Rootstalk

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Bruce Leventhal, *a high school biology teacher in Forest Lake, Minnesota, took "Prairie Grass Sunrise," the photo we're featuring on the cover of this issue, at his state's William O'Brien State Park in 2015. He also took the photo of the bison, opposite in South Dakota's Badlands National Park.*

Cover design: Mark Baechtel, Jonathan Andelson
Table of contents image: Naomi Clayton
Layout: Jonathan Andelson, Mark Baechtel

"Summer Bison Portrait, Badlands National Park, South Dakota," Photo by Bruce Leventhal, 2015

Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

Jon Andelson *is the publisher of* Rootstalk. *He is Rosenfield Professor of Social Science (Anthropology) at Grinnell College, where he also serves as director of the Center for Prairie Studies.*

Sight, Sound and ... Smell?

by Jon Andelson

Words. Images. Sounds. These are what we at *Rootstalk* share with you—our readers, our viewers, our listeners. If you have seen only a hard copy issue of the journal, you have gotten only the writing and the pictures. When we initially imagined creating *Rootstalk*, we envisioned it in a conventional print format. Later, we embraced the on-line format because not only did it allow much less expensive reproduction of images, especially color images (two dimensional art and photography), it also allowed us to add sound, including music, birdsong, and podcasts. True, an on-line presence doesn't offer the tactile experience of holding a paper issue in your hands and turning physical pages, but the sense of touch in that is, frankly, limited.

I suppose the day may come when technology could allow the addition of the sense of smell to publications like *Rootstalk*: you'll be able to see a painting of a flower and be able to smell the flower, or (not as nice) you'll read an article about hog confinements and be able to smell them. This sounds far-fetched, but when I was growing up in Chicago I went to a friend's birthday party at which the main entertainment was going downtown on the "L" to see a movie, "The Scent of Mystery." What makes the experience stick in my mind is that the film was shot (although that's probably not the right word) in "Smell-o-Vision." Little boxes on the back of each seat would, at the appropriate times, release smells that went along with the action in the film: someone eating a peach, a man smoking a pipe, and of course a woman wearing special perfume. (I am not making this up. Just follow the link above.)

And might we someday be able to read in *Rootstalk* about the incessant winds on the prairie and feel them on our cheek, or see a photograph of compass plant and be able to touch the screen and feel its sandpapery leaves? Time will tell. Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy *Rootstalk* using the three senses it can stimulate. And please, if you have words, images, or sounds about the prairie region that you would like to share, consider submitting a piece of content to us. We would like to hear from you.

Photo by Justin Hayworth

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 *(Longman, 2003), a textbook guide to short-story writing. 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

by Mark Baechtel

Now that the winter winds have stopped howling across the harvested fields, and the ambient temperature has climbed reliably above that on the surface of Pluto, we who live in the Great Flyover start thinking about that most Midwestern of Springtime traditions.

No, I don't mean drilling in the beans and corn, or getting your kitchen garden planted. I don't mean farrowing, or lambing, or hunting morels in your favorite, secret grove. Nor do I mean cataloging the waves of Spring ephemerals that compete with the 'shrooms for our attention when we walk in the woods. I'm not talking about adding birds to your life-list as the migrants pour through our skies headed to their northern breeding grounds, and I'm definitely not talking about dragging the lawn mower out of the spider-webby shadows of the garage, to see whether you can kick it into life for one more season (Some would say that's not, strictly speaking, an exclusive rite of Midwestern spring, but they haven't met a prairie lawn).

No, I'm talking about a roadtrip.

We on the prairie have been shut up inside, more or less, since Thanksgiving. We've watched the fast-falling snow and the faster-falling thermometer, and have tried not to entertain the notion that this year, finally, winter will decide not to leave, and will instead usher in a new Ice Age. You can only stream just so many episodes of *Westworld* or *Orphan Black* to stave off claustrophobia, and you can only play just so many games of Monopoly or Hearts on Family Game Night before your loved ones start looking at you across the game board with blood in their eyes.

The roadtrip is our go-to cure for cabin fever. Though I lack the stats to prove it, I'd be willing to bet

there's a significant uptick in the number of oil changes, tune ups, and tire-rotations that occur in Midwestern garages about the time the snowbanks start shrinking. We want to get out. We want to go somewhere. We want to go anywhere.

A roadtrip, to my mind, is the best way to get to know what's compelling, beautiful, *sui generis*, about the prairie region. Our home place is like us—a bit reserved, not overly showy, warm-hearted once you get to know it. It is most itself away from the Interstate, where it yields its secrets to those who will slow down, dawdle, and pay attention.

If you follow this prescription, you'll see unforgettable sights along our region's roads—for instance, the seven eagles my then-wife saw roosting in a tree along the Iowa River, or the time when I was driving through Nebraska and scored a wildlife viewer's trifecta, simultaneously seeing, from the shoulder of a state route, prairie dogs popping out of their burrows, pronghorn antelope grazing the horizon, and Sandhill cranes passing overhead. One doesn't see such things unless one gets out and looks for them, usually by taking the least direct route.

One of my colleagues at Grinnell College, Will Freeman, knows what I'm talking about. As we go to press, word has reached us of a monumental road trip that he's planning for this summer—an expanded version of a trip he took with his twelve-year-old son some years back, which he wrote about in his book, *The Quest*. On this summer's adventure, Will plans to drive his Morgan three-wheeler 18,000 miles—a trip during which he will visit all 48 contiguous states. I can't think about Will's trip without feeling a stab of envy. You can follow his adventure on his blog. So: with all this in mind, it seems appropriate to me that our Spring 2018 issue features essays on three different road trips. I hope as you read the work of Tracy Harris, Damian Johansson, and Colin Lewis-Beck, it will lift you out of whatever remains of your own winter doldrums, just as it did us, when the pieces came in over our transom.

Will Freeman and his three-wheel Morgan, "The Spirit of Grinnell." Photo by Justin Hayworth

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Photo courtesy of Fabrice Poussin

Fabrice Poussin *teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in* Kestrel, Symposium, The Chimes, *and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in* The Front Porch Review, *the* San Pedro River Review *and more than 350 other publications.*

Open Door

by Fabrice Poussin

First breaths of a new life born by a soft breeze of Spring,
why keep them prisoner on the outside when a door is
gaping beyond the hazy boundaries of the man's soul?

A gentle spider tangles, architect of a pearly trap;
soon she will glide into another trestle solid as marble,
viewing the world with a thousand acute senses.

It is dark in every atom now, the opening remains,
inviting in, inviting out, communication begins eternal,
with the fresh air of life at the hands of the sweet fairy.

Mysterious sighs, murmurs meant to be only secrets,
the creation speaks in formulas, prayers and divine spells,
injecting its eternal and mighty force to every part.

Falling leaves dusted in light pollen, caress the nest
of the eloquent nightingale, leaving their signature
in a word majestic, imprinted in every minute detail.

Let a draft live as it grows into a hurricane of complex
mechanics, made of infinite waves carrying with them
color, sound, music, gaiety, peace and all anxieties.

Watch the spirits as they giggle to ecstasy with every bump,
and leave the trace of a conversation however brief yet,
which will resonate from now, and simply forevermore.

Photo courtesy of Mariah Manoylov

Mariah Manoylov *studies Ecology and English at the University of Georgia. While this is her first publication in* Rootstalk, *she's had short stories published in other literary magazines such as* Stillpoint, *and had plays produced in the Classic City Fringe Festival in Athens, GA. Mariah communicates environmental themes in her creative writing, making art that's not only engaging but educational.*

Peaches, Meet Corn

By Mariah Manoylov

As a Georgia native, I thought the Midwest meant corn and cows and people who said "baggy" as "bayggy." It wasn't until my first year in Iowa that I realized how charming the sleepy little state could be.

At sixteen years old, a junior in high school, I set out for Iowa Lakeside Laboratory in Milford, Iowa for a conservation biology class. The field station was established in 1909, and the stone cabin classrooms bore evidence of a century of weathering. They felt lived in, like stepping into a pair of my father's work boots. How a structure could survive a hundred years of tornadoes, hail, and Midwestern lighting baffled me, but there I was, standing in one.

"Alright, time to go," my professor said. After a brief lecture on wetland ecology and conservation, we put on our waders and were off to count some wetland vertebrates. Over four weeks of counting, we'd see how the vertebrate data compared to previous records for that specific time period, indicating how its wetland ecology changed over the years. In my juvenal ignorance, though, I didn't really comprehend the importance of the work we were doing. I was just excited to stomp around in wetland for the first time.

My four classmates and I loaded into one of those boxy white vans. Starting up the engine, my professor tossed, "You ready, Georgia?" over his shoulder: a clever nickname my colleagues came up for me.

"As I'll ever be," I replied. We set off.

The miles of corn reminded me of the beach. Water never interested me, but you better believe I was that kid making civilizations out of sand. I, the sand castle wizard, built kingdoms from grains, subjects out of sea shells and stray twigs. The result would be some-

thing like the topography of Georgia: hilly, mottled, and charmingly uneven, but with a firm swipe and fierce "Mwahaha" I made the land flat again. This was how I saw Iowa: a land swiped of all its features, comforted by the horizon. I felt like I could unfurl my arms in the transparency of the open land and touch nothing on either side.

We exited the van to a fanfare of frog songs. A sulphur-smelling wetland shimmered past a fence of reeds. My classmates and I grabbed our field notebooks, a bucket, a seine net, and the data sheets and took our initial steps into the murky water.

In addition to being the kid who exclusively played in the sand, I had also enjoyed rolling around in mud. Taking those first few steps awoke the sleeping child in me. I kid you not, I actually giggled as I walked further in, the water rising past my ankles and knees, sloshing water with every step.

But the giddiness disappeared when I took one step and sank to my crotch. Water spilled over the top of my waders and soaked my torso and legs. I stepped back on my free leg to pull myself out, which just got my opposite foot stuck. There I was, a drunken see-saw trying to stop the wetland from nibbling my feet. My native Iowan classmates might as well have been those lizards who can walk on water.

There I was, a drunken see-saw trying to stop the wetland from nibbling my feet.

The class had already checked the cages, documenting frogs, salamanders, or any other critter while I was ten feet back slinging mud everywhere. By the time I had made about three feet of progress, the others had finished up and started back towards the van. Panic jolted my stomach. It was the first day of class and I didn't want to keep everyone waiting because I was mud-wrestling myself out of a wetland. I silenced my motions, breathed in, then breathed out. I knew what I had to do.

I closed my eyes, dipped under the murky brown water, and pressed my palms against the bottom of the wetland. Cold mud oozed between my fingers. With a firm push and mental cursing, the wetland released my boot. I doggy-paddled out, avoiding the muddy bottom entirely. My waders sloshed with water as I ran out of there. I probably looked like the mud-equivalent to Carrie at prom, but I made it back to the van right as the last student sat down.

My professor hid a smile, baseball cap covering his eyes. "Mud mask, Georgia?"

I quieted my panting. "And a workout."

My second intimate encounter with the Iowa terrain happened three years later, when I returned to the same field station, as the summer Writer in Residence. I was a rising junior in college, filled with frantic creative energy.

I had been writing late into the night in a building near my cabin. The front wall was almost completely made of glass so potential visitors could see if the building was occupied or not. At midnight, I was the only one there.

As I saved my Word documents and packed my bags, a flash of light startled me. The intensity of the flash reminded me of paparazzi snapping photos with those gaudy attachable lights. Then another flash.

Is it fireworks? I thought. It was close to the Fourth of July, but who used bright white fireworks?

Turned out to be neither. Just a good ol' fashioned Iowa lightning storm.

My breath fogged the glass wall as I stared at the sky. The frequency of the lightning increased till it looked like a child flailing a flashlight underneath a slush colored blanket.

"Whoooaaaa."

The same childlike giddiness bubbled into a smile on my face. But then the first gunshot of thunder nearly floored me. Then the hail fell, pounding against the ground as if a thousand terrible golfers thought my building was their target. I had never experienced anything like it: the torrents of hail, the spasming lights, and the boom after boom of thunder. If the prairies were quiet by day, they certainly partied by night.

Despite the frenzy, the chaotic weather outside emphasized the stillness within the building, much like

how passing a car crash makes me appreciate the togetherness of my own car, my own body. I sat on the cold tile floor, enjoying my steady breath as if it were a warm cup of tea. I slept on the floor that night, lulled by the hail pinging against the roof.

Some people brag about sleeping with numerous partners. I brag about sleeping with a lightning storm, which is something I can't say in Georgia. As I live my life in the Peach State, I catch myself teleported back at Lakeside Laboratory, remembering the land—honest, with nothing to hide—and feel like I'm back in a second grade recess. While Georgian stability is nice, it doesn't compare to hungry wetlands and cloud-paparazzi. I miss the gentle chaos, plan to return to the land of corn someday. Hopefully with a full body wetsuit and ear plugs.

Photo by Justin Hayworth

Photo courtesy of Ken Saunders II, taken April 12, 2017, at Otter Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Tama County, Iowa

Birds of the Prairie: Wood Duck

Aix sponsa

The **Wood Duck** is one of the most stunningly pretty of all waterfowl. Males are iridescent chestnut and green, with ornate patterns on nearly every feather; the elegant females have a distinctive profile and delicate white pattern around the eye. These birds live in wooded swamps, where they nest in holes in trees or in nest boxes put up around lake margins. They are one of the few duck species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on branches.

Song: Although better known for their distinctive coloration, Wood Duck calls are easily identifiable as well. Females make loud "oo-eek, oo-eek" sounds when disturbed and when taking flight. Male Wood Ducks have a thin, rising and falling zeeting whistle. While flying, the wings of the wood duck make a whistling or whirring sound (Description adapted from text created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology).

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of the Wood Duck, captured by Paul Driver, courtesy of xeno-canto.

Photo courtesy of Ethan Kenvarg

Ethan Kenvarg *is a Chicago-based writer, artist, and musician. At Grinnell College, Ethan released the collection,* Bruised Light, *and twice received the Selden Whitcomb Prize for Poetry. He has also created multimedia work as an artist-in-residence at Grin City Collective, and produces and plays music with the band Ooraloo. Kenvarg's work has appeared in* The Grinnell Review, Grinnell Magazine, *and* The Seneca Review.

Ode to the Honey Bee

by Ethan Kenvarg

Blessed be
The honey bee:
Miniscule
Cacophony.

Darting 'bout
Lazily,
Carefully,
The stamen's jewel.

Blessed be
The winged beast
On tiny joints
And fuzzy breast.

Bathing sweet
In nectar fields,
Happily
In apathy.

Blessed breeze
That disagrees
And blows away
With haste and ease

The sacred thrum,
The holy drum,
Its restlessness
Impetuous.

The pitch and yaw
Of pollen crown:
A pirouette
On blossom's breast.

Blessed be
This honey bee:
The flower's own
Soliloquy.

