metal

fabrication sculpture work, I don't do figurative bronze work. I wouldn't have a clue. That's something that I know people in the community identify with as sculpture, these figurative bronzes-realistic-type-things, that you make out of clay and then cast. We need to bring in an artist who does that, so that it's something we can get started. Once people learn it then they can develop it here and we can keep bringing people back.

Rootstalk: You mentioned that you're from Oskaloosa originally....

Sarah: I grew up in the Cedar Rapids area, actually. I moved there when I was eight, and I was born in Colorado, but I don't really remember that. We met at University of Northern Iowa, in our Education class, and got married shortly after that.

Matt: We both went to UNI. Then I taught at different places.

Sarah: Taught high school.

Matt: Taught high school. And then went back to graduate school after I got my BA and MA at UNI. Then I went to graduate school at Clemson University. Got my MFA there. Then I taught in South Dakota for four years which was very....

Sarah: It was difficult in a lot of ways.

Matt: It was difficult. It didn't match us very well. So then I resigned from there and we went and did art full time for three years.

Sarah: I'm a mixed media artist, and I was doing really well, really well. And then we moved down to South Carolina in 2009 which is when the market just bottomed out. We did art full time for three years which was... and I tell people this... it was great and at the same time the hardest thing I'd ever done.

Matt: It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....

Sarah: It's really true. We had four kids and no money. The power kept getting shut off, Christmas pres-

ents were being donated to us, I mean it was really difficult with the kids, but at the same time we were doing, you know, what we were put on this earth to do, which is to make art and bring beauty into the world. So we had to make a tough choice then.

So Matt came out one day and said his old high school art teacher was retiring and he asked if he should apply, and I was like, "I don't want to move to Oskaloosa, but if you want to apply, it's not like we would have to move there." He applied, and then he got an interview. I was like, "just interview it's not like you have to take the job." But then he interviewed, and they offered him the job, so when someone offers you a job and you don't have food in the fridge, you kind of have to take it, right? Especially with our children. We wanted to set a good example for them, that's why we went and did art full time. We wanted to say, "look, you can follow your dreams,

you can be who you want to be or who you're



"ANGELE," BY CHRIS WUBBENA

made to be in this world,” but it wasn’t that easy.

Matt: You know, we’re artists. Artists need a community to work from and to work around other artists and creative people. It’s interesting because I always think of myself as an artist first and then I teach after that or I advocate for the arts or I do all these other things, but I’m always an artist first. And then I look at some of my artist friends who all they do is art, and I’ve never been able to just do art, I’ve always done these other things to try and build the arts, and I don’t know where that comes from. I don’t know, it’s just part of how I operate, I guess. I guess it’s because when you realize that art is so great, you want to share that, you want to make sure that everyone understands that, knows how wonderful it is. And

when you look around and realize no one else is doing it or only a few people are doing it, you realize: if someone’s going to do it, it’s going to be me.

Sarah: Right. See a need, fill a need. There was a definite need here, so we jumped in. 🌿



“WHERE WE GOIN’,” BY JACOB MCGINN

Mammals of the Prairie: Virginia Opossum

Didelphis virginiana

The **Virginia opossum**—also known as the North American opossum—is the only marsupial north of Mexico. It’s solitary, nocturnal, about the size of a house cat and all-too-familiar to many homeowners (along with the racoon) as a highly successful raider of garbage cans.

The opossum has a number of unique physical characteristics. In addition to the brooding pouch it shares in common with other marsupials, it has 50 teeth—more than any other North American land mammal—opposable, clawless thumbs on their rear limbs, and a naked, prehensile tail. The animal is thought to have evolved in South America, but migrated north during the [Great American Interchange](#). Until recently, its range extended from Central America to the norther U.S., however climate change appears to be further extending its range into southern Canada.

Vocalization: The opossum has a voice appropriate to its retiring nature. Opossums are mostly quiet, but if provoked will hiss or make a grinding cry of warning.

Click the icon at right to hear an audio recording of the Virginia opossum, captured by Vladimir Bursh, and posted on [Youtube](#).



PHOTO COURTESY OF KEN SAUNDERS II, TAKEN NOVEMBER 28, 2008, AT ROCK CREEK LAKE STATE PARK IN JASPER COUNTY, IOWA.





PHOTO BY DAN WELK FOR CLICK PHOTOGRAPHY. EXCEPT WHERE NOTED, ALL OTHER IMAGES COURTESY OF DARTANYAN BROWN

[Dartanyan Brown](#) is an Iowa musician, journalist and educator with a 40-year career in the arts. He is an inductee into the [Iowa Blues](#) and [Rock 'n Roll](#) Halls Of Fame. Dartanyan and his late father Ellsworth Brown are both inductees of the [Iowa Jazz Hall of Fame](#). He lives in Des Moines, Iowa with Visual Artist Paula Egan.

My Integrated Life*

(Part I)

BY DARTANYAN BROWN

Born in the Midwest at nearly the exact middle of the 20th Century, Dartanyan Brown has been front-and-center for many of American culture's most defining struggles, particularly the Civil Rights movement and the advent of revolutions in music and technology. Where many people content themselves with one career, Brown has had at least four: in journalism, in musical performance, in the tech sector and in education. Through it all, he has continued to forge ahead with an optimism and openness to connection that he learned in a family guided by a strong maternal grandmother who grew up in an integrated Iowa town where she "didn't know nothin' 'bout no segregation!"

This unique foundation, along with the exceptional outlook this gave him, has enabled him to live what he refers to as "My Integrated Life."

In this issue of Rootstalk, we're running Part I of his remarkable story. Part II will appear in the Spring 2019 issue.

My name is Dartanyan Brown. I'm an African-American conceived in California and born in 1949 in Des Moines, Iowa.

I'm also a former *Des Moines Register*¹ reporter, as well as a third-generation musician with deep roots in American Jazz, Folk, Rock 'n Roll and Electronic music traditions. I've also been an educational technology enthusiast, though I label myself an artist-educator, having spent over 40 years creating interdisciplinary arts-centered curricula for students in public- and college-preparatory environments.

That I identify as all these things and more is a testimony to the family, community and educational influences that aligned through the years on my behalf.

*REFERENCES LISTED IN ENDNOTES

Reflecting on over six decades of experience, I can say that having been born in Iowa prepared me well for a fantastic journey that I like to describe as My Integrated Life.

Buxton Roots

To begin, let's travel back in time 122 years ago to a coal seam in Monroe County, Iowa, owned by the Consolidation Coal Co. of Chicago. The town that grew up around the mine, Buxton² (near present day Albia), was named eponymously for its manager, Ben C. Buxton. That was where my great-grandparents, Ross and Blanche Johnson, arrived from Virginia in 1895. Why did they travel so far?

To understand why my grandparents and other African Americans perceived Iowa as a place of refuge, we have to understand the conditions they endured in 1890's Virginia. In the year 1894, African Americans were actually the majority of the population of Albemarle County, Virginia. (The county was home to 606 free Blacks and 13,916 enslaved African Americans, compared to 12,103 Whites.) Of course, fear of that Black majority engendered the kinds of naked oppression you might expect from those dedicated to maintaining White supremacy by any means necessary. Segregation was the rule in every area of Charlottesville public life.

Ross Johnson, my great-grandfather was well aware of social, vocational and economic lines that could or could not be crossed. Even a casual review of

what my ancestors endured in Jim Crow Virginia serves to underline the hope and possibility that buoyed them on their journey out of the South. During the Civil War, Iowa had been on the Union side of things (thank goodness!) and so this land was blessed with a somewhat more progressive, humanistic perspective than, say, Missouri or the states that had been in the Confederacy. So, Ross and Blanch Porter Johnson left Charlottesville in 1893 for coal mining work on the Iowa prairie. My grandmother, Lettie Porter Thompson, was born in Monroe County on November 19, 1896.

As a child in Iowa, Lettie experienced a totally different social matrix than the one she would've endured in Charlottesville. That is not to say her family members didn't experience reduced opportunities because of their skin color, but life was materially better in Iowa if for no other reason than that they were able to take advantage of social and educational opportunities denied them in the South.

That my Grandmother could proudly say of her Iowa childhood: "we didn't know nothin' 'bout no segregation!" meant that something very significant had occurred. With a gleam in her eye that was still there in her 80s, she told me, "The happiest time was getting out for recess because you could play with ALL the children on the playground."

Over the years, my grandmother described Buxton as generally a very good place to grow up. "I don't like this one, I don't like that one...can't go here, can't



BUXTON, IOWA, AS IT WAS AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES. PUBLIC-DOMAIN IMAGE FROM BLACKPAST.ORG.

go there...we never had that nonsense!” That was Lettie...always keeping it real. Perhaps the most important thing was that you could get along with people, and basic respect was accorded to just about everyone—unless you couldn’t handle your liquor.

Her biggest regret was leaving high school before graduation. Working to help support the family was necessary, though, and so while her two sisters, Katherine and Anzul, were able to finish high school (Katherine was a state debate champion in the late 30s), Lettie, also a fine musician, sacrificed her potential opportunities for the sake of others in the family.

The grace with which Lettie Thompson lived her life was a model for folks both Black and White. As I mentioned, she wouldn’t allow talk about racial disharmony, and she instilled high standards in her family in terms of education, personal behavior and vocational excellence. .

Getting along with people of any ethnicity was the hallmark of my grandmother’s philosophy of life. She lived it and wouldn’t tolerate any derogatory talk about anyone. When I was a youngster, my parents would go for drives, visiting friends both Black and White in little communities outside of Des Moines. Mom and Dad would pack my two brothers (Kevan and Don) and me into dad’s beloved ’55 Dodge and head off to Albia, Marshalltown, Perry or somewhere else where the family had friends from the Buxton days.

I remember hearing about The Buxton Club³, a so-

cial circle of mainly women whose families had roots in Buxton/Monroe County. In the summer of 2018, I was happy to find out that the Buxton Club still sustains the memory of the place. It’s amazing that over a century later, the memories of Buxton still have a powerful

impact on those whose predecessors directly experienced it. Without question, these are the cornerstones of *My Integrated Life*.

My maternal family’s experience in Buxton was key to establishing sympathetic, forthright relationships with people regardless of ethnic or racial difference. My parents’ expansive worldview and pursuit of knowledge across disciplines was pivotal in shaping my view of music, education, technology and culture. It is the matrix from which springs the experiences I write about here.



DARTANYAN’S GRANDMOTHER, LETTIE PORTER THOMPSON

My Parents Meet

My father, Philadelphia-born Ellsworth T. Brown, met my mother, Mary Alice Thompson, in Los Angeles after the Second World War. Mom was studying music at Los Angeles City College and working as an extruder at Lockheed Aircraft when dad returned stateside after his wartime duties in the Merchant Marine. They got married in early 1949. A few months before I was due to be born, Mom decided that she wanted to be near her family. Ellsworth and Mary left L.A. and moved back to Iowa—just in time for me to arrive in October of 1949 at Mercy Hospital.

We lived at 1434 Walker Street on Des Moines’

east side. It was integrated like Buxton was, and we had lots of Jewish, African-American, Latino and European-American neighbors.

In the mid-50s the Walker Street house was a hub for rehearsals, jam sessions, and music lessons for students like 16-year-old Frank Perowsky⁴ who left Des Moines to forge an incredible career as an arranger, instrumentalist, studio musician and recording artist in New York City. Dad even had a system you could use to press your own recordings⁵ from blank vinyl discs. (Don't ask me how that worked!!)

Ernest "Speck" Redd⁶—originally from Hannibal, Missouri—while certainly not the only good piano player, was the most respected African American jazz piano player of the 50s and 60s in Des Moines. Because he lived three blocks down Walker Street from us, there were frequent music sessions involving him and my father. Charlie Parker⁷ was the reigning king of Jazz at that time, and I remember spirited discussions between the musicians about how to interpret Bird's musical innovations. Speck was posthumously inducted into the Des Moines Community Jazz Center (CJC) Jazz Hall of Fame⁸ in 2005. My dad's induction came in 2010.

Dad was a bebopper (bebop⁹ being a kind of jazz introduced during the 1940s by innovators like Charlie Parker); Mom loved Rhumba, Merengue, and European Classical music of all kinds. I was immersed in these sounds, almost inundated with them, from the time I was born. I would sing (Mom would call it yowling) along with records—no matter what style.

Though my parents later divorced and for a time my father drifted out of my life, this was a time when I gained my basic appreciation for ALL music dedicated to telling stories and bringing healing to our beleaguered souls.

My early exposure to technology

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word integration as "incorporating or coordinating separate elements as equals into a social environment." It also

has a significant, though different, meaning in the world of mathematics.

My father was familiar with both the social and the mathematical contexts for integration. Ellsworth had been one of the few Black radio officers in the Merchant Marine during WWII. Dad integrated his aptitude for mathematics into his love of music, and this led him to the Schillinger System of Musical Composition¹⁰. Years later, at my father's induction into the Iowa Jazz Hall of Fame, I learned from his friends in attendance that he brought musicians to our Walker Street house to teach them the Schillinger System.