Photo by Jon Andelson

Photo courtesy of Tracy Harris

Tracy Harris *is a writer and art lover from St. Paul, Minnesota. Her essays have appeared in* Midwestern Gothic, Tahoma Literary Review, Mason's Road, *and* Lunch Ticket, *among others. She is a former board member of* Water-Stone Review *and participant in* Cracked Walnut, *a series of literary readings in the Twin Cities.*

Roadtrip

by Tracy Harris

"That's a fucking beaver in the middle of the road!"

Sofia shrieked from inside the maroon SUV, then burst out laughing. The rest of us turned to get a look before the traffic light turned green.

It was as if we'd found a living talisman for the weekend, focusing our attention like a bullseye smack dab in the center of Rock Island, Illinois. The beaver was unexpected and out of place, as incongruous as the monumental painting that we'd driven 300 miles to see had seemed in Davenport, Iowa, just over the river. And yet here we all were: me, my friends, the painting, and now a three-foot long beaver, sitting on its haunches amid the rundown wooden houses and boarded up storefronts in the center of a town apparently more dismal even than Davenport, the city across the Mississippi that we had already christened, "Where Hope Goes to Die."

We had come to Davenport to see Jackson Pollock's *Mural*, one of the most important paintings in the history of modern art. It launched Pollock's career in 1943, established Abstract Expressionism as the major art movement of the 20th century, and solidified New York City's emergence as the center of the international art world. It was commissioned specifically to fill, and according to some accounts even trimmed to fit, the entryway of heiress and art patron Peggy Guggenheim's Upper East Side brownstone. It was a product of the city in which it was created and a catalyst that helped create what that city would become.

Mural belonged in New York. An east coast transplant myself, I couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for the painting; I felt surprised and almost embarrassed that it had not found a worthier home. *Mural* deserved a

showcase on a major stage; instead it ended up in Iowa, just across the river from a neighborhood whose greatest attraction appeared to be a beaver in the middle of the road.

To give credit where it's due, Davenport's Figge Art Museum is lovely. When we were there, its galleries were so empty that I managed to flout the rules and get a photo of myself standing next to Pollock's masterwork. I was not, unfortunately, quick enough to find my phone and snap a picture of the beaver, even though Danielle was driving slowly as she maneuvered her enormous Ford Explorer through the Rock Island crossroads that hot Saturday afternoon. We had crossed the river after our museum visit to see what else there was to do in the Quad Cities, and like the listless citizens of Rock Island who were slumping about the downtown intersection, we had not found much. Just a beaver in the middle of the road, hands to its mouth, snacking on something that none of us in the SUV had any desire to contemplate.

"Did it just crawl up from the river?" Kristina asked rhetorically.

"I don't think it's a fucking pet," Sofia replied.

* * *

In addition to Rock Island and Davenport, the Quad Cities include Moline, Illinois, and Bettendorf, Iowa. We didn't visit all four, but I feel confident saying that Davenport is queen of the Quads. Its population is over 100,000. Its downtown features several buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. Jazz musician Bix Beiderbecke was born in Davenport, as were several professional athletes whose names are unfamiliar to me. Davenport is headquarters for an upscale regional department store chain; it is served by four interstate highways; and in 2015 it had 168 confirmed shootings, at least according to Wikipedia. For a city of 100,000 that seems like a lot, but of course that number refers to shootings, not homicides.

No place is perfect. It would be churlish to run Davenport down or suggest it doesn't deserve to house a masterpiece of modern art. I certainly don't mean to suggest that people in the Midwest can't appreciate the avant-garde or that the painting is wasted out here in the hinterlands, hundreds of miles from a major airport or population center. Well, maybe I do mean that last thing, at least a little. Because Davenport felt like nowhere, and this was a surprising conclusion to draw, especially after visiting with this group of friends. We generally found the charm wherever we went.

We had met a few years earlier as tour guide trainees at Minneapolis's Walker Art Center. We were an unlikely clique, ranging from 32 to 62 in age, our music preferences running from punk metal to opera. All but me had grown up in Minnesota, but our backgrounds ranged from Panama to Latvia to one-quarter Chinese. Each of us was probably an odd duck in her own way. But during a year of studying pop art and conceptualism and visual theory, we had clicked like crazy. No one thought it strange when I suggested we travel 300 miles just to see a painting.

We were all checked in to our motel when Danielle and Kristina decided to go to a biker bar they'd seen down the road.

We had traveled together before. The previous summer, for example, we had taken a road trip through Pennsylvania. Between the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia, there were many highlights, like the night we met Kiefer Sutherland (who was then starring in the Fox TV series 24) at a bar in downtown Philly and Kristina asked him to take a picture of us. Which he did, quite graciously.

But my favorite was the night we'd spent in Hershey. We were all checked in to our motel when Danielle and Kristina decided to go to a biker bar they'd seen down the road. Danielle had grown up around motorcycles, and biker bars were kind of her milieu; plus she and Kristina were still flying high from all the M&M samples they'd scarfed down on the chocolate factory

tour.

It was midnight, Sofia and Nancy had already gone to bed, and I was in pajamas: black crop pants printed with multi-colored teapots and a solid black tank top. But I had never been to a biker bar. Kristina convinced me I didn't need to change, and she was right, although I did take 30 seconds to put on a bra. At 52, I was the second oldest in our group and felt some obligation to keep things classy.

The band was loud, and the bar was outstanding. I did my first-ever Jello shots (green). I admired the bountiful tattoos gracing the arms, chests and necks of the bar's raucous patrons. I noted with pleasure that even in my teapot pajamas I was one of the best dressed women in the room. The only real contender was a tall, thin woman in a bejeweled, flesh-tone unitard who was swaying to the music at one side of the dance floor, a sinuous, writhing cylinder of bleach blond hair, beige skin, beige spandex, and, I suspect, imitation gold.

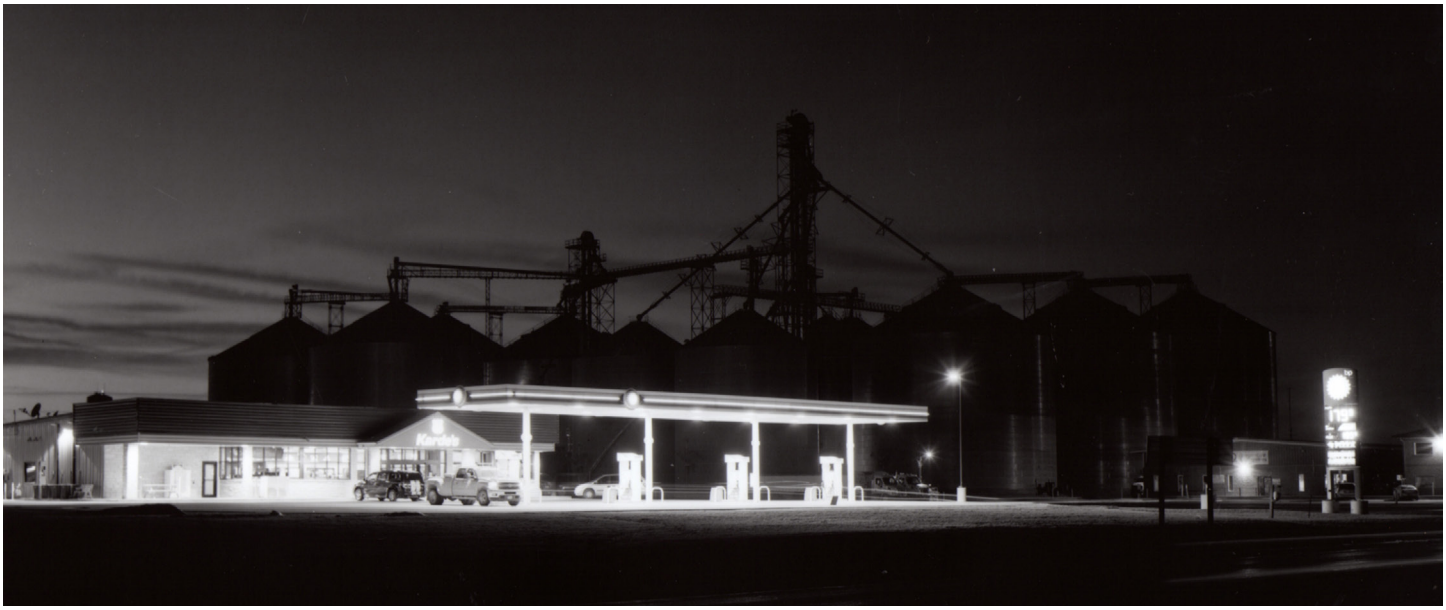
At some point a skinny old guy staggered up to the open area where the band was playing, fumbled the microphone from the lead singer and began garbling a tribute to his fiancée. Turns out we had crashed an engagement party. The bride-to-be clambered past a few tables and stumbled up to stand next to her intended.

She was no ingénue, but then again neither was he. They appeared somewhere in age between 40 and 70, and they looked a lot alike: blotchy and pale, dressed in metal band t-shirts and torn jeans, squinting and unsteady under the harsh stage lights. They both had shoulder length hair of indeterminate greyish color. I couldn't keep myself from contemplating how much conditioner it would take and how many combs would snap in two if either one decided to detangle before the wedding. They wobbled together as he sang, his voice raspy and his words unintelligible. They were beyond drunk, they were grinning a mile wide, and they were god's-truth adorable. I don't think they had a full set of teeth between the two of them.

All of which is to say that when I travel with this group of friends, we do not seek out high-end experiences. We did not go to Davenport expecting pâté and pinot noir. We really had no expectations, except for the Jackson Pollock painting.

* * *

We arrived in Davenport on a Friday night and checked into a large, clean motel just off the interstate.



"Grain Bins and Gasahol," by Robert Fox. Silver-gelatin print, 2016

We did not look like any kind of family or professional grouping, so maybe the nice young man at the motel desk was just confused when we asked what there was to do downtown. The museum, we knew, was closed at that hour, but there had to be some restaurants open on a Friday evening. Maybe a movie theater, or even a concert in a park?

"I don't know. I never go there," he said. That seemed odd. We weren't too surprised he hadn't been to the art museum, but downtown was just down the road. If he never went there, where did he go?

Still, downtown seemed like a better choice than the strip malls by the highway. By the time we got there it was about 9 p.m., the sun was setting, the night was warm. There were a couple of main streets lined with brick and sandstone buildings, tall enough to feel like they were closing in on us as the sky grew dark. A few bars had their doors open and we could hear their music playing.

I wondered how much time it had taken the young women to get ready for their evening out, how much their feet hurt in their three-inch heels, how much hope they'd invested in what the nighttime streets of Davenport had to offer.

There did not seem to be anything else—no restaurants, no theaters—just indifferently shaven young men, mostly blond and wearing loose-fitting jeans, clustered in the bars' open doorways, drinking, bobbing lightly to the music, some juggling cigarettes in the same hand that grasped the necks of their beer bottles. We passed a hot dog cart on a corner. Emphatic guitar riffs and the thumping of overloud bass filled the air with noise, suggesting a party atmosphere, but the streets were dark and foreboding, despite the music. The bars seemed barely lit, and there were not many lights on inside any of the buildings around us. We approached one of the groups of young men. They were not rude when we asked if there was anywhere open to eat.

"I think there's a hot dog cart down the block," one of them suggested helpfully.

There were young ladies on the scene, too. They seemed more interested in walking from venue to venue, a Midwestern version of the Italian *passeggiata,* perhaps. They had dressed up for the evening stroll, far more so than the men. Fitted jeans with metallic embroidery on the back pockets; thin, gauzy tops. Dangly earrings. Eyeshadow. Mascara. Long hair that had been bleached, or moussed or styled with a curling iron, or maybe some combination of all three. Most were pretty. All of them wore high, spiky heels and tottered on the uneven pavement as they walked in groups of three or four. They were probably in their early 20s, the same age as the more casually groomed men. This was it, their prime, the glory days they would look back on.

I wondered how much time it had taken the young women to get ready for their evening out, how much their feet hurt in their three-inch heels, how much hope they'd invested in what the nighttime streets of Davenport had to offer. I hoped the guys playing pool and air guitar were worth it.

* * *

An advantage of seeing *Mural* at the Figge was that we had it to ourselves. The painting is enormous, approximately eight feet high and twenty feet wide. Before *Mural*, Pollock had been painting far smaller canvases, tending toward abstraction but still representing recognizable images. *Mural* was his first large-scale all-over abstraction. Seeing it was amazing. I stood close enough to see the uneven texture of the paint that Pollock had brushed, spilled and thrown onto the canvas. I stood back to take in the picture as a whole, to absorb its dense succession of black and teal swirls, arrayed vertically across the wide expanse of the horizontal picture plane and shadowed with splotches and echoes of yellow, mauve, red and white. The effect is overwhelming: nonstop motion, force and energy, somehow contained

in two dimensions. Some people see shapes or ghost-like figures in the lines and colors. Pollock reportedly used the word "stampede" to describe the vision that inspired the painting.

It's not just the painting itself that is fantastic; it is the story of its creation. In 1943 Pollock was an emerging artist, struggling to make a name and a living for himself in New York, the city where new and established artists had come to congregate, Europe—and particularly Paris—having been overrun by the Nazis. Pollock was included that year in the Spring Salon for Young Artists at an exciting new gallery called "Art of This Century." The gallery was owned and run by Peggy Guggenheim, one of New York's most important collectors and a major promoter of contemporary art.

Shortly after the spring salon Guggenheim commissioned Pollock to create a large work to fill the hallway of her new brownstone at 155 E. 61st St. New York was usurping Paris as the art world's epicenter, and Guggenheim wanted to proclaim her support for new American art and artists. The commission would augment her status as a taste-maker and patron, and would give Pollock an opportunity to develop the potential Guggenheim and her advisers saw in his smaller scale paintings.

Pollock signed the contract in July 1943. He received a monthly stipend from Guggenheim, unheard of for artists at that time, and was given complete freedom as to what to paint. But instead of painting directly on the wall, Guggenheim wanted Pollock to create an enormous canvas, something ostensibly portable. Pollock had to knock down the wall between his studio and his brother's next door in order to accommodate the project. He hoped to have the painting done for a show at Guggenheim's gallery in November.

November came and went. The enormous canvas was untouched. Guggenheim grew anxious about whether the commission would be completed; Pollock grew anxious and depressed about his ability to complete the commission, and about the ramifications if he failed to satisfy one of New York's most important patrons. More weeks passed. Guggenheim wanted the painting by New Year's Day 1944 at the latest. Pollock was blocked.

Then, in a frenetic and heroic burst of energy, Pollock painted the entire canvas in one night just before the deadline. As soon as it was dry he brought the rolled up canvas to Guggenheim's townhouse only to find it was eight inches too long to fit in her hallway. Marcel Duchamp, the émigré artist who a generation earlier had revolutionized art with a notorious sculpture made of an inverted urinal, and now one of Guggenheim's closest friends and advisers, solved the problem by cutting eight inches off one end of the canvas. So the story goes. Duchamp's trim job is unconfirmed.

[I]n a frenetic and heroic burst of energy, Pollock painted the entire canvas in one night just before the deadline.

The painting and Pollock became instant sensations. After seeing *Mural* installed in Guggenheim's apartment, New York art critic Clement Greenberg proclaimed Pollock "the greatest painter this country has produced." Life Magazine would echo the sentiment in a cover story a few years later. Pollock's career soared; large-scale, all-over "action painting," as he called his very physical technique of pouring and throwing paint onto enormous canvases, would revolutionize the definition of art.

Decades later art conservators would question whether *Mural* could really have been painted in one manic all-night session. Pollock's wildman persona made the story seem credible. Pollock had been born in Wyoming and raised in Arizona and California. Remote, tempestuous, unpredictable, Pollock embodied the myth of the American West in both his personal life and in his art. It made sense that this untamed genius would associate *Mural* with a stampede, and the story of the painting's creation lives on as one of the greatest legends in the annals of art history.

Mural's ultimate fate, however, turned on a bit of practical irony. Although Peggy Guggenheim had commissioned a portable masterpiece, when she decided in

1947 to close the Art of This Century gallery and move she could not bring the painting with her: her new home in Venice did not have enough room. Guggenheim wrote to an art world acquaintance, Lester Longman, head of the University of Iowa School of Art and Art History, and offered him the painting if he could pay for shipping. In October of 1951, *Mural* arrived in Iowa.

* * *

I am not from the Midwest. I grew up in Boston and always imagined I'd end up in New York, or Washington, DC, or maybe San Francisco; and I did live briefly in all of those places. But I married an academic, and because I was waffling in my own career, we ended up following his job opportunity to Minnesota. I came here voluntarily, went to law school, raised two children. My choices, freely made. It's not like I was put in a box and shipped.

I've lived in the Midwest for more than 30 years, and I've pretty much made my peace with it. The Twin Cities, unlike the Quads, are a major metropolitan area, with plenty of theater, good restaurants, and, if not the teeming diversity of New York, at least enough of a population to offer a range of people and experiences. There is a lot to do here, and it's all more accessible than it would have been in the Northeast or the West Coast. It certainly would have been harder to get accepted as a volunteer tour guide in a bigger city with a more prestigious art museum.

But the thing is, I feel out of place in the Midwest. My slight accent, dark hair, and ethnic features mean people always ask if I'm "from here" or, more specifically, if I'm from New York. The answer to both questions is "no" and requires me to explain continually who I am and why I live in Minnesota. An inordinate number of people seem to have grandparents with farms; my grandparents, both sides, lived in run-down inner-city apartment buildings. Maybe because of their farm backgrounds, people here talk about gardening. A lot. It's no one's fault that I glaze over when people talk about their yard projects. It's no one's fault that I have nothing to add when people talk about their weekends spent with local relatives or friends they've known since grade school. It's no one's fault that so often I end up feeling like the oddball, or resentful that I don't have my own set of nearby relatives or childhood friends, particularly on lonely weekends when everyone else seems busy.

Truth is I've always been a hard fit. Not pretty or athletic enough in high school (who is?). Not outdoorsy or vegetarian enough in graduate school (Berkeley). Not young enough to be part of the crowd in law school (here in Minnesota), not old enough or rich enough to blend in at the first museum where I volunteered as a tour guide (the Minneapolis Institute of Art), before I switched to the contemporary art center where I met my gang of friends. Finding my place has always been a struggle, and I can't blame it all on Minnesota or the Midwest.

Finding my place has always been a struggle, and I can't blame it all on Minnesota or the Midwest. But in my worst moments, I do.

But in my worst moments, I do. In my worst moments, I remember that when I was interviewing for jobs after law school, all people did was look at the Boston-Berkeley-DC trajectory on my resume and ask, "What are you doing here?" Apparently if you're not from Minnesota or the Dakotas, Iowa or Wisconsin, people get suspicious. I don't imagine anyone asked Jackson Pollock why he moved to New York, but my prospective employers were obsessed with my geographic dislocation. So, instead of talking about my interest in immigration law, we'd talk about my husband's teaching position and why he and I chose to live in the cities rather than the small town 30 miles south where his college is located. I eventually received several job offers. It turned out I didn't fit at my law firm either. This was not particularly uncommon for a woman litigator in the late 1980s, but it didn't help that I started work feeling like an outsider because I was not from the Midwest.

It's not just my professional life. In my worst moments, all I see is flatness and space. So much space.

We envelop ourselves in it, like a bubble wrap of single family houses and wide streets and Midwestern politeness—they call it "Minnesota Nice" here—that protects us from interacting too closely, too rudely, with strangers. But when you come here as a stranger, that bubble wrap ends up feeling less like comforting protection and more like social quarantine.

In my worst moments, I miss the energy of a bigger city, and I ache for the reassuring anonymity of urban life. Being alone in a big city makes me feel powerful. It's not strange to be alone in a big city, it's an accomplishment. It means I've mastered the streets and subways and buildings and crowds; that I've become an insider; that I have, like the thousands of individuals around me, became part of a dynamic whole. When I'm alone in the Midwest, even in Minneapolis, I don't feel part of anything greater, I just feel alone. Other people say they feel so "at home" here, but they're at home with their doors closed, and no one has invited me in.

So in my worst moments, all I see is that everyone else's contentment has made me feel excluded. It makes me hate it here. It makes me wish I'd worked harder to build a life in a more exciting place. And it makes me feel sorry for the magnificent, game-changing painting Peggy Guggenheim sent to molder in a cultural desert, a city with little to offer its young people on a Friday night but a hot dog cart and a chance to drink beer outdoors in the warm summer breeze, a city just across the river from a place whose greatest attraction is a beaver in the middle of the road.

How did we end up here? I didn't actually ask the painting out loud, but I looked at *Mural* a long time. I thought about the brilliant, alcoholic genius who created it; I thought about New York City in the 1940s; and I thought about what it means to end up in a place where you'll never really click. A place where people keep noticing that you're different, but don't understand who you really are. Do people get that you're a treasure? I thought as I stared at Pollock's fantastic canvas. Do they even know you're here? My friends had wandered off. I was alone in the gallery, feeling the hum of the air control system and the subtle vibration of the lighting fixtures. I kept staring at the painting. Are you lonely? I wished there were a way to ask.

How did we end up here? I didn't actually ask the painting out loud, but I looked at *Mural* a long time.

Mural is only temporarily at home in Davenport. It was moved from the University of Iowa after floods in 2008 destroyed the university museum. Eventually it will return to the dignity of at least being housed in a university town with a considerable reputation as a literary center, although Iowa City is even smaller than Davenport and similarly hard to reach. Even with the connection to the university, the move to Iowa did not enhance the painting's reputation. Decades after Clement Greenberg proclaimed *Mural* a masterpiece, art critic Thomas Crow wrote, "If the painting remains underestimated in the literature, it may be because of its remote location at the University of Iowa."

So it's not just me. And while I am not in a position to judge *Mural*'s place in the "literature," I trust Thomas Crow. Because even in my best moments and despite the fact that in 30 years here I've found wonderful friends and countless sources of delight, I still have to fight my instinctive prejudice about anything that happens to be located in the Midwest: if it's all that good, what is it doing here?

* * *

After the excitement of seeing the beaver in Rock Island, my friends and I returned to Davenport, where a riverboat casino had docked just a little ways upstream from the Figge. We wandered in and spent about 30 minutes. The rooms were dimly lit; the walls painted dull beige, mottled with greasy streaks and scuff marks; the red carpet was faded and worn. The clientele were almost entirely senior citizens. Most wore pastel polyester stretch pants and clutched cigarettes in one hand as they used the other to feed quarters into the electronic slot machines. "Where Hope Goes to Die" suddenly seemed prophetic. The denizens of the casino were a depressing counterpoint to the young people we had seen

out on the town the night before.

I am willing to concede that Davenport might be a lovelier place than my friends and I were able to discern in the 40 or so hours we spent there. I still think it's a disappointing home for *Mural*, and I don't view the move back to Iowa City as a huge step up. In the same way, I still feel that Minnesota is a disappointing home for me. My life in the Midwest is hardly a cause for existential despair, but I don't click here. I'm not sure that living in this place has allowed me to become my best, most interesting self. Of course, the failure of life to meet expectations is not solely due to physical location. *Mural* is still a masterpiece even though it makes its home in Iowa.

On its own website, the University of Iowa admits that "[j]ust why Guggenheim chose to give *Mural* to Iowa has been a matter of some speculation." I recently learned that Jackson Pollock's parents were both from Tingley, Iowa, a small town about 250 miles southwest of Davenport. I have no reason to think Peggy Guggenheim was aware of that fact when she sent her painting to Iowa, no reason to think Jackson Pollock felt any particular connection to his parents' home state. But the fact that Pollock had roots in Iowa makes *Mural's* location seem a bit less random.

We all end up somewhere, and in the end there's a lot to be said for knowing how to bloom where you're planted. Not that I've developed an interest in gardening. But I've gotten better at navigating the broad Midwestern streets, at puncturing the bubble wrap and making some connections. I don't love the Midwest; I advise my adult children to think carefully about where they will live their lives; and I spend as much time as I can outside of Minnesota. But on the other hand I am lucky: I have four friends here who were willing to travel 300 miles with me just to see a painting.

"Mural," oil and casein on canvas, 8' X 13' by Jackson Pollock, 1943. Image courtesy of www.jackson-pollock.org

Photo by Matthew Harper

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Travel by Starlight

by Stephanie L. Harper

The map has led me to this unsought future
but I've come to cosset its every unfolding

like an aging cottonwood learns to curl its roots
around the creatures born in the forest loam

Still in the starlight of dreams I often return
to that course I used to wind through the rural Midwest

& immerse myself again in late summer's haze
of primroses columbines & great hay rolls

all drowsing along the twilit roadside I drive
past the cornstalks' muggy throngs reaching

their nascent fingers to wrest the last sun-drops
from the dome's milky yawn until the oaks

grow drunk with nightfall & the winged hosts
soused among their leaves all break into song

to wake me to my life
a map on its head:

East has become west & west east
for the Northern Lights always inviting

themselves to swim on my horizon

Though I'd have once been glad to drown
in the luminescent breath of such interlopers

I now see their hold on me was only fleeting—&
that tonight's reverie was no more solemn nor less

gratuitous than it was to mistake the crackle from
my gas fireplace I must have dreamed

for a memory

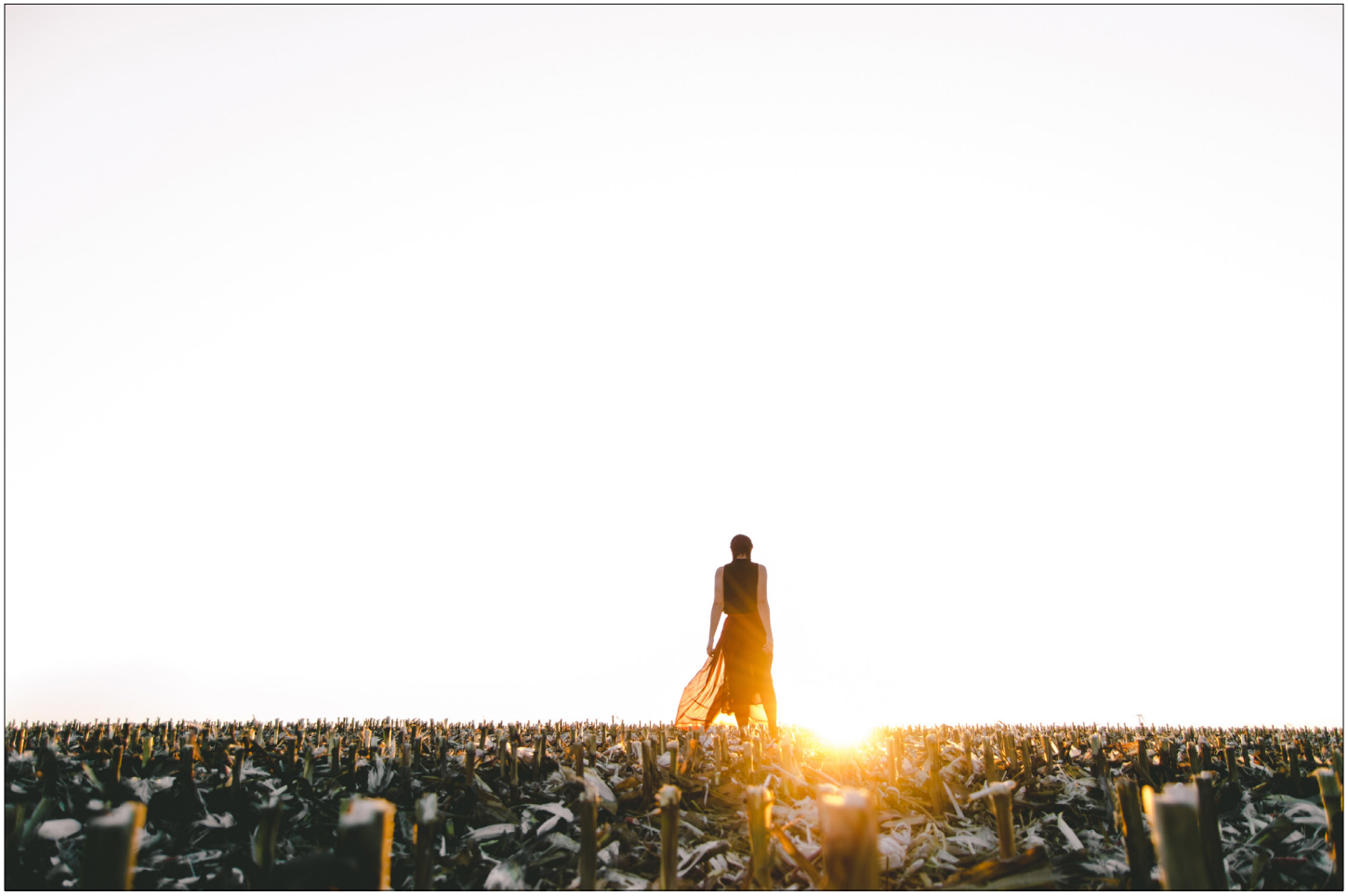


PHOTO BY ELLEN SCHOENMAKER

Photo by B. L. C. Bowne

Damian Johansson *is completing his MFA at the University of Minnesota, where he writes, takes photos, and teaches throughout the state's two seasons (Winter and Summer). Preferring the liminal spaces, he can be found near the Minneapolis/St. Paul border, in the university gardens, and picnicking in the experimental fields of the university's agriculture campus. His work has been published in the* Ivory Tower, Anamesa, Juxtaprose, *and other small and important publications in both corporeal and digital corners of the world.*

His Ambassador

by Damian Johansson

2 At least twice a week I drive between Red Wing, Minnesota, and Minneapolis. It takes just over sixty minutes. I call it my Crying Commute. After I pass the exit for Treasure Island Casino, as my old Honda Accord begins to climb the bluffs that girdle Red Wing, I put my music on shuffle. My iPod is stuffed with three thousand songs; anything could play, from opera to polka, from punk to the music we made together in the basement studio we built in the middle of the night with borrowed power tools and our hands. It doesn't matter what plays, I almost always cry, surrounded by all that nothing between Red Wing and the city: farmland, refineries, the supper clubs that always exist in small towns, a vacant strip club, burger shacks.