Music, mathematics and technology were completely integrated in my father's mind. In my 20s, when I encountered the writings of R. Buckminster Fuller¹¹, I found someone who could clearly articulate complicated ideas in the same way my father could. Bucky's *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*¹² was an inspiration, and it remains an inspiration to this day.

Dad also collected radios, and the pieces in his collection were objects of fascination for me. I remember a small room in our house that was filled with scopes and electronic parts. As a youngster



DARTANYAN'S MUSICAL PARENTS, ELLSWORTH AND MARY ALICE

watching television (we baby boomers were the first TV generation) I was awed by science fiction serials of the day (Captain Video¹³ anyone?). The radios on Dad's worktable had these things called "tubes" inside, and to me they looked like little spaceships. I delighted in removing them from the back of old radios and zooming them around the room flying my mission to Mars.

The 60s: Music, and *The Register*

According to my grandmother and everyone else I knew, if there was something I wanted to do, I had to get out there, prepare myself and go for it. During the tumultuous years of the 1960s, I would find myself pursuing ambitions in two realms: the literary and the musical.

As a child in 1954-56, I had watched Superman on television, but rather than Superman, I wanted to be Clark Kent, the mild-mannered reporter. At age 12, I decided I wanted to be a writer.

In a similar way, my childhood experience growing up in a hub of the musical community primed me also for a passionate, lifelong obsession with music. It seems fitting that a decade so filled with foment and change for our country should also be transformational for me personally. It is yet another example of integration as my life's theme.

In 1964, my best friend George T. Clinton (whom we called "G.T.") played the Hammond B3 organ in a band called The Upsetters. It included drummer Jimmy Brown, guitarist Bernie Fogel and bassist Wally Ackerson. I blame these guys for destroying what was left of my resistance to making music a participation sport. George lived in what was called the "Southeast Bottoms" or Chesterfield district of Des Moines. Raised in the Shiloh Baptist Church, G.T. was steeped in Gospel and Praise music, but he also studied jazz extensively

with our neighbor Speck Redd while he was still in middle school. By 1964, he had added the "gospel" of Little Richard to his repertoire, and became Des Moines' first Beatles-era "rock star". His musical talent was matched by a dangerously sexy rock star attitude that Jagger himself might have envied. An African-American with a Beatle haircut (!) and an instinct for knowing where the music of our generation was heading, George introduced me to memorable jazz and rock music experiences long before I considered actually performing myself.

He introduced me to a local Jazz Festival at the First Unitarian Church and took me to the KRNT Theater to see Illinois Speed Press¹⁴ and Chicago Transit Authority (later Chicago¹⁵), as well as Veterans Auditorium to hear Cream¹⁶ (god, Eric Clapton played LOUD!!). He started

taking me to his bands' rehearsals and asked the bassist to show me how to play a blues bass line.

After a lot of practicing in the basement, I was playing bass myself, and in the winter of 1968 I went with a group of friends to the Drake Fieldhouse for a concert by a band from Chicago.

It was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band¹⁷ featuring the legendary harmonica player and singer. He introduced 17-year-old Buzz Feiten on guitar to us. Also on board were Phillip

Wilson on drums, Tenor saxophone player/vocalist and songwriter Brother Gene Dinwiddie, and I think David Sanborn was in there, too, on alto saxophone.

I had never heard of this band before, but after the concert I went out and bought their new album ("The Resurrection of Pigboy Crabshaw¹⁸") and lost the rest of my mind while playing it.

Everything about this music confirmed that something big was missing from my own life. My mother and father had divorced sometime in the 1961 through 1963 period. I'm not sure when, exactly, because between the ages of 11-13, memories of my father seemed to

According to my grandmother and everyone else I knew, if there was something I wanted to do, I had to get out there, prepare myself and go for it. During the tumultuous years of the 1960s, I would find myself pursuing ambitions in two realms: the literary and the musical.

just gradually fade away. My brothers and I were used to him going to out of town engagements, but as I got into middle school I realized that he was just...gone. I must've eventually been told the who/what/why/when and how of the situation but that didn't soften the emotional upset.

The songs, the lyrics, the sound...everything about the music I began listening to after the Paul Butterfield concert seemed to beckon me back home. There was something so inherently comforting and challenging at the same time that something inside of me literally cracked open, I suppose. What was revealed was a yawning cavern of stuffed pain, questioning and longing to understand what, besides my dad, happened to be missing from my life.

I struggled to deal with feelings that had nothing to do with striving, with achieving, or with caring about social position. I discovered the primal longing that each of us is subject to as human beings. It was the simple realization that my family had fractured and I had tried to act as if nothing was wrong in the years since the divorce. My brothers and I were trained to keep moving forward and not to talk, think about, or acknowledge the chaos that enveloped our lives in the years 1960-70.

After the Butterfield Concert, with friends Rick Arbuckle, Paul Micich, Frank Tribble, and Sylvester Strother, I started the Black and Blues Band as a kind of serious hobby. I was really glad I learned to play the blues on bass and guitar, because I was ready to fit right in to the Blues Revival that followed in the wake of the British Invasion¹⁹.

I feel it important here to mention that Blues music—that quintessential African-American music form native to the USA—was being ignored by almost everyone in 1960. By 1964, though, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, The Kinks, Fleetwood Mac and other British rock stars revealed that the secret of their success was the Blues elements they cribbed from Americans like B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Elmore James, Little Richard, Sonny Boy Williamson, Gatemouth Brown and, of course, Mr. Crossroads himself, Robert Johnson. It

was deeply ironic: White kids all over America were losing their minds over British musicians who credited, praised and emulated the Black originators of the music. I believe the homage musicians like Mick Jagger, Paul McCartney and others paid to their Black mentors added momentum to an American Civil Rights movement that sought to restore humanity and dignity (and commercial success) to many of those same individuals.

The summer before my senior year, I scored my first job, sweeping up the floors at Kassir Drug Store on Locust Avenue. It was, as advertised, a pretty menial gig, and while I was sweeping there was lots of time to think about what I really wanted to do with my life. I was already taking jour-

nalism classes at North High School with Mr. Barnett, and I was already Sports Editor for the *North High Oracle*. Importantly, I had also written some articles for the *Iowa Bystander*²⁰, the state's most established newspaper for the African American community. *Bystander* editor Allen Ashby was my first mentor. He was a wise, knowledgeable man who prepared me well to go forward.



A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG JOURNALIST. DARTANYAN AT THE OFFICES OF THE DRAKE TIMES DELPHIC

So during the late summer 1967, as I was slinging the broom at Kassar's, I thought that my experience might enable me to at least try to get a job at the *Des Moines Register*. I just remember thinking: "This is it. Go and at least ask about a job."

I put the broom aside, checked out, and walked the four blocks to the *Register & Tribune* building. Once inside, I asked the receptionist where to apply for a job and she told me Fourth floor (while looking at me like she was thinking: "Sure kid, go on up...fat chance though...")

Thanking her, I turned and walked through the lobby toward the elevators, noticing the huge, slowly rotating globe that displayed the time in every country. I also looked up to see the big, mounted panels displaying Pulitzer Prize winning stories, editorial cartoons and headlines. At that point in history, the *Register and Tribune* newspapers WERE the news sources all Iowa (and most of the Midwest) depended upon.

I got off the elevator, turned left twice and walked into a beehive convention in which activity was going off in all directions at once. I had happened to arrive just at Saturday afternoon's sports deadline, where—it seemed—every living being who wasn't playing football somewhere in Iowa was covering someone playing football somewhere in Iowa.

Sports Editor Leighton Housh was patrolling the writers' desks where Bill Bryson Sr.²¹, Buck Turnbull, Jim Moackler, and Ron Maly were racing toward their personal deadlines, pounding out stories on typewriters that emitted the 'chik' 'chik-chik' 'chik'- sound of those old metal key-action Smith-Coronas.

Meanwhile, Bill Dwyre²², Ron's Maly's brother Phil, Larry "Laddy" Paul and Copy Chief Howard Kluender were at the editor's ring, heads down, pencils slashing through sloppy copy, replacing it with elegant, brief sentences, designed to be read over coffee in the morning edition.

When a break came in the action, Housh came

over and took my application and asked me why I wanted to do this job, and what made me think I could.

I surprised myself with an almost immediate answer: I already was writing for my school newspaper, I really, really wanted to be a reporter, and I'd do anything to begin working there.

He took his pipe and switched it from one side of his mouth to the other, evidently curious. "Come back tomorrow," he said, "And we'll start you on the phones."

Stunned, I stood there as it sunk in, thinking: *Wait...he said...come back tomorrow...that means... I got the job!!*

That moment validated everything I had ever been told by my family about the way opportunity would be open to you if you were prepared. The civil rights

era was right on top of us then, and this gave me a certain amount of courage, I suppose, to go after what I really wanted. As I see it, moments like this one—where courage is what's required, if we are go-

Integration is a part of this time in my life: when I was hired as a coffee boy, sports phone desk person and copy runner, I was the only African American on the *Register* editorial staff.

ing to step up and seize the opportunity when we have the chance—come to all of us sooner or later. Ethnicity has very little to do with it. Mine was a quiet triumph. In seeking an objective that I felt prepared to handle, I was confirming both parental guidance and personal observation of the way things could be.

Integration is a part of this time in my life: when I was hired as a coffee boy, sports phone desk person and copy runner, I was the only African American on the *Register* editorial staff.

Soon after I was hired, though, other African Americans followed: photographers Ron Bayles and (fellow North High graduate and NHS Hall of Fame Inductee) David Lewis came onboard, as well as the (great) feature writer (and another North High graduate) Elenora E. Tate. Each brought extremely high levels of professionalism to the job.

Another important milestone that I should note: after serving for a few months as coffee boy and copy

runner, I was reporting on high school sports events and learning the ropes of general assignment reporting. On April 4th 1968, I was on the spot for the reporting break of a lifetime—which sadly, was connected to the death of a great American hero. Martin Luther King's assassination was an earthshaking event, and in the wake of his murder Black communities across the nation erupted in rioting and what amounted to a communal scream of pain, anger and sorrow.

Des Moines' Black community also ignited in violence that consumed the central corridor along University Avenue. I was in the sports department when I was

approached by the city editor with a question: Would I be able to grab a camera and go to the area of the rioting to take pictures and report on what might be happening?

Before I knew it, I was stepping over fire hoses in the street, avoiding the police who were trying to keep order, and estimating the size of the groups of people who were either part of the action or observers. Martin's death was a tragedy that I felt viscerally, but I was being given a chance to contribute to the reporting of a major news story. In later years, I learned that event was a sad but important launching pad for more than a



PROTEST AGAINST THE VIET NAM WAR IN 1968, AT DRAKE UNIVERSITY



ANTI-RACISM PROTEST AT DRAKE UNIVERSITY IN 1968

few other Black journalists of that era, including the late Ed Bradley. After that night, I was moved to general assignment reporting covering stories including the Iowa legislature.

Thankfully, my faith in my ability to attain a job that I wanted was greater than my fear of being rejected. Racist messages, seeking to sow fear and doubt about people of color, were as strong then as they are now. Knowing about my family's experiences in Iowa over the last 100-plus years, though, helped provide me with the perspective I would need to navigate a new world for which there were few road maps.

Looking back on it, I think the best thing about my time at the *Des Moines Register* was acquiring great research skills. The esteemed Iowa author Bill Bryson²³ and I both began working for the *Des Moines Register* while still in high school. His father, Bill Bryson Sr. was one of the nation's great sports writers. Bill Jr. and I were high school-age copy runners and cub reporters learning the ropes, but we began a friendship that contin-

ues to this day. Those who love Bill's body of work appreciate granular research combined with the wit of a happy sage. Bill began developing those gorgeous research skills whilst searching out obscure bits of information in the *Registers'* vast archive of clip files in 1967-68.

The investigative reporter is the original Google. They never rest, and they never stop turning over rocks to find the truth. Learning where to look, whom to ask, and whom to "socially engineer" have always been the hallmarks of those who went out and got the story, and got it right. Pulitzer-Prize-winning writers like Nathan 'Nick' Kotz²⁴ and the *Regis-*

ter's own Clark Mollenhoff²⁵ were the kind of reporters that we need vastly more of today.

Then, in 1968, my journalistic worlds became a little too well integrated. Let me explain:

During my sophomore year at Drake, I was the sports editor of the University's student paper, the *Times-Delphic*²⁶, while at the same time I was now a Police Beat reporter for the *Register*. As an 18-year-old, I was doing pretty well. I was getting lots of opportunities, and like a hungry kid at a banquet I was grabbing everything I could.

Late in the 1968-69 Drake Basketball season the Bulldogs were playing a pivotal Missouri Valley Conference game at Veterans Memorial Auditorium. Meanwhile, I was on police beat at the police station across the Des Moines River to the south and east of the auditorium.

I was monitoring the police radio, which was my job, waiting for something to happen. Meanwhile, the

little AM radio on the shelf was tuned to the basketball game and crackling with excitement. WHO radio broadcaster Jim Zabel was going crazy as the Bulldogs were in a very close contest.

Man, how did this happen? I thought. I'm the Sports Editor; how come I'm up here at the cop shop, dammit?!

Well, as 18-year-olds will do, I decided to take a chance. I could leave the station, hightail it up to the auditorium, grab some of the action and take a few pictures for the next edition of the *T-D*. What could go wrong?

Well...upon my return to the copy desk after my shift at the station, I was asked how the game went? My attempt at playing dumb was unmasked by the fact that the game was broadcast on TV (duh?) and my face had clearly been visible among those on the sidelines. The press passes giveth and the press passes taketh away. Luckily there had been no murders, fires, robberies or even kittens up a tree during my absence, but my two-places-at-once act became office legend at the pre-Gannett *Register*.

The Wobble Begins

There was no doubt that my balancing act was getting to be a serious handful. Music, academics, a budding journalism career, the ever-present civil rights struggle and war worries were weighing on my mind.

It was also getting increasingly difficult for me to ignore internal questions about my absent father. Like that annoying small stone in your shoe, it wasn't long before—one way or another—I was going to have to stop along the path to deal with it.

The tragedy of the Kent State Massacre²⁷ in May of 1970 triggered deep evaluation for me: Who was I, really? What was I doing here? Where else should I be? Why couldn't I ever relax, and how could I regain equilibrium?

Like reviewing old movie footage, I began to re-

play my life looking for something to help me deal with something deep that I hadn't dealt with previously. The more I concentrated, the more I began to remember events surrounding my parents' breakup that I hadn't allowed myself to revisit ever before.

At the time when a young man most needs the closest guidance to navigate the path into manhood, I was without my captain. Adding to the chaos, we were forced to move out of our house because of something called Urban Renewal²⁸. I learned that urban renewal was actually short hand for "build a big new freeway—over land formerly known as the Black neighborhood."

Our little home, located at 1434 Walker St., was to be leveled to make way for the new freeway.

So: wow, first Dad is gone and now the city is telling us they can just take our house and offer compensation based on their assessment, not our asking price. Mom was able eventually to find us a new home in the

Union Park neighborhood. Surprisingly, the move turned out to be a very cool thing, because instead of being held at a middle school, my new 9th grade classes convened at

The tragedy of the Kent State Massacre in May of 1970 triggered deep evaluation for me: Who was I, really? What was I doing here? Where else should I be? Why couldn't I ever relax and how could I regain equilibrium?

North High School, so I got to attend high school a year early. This wouldn't be the last time a perceived negative would transform itself to my advantage. Flashing back to the present, I realize that attending classes at Drake was becoming burdensome because I simply had too many commitments and no time for rest or reflection.

As for Viet Nam—another stressor at the time—Mom hadn't even wanted me to join the Cub Scouts so, the military was completely out of the question. As she told me with fire in her eye: "I'll send you to Canada myself before I'd let them have you for that war!"

In an atmosphere of so much turmoil, I was really missing my father's influence in my life. Telling myself

that I didn't care, or that it didn't matter wasn't working for me anymore. In the spring of 1969, I was sitting in my office at Drake when I had a revelation-like flash: I'm a reporter. I can find out everything else; why don't I find my father? Wow! good question Dartanyan. What would a good reporter do?

I decided a good reporter would try the musicians' union. I got the number for the New York Musicians Union Local 212, placed the call and asked: "Hello? Can you give me contact information for Ellsworth Brown please?"

"Just a minute...yeah we've got a number right here for you."

Holy crap. I had my Dad's phone number. Now the question was: "Do I reeeally want to make the call?"

No longer able to quell the inner chaos that draped over me like a heavy overcoat, I dialed the number in hopes that some resolution might be gained from closing this long unresolved circle. Hearing his "hello" on the other end of the line, I felt like a salmon arriving back upstream to its spawning grounds. My father's voice resolved the suspended chords of my life. I think we were both relieved that we were still alive and that positive energy seemed to attend our reunion. We filled

each other in on some key points. Yes, Ellsworth was still a working musician, living on Staten Island. No, Dartanyan didn't play a lot because he was in college, and working as a journalist.

That call was the coolest thing ever, and after it I updated my brothers Don and Kevan on the news. Re-connecting with dad was literally life changing, as all three of us would try, with varying degrees of success, to rebuild a relationship with Ellsworth and to make up for the time lost.

After the call, I resolved to go to NYC to see dad during my Spring break.

Our reunion was pretty crazy. We obviously had love for each other, but it was also obvious that, generationally speaking, we had developed very different views of the world. Example: I played electric bass and Dad thought all electric instruments were illegitimate. It was a great first meeting, though, and when it was time for me to return to Des Moines, I found out that, in addition to his music, Dad had high respect for German engineering. He was an excellent Volkswagen and Mercedes repairman, and gifted me with a Volkswagen bus from his small collection of vehicles.

Upon my return to Des Moines, I knew that my life trajectory was changing. Youthful frustration with the hypocrisy of the Viet Nam war was palpable. We intuitively knew that the government's intentions were not what they were said to be. Our generation had to be both courageous and outrageous enough to look beyond the stories we were being told and to find out for ourselves how to enact our morals.

Trying to keep all of this balanced in my 19-year-old brain was causing burn out. My grades were going down, and staying up until 2 a.m. jamming with my musician friends wasn't really helping me in classes. Something was going to give; I just wasn't prepared for how it would happen.

I was spending more time playing with musicians in town and discovering



WHEATSTRAW ON STAGE IN GREENWOOD PARK IN DES MOINES: RON DEWITTE (GUITAR), DARTANYAN (BASS) AND DAVID BERNSTEIN (ON DRUMS). PHOTO BY BILL PLYMAT

where jazz, blues, rock, and even country players were jamming and experimenting. There were always adoring fans at these happenings.

Des Moines might have been Hicksville in some ways, but marijuana still found its way there just like everywhere else in the 60s. In fact, it was hard NOT to run into the plant during those days. I mentioned my tee-taling folks earlier in this story and, of course, they had the same attitude about pot. While I wasn't partaking (yet) it was always being offered...and I usually declined.

Well... and....

One time a gal offered me a half-smoked joint and I didn't want to be impolite, so I took her half-smoked gift and stuck it in my billfold saying, "If it's ok with you, I'll save it for later." Famous last words.

Busted

Later that evening, I was driving my newly acquired VW bus near campus when, all of a sudden, the jarring lights of a police car in my

rearview mirror brought me to attention. In the best of times, Black guys don't want to see flashing police lights in your review mirror. Upon request, I offered up my ID and waited for everything to be ok. I hadn't gotten my permanent license plates for the bus yet...but I had the paper temporary permit, which was taped, to the rear window.

Well, he looked at my driver's license, looked at me, looked at my license again...and then told me that I was under arrest!!!! He kind of grinned as he held up my driver's license so I could see....something..stuck..on..my..license?!

Jeez, I mean, how often do you hand a policeman your driver's license...with a marijuana roach stuck to it? While he held it out in front of me, I took a last desperate opportunity to 'save myself.' I grabbed the roach and stuck it in my mouth and swallowed it. He didn't seem to know whether to laugh or hit me, but in that

moment, my life passed before me and I knew it wasn't going to be ok for a while.

Twenty years of building, working, preparing, praying and striving were (as I thought at the time) about to be completely wiped away. A roach no bigger than my fingernail blew up my life as completely as if I had set off a bomb. Which, in fact I had. Taken to jail, I had to call my mother to bail me out, and you can believe I'll never forget the look on her face.

Of course, I went from covering the news to *being* the news in the worst way possible. The sense of shame was searing. The hopes and aspirations of many in my family and community were upended with my arrest for what amounted to the politically motivated machinations of Richard Nixon. Fifty years later, when in many cases we refer to marijuana as medicine, it seems a tragedy that he had the power to alter so many lives for a

craven political motive.

To say I was forever scarred by the experience was understatement. The real, deeper lessons of the experience

took some time for me to tease out of the chaos. At this lowest point in my life thus far, I was ready to chuck it all. As I was sinking, though, I was thrown a lifeline. It was called Wheatstraw....

In April 1970, musicians Ron Dewitte, Craig Hornor and David Bernstein asked me to join their band, and since the band's former bass player (whom I replaced) owned its former name, "The American Legend," we'd have to find a new name. We were blues addicts at this time, and there was an obscure guy named Petey Wheatstraw. We thought that name (also on cigarette papers of that time) was funny, so we went with it for a band name.

Funny what joining a \$90-a-week Blues band and leaving town will do for your crushed ego. I learned to care again. I started to care about myself and slowly dare to rebuild a value system. My searing sense of failure began to ease as I devoted many hours to practice, lis-

Funny what joining a \$90-a-week Blues band and leaving town will do for your crushed ego. I learned to care again. I started to care about myself and slowly dare to rebuild a value system.



A SYMPHONY IN BROWN CRUSHED VELVET: DARTANYAN IN SIX THE HARD WAY AFTER IT MORPHED FROM WHEATSTRAW

tening, analyzing and performing with my new band mates.

It was also a good thing that I was now actually communicating with my father. With his help, I eventually came to see that leaving college was a personal reset that put my life on a more sentient path. It sure beat going to Viet Nam to kill (or be killed) by folks I didn't even know.

Last Resort?

I might not have considered leaving everything behind to join a blues band if it hadn't been for guitarist Ron Dewitte, who was eventually inducted into the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame with me in 2010. He was one of the most expressive blues guitar players I had ever heard. The touch, timing and fire that distinguished his playing rivaled anything I'd ever heard from anyone short of Jimi Hendrix. Craig Horner, our keyboardist and trumpet player, was also a fine musician who spent

long hours practicing and listening to everyone from John Coltrane²⁹ to Jimi Hendrix. Importantly, I discovered that culture isn't just about famous individuals. It's what my friend, University of Indiana music professor David Baker, described as the Inner Circles vs. the Outer Circles. The marketplace needs "stars" (outer circles) for sure, but the real "capillaries of culture" (inner circles) are those local masters of community knowledge and custom who often remain unknown beyond their locality. So, while you may not have heard of Ron Dewitte, Craig Horner or David Bernstein, there was no doubt these guys dedicated their lives to expressing musical truth. Wheatstraw spent a fair amount of time on the road during 1970-72, playing the Midwestern states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota.

It was in Wisconsin that a new chapter was getting ready to begin for me, but I sure didn't recognize it at the time.

The first time I heard Bill Chase³⁰ was when Wheatstraw was booked at Judy's Gin Mill (!), a beer bar in Fond du Lac Wisconsin. It was a Friday afternoon and David, Ronnie and I were sitting around our hotel room doing basically nothing. Things were calm until Craig literally burst through the door (knocking over a nightstand in the process) and leaped to the record player. He took the record that was playing on the turntable and frisbee'd it across the room. Replacing it with one he held, he said: "You guys are NOT going to believe this...!"

And with that, we heard the first track of Chase's first album entitled "Open Up Wide...."

Once I peeled my brain off the ceiling, I researched Bill Chase and discovered he'd been a star trumpet soloist for big bands of the 60s, including Maynard Ferguson³¹, Woody Herman³² and Stan Kenton³³. Bill was a monster trumpet player and now he was a band leader whose first single ("Get It On") would become an international hit song.

Hearing the album definitely changed my impressions of what music could be; but at the time, I had no idea that Chase's music would literally reshape my life about 24 months from that moment. Wheatstraw toured for two more years, surviving until 1972, when in desperation we became Six the Hard Way (don't ask...). Reality finally caught up to us, though, and I went back to Des Moines to write music and finish a journalism degree. Or so I thought...

When I returned to Des Moines after the Wheatstraw experience, I formed my first working group, called Dynamite. It was an extremely funky quartet featuring members Phil Aaberg on piano, Rod Chaffee on guitar, Tom Gordon on drums, and yours truly on bass guitar. A band of writers, we played bluesy-jazzy roots music that morphed from one style to another with great relish. Our influences were as wide ranging as John Coltrane, Paul Butterfield, John Cage³⁴, the group Tree (an Iowa City Free Jazz collective), Donny Hathaway³⁵ and the Sons of Champlin³⁶.

Dynamite was a fun band with talent to burn, but unfortunately for us (though fortunately for my future), through a connection to the Kansas band The Fabulous Flippers³⁷, our drummer, Tommy Gordon was called up to the "big time" to play with...Bill Chase!! (Chase's second album, "Ennea," had been released a few months

earlier). Tommy was a great drummer who rightly jumped at the chance to play with Bill. Of course, that meant the end of our great little Des Moines band but things were far from boring....