"Universal Traveler," by Air is especially effective. I'm fine until one about a minute and a half in, when the song transitions into an un-voiced chorus, backed by strings. The absence, or removal of the vocal track is sudden, and perhaps my sadness and separation rush in to fill it. Perhaps.

Whether I'm stopped at a traffic light or driving the open, empty farm highways, and I am immediately, crashingly terrified, and imagine I can feel my consciousness being torn away. For a moment it feels as if what is essentially me, my self, might completely shatter, and disappear, and I'd join him wherever he is, in the unknown, in the Ever that exists after this reality.

At the same time, my mind is invaded by the forever-image that accompanies thoughts my death, bidden, or persistently unwanted; a motion picture that plays in my brain whenever I think of what death will be: a video of Earth from space, in the right hand and bottom sides

of the frame; perhaps one-eighth of the Earth.

Algid, white cirrus clouds ribbon against the brilliant blue, and the blackness behind it is so much more real because of the light of the Earth. As the camera moves away from the Earth, up, and left, there is a sound like the white noise rush of air during a commercial flight.

I'm so used to this, my imagining death cinematic, then realizing again, as real as the floor mats beneath me in the car, that he's gone. The realization allows me to pull my self back into place, and obliterate the image before I yield to the complete terror of being alone.

Sorrow replaces the fear as it leaves, some of the energy of anxiety and terror, I imagine, is sublimated into water, and tears are left behind on my face, and in my eyes.

Once, near the Koch refinery, still thirty-eight minutes from Minneapolis, I screamed in my empty car. Seconds were ticking loudly, and I still hadn't achieved separation from the death-image. The scream broke up my moving away, stopped my slipping from the Earth, and I remained in my seat. The scream turned into laughter as I knew I'd made it back.

1 to one. Mirrors. We weren't mirrors, more like complimentary images, like that famous picture of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady on the jacket of *On the Road.*

Jack Kerouac died vomiting blood. Nine years earlier his favorite cat, Tyke, died the same way, the day after Jack left for a trip to Monterey, California.

Once we'd keyed onto the Beats, we were always playing the Past Life Game. In a combination of mysticism and proto-literature-review, I suppose, we'd make arguments for which Beats we were reincarnated versions of.

Ginsberg was still alive, so he was out. As was Gary

Photo by Ricardo Hernandez

Snyder, who I felt was a dubious addition to the list—he wasn't really a Beat, was he—but I admired him so much I might have chosen him if he'd been dead.

Matty always just said *Bukowski, Bukowski, Bukowski,* so we didn't play the game much with him. *He's not a Beat,* Tony said, *I don't care how many poems he wrote about fucking.*

We knew that it wasn't true, of course; if there are past lives I don't expect many of us were Marie Curie or Archduke Ferdinand. I expect that we were the guys who fixed faucets, or made your breakfast, those that only had faces and identities for the half-hour they rode next to us on the bus.

We always argued, interestedly, amicably, which of us was Kerouac, and which of us was Neal Cassady.

I'm sure the closest most people ever got to fame in past lives were people like Edwin Meese's secretary, the cue card holder for Ed Sullivan, or the executive chef of Dwight D. Eisenhower's White House. I suppose it's just mirroring; we want to see parts of famous people in our own makeup.

We always argued, interestedly, amicably, which of us was Kerouac, and which of us was Neal Cassady. Who was the writer, and who was the acting force? Now that I'm left here writing, does that make it more likely that I'm Kerouac? Or since I'm the only of us still able to act, in this dimension, am I Cassady?

Survivors get to decide because they're what's left.

1, 2, 3;

Ever since Tony left, my therapist suggests I number my thoughts, going towards categorization rather than away from it. This is noteworthy because other therapists have tried to release me from categorization.

She hopes that using numbers as journal headings will allow me to focus on what I've been avoiding, letting my mind wander into "corridors of confrontation" because of the random associations I'll have with numbers.

Structure is good, she says. *First, write numbers. Next, write something after them.*

Anything, I ask.

Anything, she says.

Does it matter what the numbers are—should they have some sort of order?

(I'm always interested in order.)

Just write any number that comes to mind, she says.

And this will help, I ask.

Let's hope it will help, she says.

26 October, walking in the Experimental Garden, my hands stretched from my sides, touching prairie grass tops, a two-year-old on my shoulders, saying *Twees!,* trying to touch the limbs above him. A woman rises out of a group of basil plants like a character from an absurd children's story, but not Alice in Wonderland; that story terrified me. A ghostly woman rising out of a field of basil at 9 p.m. is just comically absurd.

The sun is down, the moon is out, quarter orange shaped.

You can take it, she says. *Take it. Take it. Take it. The students told me I could take it. Do you like basil? They compost it after the season. They don't even eat it.*

I wonder if this is a test. Maybe she's a sociology

student. Her senior thesis, "Confronting Strangers with 'Free' Herbs; a Study in Morality."

She could be a ghost, a casualty of a love-triangle between Horticulture students, her body buried beneath the purple basil, composted into the hundred-year history of the university's agricultural showplace.

She pulls off a sprig, chews it. *Tasty,* she says. *Take some.*

I look around, confused, but the others see her too. So—not a ghost.

Isaac, atop my shoulders, under branches, in awe: *Twees!,* and we line up to tear off pieces of basil to bring home, to transubstantiate into Holy Basil Supreme, "Damian's Painfully Spicy Pesto," homemade pizza—fresh basil, olive oil, mozzarella, pecorino, laid over 14-inch pita bread from Holyland Deli.

72 inches across the aisle of the bus a woman with hair the color of coal moves a baby from her shoulder to her lap. She looks tall, but is sitting, so that's only a guess. Her arms are uncovered, and I am having trouble not looking at them. I am close to staring.

The distance from her shoulder to her elbow is so long, and as I stare I keep thinking: *Long muscles. Long muscles. Long muscles.*

I look up and she has caught me looking at her. The blue / green veins in her arms (Long muscles) stand out from her yellow / orange skin like seams in leather; she is beautiful in indignation, shifting the baby again.

28 times today I touched my necklace, my fingers lingering on the large wooden beads that recur along its waxed black thread. I touch the necklace and recall the song "Slowly Revealed," by Arizona desert artist Steve Roach. I'm anxious, and the fear is ascending.

I go to the song like a blanket to cover my anxiety, and I see tall cumulonimbus clouds, and my mind leaps to another moss-covered stone of a thought, stuck in the river of anxiety, in a row of rock-thoughts that help me ford it. I see the cover of a Robert Heinlein book, *To Sail Beyond the Sunset,* a nude woman, wrapped in red hair, standing on a shell—Heinlein's heroine/assassin Maureen Johnson as Botticelli's Venus. She's in front of cumulonimbus clouds, what my mind has labeled "Heinlein Clouds." I touch the necklace, completing the circuit. "Slowly Revealed," cumulonimbus, Heinlein book cover, talisman touch.

At the base of the necklace: a raw piece of schorl, black tourmaline, a gift given, historically, by certain Native tribes to the grieving...

At the base of the necklace: a raw piece of schorl, black tourmaline, a gift given, historically, by certain Native tribes to the grieving: funereal gifts. Beautiful, as black as a closed casket, alien in this world, it's as familiar to my fingers as the crushed rock and organic matter we call dirt, as familiar to me as his electric blue eyes, behind a row of fallen auburn bangs.

Vertically striated, prismatic, my tourmaline could be igneous, but I'd rather it be metamorphic, bent through millions of years, twisted by immense volcanic and magmatic pressures, turned by movements in the Earth's hidden insides. Black tourmaline was my favorite stone before all of this. It's my favorite stone still, now, in the afterwards.

I think of my girlfriend's tiny hands, working along the wood and glass beads, drawing them over the waxed cotton, wrapping the tourmaline in copper as she makes this necklace for me.

"Slowly Revealed," cumulonimbus, *To Sail Beyond the Sunset.* Finally, I touch the tourmaline at the neck-

lace's terminus.

>6 times a month I drive to the Experimental Fields, eight acres of unexpected farmland behind the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota. In fall it becomes a sea of wheat and soybean. After harvest it looks desolate, but is decorated with mounds of the blackest, most nutritious soil ever created; the black mounds are more beautiful than the fields in bloom.

In winter, it is a lovely tundra, a wasteland with dead wheat branches rising like half buried giant forks from the snow, organic Dada sculptures in negative forty degrees Fahrenheit. Most often, when I go there, I sit in my car, not smoking anymore since he died, I sit and watch the frozen wheat forks lean in the wind.

In summer, fall, and harvest time, I walk through the wheat. I leave my keys in the car, and voices from the radio drift over the fields to me.

I run my hands along wheat tops, followed by the dislocated, ghostly voices drifting from my car as they discuss aliens from Zeta Reticuli, the War in Heaven, thousand-year conspiracies, and true Messiahs. In winter the voices are close-up as I sit in the car, not smoking, enjoying the view of the tundra through my traveling picture window.

The fields are for students' experimental variations of common Midwestern plants, grains mostly. The eastern corner is gilded with the Experimental Garden (*Twees!*).

A raptor house slumps near wooden signs on the western edge of the field, like a horror movie house, windows boarded, rust-colored stains running down the opening. A row of antique looking Edison lights runs the eastern perimeter of the fields back to the road, leading me back to reality.

Most things my eyes find in this landscape are special to me, familiar, stuffed with memories that encircle and protect me, and that's why I come here.

A faunal nook between the bench and the arborvitaes, floored in cedar chips, where I slept in my Atom-era orange sleeping bag, not seeing the six-inch spider and its four-foot web beside my head until I woke to the fulgent sun, too early, my body grateful, stretching after sleep.

The dirt and grass footpaths between the planted rows where I biked between the fields, sweated, chased friend's toddlers, and wandered in the night, pretending I was in a 1950s Science Fiction feature on a farm on Ganymede, with Jupiter looming closely in the sky above me.

An inexplicable wrought iron table with matching chairs in the center of the garden where we would meet for late night takeout, sandwiches and pickles and wrappers with stars overhead, verging on the fields. The fields.

The fields are perfect for kite flying.

46 I begin writing a poem about him. Simple. A poem. Just a few words. Forty-six times I erase the words I've written, finally tearing the page, then the book, in half. I stand up and walk away from the table.

6 Last night I dreamt he was alive. Mixing music in the basement studio we built, splicing guitar over husky beats, fitting them like frames around his halcyonic bass lines that drive us up into the beautiful sky over his parents' house by the train tracks in St. Anthony Park.

He turns to me, asks if I have a cigarette.

I look away from the screen, to him, and his sockets are eyeless, black oval voids, but he doesn't know it, he's still talking. His skin slips from his cheek; he's decaying, and I realize he's dead. This is a dream, but he's

still talking.

Small things are moving in the abscesses and the absences of his face as he stares at me, eyeless, smiling, waiting for a cigarette.

I wake up in sweat. I hate the number six.

It feels like

100 times a day I force myself to see him, but it's probably more like thirty.

I see him put a cigarette in his mouth and laugh around it.

I see him raise his eyebrow in communication, anticipating my response, enjoying the banter as it goes between us.

I see him turn to look at me from the edge of the Grand Canyon's north rim and feel his spirit as it moves to me in beatitude, vulnerability, reaching, in the sacredness of sharing; it moves to me and encompasses me.

I see not-him as he smirks in his casket, not-him.

I force the memory of the not-him away, and I see him, handsome, china-blue eyes through the cigarette smoke in the dashboard light as I drive fast on a rural road's curve, in fall, under pine trees.

8 The Beastie Boys recorded eight studio albums, over twenty-five years, before one of the three members, Adam Yauch, died of cancer, in 2012.

The Beatles released 23 albums before they broke up in 1970.

John Lennon released 11 studio albums before his death in 1983. Albums like *Double Fantasy,* and the posthumous *Milk and Honey*, are considered noteworthy for their strangeness, rather than their listenability. All I remember about his solo work is the video of him sitting at a piano while "Imagine" plays, and the photograph of him curled around Yoko, the camera above their bed, and the gun, in Mark David Chapman's hands, as I imagine it, going off outside of the Dakota in New York.

After the breakup, and before his death in 2001, George Harrison released 12 studio albums, one of which was called *All Things Must Pass*. His songs "My Sweet Lord" and "Here Comes the Sun" come up occasionally during the Crying Commute.

Ringo released 16 albums solo, if you can believe it. The Beatles let him sing songs like "Yellow Submarine" and "With a Little Help from my Friends," and it worked, although it surprises me every time I think about it.

I'm sure that not even death will stop Paul McCartney from releasing mediocre albums nearly every year.

Working solo is difficult.

200 years ago. This is a thought experiment. Two hundred years ago, my brain existed. Wait, strike that.

200,000,000

years ago, my brain existed, but was a barren slab of granite. Sentient granite.

Tremors under my mind cause fissures to crack the granite. Sub-mind magma flows up between the fissures, covering the surface of my mind with naked, ardent lava. The sea around my mind washes ashore, eroding and shaping the glassy obsidian into rich, loamy soil.

Soon, palm fronds and prairie grasses grow. Pleasant ferns and soft rushes, here and there a cattail waves by a newborn lake, poking up from the fecund grasses that ridge the beach my mind has grown.

Later, wheat joins the prairie grasses, lotuses elbow for space in the ponds in my mind. Dinosaurs eat the ferns, and each other.

Succulents, poppies, other beautiful and soft plants emerge, providing a soft landing space for difficult thoughts.

It's ok to have difficult thoughts, to let them hang glide and parachute through my primordial-mindscape. I've cultivated my mind. It is ready for them.

0 times at first. I never want to tell it, but I always want to tell it. The first time I told it was a surprise. My phone rang. I didn't recognize the number. I answered, and Jeremy asked me.

His question was just a word, his voice ragged in disbelief, with a tinge of that hillbilly accent he used to affect when we were sharing a joke, when he would talk to me sweetly:

Tony? Jeremy said, half gasping.