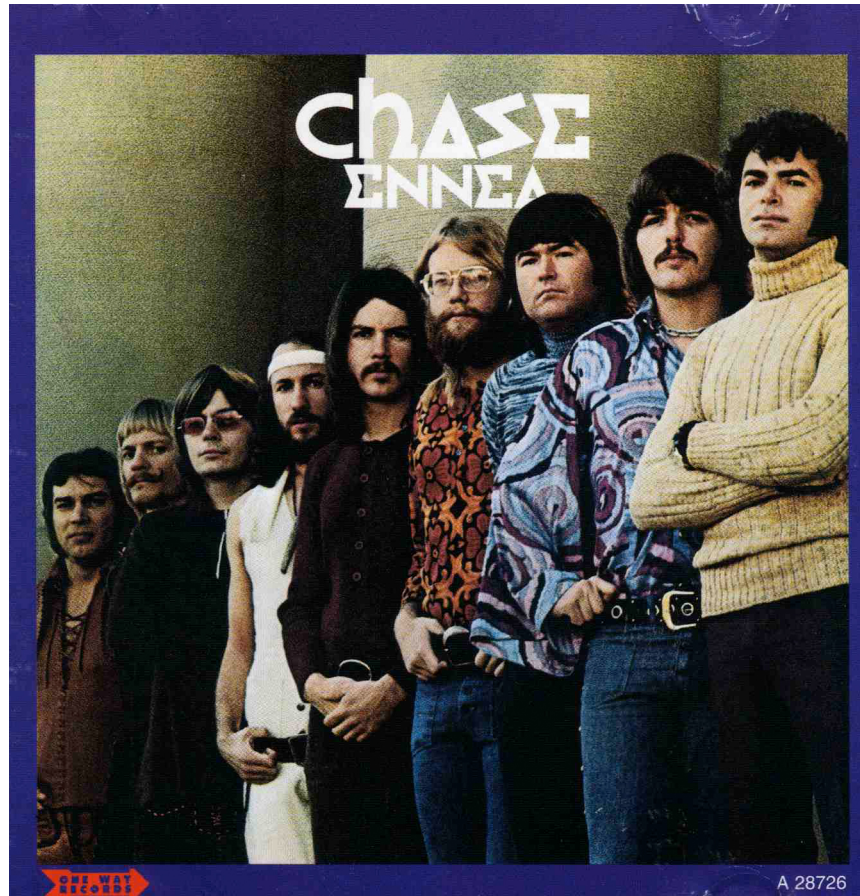
After Tommy left town, I collaborated with John Rowat, Bill Jacobs and Michael Schomers to start a band called The Mothership. It was another more experimental band with jazz/rock/country influences. We had a band house on the SE corner of Des Moines on Army

Post Road. Next door to our house there was a big roadhouse called the 505 Club (which everyone called "The Five." It was notorious as what I would call a "cowboy punch out" bar. It was a rough joint, but the music that got played in there was worth the risk of injury or dismemberment.

The Five was owned and managed by Dick Kampus, a large and hearty man with a real lust for throwing a party. The Five was the classic edge-of-town bar which even the local

police didn't mess with too much because it was that rough.

Over the years, we saw lots of different groups there. Funky horn groups like the previously mentioned Flippers, singer Marvin Spencer³⁸, and lots of groups from Kansas, Florida, Louisiana and elsewhere. The list of bands that toured the roadhouse circuit to carve out a



CHASE'S SECOND ALBUM "ENNEA" CAME OUT NOT LONG BEFORE BILL CHASE CALLED DARTANYAN UP TO THE BIG-TIME

career is long. I was at home next door to the club when one day the phone rang....

I picked it up. "Hello," I said.

"Hey Dart," said the excited voice on the other end, "Get your ass over here now and hear this...!" I recognized the voice as Dick's from across the driveway at the Five.

"What are you talking about, man?" I queried.

"Just get over here NOW, you won't believe it."

As I loped across the expanse of white gravel, I heard the rhythmic thud of bass guitar and drums coming through the walls of the club. As I got closer to the door, the syncopation was getting "too good" if you know what I mean. By the time I entered the cavernous club, it only took another two or three minutes to realize that something special was happening on the stage—and this was just rehearsal.

The group rehearsing for the evening's show was Wayne Cochran and his band, the CC Riders³⁹. For those of you unfamiliar with the tradition, Wayne Cochran was a White soul singer in the tradition of James Brown. The cool thing about Cochran was that he, like Brown, was the real deal. He was a loud, signifyin', funkified White boy who could drive an audience as well as any R&B veteran I ever saw. But I digress....

Cochran's energy emanated as much from his band as from his own nasty soul. The band's engine was being stoked by a tall skinny kid on bass who they called Jaco.

"Jaco" was Jaco Pastorius⁴⁰, later bass player for Weather Report⁴¹, which—alongside Miles Davis's⁴² electric bands, the Mahavishnu Orchestra⁴³, Return to Forever⁴⁴, and Headhunters⁴⁵—was one of the most important jazz fusion bands of the 70s and 80s. When I saw him at the Five, though, Jaco was the heart of Wayne Cochran and the CC Riders' rhythm section, which also included guitarist Charlie Brent. (As a side

note, Brent—a dynamite arranger—would later contribute charts to Bill Chase's second album, "Ennea.")

Well, I listened transfixed as I watched Jaco creating totally loose, but on-the-mark bass grooves. His sensibilities for groove and support and melodic bass playing were strangely scary, but at the same time an affirmation of where I knew the instrument could go.

After the rehearsal, I made a beeline for the stage and introduced myself to Jaco. Being an old newspaper reporter, I wasn't going to miss an opportunity to "interview" this guy to find out where he got his bouncy, funky style.

I offered our house next door if he wanted to hang out with us, and for the next 3 days I played host to the Future Of Jazz Electric Bass! We jammed, talked, went to the Cochran gig, then jammed some more, talked a lot more about life, our families, Miles, and why each of us had a lot to offer. I have never met a more honest, car-

ing, sensitive and talented individual than Jaco Pastorius in 1972.

While Jaco was a natural musician whose father played drums, he'd also studied with Ira Sullivan⁴⁶ at the University of

Miami⁴⁷. His mom Greta was someone he was totally devoted to. Jaco already had a young family then, and it was his single-minded goal to support his family by convincing everyone that he was the world's greatest bass player!

He was convinced of that fact (I certainly wasn't going to disagree, based on what I had heard) and he told me of his plans to leave the Cochran band soon and travel to Boston to join up with a new friend named Pat Metheny⁴⁸. Metheny, he said, offered him an opportunity to teach at Berklee College of Music⁴⁹ in Boston. In 1976, Metheny—who was then only 21—would make his seminal debut recording "Bright Size Life"⁵⁰ on ECM with Jaco. Later in 1974, Pastorius and Metheny joined pianist Paul Bley and drummer Bruce Ditmas to record

I listened transfixed as I watched Jaco creating totally loose, but on-the-mark bass grooves. His sensibilities for groove and support and melodic bass playing were strangely scary, but at the same time an affirmation of where I knew the instrument could go.

an album on Bley's Improvising Artists⁵¹ label).

Anyway, the three days spent with Jaco could only be termed as a meeting of kindred spirits. The next time I saw him was 1976 at the Newport Jazz Festival⁵². By then he was with Weather Report and a true star. The best thing was, when I saw him again, he actually spotted me at the back of a large auditorium (Alice Tully Hall, I think) as I was walking in for Weather Report's sound check.

From the stage, he saw me (barely visible I was) and yelled at the top of his lungs "Hey DARTANYAN, HOW YA DOIN'!" It was a testament to his eyesight, his memory and his heart that he actually remembered our time together after HIS life had changed so radically.

One sad note: The Jaco I knew in 1972 was on a natural high of life. He neither smoked, nor drank, nor even talked about anything but the most inspiring subjects. His goal was to play with Miles Davis. Period. He knew he was good enough, musical enough, and hip enough and that was that!

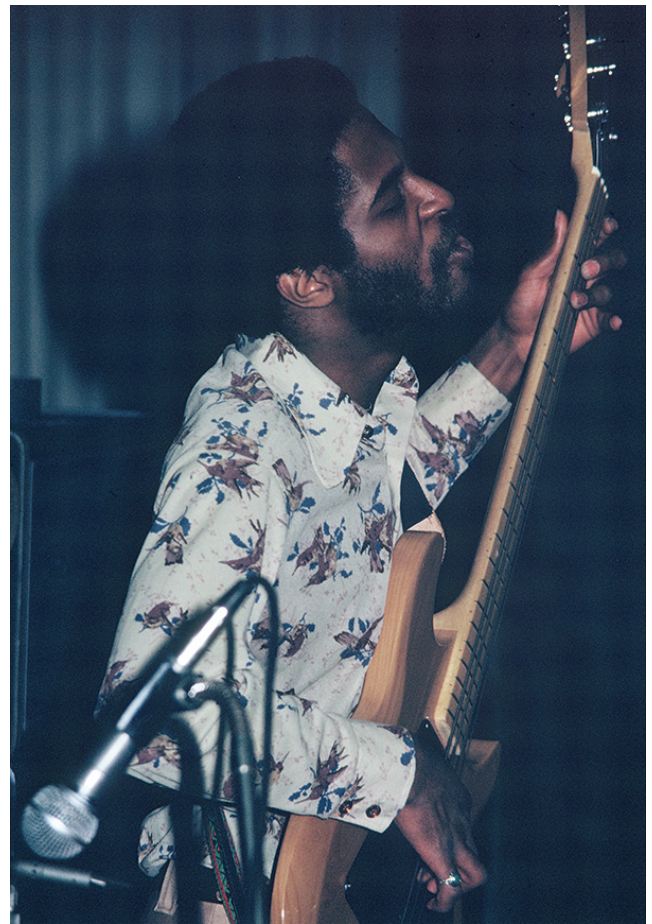
I never saw Jaco again after Newport. Back in 1972, he had told me that he had a chemical imbalance that meant his sensitive system could not tolerate most drugs or any alcohol. Moving to NYC was probably the worst thing he could have done because the influences on him at that time were uniformly bad. Every time news came in about him it was usually great professional triumph but leavened with the sad news of his descent into drug and alcohol abuse. Still, I'll always have memories (and the tapes) of the Jaco Pastorius I knew, who propelled Wayne Cochran and the CC riders in '72. Bless you Jaco.

Back to Bill....

It was now spring '73 and, as I mentioned earlier, Tommy Gordon, our drummer in Dynamite, had already joined Chase through his Fabulous Flippers connection. Former members of that group were touring with Bill touring in support of the "Ennea" album, so Tommy's connection from years earlier had paid off. It was about to do the same for me.

I was in my kitchen making a sandwich when the phone rang.

I picked it up with my mouth half-full and almost choked when the voice on the other end said. "Hello,



DARTANYAN SAILING ON STAGE WHEN HE WAS A MEMBER OF CHASE

this is Bill Chase."

Needless to say, I was nervous and incredulous as he laid out his offer.

"I've been looking for a new bass player and Tommy says that you're a great bass player and a singer too." I didn't quite know what to say except to try to agree without sounding too egotistical (unlike my friend Jaco, who would have had no problem promoting himself).

"We have a tour due to start in El Paso, Texas in two weeks," Bill said. "Do you think you can make the gig?"

He asked me if I knew the music and I said that I knew the first album from listening, but that was it. He said, "No matter, we've got all the charts."

I just said a little prayer of thanks that I was playing in the Drake University Jazz band with Bob Weast⁵³. Taking two semesters of Jazz Band had given me exactly the foundation I needed to read the charts I lived with

for the next 17 months.

Talk about bittersweet....

I had just signed a lease with my friends in Des Moines to secure our band house and now was I going to leave town?

My band mates, John Rowat, Michael Schomers, Frank Tribble and Bill Jacobs, were more supportive of me moving up than they were disappointed at losing a renter, so I was off to Chicago to begin what would be life-changing circumstances. 🌿



DARTANYAN ONSTAGE WITH BILL CHASE



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN GREY

John Grey is originally from Brisbane, Australia, and now makes his home in Providence, Rhode Island. His poetry was most recently published in the [Homestead Review](#), [Poetry East](#) and [Columbia Review](#), and he has work forthcoming in the [Roanoke Review](#), the [Hawaii Review](#) and [North Dakota Quarterly](#).

Two poems

BY JOHN GREY

FEELING AUTUMNAL

Once brash colors
curl up, die,
drift one by one
to earth.

Light shrinks,
wind whips clear
the last of warmth.
The sky is as gray
as granite.

Lake surface wrinkles
like skin flinches.
Geese and ducks
rock in and out
of ripples.

A man can feel old
in Autumn.
The hues fade out of him
as much as they do the forest.
Good years flake away.
The clouds, his hair,
differ only in the way they drizzle.

I may only be middle-aged
but I head for home
before things really darken.

DISSATISFACTION

This winter has provided
all of its promised textures,
white and overspreading,
as lovely, in an ascetic way,
as pale cheeks in a mirror.

But its bitterness
plunges daggers,
its winds are as brutal
as they are predictable.
And this standstill is
another word for loneliness.

But there's the warmth of the fire,
a gathering with others
that begins as necessity
but matures into closeness.
I hate to see it leave.

But spring is
like a child in winter's womb
I'm so in thrall to its coming.
But what if it's a monster?

Each morning, the calendar turns over.
The temperature is up or down.
The feelings run the gamut.
I so love this weather
I can't wait until it changes.
Or there's a new mood to the air.
So what's wrong with the old one?
But mostly, I feel pity for those
who know exactly what they want.
The situation's always too ambiguous
Is this it? Is this not it?
They'll always have too much to go on.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRUCE LEVENTHAL, TAKEN IN JANUARY OF 2018 ON A STRETCH OF FOREST-BOUND PRAIRIE NEAR THE MADISON RIVER AT YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK IN WYOMING.

Mammals of the Prairie: American Bison

Bison bison

This prairie icon travels under a number of names: the Bison, the **American Bison**, or (most commonly) the Buffalo. Once, famously, its herds blackened the Great Plains, sustaining the Plains Indians who hunted them. During the late 18th century, an estimated 60 million bison roamed the middle section of North America. Then came America's westward expansion, and the huge herds were nearly exterminated, dwindling to less than 550 animals by 1889. Strenuous conservation efforts brought the bison back from the brink, and the population has rebounded to roughly a half-million animals.

Vocalization: According to the [National Park Service](#), bison make a variety of sounds. These sounds include

anything from the low rumblings of male bellows heard during mating season to the high-pitched bleats of a calf looking for its mother. Other common sounds consist of "snorts," "coughs," "roars," and "grunts."

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of a bison's roar, captured by May Castelberry and posted on [Youtube](#).





PHOTO COURTESY OF ALICIA DEHAAN

Alicia DeHaan is a high school senior living in Salina, Kansas. Most of her time is consumed by school work and preparations for college, but in her free time she plays with her dog, reads enormously long novels, sings musical theater songs, and searches for interesting things to write about Kansas.

Cheyenne Bottoms: The Indispensable Kansas Wetland You Never Knew About*

BY ALICIA DEHAAN

The Sandhill crane's weary wing beats carry him along with the flock, lower and lower, closer to the mud flats where the flock will rest before continuing its migration. The setting sun glints off shallow water, adding a rosy glow to the gray and brown of the crane's outstretched wings. As the flock banks and descends, the air is filled with the calls of ducks, geese, herons, egrets, and the many shorebirds that are also visiting the marsh to rest and refuel. An incredible forty-five percent of all North American shorebirds arrive at this Kansas marsh, known as [Cheyenne Bottoms](#), each year during their spring and fall migrations. Cheyenne Bot-

toms, the largest inland marsh in the United States, is vitally important to the survival of many shorebirds. It also brings 60,000 people to the area each year, providing an opportunity for both children and adults to learn about the importance of wetlands and the animals who live there.

Although few would guess it, Kansas contains one of the most crucial shorebird stopping places in the western hemisphere.



AMERICAN WHITE PELICANS, CORMORANTS, GULLS AND ASSORTED OTHER WATERFOWL GATHER ON A SPIT AT CHEYENNE BOTTOMS. PHOTOS BY KALEB KROEKER UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

*REFERENCES LISTED IN ENDNOTES

Each spring tiny western sandpipers, weighing only 0.8 to 1.2 ounces, leave their winter homes in the south to fly from 900 to 2,500 miles to reach their Alaskan breeding grounds. These diminutive sandpipers must be able to find areas of marsh, swamp, or beach where they can rest and store body fat to accomplish their marathon migration. If the birds are unable to find enough food in one spot, they will be forced to stop again. Too much delay will cause the birds to arrive late to their summer breeding grounds. If too much of the short Arctic summer has been wasted, some of the birds may choose not to mate. Since the United States contains only three large shorebird stopping places east of the Rockies, Cheyenne Bottoms is clearly indispensable.

If you visit Cheyenne Bottoms in late October or early November, in addition to seeing many ducks, geese, and various shorebirds, you might be lucky enough to spot an endangered whooping crane. In 1941 these tall white cranes numbered only sixteen. Now there are nearly 300, partly thanks to safe havens like Cheyenne Bottoms. Other protected or endangered species that visit the marsh are the bald eagle, piping plover, and peregrine falcon. The wetlands have been designated as a critical habitat for both whooping cranes and the interior least tern.

Before the arrival of Francisco Coronado, only the native Indian tribes, such as the Cheyenne, after whom Cheyenne Bottoms is named, knew of this place. Although other explorers visited the region, and large numbers of settlers began arriving in Kansas by 1854, it was not until the 1920s that anyone felt moved to find out more about the thousands of birds that arrived at the Bottoms each year.

Frank W. Robl, a farmer from the Ellinwood area, began banding birds at Cheyenne in 1924. He caught birds with nets or traps that would not harm them. Once a bird was caught, he secured a small metal band, containing his contact information, around one of the bird's legs. He hoped someone, maybe a hunter, would recover the bird and return the band to him, so he could



A BLACK-NECKED STILT WORKING THE SHALLOWS AT CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

determine how far the banded birds had journeyed. Robl found that the birds he'd banded at Cheyenne Bottoms had flown to Kansas from all over North America.

Robl was astonished at the returns he collected, receiving them from as far away as Alaska, South Carolina, and California, while other birds were recovered in Mexico and Honduras. Beside satisfying his own curiosity, Robl's work served another purpose. He spoke at the State Wildlife Conference about preserving Cheyenne Bottoms for migrating birds, and when he was offered a few minutes on a na-

Kansas contains one of the most crucial shorebird stopping places in the western hemisphere.

tional radio program in 1934, he told a million people about the marsh. Others who were interested in creating a wildlife refuge at Cheyenne joined with Robl to testify before the Senate Committee on Wildlife, and he even contacted then-Vice President Charles Curtis. In response to these efforts, Congress promised \$350,000

for construction of dikes, roads, and hunting blinds for sportsmen, so Cheyenne Bottoms could be properly managed. However,

because of the Depression, only \$50,000 were made available. Despite this setback, Robl's dedicated banding of nearly 19,000 birds over a quarter of a century showed the world how important Cheyenne Bottoms was and helped protect the wetlands for many more

generations of birds.

In 1966, Edmund Martinez became interested in banding the birds of Cheyenne Bottoms. Since Robl had banded very few shorebirds, when Martinez began banding birds, only 349 shorebirds had been banded in all North America. Over the next twelve years, Marti-

nez banded over 58,000 birds from 32 species. His northernmost return came from Siberia and his southernmost from Argentina.

Over the next twelve years, Martinez banded over 58,000 birds from 32 species. His northernmost return came from Siberia, and his southernmost from Argentina.

A 1974 shorebird survey in which Martinez participated found that no other place, from Texas to North Dakota, had even ten percent the number of shorebirds that visited Cheyenne Bottoms. When the data from the two men's research was combined, it became clear that

the wetlands was a vital oasis for migrating birds.

In a *New York Times* interview, Martinez said: "It's remarkable what passes through Cheyenne Bottoms, sandpipers that winter in Tierra del Fuego and breed in Siberia. I got to hold them in my hand and marvel at how they do it. To get returns on birds that I banded from northern Russia and South America, it really put into perspective what is going on here in the cen-



"COTTONWOOD RIVER," OIL ON CANVAS, 26 X 36 INCHES, BY JANE PRONKO, 1993



BANK SWALLOWS AT CHEYENNE BOTTOMS

ter of Kansas. These small birds are the best athletes in the world.” (Laux).

Not only does Cheyenne Bottoms provide shelter and food for many animals, it also draws many people to Kansas, opens a door for people to learn about this very special wetland ecosystem, and brings \$2.8 million into the state’s economy annually. Each year, 60,000 people visit Cheyenne Bottoms, some drawn by the [Wings n’ Wetlands](#) birding festival which is held every other year at the marsh. Visitors to Cheyenne Bottoms can hike on a nature trail, listen to guided tours, and explore displays inside a Wetlands Education Center.

Cheyenne Bottoms is an essential link in the yearly migration for tens of thousands of birds. Without the dedicated work of Frank Robl and Edmund Martinez who showed the world how significant this Kansas marsh is to the survival of many North American shorebirds, this might not be the case. Robel and Martinez,

who invested their lives in studying, understanding, and protecting Cheyenne Bottoms, have made it possible for us to visit the marsh, see the sun sparkle on the shallow water, hear the raucous calling of geese, and crane our necks to see flocks of thousands wheel in the sky. We can marvel at their migration journey and should do what we can to ensure that the waypoint they rely on will always be here to welcome them. 🌿



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINDY CROSBY

[Cindy Crosby](#) is the author, compiler, or contributor to more than 20 books. Her most recent is [The Tallgrass Prairie: An Introduction](#) (2017 Northwestern University Press). Her new book, with Thomas Dean, *Tallgrass Conversations: In Search of the Prairie Spirit* will be out in the spring of 2019 from [Ice Cube Press](#). Her work is also included in [The Tallgrass Prairie Reader](#) (2014, University of Iowa Press). She teaches prairie ecology, prairie literature, and prairie ethnobotany in the Chicago area, and is a prairie steward who has volunteered countless hours in prairie restoration.

This essay first appeared in her [blog](#), “Tuesdays in the Tallgrass” in October 2018.

Little Prairie on the Freeway

BY CINDY CROSBY

I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do.

Edward Everett Hale
The Book of Good Cheer

Strong winds. Gray skies. A cold drizzle. Not an optimal day to go for a prairie hike. But you hike when you have time to hike, and weather be hanged. Today, [Hinsdale Prairie](#) steward Kath Thomas has promised me a tour of a prairie remnant, just down the street from her house. Not much more than an acre, it's a tiny remnant island adrift in a sea of development.

What's a prairie remnant? Simply put, it's a piece of the original tallgrass prairie that has not been plowed or destroyed. Illinois once had 22 million acres of tallgrass prairie; only about 2,300 high quality acres remain. Other Midwestern states have even more dismal statistics. These remnants are often tucked into old cemeteries, or the corners of farm fields. Along railroad tracks. On rocky hilltops unsuitable for plowing. Or, places like this alongside a freeway that escaped notice.

Mowers have knocked back the prairie on the freeway side and it's been trimmed back along the sidewalk which flanks it on the west. There's a roar of traffic from the freeway. The din is overwhelming. A prairie—here? Really? If there is birdsong, it's erased by the sounds of trucks. And yet...you feel it. This is a special place.

As we hike, Kath points out the bluebird houses. Anybody home? Nope, not today. Too late in the season. As we brush aside the tallgrass and hike deeper into the prairie, the real treasures emerge. Over here, spent prairie gentians. To the left, prairie dropseed, lime-colored for autumn. Just ahead, the bloomed-out spikes of *Liatris*, blazing star, with a few ballet-skirted seedheads of *Echinacea*; pale purple coneflower.

Other treasures appear as we walk. Prairie dock. Some rough-cut leaves of compass plant. All of these tell us we're walking through prairie, not an old field. Signs of a survivor. The rain starts up again. Wind and wet blur the grasses into a watercolor of motion.

The rain also brings out the globe-dark silhouettes of rattlesnake master and pops of black-eyed Susan seedheads. I imagine these two plants in summer; their flashes of silvery white and lemon yellow.



THE "ROUGH-CUT" LEAVES OF A COMPASS PLANT IN FALL



A NECESSARY PRECAUTION, TO KEEP ROAD MAINTAINANCE CREWS AT BAY

Reality, in the form of more cold drizzle, brings me back to the present. Kath will be the first to tell you this little prairie remnant is here because of Dr. Robert Betz, who identified prairie bush clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*) here in the 1970s and championed the prairie's survival. We don't find the prairie bush clover as we hike today, but we do find round-headed bush clover. Not nearly so unusual, but still intriguing.

Look around and discover a jewelry box full of plant gems. New Jersey tea with its blown-out seedheads and curl of last leaves. Bee balm, with its powdered leaves at the end of the season, exhaling an astringent scent. Big bluestem, the Illinois state grass, waves its turkey-footed seedhead against the gray sky.

The Hinsdale Prairie refuses to give up the ghost, despite inroads from utility work, encroachment by development, and occasional mowing on the east and west side that shaves off precious portions of the tallgrass. Crown vetch, teasel, and daylilies threaten to dispossess the Indian grass, little bluestem, and wild quinine.

Kath does everything she can to raise awareness of this remnant. She founded “Friends of Hinsdale Prairie,” dedicated to advocating for the prairie on social media and with local government. She intercedes for the prairie when she sees unusual activity, like utility trucks parking on the grasses or neighbors throwing yard waste into the wildflowers. She picks up trash. Each day brings a new challenge. And Kath is only one person.