Then: *He's dead.*

Tony, I said, louder than Jeremy, like we had a bad connection. I stood up from the chair in the hotel room, and strode to the balcony. *Tony (!)*, I said, practically screaming, and he said it right back at me in that hillbilly voice, a one word conversation, a bad Sesame Street sketch.

After Jeremy and I discovered we couldn't say anything more, I closed the phone, and Bri came out.

Honey (?), she asked.

I'd said Tony's name too loudly, moved too forcefully from the hotel room to the balcony.

Tony's dead, I said. *He's dead.*

Tony Bell (!), she screamed. *Your Tony?*

I put my hands on the balcony that overlooked the interior atrium of the hotel. Adults dressed as Jedi were mock-lightsaber fighting, on wide, open spaces of industrial carpet. Clumps of nerds playing board games on the carpeted plains beneath me. A pool with one swim-suited child, poised to dive into the deep end, her father urging her, belly-deep in pool water, arms open as a target.

I thought about that self-created colloquialism my grandmother used to repeat—"as open as the grave," and thought: *His arms are as open as the grave.*

I remember Bri touching my back. I remember her bringing me a Two Hearted Pale Ale in a bottle.

I remember Justin asking, pain in his voice, after I'd called him: *Where are you?* And me saying: *I don't know. I'm not—sure—where I am. I'm at the hotel. The RadishTree.*

Justin: *I'm on my way.*

Later, Justin, at my left, as large as a refrigerator, as immobile, holding a beer, neither of us talking, marking time together on the balcony, our hands on its lip as we looked over at the nerds below, cavorting.

He didn't know it, but I was drawing solace from his shadow, in my peripheral vision, from his huge quiet. That's Justin's power, to console in silence.

I remember making the other calls. *Sit down,* I said, *I have something to tell you. It's hard,* I said, and hearing the thumps of people falling down on the other ends of the telephone after I'd told them.

I'd started the day, as Anne of Green Gables would describe it, as his "bosom friend." By the close of the day, I'd become Tony's ambassador to the world, an ambassador for the dead.

∞ times I want to tell it, with one caveat: I always want to tell how he died, and always wish I hadn't, afterwards.

I'll never be the same, I told my father. This was after the telling, but it was still a part of it.

I don't know how to get back, I said. *To me.*

Dame, he said, *You can't. You'll never be the same. You can't be.*

I'll never be me, I asked, incredulous, made into a child again by the question.

You'll be you, he said. *But the you in this, now, will be different.*

Made a child by this conversation, I imagined I'd come through a maze as sunset descended, chased by a Bronze Age hybrid monster, arborvitae walls brushing my shoulders as I walked through the exit, and turned back to see the foliage-door close behind me.

The maze, the foliage-door, the minotaur, traversing it, all of it making up the me, closed off from me in a way it hadn't been before. I could return to it in memory-

—walking up to Tony's bed in the late afternoon and wake him from a dream, covered in cast-off clothes, to see his big and shy smile and hear his first words of the day to me

—him, taking the back off his 1960s office chair, silver metal, green tacky fabric, afraid he'd fall asleep if he could lean back, as we sat in front of the computer and edited video for a contest due in four hours

—him, eating a McMuffin in the late hours of a road trip, after we'd driven all night through Ohio, and it was morning again, reborn

—arriving at the north rim of the Grand Canyon at midnight, full moon, with our cameras, tripods, our cigarettes, walking out on the overlooks, girded by fifty-year-old handrails, a thousand feet above the canyon's floor, his face behind a camera, me, posing in the moonlight, him, setting his camera down, us, opposite, mirroring Wing Chung forms together on the outcrops, his eyes on mine as we moved, synchronized, in First Form, under his eyes, his smile, his smile, his smile—

But all of that is history. The new me, only openness in front of me, nothing yet, no maze, no familiar territory, nothing traversed.

4 days later/4 days before

I remember the sound of my parents: uncertain, stymied and sorry that sorry was all they could give me, and I don't want to tell anybody else. I don't want to give them that feeling that I see after I've given it. I don't want to tell them of the moments made monument, "the last moments of his life," soon to be green and oxidized on a plaque of copper in my mind, a plaque that nobody reads, that on the best days, children play around it, oblivious.

I don't describe the start of his day with Emily in bed in the second month of their marriage.

I don't want to tell everyone about the energy drink he sipped as he drove to their new house. How they scraped paint off the garage. How he scolded Emily for doing it wrong.

How he stood up, grabbed his chest and said: *That hurt.*

How she led him to the back step of the house they hadn't moved into yet, and sat him down.

How he grabbed his chest, and then fell backwards onto the concrete.

How the pupils in his beautiful blue eyes dilated, and how she screamed his name just before she started CPR. How the white liquid poured from his mouth as she phoned the paramedics. I don't tell this unless I must. I wasn't there. For a long time, because I wasn't there, it might not have happened. For a long time, I couldn't say he'd died, I'd just pause between words and say: he…left.

Grief is dislocation, and sometimes I think my soul is like Tony's, dislocated by his…leaving.

I don't tell how Emily pushed on his chest and breathed into his beautiful mouth and how she knew he was gone.

I knew he was gone, she tells me, the day after, *because there was nothing in his eyes, his eyes relaxed into the blue, and I knew he was gone.*

I don't tell this, but I imagine it: his heart, his ascending aortic artery as it gave way, filling his insides with his lovely hot blood, red, highly pressured, filling up his off-limits insides where it shouldn't go.

I don't tell this to anyone: that I hope he had a soul, and that I hope, that when it needed to leave its casing he was as satisfied by the leaving as he was in living, and that he was held in the arms of the universe as he left, making that satisfied Tony-face, floating above as his wife dialed 911, as she called his father, as she dropped the phone and her voice rose into the air senseless and screaming like a frantic bird.

When I try to tell it, or come close, people's faces become chasms that cannot be resolved, just as uncertain as my parents were when I told them. People don't know how to respond, and ambushed by my honesty they are reduced to statues, uncertain, and this inverts them. I've tried to apologize after telling them, but this doesn't return them to a resting state, and I fear this unalterably dislocates them.

I don't tell how we stood outside of that same house he died behind, four days before, smoking and smoking and smoking.

We'll make tube amplifiers. Basement kits, he said, *the kind that come in the mail.*

He was 36 days into his marriage, his sons, 3 & 2 years old, and we stood there under the light of the antique street lamps of St. Paul. We stood there talking about what we'd do next.

I don't want to tell any of this.

I need to tell all of this, but I'm too tired to continue my new ambassadorship today, and most days.

Sometimes it seems like life is direction, a purpose - and death, without that purpose, a dislocation. The grief of us, left behind, isn't sadness, it's disorientation. For me, it's a particularly gruesome disorientation: probing and discovering that part of me wasn't me, but who I was in his reflection.

Whatever I thought was me has been unseated, and what remains isn't exactly me, either. Today, I don't want to be his ambassador, but who am I, without him, besides that ambassador?

At least 3 miles before I go home.

Since he's gone, I've stopped smoking. I've replaced it with treadmilling, and running around a track at the

university gym.

Sitting on my knit oatmeal-colored couch after work, the feelings start to come in through the cracks in the null that grief has created and surrounded me with. I don't want to feel them, and grief doesn't want me to, either. It's protective. As the mists of emotion start to get thick, I don't see the butcher's block in the kitchen, the squat robot of my television, or the oatmeal couch around me.

Afraid that emotion will catch me unprepared, I grab my keys, and rush to the gym. Feelings are parsed out better atop a treadmill. Somehow they're filtered. If they cause me to cry, it's just a river of tears. On the treadmill, or turning circles around the track, I trust that I won't totally lose my self.

As I walk through the double doors I convince myself it's not avoidance, but a safe decanting of what I need to let come out. Down the stairs, I bypass the treadmills, headed upstairs.

A class of rock climbers unfolds up a faux-rock wall in front of me as I walk past. They're belted in, red ropes tied to metal clips in the mottled brown of the wall, feet splayed above them, tentatively touching the wall, in tiny clown-colored shoes, bits of rubber on the toes.

I walk past the squash courts, in front of a Hispanic woman on an elliptical, a frantic and too-skinny college girl on a stair climber, nervously looking at me as I walk by, quickly looking away. I hear people upstairs bouncing basketballs and I go through the doors, I get my towel from the towel-bin.

I walk past beer-gutted men reading magazines in exercise-bicycle-recliners, turn a corner by the pilates people speaking pilates-ese on unrolled mats, through a door, and up flights of stairs to the third floor track that overlooks the basketball court.

There are two teams using the court, scheduled games with scorekeeper-lit signs, red lightbulbs, studying students on the sidelines, but instead I see him, I remember him in the eye of my memory, and counter-clock-wise, I start to run.

Tony, under the 280 bridge, fifty feet from the train tracks, earnest face, Lincoln-on-Rushmore nose, eyes following me, talking to me, fingers fast on the frets of his upright bass under the shadow of the bridge. I look down and see my hundred-and-fifty-dollar left-handed acoustic guitar. I'm puzzling my way through some Bosso, fumbling half-chords and single-string melodies.

Matty leans into the picture in my mind, trying some poetry over us. He stumbles onto a vein of rhythmic words and digs in and Tony hears it, catches the rhythm in the frets of his bass, and together we make sense, sonically.

Tony swings his bulk closer to the bend in the bass, he moves closer to it like a woman going in for a kiss, big and graceful, and I see his eyes light as his notes follow my Bosso, as my Bosso blends into his notes, and his mahogany hair's falling into his so-blue eyes, but I can still see them. We're all together, with each other in the Bosso, with each other in the words.

Damian Johansson (L) and Tony Bell. Photo courtesy of Damian Johansson

It feels like it lasts, like we're slipping into timelessness, and then a container truck blows its horn on the bridge above us and Matty falters. The wind catches his words, juggling them, and Tony doubles down, fingers

riding the hard black ebony of the bass' fretboard, trying to catch Matty's words back from the wind as they wobble. I'm pounding the strings but the Bosso won't come out, I can't put our togetherness back together, and the cohesion we've created is tearing.

The world and the wind pushes their way into our circle, and the moment is gone, it falls apart. It's only us again, doing a Friday, and we look up at each other and at the bridge, and the stars above us in the deep blue and I realize I'm sweating from playing too hard, and the streetlights are coming on, and Tony smiles, sharing it all with me.

Matty yells *Fuck!* and it echoes through the underside of the bridge and I laugh. I reach out for Tony, relieved that whatever it was is gone and we're back to Just Friends, doing a Friday, not trying to hold it up, keep whatever it was spinning in the air with some magic between us. Tony has a cigarette in his mouth and he's lighting it around his bass, still hugging the maple of it and Matty comes over to get a cigarette from me, reaching into my front shirt pocket unbidden, and as I smile my guitar slides, goes side-saddle, like a wooden infant on my hip. We're an accidental triangle, my palm, flat on Tony's chest, across his upright bass, his arm around the high-middle of Matty's back, and we stand there for a moment, laughing into each other, out of breath, sweating, looking in each other's eyes, sharing and enjoying some satisfied exultation, lighting and smoking our cigarettes.

5 a.m.

I'm in bed. I start crying. It's a surprise, this swell of emotion and water, and I search in my mind for a reason. Donna Reed has just come on the television, and Mr. Ed will follow.

Last week I was ambushed by the same swell, Fred Astaire-ing around my house, dancing in socks on a hardwood floor, twirling, Swing music loud on my ste-

Hazelwood Cemetery, Grinnell, Iowa. Photo by Emily Mamrak

reo. The vintage tubes from my covetously old amplifier light up the dark corner of my living room, playing on the spines of art books on my bookshelf: a fragment of Basquiat, a sliver of Rothko, the bottom of the spine of Gerhard Richter. I pretend-ice-skate-on-imagined-pond in my stockinged feet on the hardwood floor, hands clasped behind me like the children skating in the Charlie Brown Christmas Special.

Just like now, I started crying. Tears out of nowhere —and that feeling—what did I forget? Why am I crying? And just like now, searching for the why, finding nothing, trying to convince myself that it must be Tony, it must be because of Tony, and my obsessive mind reaches for connections. In our post-high-school-music-combo we'd sketched out a cover Skating by Vince Guaraldi, Tony playing the bottom half of the piano on his bass, me daintily finger-walking the melody on a delayed Fender Jazzmaster, but we'd never played it more than a few times at practice, and never completely. We'd get halfway through, realize we were sort of doing it, making it work, and the groove would fall apart in our hands, and we'd fall apart in laughter that we'd done it, sort of successfully.

This must be why I'm crying, I thought. Jazz on the hifi + pretend-ice-skating on hardwood with my hands clasped behind my back = somehow that thwarts my usual avoidance of the fact that Tony's dead. My brain rejects, this, and the otherness—the extra voice that OCD creates talks back: OCD is typified by odd connections, and the emotional weight within.

I remember this, and still have no idea why right now I'm crying in bed with Donna Reed on my television, or why last week, atop my stocking-skates I'm ambushed by emotion. Are these only other Crying Commutes?

In bed I circumvent the sobs. I say out loud:

Oh, Tony.

This sounds too intimate, like we were lovers, or I'm his mother, and I think of his mother, medicated, diving into a messy dissolve when I see her at the gravesite.

How are you, she says, and she doesn't care. I don't mind that she doesn't care. He son's death is a bell, constantly ringing, taking her out of every conversation, interrupting, and she's looked lost inside since he left. I'm surprised that she can't find her place, and in a flash of memory she's letting the dogs out at 4AM, smoking a long white cigarette as Tony and I arrive back at his house, just coming in from the night, and then we're in Forest Lawn, and she kneels over Tony's grave to wipe away some speck of something I can't see, and maybe there's nothing there, and she says: *Oh, Tony;* and she's gone again, vacant, inside. Her new husband walks tentatively to her and rests a hand on her shoulder, and looks around for someone to tell him what to do as he stands on Tony's grave.

In bed, I say his name, and this doesn't stop the sobbing. It sounds strangely intimate, and I'm don't mind that so much anymore. I'm saying his name, and taking breath in, and pushing it out. I say it over and again:

Tony. Tony. I make up permutations of his name, sing-songing in the way I repeat things. *Tony. Tony. T-Billy, Tyrone,* and suddenly the plastic overlay, the neutrality and dissassociation of grief is rolled back, and I'm assaulted by feelings, and they've got me crying, they've turned me into a stutterer: *Tah-Tah-Tony.*

It's 5AM. I'm saying his names, casting them like a spell to stop me crying, and Donna Reed is on the television.

I hear his first girlfriend, Christina, say his name at a party in the darkness of my basement, questioning: *Tony – where are you, in the dark?*

I hear his mother yelling it to us atop the stairs, as we replay songs we've made in the basement studio. *Tony! Cut out that boom, boom, boom shit! I can't have*

you this loud in the morning!

I think of the darkness in my life since he's left, and the darkness of my imaginings of the afterlife, lonely, cold, both together: algid, like the clouds in my forever-death-image.