But she’s one person changing the world, making a difference. Right where she lives. Kath inspires me that change is possible—if only we will step up. Take care of the places right in front of us. Tell others why something matters.

How will you change your world? There’s never been a better time to find out. 🌿



THE HINSDALE PRAIRIE REMNANT, AN ACRE+ SWATCH THAT HANGS ON ALONG A STRETCH OF ILLINOIS ROUTE 83 ON THE WEST AND THE VILLAGE OF HINSDALE ON THE EAST.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICHARD LUFTIG

Richard Luftig is a former professor of educational psychology and special education at [Miami University in Ohio](#) now residing in California. He is a recipient of the Cincinnati Post-Corbett Foundation Award for Literature. His poems have appeared in numerous literary journals in the U.S. and internationally in Canada, Australia, Europe, and Asia. Two of his poems recently appeared in [Realms of the Mothers: the First Decade of Dos Madres Press](#), and Rootstalk published three of his poems in its [Fall 2017](#) issue.

Two poems

RICHARD LUFTIG

THE NOTION OF NORTH

My parents wished away their lives
in their winter States over moving south
to Florida or west to the California coast.
But I dreamed of north, always north.
I knew just where I'd go—North Dakota:
First to Bowbells then across the border
at Portal, and on along the railroad
trunk line to Churchill by Hudson Bay.

Then east across Quebec to Chicoutimi
where Highway 175 makes a circle
around the town as if giving travelers
a chance to escape before overstaying
their welcome. Towns I'd visit for no other reason
except for the sounds of their names.
Places I read from the Texaco roadmaps
I saved like other kids collected baseball cards:
Moose Jaw, Flin Flon, Saskatoon, Yellow Knife.

I'd stop in cities I couldn't pronounce
on a bet: Antigonish, Cocagne,
Tatamogoosh, Musquodoboit, and of course,
Middle Musquodoboit. I knew I could
sow my wild, winter oats in Fertile, Saskatchewan,
and that they'd have a parade for me in Welcome, Ontario.
That I'd sit for a while, find my karma in Peace River
until I finally made it to Paddle Prairie where it stays
light all night in summer. I'd travel these towns

where rumor has it that ponds freeze
over in September, where the only two seasons
are winter and the first of August, where they won't
let you play hockey unless you speak fluent French.
A guy once told me it was so boring in Newfoundland
that the only things to do was drink, watch television and screw
and I remember thinking: *What else could one want?*

But I never went, never did load up a VW bus,
catch a Greyhound, take a puddle-jumper
to Red Deer or Regina, Moncton or Trois Rivières.
Never made it past Ohio, Indiana, save
for the occasional foray to Seattle. And now

too old, landlocked in these dreams
and living in a California desert lost

among brown, burning hills, I long still
for northern nights, basso winds tinged
with frost, fenceposts that dress up on Sundays
in their best winter hats of snow. I watch
the sky and watch for the chevron flight
of Canada Geese and listen as they leave faint,
distant cries of their wish to make it all the way home.



PHOTOGRAPH BY LEINA'ALA VOSS

WINTER GAMES

Another January comes to Iowa.
But these farms and fields are nobody's
fool: they give up what little scraps
of husks and stalks they have left
after a late fall's harvest to hunker
down and wait for the first full frost
of the year. This house, too,
has been trying to tell me for weeks

with its whistle and its moans
through spaces that leak
frigid air that I should have covered
the porous windows with plastic,
stuffed foam between the doors
and floors by now, made sure there's
oil in the tank in the back yard
for when the fuel truck can't make it

through because of the iced roads.
But, like always, I've been a slow learner.
I've not yet gathered my supply of gossip
and rumor to sustain me like cords
of firewood throughout the three,
no, make that four months that winter
holds court and announces itself king.
It won't be until March, before any

any of us hobbles out on our toes
to avoid the mud, peer straight down
at our driveways to avoid the black ice
that wants nothing less than to do us in.
I'll just have to make it best I can
with the little I've put away to ride
the season through: lean in hard
to the secrets that everyone keeps

but everyone knows, live,
best I can, to hold on
until I emerge, see the shadows
of those who made it into spring
and take comfort on how
my neighbors survived
using my life as kindling
to stoke their own winter fires.



"SANCTUARY," OIL ON CANVAS, 24 X 36 INCHES, BY JANE PRONKO, 1998

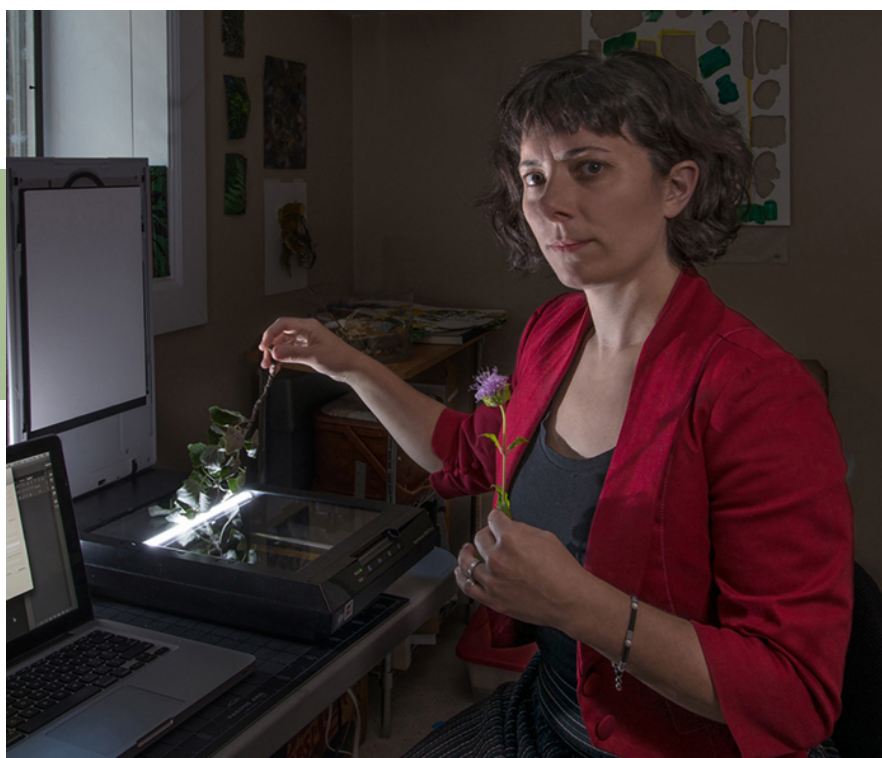


PHOTO BY RIK SFERRA

Closeup: Regan Golden

Regan Golden depicts ecological change in the American landscape using drawing materials and altered photographs. Golden's images have been exhibited in solo and group shows both nationally and internationally, including [*Harvard University's Fisher Forestry Museum*](#), [*The Cue Art Foundation*](#) in New York City and the [*Museum of Contemporary Photography*](#) in Chicago.

Recently, Golden has exhibited works from her series, "The Prairie Constructs," which comprises over 140 mixed-media images which draw heavily on the Tallgrass Midwest for inspiration. Golden has exhibited works from the series at [*Soo Visual Art Center*](#) in Minneapolis, [*Residuals at the Architecture Library of the University of Minnesota*](#) and [*Unearth at the Painting Center*](#) in New York City. We have chosen a number of images from the series to feature in this issue of Rootstalk.

Golden has received numerous grants and fellowships including [*The Core Program Fellowship in Critical Studies*](#) at the [*Museum of Fine Arts Houston*](#), [*The Jerome*](#)

[*Foundation Emerging Artist Fellowship*](#), [*The Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grant*](#), and a [*Long-term Ecological Research Grant in the Arts*](#) from [*The National Science Foundation*](#).

In 2016-2017, Golden was the first Artist-in-Residence at the [*College of Biological Sciences Conservatory at the University of Minnesota*](#), a home for rare and endangered plants from around the world. Golden is currently a Lecturer in Drawing, Painting, and Critical Studies at the [*University of Minnesota*](#) and the [*Minneapolis College of Art and Design*](#).

Golden has written about her work in general and "The Prairie Constructs" in particular in an artist's statement, at right.



"PRAIRIE CONSTRUCTS #35 & #36," ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, EACH IMAGE 36 X 54 INCHES, BY REGAN GOLDEN, 2015

For the past decade my artwork and research has focused on 'edgelands,' from a forest in Massachusetts bordering a subdivision to a ragged prairie in Minnesota running along a railyard. Edgelands act like scrims rendering other spaces invisible, yet the edgelands are absent from most city maps. This wavering visibility seeps into my photographs and drawings: the soft villous hairs on the unfurling fern fronds are partially obscured by a puddle of green paint. Edgelands are considered one of the last refuges of wildness. I photograph and draw the plants I discover in these overgrown patches of "weeds" as the seasons change. My images are as much about making visible this overlooked landscape as they are about documenting the passage of time.

"The Prairie Constructs" are an ongoing series

which catalogs the life and death of plants from the edgelands of Minneapolis. Made almost entirely on the scanner bed, The Prairie Constructs are a digital version of a photogram or botanical solar print. The images are shown as both large-scale digital color prints and as an artist book or compendium, showing the evolution in the landscape over the course of a year. What started as a way of collecting bits and pieces of plants as the seasons change has turned into a methodical and sometimes frenetic project of gathering and experimenting with each plant.

Since I often uncover synthetic materials, plastic bags mostly, as I collect plants I included these in the images as well.

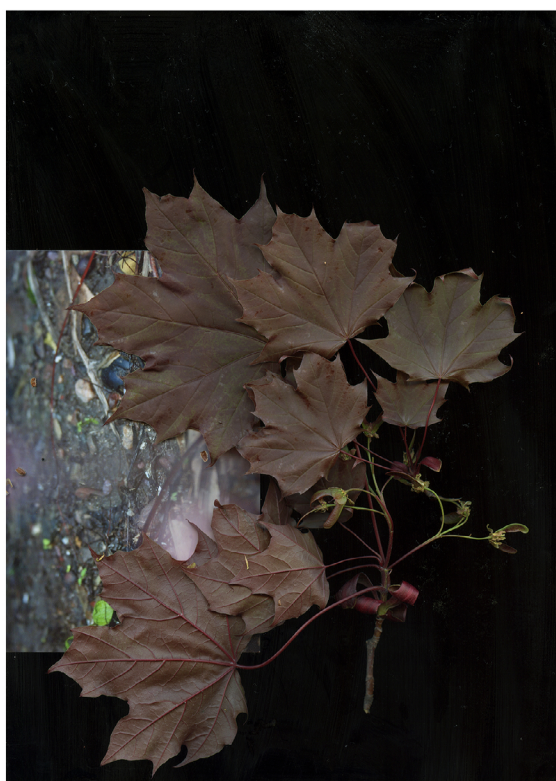
Chance also plays an important role because the view from below of the scanner is not visible until the



"PRAIRIE CONSTRUCT #41," ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, 36 x 54 INCHES, BY REGAN GOLDEN, 2015

image appears on my screen. I place my materials within the frame and then document them as they react and evolve (melt, flow, crumple, wilt), often making multiple scans from a single combination of paint, photographs, plants and plastics. I orchestrate this "organic process" that is then recorded and amplified through digital technology.

Light is an important ingredient in the transformation of my materials and in the elevation of these spaces. I work with light when photographing the landscape, making the scans and installing the images. In traditional landscape painting, light can be interpreted as *lumen*, observed light, or *lux*, divine light or the light of reason. I prefer to think about light in terms of Heidegger's description of *lichtung*, which translates as "light in a forest clearing." He argues that openness must precede *lumen* and *lux*, observation and judgment. My work enables me to be open to the natural world that is around me, even in the city. It is this sense of wonder and awareness about the persistence of urban nature that I want to pass on to viewers through my images. 🌿



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, "PRAIRIE CONSTRUCT #23, #5, #36 & #18," ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT, EACH IMAGE 36 X 54 INCHES, BY REGAN GOLDEN, 2015

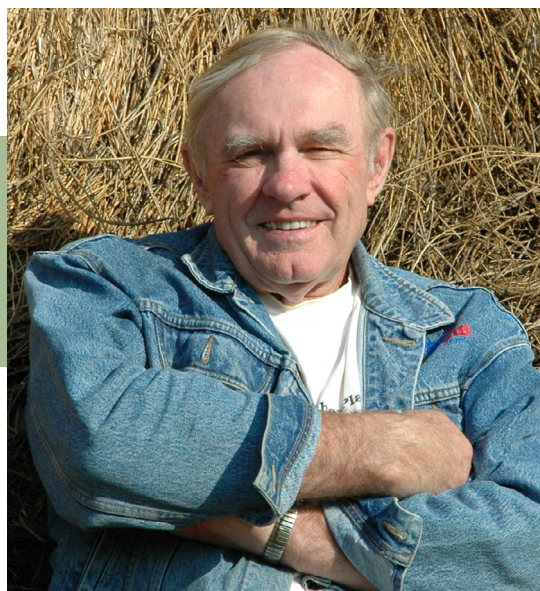


PHOTO COURTESY OF FRED KIRSCHENMANN

[Frederick L. Kirschenmann](#) shares an appointment as Distinguished Fellow for the [Leopold Center](#) and as President of [Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture](#) in Pocantico Hills, New York. He served as the Leopold Center's second director from July 2000 to November 2005 and has been recognized widely for his work. He also continues to manage his family's 1,800-acre certified organic farm in south central North Dakota, where he developed a diverse crop rotation that has enabled him to farm productively without synthetic inputs (fertilizers or pesticides) while simultaneously improving the health of the soil. His farm has been featured in numerous publications including [National Geographic](#), [Business Week](#), [Audubon](#), the [Los Angeles Times](#) and [Gourmet](#) magazine.

Book Review: *Building the Agricultural City: A Handbook for Rural Renewal* by Robert Wolf*

BY FRED KIRSCHENMANN

When men are merely submerged in a mass of impersonal human beings pushed around by automatic forces, they lose their true humanity, their integrity, their ability to love, their capacity for self-determination.

—Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

Merton's powerful epigraph serves as a compelling opening salvo, one that Robert Wolf himself sounds with this creative and timely book, [Building the Agricultural City: A Handbook for Rural Renewal](#). Following in Merton's footsteps, Wolf provides us with an alternative vision of rural America that, to many of us, may seem an impossible fiction in light of what writer and critic [Wendell Berry](#) decried as the "unsettling of America." This "unsettling" is a process, centuries in the making, that has reverberated across our rural communities, contributing to a sense of divisiveness between rural and urban locales. It may cause most of us—especially those living in rural areas—to believe that any alternative, positive future for rural America, like the one Wolf envisions, simply defies reality.

Nevertheless, in this inspiring book, Wolf provides us with a practical scenario for how we could actually experience a rural renewal grounded in the evolution of a new paradigm. As Wolf points out, we now need to begin building regional, alternative "arks" that envision alternative rural futures in which rural and urban communities are no longer separated, but become part of a *bioregion*, wherein rural and urban citizens work together to produce new communities that are driven

*REFERENCES LISTED IN ENDNOTES

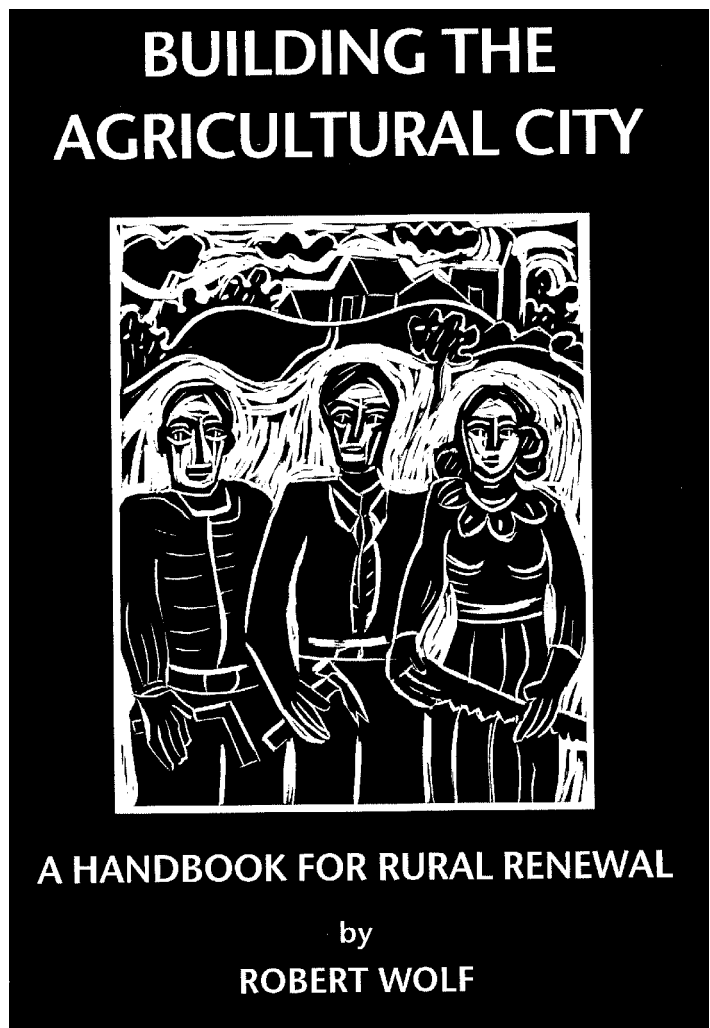
by self-renewing regional capacities, in lieu of the current dominating and centralized globalist economies. As Wolf says:

Regionalism is precisely the means by which we can reconstruct society with a human face—if we have the collective will to do it. Regionalism is a form of decentralization, and is at odds with our overly centralized system, which seeks to impose uniformity in every sphere of activity (page 38).

Those who think such a future is unrealistic may want to also consult a new book by John Thackara, [*How to Thrive in the Next Economy: Designing Tomorrow's World Today*](#), in which he points out, based on his travels around the world, that such rural/urban bio-regionalisms are, in fact, already happening in many parts of the world.

Of course, communities across the U.S. have been heavily influenced by the culture of the Green Revolution, which envisioned, and created, a food system designed to feed the world with cheap food produced by fewer farmers, thereby producing an industrial, input-intensive food system designed for “maximum, efficient, production, for short-term economic return.” The Green Revolution’s proponents claim that bio-regional transformations are untenable. Viewed from this perspective, the industrial farming-and-food paradigm embodied in the Green Revolution seems inevitable, and many believe that science and technology will insure its resilience, and its economic efficiency ought to be enough to ensure its attractiveness. Wolf views this paradigm as a limit on our imagination, as it leads us to believe that the current order of things is simply the way things will always be. As Wolf says:

Clearly, achieving greater self-sufficiency is not simply a technical problem. More than anything, it is a social problem. Many people here [in the Driftless Region of NW Illinois, SW Wisconsin, and NE Iowa], as elsewhere in America, believe that our centralized system is a reality of nature, like the Atlantic Ocean or the Adirondacks (page 31).



BOOK COVER FOR *BUILDING THE AGRICULTURAL CITY: A HANDBOOK FOR RURAL RENEWAL* BY ROBERT WOLF.

Wolf provides us with a different scenario, pointing out some of the many reasons why the industrial food system is already beginning to “approach collapse” and is likely to include “chaos and violence” when it collapses. It is imperative, he argues, that we explore an alternative food system and begin building it.

Of course, one of the many drivers of the Green Revolution model—as well as our enthusiasm surrounding it—was our collective assumption that the natural capital would always be there, throughout our industrial economy—and that new technologies would constantly be developed to replace it. Components of this natural capital would be healthy soil, cheap minerals, plentiful fossil fuels, and abundant fresh water—all

essential to the “success” of our Green Revolution food system.

Now we are beginning to recognize that many aspects of this natural capital are in a state of depletion. As Wolf notes early in the book, “one of the distinguishing features of contemporary American civilization is the frequency of breakdowns and failures in industry, government, and society itself. The size of the problem is enormous.”

Take, for example, minerals. Rock phosphate—which is the “natural capital” from which we manufacture our phosphorus inputs—is now depleted to a point where we only have perhaps another ten year’s-worth of supply remaining on the planet. Or soil. Since we have paid little attention to restoring the health of our soils in our input-intensive systems, we need large quantities of fresh water for irrigation. This is due to the fact that most of our soils now only absorb about a half an inch of rain water per hour, so we now use approximately 70 percent of our freshwater resources on the planet for agricultural irrigation. All of this, of course, is beginning to increase costs and produce diminishing returns—especially for farmers. In his recent book,

Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life, David Montgomery provides concrete evidence of how some farmers are already beginning to alter their farming systems because the input-intensive systems simply no longer produce positive economic returns for them. Instead of continuing to rely on external inputs, which are becoming more costly, they are beginning to employ practices that restore the natural capital, reducing the need for the inputs. These farmers are now reducing their costs, increasing their net profits, and are no longer interested in “getting bigger.”

This begins to make clear why the revolution Robert Wolf envisions is a practical necessity. Even if we only consider cheap energy, minerals, soil and water as part of the natural capital that has “sustained” our industrial agriculture for the past century, we must recognize that they are all in a state of depletion. As Wolf duly noted throughout his treatise, our industrial economy will, at best, only survive for another two or three decades:

The centralization of American government, finance, and industry has grown extreme, to the extent that it governs our life and work. Such a



PHOTO BY JON ANDELSON

system cannot long endure, and our various environmental and social breakdowns are evidence of an ongoing crisis... Our institutions and corporations have grown too large: everything exceeds human scale and has become inhuman. It is imperative that we construct political and economic units in which people can once again find a home (page 23).

This search for a home, for the reconstruction of our self-reliance, is the compelling reason that Wolf's vision for the renewal of rural America, beginning with arks of refuge from industrial capitalism in places like the Driftless Region of the Upper Midwest, may seem strange to those of us still locked into the culture of the industrial economy. Wolf, looking back in our collective history, demonstrates how "early American history is replete with examples of local and regional self-reliance, from the Spanish Southwest to Yankee New England, from Chesapeake Bay to the Carolinas and Georgia." Returning to that kind of regional self-reliance can play a central role in deconstructing the highly problematic political economy in which we live.

Those still not convinced may want to examine yet another recent publication by two of our leading agro-ecologists, Peter Rosset and Miguel Altieri: [*Agroecology: Science and Politics*](#). Rosset and Altieri highlight the key fact that the majority of food that feeds the global population in today's world is being produced by smallholder farmers farming five acres or less! Going further, Rosset and Altieri point out that those smallholder farmers are already employing, and have been for millennia, the very kind of agro-ecological farming practices—grounded in "local autonomy, local markets and community action"—that Wolf envisions for a future America. Finally, it is also important to recognize that these "agro-ecological" farming practices, which Rosset and Altieri describe, are operating as "human-centered cultures" driven by community relationships, not by machine-like alternative perimeter cultures that humans have to conform to—exactly the kind of human-centered culture that Wolf envisions for the [*Driftless region*](#) and eventually America's future.

Finally, as we anticipate these future changes, Wolf

suggests we embrace not more *technology*, but more *imagination*. Therefore, the arts can play a critical role in helping us to envision and adapt to this new future:

Regionalism fosters a regional culture. Regionalism promotes the arts as a means of maintaining regional consciousness. Regional consciousness in turn fosters a willingness to work together, which in turn creates wealth (page 39).

From my perspective, Wolf's book is filled with important information—information that is vital for all of us to digest as we anticipate the changes coming at us, so that we can get an advanced start in preparing for them. Furthermore, by beginning to construct a few "arks" here and there, it becomes possible to demonstrate that the kind of human-centered, agro-ecological community farming which is already "feeding much of the world" could thrive in America. Doesn't that seem like a good way to start this transformation? 🌱



PHOTO COURTESY OF BRUCE LEVENTHAL, TAKEN ON NOVEMBER 5, 2016, AT FORT SNELLING STATE PARK, (ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA) ADJACENT TO THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY WILDLIFE AND FISH REFUGE

Mammals of the Prairie: the White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

The white-tailed deer is widespread in the prairie region. Its natural range stretches from Canada south through the continental U.S., Mexico, and the countries of Central and South America, down to Peru and Bolivia. The female—the doe—usually weighs under 100 lbs, but can range up to nearly 200 lbs. The male—the buck—usually weighs around 100 lbs, though specimens approaching 300 lbs have been known. Bucks are distinguished also by antlers, which they shed and regrow yearly, and use to engage other bucks in antler-to-antler pushing contests during the mating season, usually late October to early November.

On the prairie, the introduction of large-scale agriculture and the clearcutting of coniferous forests, along with the virtual extirpation of the white-tail's natural predators, has helped its population to explode.

Vocalization: the white-tail has a repertoire of social

grunts and wheezes, but reserves its loudest sounds for the mating season. During the rut, males will make a variety of grunts, wheezing snorts and groans to announce their intentions, corral does, or warn rivals.

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of the White-tailed deer during the rut, captured by Jedd Edwards for [The Management Advantage](#) and posted on [YouTube](#).





PHOTO COURTESY OF RODNEY NELSON

Rodney Nelson's work began appearing in mainstream journals long ago. See his page in the [Poets & Writers directory](#). He has lived in various parts of the country, working as a licensed psychiatric technician and copy editor, and now resides in the northern Great Plains. Recently published chapbook and book titles are Canyon, Late & Later, [Metacowboy](#), [The Western Wide](#), Mogollon Picnic and Ahead of Evening, (both from [Red Dashboard Press](#)), [Hill of Better Sleep](#), In Wait ([Mind Bomb Press](#)), as well as Felton Prairie, Cross Point Road, Billy Boy, Winter in Fargo, Hjemkomst, Time Tacit, and Minded Places (all from [Middle Island Press](#)).