I imagine my neighbors hearing me slapping my chest and singing nonsense in my bed, and my voice falters halfway through, and then I don't care about the neighbors. I do care, but not enough to not sing his name, and this brings me further back from crying, into a wide smile underneath/separate from the tears that stand as big as statues on my face.

I slap my naked chest twice, singing his roulette of names. I start laughing because it's so ridiculous. *T-Billy. T-Billy. Tyrone.* The tears turn off.

I'm not alone. He's here with me—in his name. Donna Reed is still on the television. Mr. Ed will still follow.

It feels like I've said his name more in the last three years without him than I did in the 27 years I had him. I like saying his name more now, and I'm in that place between crying and laughing, and I slap my chest and say his name louder: as an incantation, an adage, a precept, a battle cry.

1.620 trillion raindrops fall, according to *USA Today*, during the average thunderstorm, none of which are teardrop shaped. The actual shapes of raindrops range from tiny spheroids to middling hamburger bun shapes, to thin parachutes of water with a tube-shaped drop towards their bases.

This knowledge is elegant, sundry, and terribly amusing, but at this moment, on the scooter, only conjecture; I don't feel the marching army of raindrops as they storm down the beach of my head, as I sit on my scooter waiting for a stoplight to change.

Earlier, a camera watched me as I cried my way through ninety minutes on the treadmill - another version of the Crying Commute. The only common denominators were the music, the movement (one the actual movement of my limbs, the other, only movement across space and time), and my dissolve into laughter. This time, my smile came because I imagine the bored gym attendants folding towels, watching the monitor screens like televisions, the way you'll watch anything to arrest boredom.

Look at that fat guy on the treadmill, they might say. *He's working out so hard that he's crying.* I imagine another attendant looking up at the monitor from her phone in her hand. *Aw, poor guy,* she might say.

This imagined scene made me laugh, then cry, then laugh all over again. I imagined Tony, like an immense cumulous cloud on the horizon in May, his arms resting on the broccoli forests in the deciduous belt of Minnesota that we lived in for so many years together, together, his confident face and awkward, too-long fingers—

(Jack Kerouac: "Sweet face—hard to describe… swaying to the beat, tall, majestical,")

And it doesn't matter what teardrops or raindrops are shaped like. I know they're there, but I can't feel them, and I wonder where Tony is, if Tony is.

I don't know if he's really here, or if I just tell myself that I feel him. Some days it matters if he is, and others it only matters that I remember what it was like to be with him.

On the scooter, I look up at the sky. The rain coming down makes it feel like I'm traveling fast, the way light-speed is shown in science fiction movies, but I'm anchored, waiting for the stoplight. This is what life is like: feeling permanent, when we're all just waiting. This is what life is like: accepting the illusion of permanence, and not missing the brilliance of being here, the uniqueness, while we wait; finding the beauty as the sorrow passes us by, the beauty through the sorrow.

I look across the street. The road is empty, and I'm still waiting. I'm raw from the crying and the laughing, still waiting, ready to move. The scooter doesn't weigh enough to trigger the light, and the light never changes. I just decide to go. A substantial part of the guilt that I've been holding calves off—that I'm still here, at the stoplight, on the Earth, in his children's lives, and he's not, and that I can't see any reason that all of this should be as it is—releases from my body in waves like a flood over the prairie that surrounds me as I stop waiting for the light to change.

Hazelwood Cemetery, Grinnell, Iowa. Photo by Emily Mamrak

Photo by Kristen Asp

Clare Jones *was awarded second prize in the essay category of the 2018 Keats-Shelley Prize. She is the recipient of a grant from the Fulbright Program and an Alberta Metcalf Kelly Fellowship from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.*

Think of night as controlled prairie fire, and it becomes an imperative

by Clare Jones

The star spore
got sorted into sori
by the people
on the far shore
who saw them press
themselves against
the wrong side
of the fern in distinct
patterns as though
prone and pushing back
the past and when they went
ripe the indusium
came away as night
began all over again

Photo courtesy of Naomi Clayton

Roots Talk! Episode 3:

"Kernza: Grain That's Sustainable by Design"

A Podcast Interview with Biologist Lee DeHaan and Pete Ferrell

Photo courtesy of The Land Institute

In the third *Roots Talk!* podcast, audio producer Noah Herbin interviews biologist Lee DeHaan and Kansas rancher Pete Ferrell. Ferrell, a Grinnell College alum of '74, runs a family cattle ranch, works as a project development consultant for Energy for Generations, LLC (a wind power development company), and serves as chairperson of the Board of Directors of The Land Institute. In this last capacity, he has worked with Lee DeHaan to develop intermediate wheatgrass into a perennial grain crop with an established root system—a hybrid marketed as *Kernza*. DeHaan, who is the Lead Scientist for the Land Institute's Kernza Domestication Program, gave a talk at Grinnell College last September titled "Kernza Perennial Grain: Sustainable by Design," in which he discussed the ecologically friendly possibilities that the development and growth of Kernza offered. In this short interview, DeHaan describes that the environment in the Midwest needs our urgent care in order to survive into the future. He says the development of perennial grains such as Kernza may help alleviate the Midwest's environmental problems.

To hear an audio recording of this issue's podcast, click the audio link above.

Photo courtesy of Taylor Greene

Making Room

by Taylor Greene

Taylor Greene *is a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky, and a lifelong resident of the commonwealth. When not working at various bars he can be found DJing on WRFL Lexington, volunteering with the Daniel Boone National Forest archaeologist, or writing poetry over a glass of bourbon.*

It would be easy
to make space
for you in my heart.
Because,
as you can see,
I already have a spare bedroom.

I must apologize
for its clutter and mess,
it hasn't been used in
some time
but it could use a boarder like you.

Just give me time
to clean,
to remove the cobwebs
and the memorabilia of bygone residents.

I will warn you,
there are holes in the walls
I've never been able to fix.

Maybe you'll have better luck than I

Photo courtesy of Jennifer Mueller

Jennifer Mueller *is the Site Manager for the Lac La Biche Mission Historical Site. She is the fifth generation from her family to have ties to the Mission, starting with her great-great grandfather and her great-grandparents, who settled near the Mission to farm. Subsequent generations continued to have a close relationship with the Mission, whether it was being a student at the school, working as labourers at the site, and/or attending church services. Always having a keen interest in history and archeology, Jennifer is happy to continue to work with other community members to preserve this Canadian National Historic Site for future generations.*

The Heart of the Oblates' North: The Lac La Biche Mission

by Jennifer Mueller

Situated on the scenic shores of Lac La Biche Lake, you will find the Lac La Biche Mission Historic Site (Notre Dame des Victories), located in Alberta, one of Canada's Prairie Provinces. At first glance the importance of the site, in relation to the history of the province, may not be apparent, nor how it embodies the themes of sustainability and community. This article will briefly explore the important roles that transportation, agriculture, and community played in the establishment and growth of the Mission, its decline, and its eventual transformation into a historical site.

From the beginning, the Lac La Biche Mission was the heart of a greater community made up of priests, brothers, nuns, school children, and families who had settled around the site. In 1853, the Mission was founded by the Oblate order of Roman Catholic priests, near the Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post, in what would later become the hamlet of Lac La Biche. The priests soon realized that the original site was unsuitable for farming, so they relocated the Mission to its current position, approximately 12 km from Lac La Biche, in 1855. Over the following decades, the Lac La Biche Mission would become the heart of the Oblates' northern Alberta territory, a central warehouse integrated into a vast river and land transportation network.

In 1856, Fathers Tissot and Maisonneuve began cutting a cart road from the Mission to Fort Pitt, which would connect it to the Red River cart brigades. By 1867, the Mission built its first scow and sent it down the La Biche River into the Athabasca, testing the traders' ability to navigate the route. Establishing this route was necessary to move much needed supplies from the south to Oblate missions further north, where the ability to produce food was more limited. From 1870 until

Lac La Biche Historical Site, 2017, by Jennifer Mueller

1889, a caravan of 10-20 carts pulled by oxen and supervised by three or four local Métis men from the Mission would make an annual trip to bring back supplies from Fort Pitt to the Mission. These supplies were stored at the Mission's "Grand Hanger"—a large two-story warehouse. In spring, these supplies were loaded onto barges and sent to the northern missions.

Although the transportation network established by the priests brought in necessary supplies, the Oblates believed agricultural production was essential to the development and sustainability of the Mission, and as a means to secure additional food for the missions further north. The Mission was expected to be self-sufficient and to do so required growing crops. This was not always an easy mandate to fulfill. In the early years, the Mission lacked both tools and draft animals. Despite these limitations, by 1856, just a year after settling on this site, they grew a modest crop of potatoes, barley and turnips. By 1861, they were also growing oats and wheat; the first commercial crop of wheat in Alberta was grown at the Mission. Essentially, in these early years the priests were conducting an experiment to discover which crops could be successfully grown in North Central Alberta. These early trials—which revealed that crops such as wheat, barley, oats, potatoes, and hay could be successfully grown in the region—led to a large influx of settlers in the early 1900s.

Another step forward in agricultural production for the site occurred in 1863, when the missionaries built one of the province's first grist (flour) mills. In 1871, the grist mill was modified to become the province's first water-powered sawmill, an innovation which was important to the continued growth of the site. Cultivated acreage increased almost yearly, and more farm animals were brought in, including horses, cattle, hogs, and poultry.

In the late 1800s, when the Mission's role as a major transportation hub came to an end, it was clear how interwoven transportation, agriculture, and community were in relation to the success and sustainability of the Mission. With the introduction of steamboats on the North Saskatchewan and Athabasca Rivers, northern transportation routes changed. Consequently, the Mission was no longer used as a transshipment point, and Métis families in the Mission area, who had worked in this industry, relocated to Athabasca Landing to work on the boats. Also, the Grey Nuns were transferred out of the Lac La Biche Mission and the school was closed in 1898. This occurred despite the protests from local families who wanted the school to remain open for their children to attend. Subsequently, the farm was abandoned, as they no longer needed to grow food for the northern missions nor for the nuns and students. This led to the personnel of the Mission being reduced to just a few priests.

A new order of nuns—Les Filles de Jésus—came to serve at the Mission in 1905, bringing new vitality to the site. They reopened the school for local children and for boarding students. The Mission once again thrived for a time. More settlers arrived with their children, increasing school enrollment. With additional personnel

Nun Feeding Chickens at the Lac La Biche Mission, date and photographer unknown

transferred to the site, farming operations resumed to feed the students and staff, and new buildings were constructed.

Though the Mission was never able to recapture its glory days as a major transshipment point, it built upon the energy brought back to the site with the reopening of the school. For example, it took on a new role for the community as a communications center; by 1915, the Mission had a post office, a land office, and telegraph connections. Soon after the Mission installed a phone, one of the few places in the area residents could make a telephone call.

Mission activities focusing on religion, education, and agriculture continued until 1963. That year, the convent, which housed the nuns and the boarding students, no longer meet provincial Fire Commission standards. As a result, the school closed and the nuns left the Mission—the beginning of the end for the Mission as an active site. Though the rectory (priests' residence) and the church continued to be utilized, most of the other operations, including farming, were shut down. In 1978, the rectory was also closed due to a shortage of Oblate priests and money.

By the 1980s, the site was completely abandoned; the buildings were losing their battle with the elements and the Mission's important history was at risk of being lost. However, it had not been forgotten. Many families who had close ties to the Mission did not want to see the site destroyed, so a dedicated group set out to save the site and preserve its history. Funding was secured to stabilize or restore the remaining buildings, including the convent, rectory, church, school house, laundry house, garage, and chicken coop. People who had lived and worked at the Mission were interviewed, and their stories recorded. Additionally, through great determination and hard work, community members dedicated to preserving the site obtained Provincial Historical Resource (1987) and National Historic Site (1989) designations for the Mission. Once again, the Mission managed to survive by serving a new purpose for the community, this time as a historic site.

Today, many community members continue to contribute to the preservation and development of this important site, sharing its history with the community and with the rest of the world. Visitors to the Mission can now explore several restored historic buildings and exhibits, while interpretive guides share stories about the site's history and the people who lived, worked, and were educated here.

Convent prior to restoration, mid-1980's, photographer unknown

Convent after restorations, 2017, by Jennifer Mueller

Birds of the Prairie: Baltimore Oriole

Icterus galbula

The rich song of the **Baltimore Oriole**, echoing from treetops near homes and parks, is a sweet herald of spring in Eastern North America. Look way up to find these singers: the male's brilliant orange plumage blazes from high branches like a torch. Nearby, you might spot the female weaving her remarkable hanging nest from slender fibers. Fond of fruit and nectar as well as insects, Baltimore Orioles are easily lured to backyard feeders.

Song: The pure, liquid, whistling tones of the male Baltimore Oriole are a herald of springtime in eastern North America. His song consists of a short series of paired notes, repeated 2–7 times, lasting 1–2 seconds. The flutelike sound has a full, rich tone. The male sings to establish and defend a breeding territory, so you won't hear the full song on the wintering grounds. The female Baltimore Oriole also sings. Her shorter songs may be communications with her mate. Occasionally, mated pairs may sing a duet. (Description courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.)

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of the Baltimore Oriole, captured by Antonio Xeira, courtesy of xeno-canto.

Photo courtesy of Ken Saunders II, taken May 19, 2013, at Arbor Lake City Park in Grinnell, Iowa

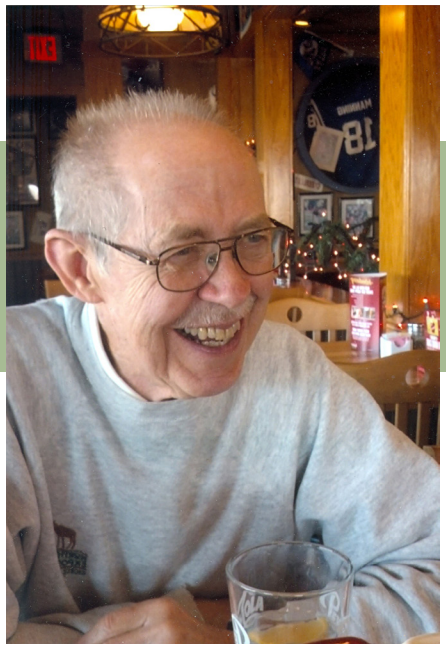


Photo courtesy of Don Janzen

Donald Janzen *studied physics before earning a Master's and PhD in anthropology at the University of Michigan, specializing in prehistoric archaeology of the Midwest and the historic archaeology of Shaker villages. He taught anthropology at Beloit College and Centre College and presently lives in Tarzana, California.*

Growing Up in Kansas

by Donald Janzen

February is a cold month in Kansas, especially with the prairie wind, and on February 2, 1899, it was 22 degrees below zero. Henry and Carrie Janzen were expecting the birth of their fifth child, and on this day she went into labor. Attempts to get a doctor had failed and Henry had moved the bed into a room where there was a heating stove. According to the story Carrie later gave a newspaper, she had milked the cows and scrubbed the floor when it became apparent that the time had come. She said that when the baby finally came she got up and cleaned up, but felt bad, and so laid down to rest. Shortly afterwards, a second baby arrived, so she got up, cleaned it, but still felt bad. When the third baby came, she was too tired to clean it and finally asked my grandfather for help. It was not until the next day that the doctor finally arrived, and he expressed concern because the afterbirth looked abnormal. With that, my grandfather led him to another bed and showed him the triplets; Edward Carl, Edmund Ernest, and Edna Clara. According to one account, the doctor had a wooden leg, and when he saw the triplets he was so excited that he started dancing. It is also said that his charge for the visit was $10, but he returned $7 so a photograph could be taken. Perhaps this is the photograph that is shown on the next page. I have often wondered if these were the first European triplets born in Kansas.