Two poems

BY RODNEY NELSON

MAPLE CREEK CROSSING

in winter the horizon would take and hold the eye
but now in June the fore and middle ground are focal
and it is not so much the look of the woods around
the creek as the turning at siesta time to look
that would have the mind dismounting and reclining on
the rich kept lawn and open to the recital of
a mockingbird near the marker

beyond are white smoke
of ditch fire and brown and tan dust from fieldwork and
the road but here in immediate heat we read of
American cavalrymen and trappers that crossed
and rode on to one more important site or other
where they would rally to find a pose in history



"STORM IN THE FLINT HILLS," ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 24 X 30 INCHES, BY JANE PRONKO, 1975

A JUNE WEATHER

in the darkening a straight wind out of southwest got violent on the prairie, nothing to hinder it
but a town or grove, and younger trees bent deep, not cracking, losing no leaf, seemed to be
joining in, bearing guidons for it, and at the window I read lines in an old book

Men med vildare Stød

falder Stormen paa

Frithiofs Saga by Esaias Tegnér, the Danish translation, a copy someone had brought along to
read and reread during settlement of a Dakota of tornado and blizzard, the language could not go
on however, would not have done where weather broke into columbarian serenity and did not
arise from unquiet sea movement, now the book was mine along with a memory of one that had
read aloud, of a voice wanting Frithiof's northern gods to have been, to ignore the others or none
directing the wind in this broad wilder place

But with wilder Thrusts
the Storm comes down



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SEBASTIAN BRAUN

Sebastian Braun earned a Master's degree in ethnology, history, and philosophy from the [University of Basel](#) and an MA and PhD in anthropology from [Indiana University](#). Prior to becoming Director of [American Indian Studies at Iowa State University](#) in 2015, he taught in the [Department of American Indian Studies at the University of North Dakota](#). His research interests are at the intersections of culture, ecology, economics, and politics.

Extraction, Roots, Energy, and the Plains

BY SEBASTIAN BRAUN

People in exile are experts on roots and energy. They know how much energy is needed to extract roots, how much energy is needed to stay uprooted, and, because a state of uprootedness is unsustainable over the long run, how much to sink roots deep into the ground again.

I remember standing in North Dakota and looking toward the horizon. One can actually see Earth as a globe - the slight curve of the horizon, where the winds come from that bend the grass and the few trees, and where the clouds gather that sweep overhead, only to disappear again and make way for the blue sky. Sometimes, looking toward the horizon, I would feel an overwhelming joy, seeing mountains in the distance. It was usually a short emotion, as I realized that my mind had played tricks. Those were not mountains, could not be mountains. They were clouds that had swept me away toward home, mirroring a more familiar landscape.

Living on the Great Plains costs a lot of energy. The sky overhead is endless, and the people are exposed to that sky as if on a plate. Shelter becomes more than a physical necessity. Humility in the face of this force is self-imposing and sometimes overpowering. There is a connection between people and nature, because everybody is exposed to forces that cannot be tamed or understood. At least, that is, until people started to surround themselves with constant shelter, as if to avoid having to look into that sky, to acknowledge the force, to be humble. Instead, they could now disconnect



themselves from nature, think of themselves as superior, and think of distance in miles per hour, hurtling themselves quicker and quicker through the landscape they no longer needed to acknowledge, ripping up all their roots, at least the long, deep, strong roots that hold the grasses in place against the winds. Instead, they now plowed the earth and selected what roots were allowed to grow. And all of this cost even more energy because to be without roots requires one to levitate in place, nothing but a fleeting shadow over the land, which has become but an abstraction, no longer real because it is just land. There is no distinct smell of the earth, no change in winds that herald rain, no experience of seasonality, no need to observe closely how its other inhabitants behave, no sharing of the landscape with them. Kinship and its obligations have been narrowed to the people in the shelter, and has been turned against those outside the shelter. And so, with the extraction of roots

comes the need to extract more and more energy.

Energy has become visualized for me in the form of long trains of black tank cars and coal tenders moving across the plains. When we lived in North Dakota, they were parked right next to the campus of the university where I taught, and I often wondered what would happen if the oil wagons exploded like they had done in [Lac Megantic](#) and right outside Casselton. Now that I live in Iowa, the same wagons rumble by our house about five times a week. Here, they are loaded with ethanol, not oil or coal, but the image of energy being transported to markets is the same. The Prairie-Plains are the heart that sends fuel to the outliers. It is a restless procession of long trains, traveling through places that try to still be rooted, yet are more and more depopulated. People and grass have been uprooted and swept away, and even those who have stayed behind need heavy machinery to anchor them down, now that the roots are

mostly gone and the shelterbelts are disappearing.

There are other ways that the energy flows, of course. Pipelines cross the Plains like a vast network of pulsating arteries. Not veins, however, as there is not much coming back. Invisible, those lines are connected to the new artificial roots of hydraulic fracturing. These roots fan out from wells, which draw different nutrients out of the Earth, nutrients for the industrialized society. However, just like the roots of water-hungry plants, these new kinds of roots are also thirsty. They are thirsty for poisonous nutrients—oil and gas—that they extract, but they also put poisons into the Earth. Toxic materials are mixed into the water that is used for fracturing the rocks, and fracturing wells are extremely thirsty. In 2016, a well in the [Bakken oil field](#) required 5.5 million gallons of water, while one in the Permian basin used 11.2 million gallons of water. In August of 2018, the Bakken had 12,571 producing oil wells. Some of this “water”, too, will flow back out. This is now called *produced water*, but it really has not much in common anymore with water. It is about twenty times saltier than ocean water, slightly radioactive, and highly toxic. Apart from its use in the artificial roots of hydraulic fracturing, it can not be allowed to ever come into con-

tact with other roots. This brine needs to be disposed of, hopefully for ever, and it is usually injected back into the Earth. In the United States, about 180,000 Class II injection wells pump over 2 billion gallons of fluids into the Earth every day, most of them in the southern Plains. What happens when these fluids are not injected deep enough or break free from their layers can be seen on the [Fort Peck Indian Reservation](#) in Montana. Here, an underground brine plume has been migrating slowly through water wells for the past 40 years, a legacy of injection practices in the 1970s. Slowly spreading toward Poplar and the Missouri River, the only solution for this catastrophe has been to try and pump it to the surface again, and then to inject it deeper.

The pulse of this network has become constant beneath the soil, and in some places, it has become so strong that it regularly causes small earthquakes. Whether or not these pulses will eventually set the liquids free is a matter of debate that will only be shown by time. If, however, any of the produced waters make their way to the grass roots, people, plants, and animals will have to leave. Under the ground sleeps the greatest danger to communities. It might be a telling sign that a break in a produced water pipeline is much more im-



pactful than a break in an oil pipeline.

The Prairie-Plains have become the roots for the United States, where wheat, oil, soybeans, corn, and coal are extracted from the soil to feed the cities far away. Not much thought is spent on the roots. They are often regarded as boring and colorless and are taken for granted. Eighty years ago, during the [Dust Bowl](#), the nation did come to realize that it had better pay attention to the roots when the topsoil was flying away. One of the best kept secrets of the Plains lies in Denbigh, North Dakota, an as-

sembly of houses off the main road to Minot. Across that road stands the [Denbigh Experimental Forest](#). At first, it might come as a surprise that the ground in the forest is mostly sand. This sand is not the leftover of a prehistoric beach or long-ago glacier, but the result of much more recent overgrazing and over-plowing. In fact, the forest was planted as a grand plan to save the soil. It was one part of the national response to the destruction of the plains grass-, range-, and farmlands. The original plan called for planting a series of 100 mile long shelterbelts, a mile apart, over more than a thousand miles from North Dakota to Texas. While this plan was eventually given up, between 1935 and 1942, the Forest Service planted 220 million trees in the Plains. Denbigh was to be one of the nurseries for these trees. Standing in the midst of these trees in the middle of nowhere, a tree island in a sea of industrialized agriculture, I found it hard not to think of the imagined and real root systems holding the soil and people in place and to compare it to the oil boom ongoing a hundred miles further west. There are no Denbigh forests, no designed areas of seeds to fan out and protect the land against this new kind of industrialized havoc.

The Denbigh trees were and still are an illustration of the possibilities to make roots. Like plants, animals and people can become rooted in a place. Humans do

that by establishing a relationship with a place: by listening to the landscape and its inhabitants. The stories that we learn and share in this process are our roots, they hold us to the places we engage with. It is hard to say how long it takes to become rooted. A few generations is my guess. Once we know the stories of all the places around, above, and below us, we are rooted. By that

time, we are also rooted in the ground because our ancestors have related to the same places. Rooted knowing is not knowledge formally learned, but sensually experienced. It

Rooted knowing is not knowledge formally learned, but sensually experienced. It is the knowledge of how the dirt smells and feels and tastes after a rainstorm. It is the ability to find one's way through the landscape of stories.

is the knowledge of how the dirt smells and feels and tastes after a rainstorm. It is the ability to find one's way through the landscape of stories. It is the skill to predict the weather by looking out the window and to estimate distances by how long it takes to walk along the contours of the land. And it is to understand that that we humans are just one of the parts in any place that we live, to be humble before greater forces with great and small powers. The energy of place is tied to roots, but those are the roots of community, not extraction.

When I was younger, I used to mountain bike on the mountain behind the house where I lived in Switzerland. There is a place there where the trees give way to a cliff, and there I can experience my home. Looking out over the Sundgau, I can see the Belchendreieck, the mythical triangle of mountains in the Vosges, the Black Forest, and the Jura that served as an astronomical calendar and a place power grid to the people before me. Looking west and north, there are possibilities of openness, promises of adventure, and winds of chance. I always longed to know what lay beyond the next ridge. The Plains, although topographically the opposite of my home in Switzerland, remind me of it, possibly because they offer an endless opportunity to go farther, a constant draw toward the horizon. Perhaps that is why I fell in love with the Plains the first time I traveled them.

Few things are better than lying awake at night in a tent, smelling the sage, and watching the thunderstorms on the horizon parade by. Some people tell me that there is nothing on the Plains, that it is fly-over and drive-through country. They have never taken the dirt tracks to watch pelicans on remote lakes, have never gotten stuck in Plains gumbo, have never observed ground squirrels playing around their tent. These days, I too hurry through the Plains to get places, and sometimes I feel a pain for passing by all the places that I know lie right over the hills, in beautiful valleys, away from the interstates and the industrial fields. There is nothing as depressing as a flattened, brown, industrialized, ploughed landscape devoid of roots. There is nothing as beautiful as a wide river valley with a sprinkling of savannah trees. To allow and make people see this beauty, we need to open the land to the public, to allow people onto the land, not in small, enclosed parcels, but in continuous flows, traveled in days, experienced close at hand. Observed, listened to, smelled, and tasted.

Ironically—or perhaps not at all—those land-

scapes would also provide us with material energy. The energy returned over energy invested ratio for all those wagons full of corn ethanol that roll behind my house is lousy and unsustainable. Instead of plowing up the Native roots and replacing them every year with corn to provide to pigs and to distill into ethanol, the best use of this landscape would be to turn it back into switchgrass prairie. Ethanol production from switchgrass is about 5 to 6 times more efficient than ethanol production from corn. And while currently the research is directed at switchgrass monocultures, a true prairie flora could probably be used for the purpose, too. A green economy for Iowa would see the restoration of switchgrass prairies and the harvest of the grass for ethanol production. That would also allow the restoration of roots to the land and a diverse plant and animal habitat. Sustainably planted islands of edible corn in this prairie instead of diminutive islands of prairie in a desert of corn and soybeans would still produce food. In the coming years, agriculture, just like everything else, will need to adjust to massive changes in climate and in energy use. We all





need to re-learn to live with the land instead of against it. We will all need to re-learn the value of roots and how to maintain them.

I am not advocating for a return to pre-industrial life; wind power generation will have to be a part of the solution on the Plains and Prairies. Wind turbines are rooted like prairie grasses and like the farmers who take care of the land. Instead of clearing the land of its roots, however, and watch people, native plants, animals, and everything else be swept away from it in the name of industry, we should emphasize this caretaking function of farming. In order to see prairie caretaking as farming, we need to redefine the meaning of the term, farming. But farming as caretaking of the landscape instead of industrial extraction of resources would restore the powers of roots and enable those same roots to care for people. Instead of seeing that as a threat to farmers, I see it as a restoration of the true meaning of farming. Until industrialization, farming did not mean to rip out roots, but planting roots and at the same time taking care of existing root systems, nurturing the land for plants, an-

imals, and communities.

Ironically, people in exile are experts on roots. What we have learned is that roots cannot be forced. Roots need to grow naturally. If we allow them to grow, over time, patiently, listening and observing and learning, then we will be able to harvest their true energy. 🌿

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