The names given to the triplets were carefully planned so the initials of Edward Carl and Edna Clara would be the same as with their grandfather's (Edward Carl), and Edmund Ernest would be the same as his uncle, Edward Ernest.

I can't imagine having your family unexpectedly go from four to seven children in one day, especially when the other four children weren't that old: Henry 6, Al-

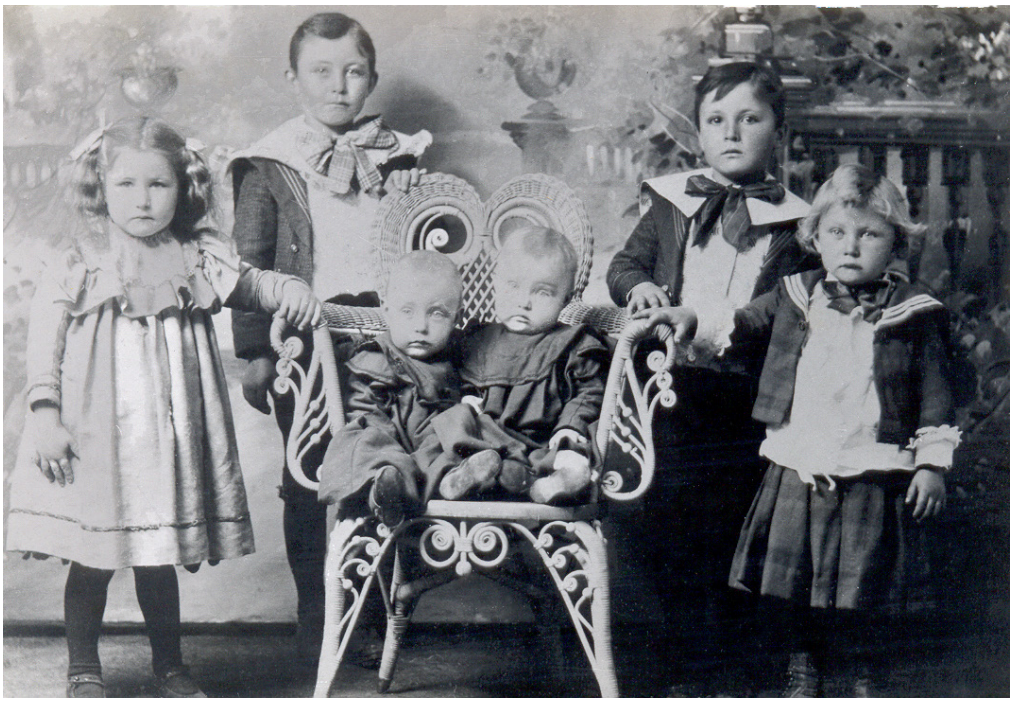
The Janzen Triplets (left to right, Edmund Ernest, Edward Carl, Edna Clara)

bert 5, Rosa 4, and Leroy 2. The house was not that big and finances were limited, but these early homesteading families knew how to survive. Eventually my grandfather's children would become a sizable workforce and make him wealthy. I once heard the finances of these pioneer families described this way: the first six years it costs to raise a child, the next six years their work equals their expenses, and the next six years they pay for the first six. As you will see, my grandfather derived a large profit from his children.

I don't know a lot about my father's early childhood, and most of what I know I got from my mother. I know that as a child he never had a toy and his parents never read children's books to him. My mother said that when they married he had not heard of Cinderella, or any of the fairy tales. To rectify this, she got all of these books from the library and had him read them.

The event that probably changed my father's life the most was the death of his triplet brother, Edmund, in August of 1899. The cause was considered weed poisoning in cow's milk. As a result of Edmund's death, my father was paired with his sister Edna, and therefore did not enjoy the male camaraderie of his brothers to the degree that he would have had Edmund lived. As a triplet, he was also smaller than his brothers, and this seems to have made a difference. My mother said he was also teased. In spite of these things, my father thought he had a normal childhood and never resented his parents or siblings. If fact, as an adult his favorite vacation was to go to Kansas and visit family, where he was always received with open arms.

The absence of toys and ignorance concerning children's stories is not an indicator of neglect by his parents, but shows the survival mode that underpinned life on the Kansas prairie at that time. However, as the photographs of the Janzen family show, the children were always well-dressed, at least in those photographs. My grandfather was proud of his family, and their appearance was important to him.



The Janzen Children in 1900. Standing (left to right), Rosa, Henry, Albert, and Leroy, seated is Edna (left) and Edward (right)

I am sure that the family was always well-fed, though the menu might seem Spartan by 21st century standards. My father spoke of having potatoes with clabber milk for the evening meal and, being wheat farmers, there was always an abundant supply of bread. One of my father's favorite stories was about a dried breakfast cereal they had, called VIGOR. It was similar to corn flakes, which my father always referred to as "fence post shavings." At one time the makers of VIGOR had a promotional, and in each box of cereal was a letter, V, I, G, O, or R. There was a prize if you could collect all five letters. One of the letters was difficult to get, and my father said that one morning while he was dressing he heard his father give out a yell, they finally had all five letters. As winners, the company sent them a barrel of semi-porcelain English china made by Clementson Brothers. After his parents died and things were being divided, my father got a bone dish from this set and one of the twelve chairs that were around the kitchen table.

As the family grew to ten children, my grandmother baked twelve loaves of bread every other day. It is interesting how certain foods my father had growing up remained his favorite after he left home. To him, fried bologna was far superior to a filet mignon, and nothing went with it better than creamed corn. His choice of candy also seemed strange to me. One of his favorites was horehound drops, a hard candy made from extract of the horehound plant, and it had a bittersweet taste that I found generally disgusting. I guess that this was the kind of candy his father bought the children at the general store, and they loved it.

I remember my father saying that every fall his father would be gone for several days and return with a wagon load of apples and a barrel of cider. I guess the apples were dried, or turned into applesauce, and this lasted them through the winter.

My father was always very neat and kept things well organized. This was probably a combination of his German upbringing and having five brothers and four sisters. He told me that he and two of his brothers shared a room. There was one dresser, and each of them

Bone dish from the VIGOR set of China

had two drawers in the dresser and a third of the top to keep their hair brushes and other items. I doubt if he ever considered using more than his third. I remember my father saying they never had underwear and his dress clothes consisted of one wool suit. He said he knew what hell was like having to sit through a church service in the summer in a wool suit with no underwear.

This photo indicates the magnitude of Henry Janzen's farming operation. Pictured are 24 to 25 people and 26 horses.

By 1907, the Janzen family had grown to six boys and four girls. A seventh boy, Walter, died in infancy. With this brood, my grandfather had the labor to make the transition from farming to agriculture. Well-established in the family system at this time was the division of labor by sex. My grandmother and four girls were in charge of the house, which meant cooking, laundry, and cleaning, while my grandfather and the boys did the farm work. Actually, this division of labor was not fair, because the last two Janzen children were girls, Nellie and Thelma. This meant that Rosa and Edna were in their teens before Nellie and Thelma started school, and along with their mother, were doing the bulk of the female labor. I always remember my Aunt Rosa as being a happy person, but my Aunt Edna played the role of what my mother called "Pitiful Pearl." She referred to herself as "Cinderella" and claimed that she always did more than her share of the work. Who knows?

My grandfather's farming activities were diversified and, beside growing wheat, he also had cattle, and perhaps other things that I am not aware of. I know my father talked about driving cattle to Ellsworth, Kansas. Naturally my grandfather had a large number of horses, because they pulled all the farm implements. My father said that over the winter the horses were not used that much, and in the spring, they would have to be "broken" again (broken means tamed). It is hard for me to imagine my father on cattle drives and breaking horses in the corral. He also mentioned the time his father told him to plow a field that had never been cultivated before, where watermelons were planted as a cover crop. He said that it produced an amazing number of melons. This reminds me of a story that my mother tells about her first visit to Kansas. She said that all the Janzens loved watermelon, and that sister Rosie's eyes danced when she saw one. They would buy watermelons by the truckload and just eat the heart.

> All the Janzens loved watermelon, and...sister Rosie's eyes danced when she saw one. They would buy watermelons by the truckload...

When my father was growing up it was an accepted practice for children to earn money for their father, and my grandfather had this down to a fine art. When the boys were young, after the wheat was harvested, he hired them out to other farmers. Pay for this labor naturally went to my grandfather. My father said that each year before school started his father took them all to the store for new clothes. The money he had earned went to buy his clothes, and one year there was a small amount left over. He was hoping that his father would give him this

money, but instead it went toward the purchase of his younger brother Herbert's clothes. This indicated how my grandfather thought about money. My father was working for the benefit of the family, not himself.
In a way, there was a communal economy among these homesteading families, and it probably insured their survival.

As the boys got into their teens, my grandfather would buy a farm and have two of the boys and one of the girls run it. My father always refers to periods when he would work on a new farm as his "Batching Days," batching being short for bachelor. In his case, he and his older brother Roy (the Leroy was dropped) worked a farm, and sister Edna did the cooking and laundry. Using this scheme, my grandfather was able to acquire a lot of land, and I suspect that eventually he was considered wealthy by the standards at that time. Even with a large family, my grandfather had to hire outside labor, and my father would often tell stories about the Bohemians that worked with them. One thing that he learned from the Bohemians was how to cuss. This was, of course, in their language (whatever that was) so he would say "Yaki dum fas coogie" (spelled phonetically) to relieve his frustration, and not break any church rules about swearing.

My father would often tell stories about the Bohemians that worked with them. One thing that he learned from the Bohemians was how to cuss.

With so many horses and cattle, hay was important, and my father said this need was filled by creating large piles of hay called "hay stacks". These enormous piles of hay had to be constructed in a special way so they would drain water. My father often told about the time his father put him in charge of the hay. His job was to stand on the stack, and as the wagons brought the hay he had to spread it in a certain way. It was my understanding that there was a certain amount of prestige in being in charge of this job.

My grandparents spoke German in the home, and my father still remembered poems that he had memorized in German. It was common across the country for people of German descent to speak German and in major cities with large German populations, like Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee, there were even newspapers printed in German. This practice came to a relatively sudden halt with the start of World War I. People of German decent faced a conflict between pride in their ancestral heritage and national loyalty. As a means of demonstrating their national loyalty many families ceased speaking German.

Religion was a big part of the Janzen's lives, and before every meal my grandfather would give a lengthy prayer. I remember these when I visited Kansas, and when my grandparents would visit us. It is interesting that there is a sharp division in German culture regarding smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages. Most of the early breweries in the United States were started by Germans, and I suspect these were the Catholic Germans and not the Baptist Germans. Smoking and drinking (in a limited way) did emerge among my father's brothers, and it was their

Wilbert Janzen plowing behind his father's nine-horse team

children who influenced them. My cousin Leon told me that when the cousins returned from World War II many of them smoked and drank beer and introduced these to their father. I suspect that smoking and drinking was done behind the barn and outside the view of their wives.

My grandfather retired from farming around the age of fifty-five. His retirement was not his choice, but my grandmother's, and she forced it upon him in an interesting way. While he was in Kansas City selling cattle, she purchased a house in Lorraine and had the boys (her sons) move everything there. When my grandfather came home the house was empty. Yes, my grandmother did have the money to buy a house. When her parents died, she had inherited land, and when the oil boom hit Kansas oil was discovered on her land. I believe I am correct that the oil company gets seven-eighths of the oil a well produces and the landowner one-eighth. My grandmother took her one-eighth and had the oil company pay her half, with the other half divided into tenths and a share given to each of her children. Each month, my parents received an oil check, maybe for twenty or thirty dollars. Finally, when the well went dry it produced gas and the check for that was eventually a dollar or less. Although my grandfather's retirement was forced upon him, I am sure that every day he went to his sons' farms and told them how to run things. I say this because this is the way the sons acted when their children (my cousins) started farming. My cousin Leon's father, Wilbert, was still telling him how to farm when Leon was in his 60s.

The Janzen family, 1918. Seated Henry and Carrie, standing, left to right, Herbert, Henry, Nellie in front of Henry, Rosie, Wilbert, Albert, Edna, Thelma in front of Edna, Roy, and Edward

Although my grandfather's retirement was forced upon him, I am sure that every day he went to his sons' farms and told them how to run things.

My father's early schooling consisted of going to a one-room school through the eighth grade. It was located east of Lorraine in an area referred to as the "Oxhide." A roster listing the students in the school is titled, "Oxhide Public School." Of the 21 students, six were Janzens. Without a date, this list is difficult to interpret, but when my father was in the fourth grade, his sister Rosa (who was four years older) and brother Albert (who was five years older) were just in the 7th grade, while his brother Henry (who was six years older) was in the 8th grade. Perhaps not all children started school at the same age, and some may have had to repeat a grade because of illness. It was always my impression that my father's parents took a neutral view towards education, since going to high school appears to have been optional. However, their participation in running the school system, as seen on the above roster, seems to indicate that this was not the case.

I have sixteen hand-written pages of notes that my father's sister Edna wrote about her childhood. Here is an excerpt, containing what she says about the "Oxide" School.

Remember the "Old Oxide School, my the

OXHIDE
PUBLIC SCHOOL
District No. 40
—o—
Ellsworth County, Kansas.
—o—
BRAD. S. HOOPER, Teacher
—o—
Pupils
2nd Grade
Albert Waer — Herbert Janzen
Augusta Heitschmidt — Joe Bezemek
Joe Cikanek
3rd Grade
Edith Waer — Edna Janzen
4th Grade
Mary Bezemek — Kenneth McCrory
Edward Janzen — Ella Heitschmidt
Roy Janzen 7th Grade
Albert Janzen — Anna Heitschmidt
Rosa Janzen — Frances Silkenat
James Bezemek — Willie Waer
8th Grade—Graduates
Charles Waer — Henry Janzen
9th Grades—Graduate
Ida Katterman
—o—
School Board
Mrs. H. L. Janzen, Clerk
H. L. Janzen, Director
John Heitschmidt, Treasurer

ROSTER FROM THE OXHIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR 1909

distance we had to walk, three and a half to four miles, how cold we'd get, we always liked to stop at the Bezemeck home to warm up, this was the half way place, then we go on, and many a time we would stop there in the evening and Mrs. B. would have lots of homemade bread baked that day, she would slice a loaf or two and we ate syrup on it, and also had hot coffee, then we went on our way rejoicing.

How we would get lost in Gregory's large pastures on a foggy morning. The Texas longhorn cattle Gregory has in the pasture we walked through, there were hundreds, remember how they would circle around us then take out after us, this one evening home here they came, seemed Leroy was always walking with Anna Heitschmidt and she told Leroy let's kneel down and pray, Leroy said you can pray but I'm heading for the fence, my how we all ran, we barely were over the fence and the cattle were just at our heels.

The Janzens' "School Bus," circa 1909

Today an 8th grade education is considered only a step in the educational process, but in the early 20th century it was considered a noteworthy achievement. I have a copy of an 8th grade final exam dated 1895, from a school in Salina, Kansas. I doubt if today the average high school senior could pass this exam. The importance of an 8th grade education is reflected in the elaborate diploma my father received for this accomplishment.

My father continued his education by going to the Lorraine High School, and then he could drive a rig to school. The photograph titled, "Ed and Herbert's school rig" with a date of 17-18 (1917-1918) shows what I always referred to as my father's school bus. As an aside, I have the impression that at times the Janzen brothers might have been "hell on wheels". My father had numerous stories of how they turned the rig over, the horses got loose, and they had to walk home. From what I remember of my uncles Al and Roy, this is believable. Teenagers were probably just as wild with horse-drawn rigs as they are today when they get cars. Actually, I know very little about my father's high school years. He was on the basketball team, and he told me that he was president of his class. I later learned that he and Anna


The Oxhide School, circa 1909. Edward is in the second row, second from the left

Schroeder were the only ones in his grade.

I still have some of my father's high school text books, and they give an interesting insight into his education. I don't know why, probably out of nostalgia, but I've never been able to discard these books. They were obviously very important to him because he hauled them from Kansas, probably to Mississippi, and to all the places that he lived in Louisville. He wrote his name in most of these books, and sometimes the year.There are eight school text books in the collection, and one other titled *Freckles*, that I would call popular contemporary fiction of the time. It was published in 1904, and on the inside is written:

A Merry Christmas
& A Happy New Year
For Edward
From Frieda Hornfeld

All of the text books are recent editions (the earliest being 1905) and the depth to which the subject matter is treated is impressive. Four of the texts are literary works: *Lady of the Lake* by Sir Walter Scott, *The Snow Image* and *Twice Told Tales* (together as one book) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Ben Hur* by Lew Wallace, and *The New Hudson Shakespeare*. In the latter book is written:

Edward C. Janzen Senior 1917-18 Lorraine High School

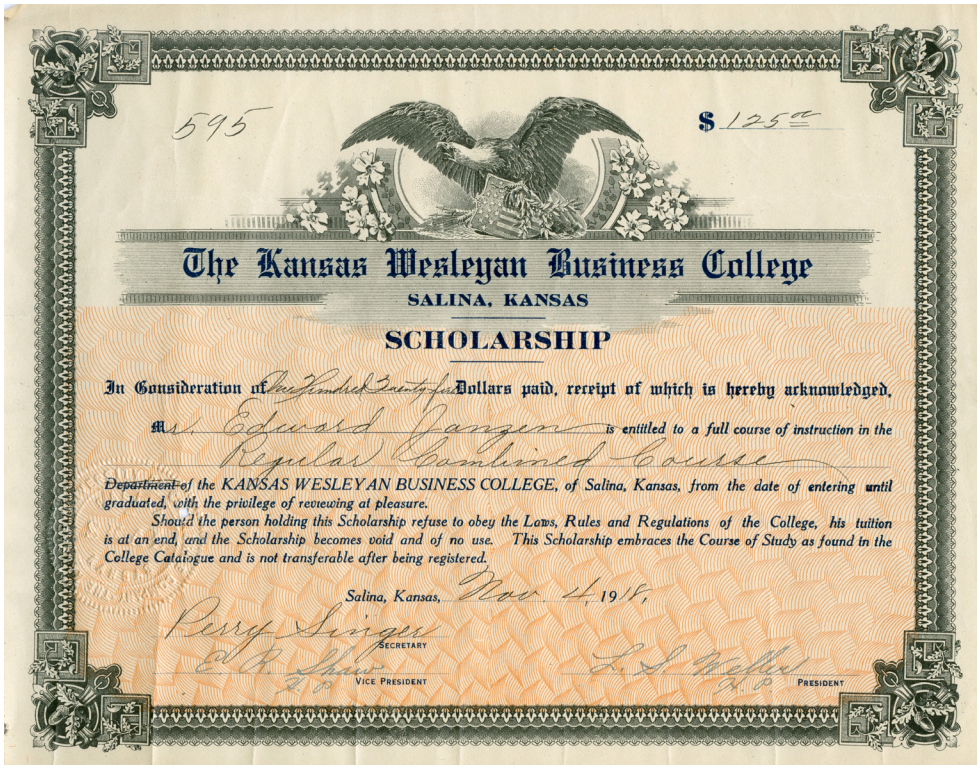
His report card for his junior year indicates that he took a course in botany and it included a laboratory. I suspect that his book, Practical Botany (545 pages), was the textbook, and I would judge it equivalent to a college text on the subject today. My father's report card for his senior year indicated that he took English III and English History. His text book for the latter class was *The History of England* (646 pages) and *A Short History of England's and America's Literature*, was used in English III. Both of these are impressive texts and would be college level books by today's standards. It should be remembered that not only do these books treat the subjects in a sophisticated way, but the teachers had to be well-versed in the subjects in order to teach from them. My father's diploma from the Lorraine Public School is dated April 26, 1918, and it is larger than any of my university diplomas. There was an elaborate formal invitation to the commencement which mentioned the class colors, flower, and motto. Only 37 years had passed since homesteading began in Kansas, but already Lorraine was copying what was happening in the cities.

1917 Lorraine High School Basketball team. Edward Janzen is standing at the far right

It was my father's older sister, Rosie (the nickname she acquired for Rosa) who encouraged him to continue his education beyond high school. I never thought about why she did this, but perhaps her motivation was my father's grades during his Senior year. They were impressive. For the five subjects he

took, his year's average grades were A+ in four classes and an A- in the other. In the fall of 1918, he entered Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kansas, to take classes in business. Unlike his brothers who stayed in farming, this pointed him in the direction of the corporate world.

At this point, the sequence of events becomes unclear, and I attribute this is to two major events that occurred simultaneously: the Spanish Influenza and the end of World War I. According to my cousin Ronald Nelson, the family historian, on September 12, 1918, my father received his induction notice for military service. He never talked about this, and I don't know if this occurred just before or just after he went to Ottawa. It appears that induction did not mean a call for duty, and my father was still able to go to Ottawa University. Since the Armistice ending the war was on November 11, 1918, I don't know if these late inductees were told not to report, or if they assumed this meant they no longer had an obligation to report. In either case, my father's ties to the military ended.


595

$125.00

The Kansas Wesleyan Business College

SALINA, KANSAS

SCHOLARSHIP

In Consideration of One Hundred Twenty-five Dollars paid, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged,

Mr. Edward Jansen is entitled to a full course of instruction in the Regular Combined Course

~~Department~~ of the KANSAS WESLEYAN BUSINESS COLLEGE, of Salina, Kansas, from the date of entering until graduated, with the privilege of reviewing at pleasure.

Should the person holding this Scholarship refuse to obey the Laws, Rules and Regulations of the College, his tuition is at an end, and the Scholarship becomes void and of no use. This Scholarship embraces the Course of Study as found in the College Catalogue and is not transferable after being registered.

Salina, Kansas, Nov 4, 1918.

Perry Singer
SECRETARY

E. R. Shute
VICE PRESIDENT

L. L. Waller
PRESIDENT

EDWARD'S SCHOLARSHIP TO KANSAS WESLEYAN BUSINESS COLLEGE. SINCE THIS CERTIFICATE REFERS TO $125 PAID IN FULL, IT IS NOT KNOWN IF THE REGULAR FEE IS HIGHER AND THE SCHOLARSHIP REDUCED THE FEE TO THIS AMOUNT

It was also around 1918 that the Spanish Influenza hit Kansas. This disease, which is estimated to have killed 50 million people world-wide, was the most devastating epidemic in human history. When the flu struck, at the urging of his parents, my father left Ottawa, and returned home. By the end of 1918 the threat of the flu lessened, but instead of returning to Ottawa he enrolled in The Kansas Wesleyan Business College in Salina, Kansas. I found a certificate awarding my father a $125 scholarship to the Salina school, and this may be the reason he didn't return to Ottawa. In a note my father wrote about this time period he says that in the fall of 1919 he left for Charleston, Mississippi, to be employed at the Lamb-Fish Lumber Company as an assistant bookkeeper. Therefore, he never completed his degree, though it is my understanding that the College was responsible for getting him the job in Mississippi. So, at the age of twenty my father left Lorraine for a career outside farming. I doubt if he had ever been outside Kansas, and moving to Mississippi, away from his family, had to have been a traumatic experience. Although he never returned to Kansas, I believe that for the rest of his life he considered himself a son of the Sunflower State.

Photo by Justin Hayworth

Byron Hueftle-Worley *has been a Grinnellian for over fifty years, and a City Council member for over eighteen. One of his hobbies is scanning early local newspaper files for interesting bits of forgotten history and town lore. He is working on a comprehensive description of the tornado of 1882 and its aftermath, which he hopes to finish "within the next fifty years."*

The Peace Rock

by Byron Hueftle-Worley

Early in the morning of April 21, 1914, the north end of the quiet little town of Grinnell, Iowa—home to Grinnell College—was shaken by a terrible explosion. Windows rattled and people were jarred from their sleep. When an investigation was conducted after sunrise, it was revealed that a large rock which had been placed on the College's campus the previous fall had been attacked with a large charge of dynamite and badly damaged.

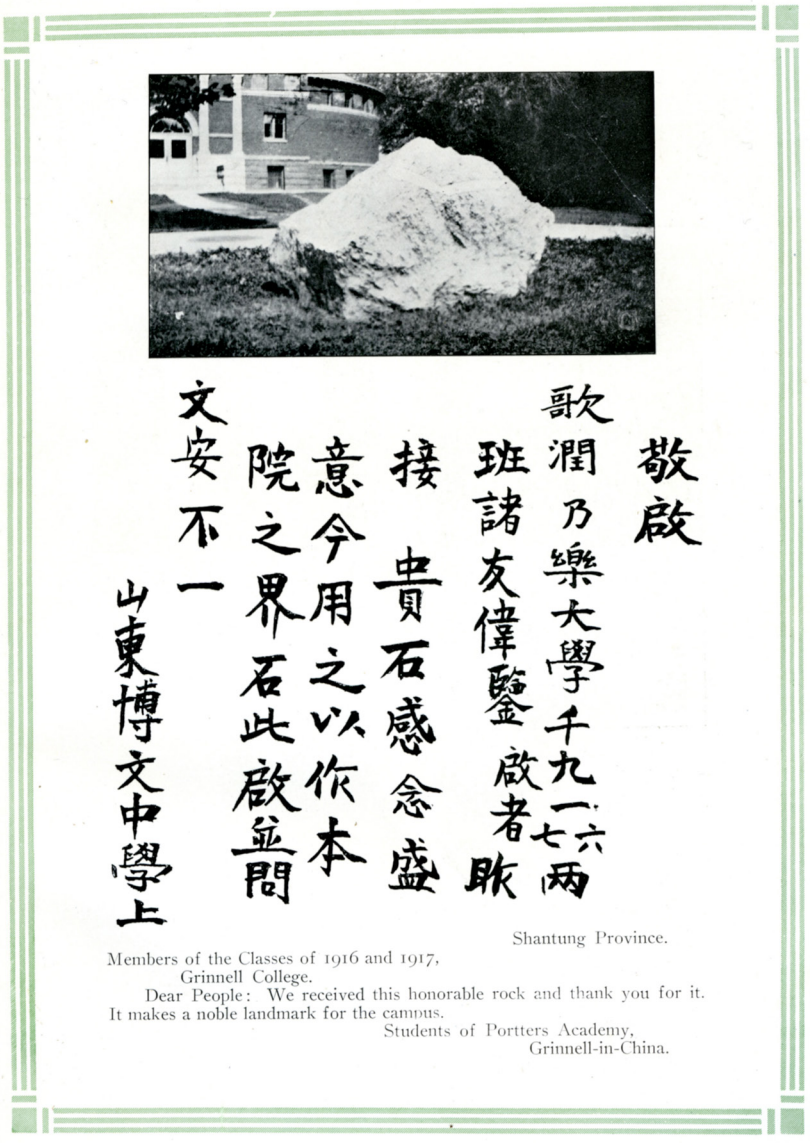
That was the main point of an article concerning the event in the *Grinnell Herald* newspaper. I came across the piece when I was scanning for some other historical information. I was fascinated by the story and began to research the story both back and forward in time through the old newspapers, college yearbooks, and any other documents I could find.

I learned that the College's students—along with students at many other colleges and universities—followed a tradition called the "class scrap," which was essentially a wrestling match between the boys of the sophomore and freshman classes. These contests started at Grinnell sometime in the 1870s. They were a sort of capture-the-flag game in which the object was to capture and tie up all of the members of the opposing class. After a night spent camping out in different parts of town, often with skirmishing between small groups of marauders, the two groups would meet on campus at a predetermined time for a final brawl. Often times hundreds of spectators would be waiting to watch the fun, and the results were usually reported in the student newspaper, the *Scarlet and Black,* along with coverage in the town newspapers. The local papers covered the scrap as if were any other sporting event.

As sometimes happens, even today, the scrappers' youthful energy and enthusiasm would sometimes overpower common sense. During the scrap of 1907, for instance, the freshmen camped out in the men's gymnasium. The sophomores surrounded the building in the early morning and used crowbars to pry up the heavy stone steps, which they then leaned against the entrance doors. The freshmen simply opened the large window in the director's office and climbed out. While the ensuing battle lasted for an hour and a half, the school Administration's anger about the incident lasted considerably longer.

In 1911, the freshmen camped out in a friendly farmer's barn somewhat out of town. Someone tipped the sophomores off about the hiding place, and they quietly moved in to surround the barn. The freshmen refused to come out and fight and the sophomores were unable to break into the building to get at them. So, while his classmates blocked the barn doors, one sophomore returned to campus and stole a container of Bromine from the chemistry lab. Bromine is nonmetallic element that is liquid at room temperature. It is quite dangerous to handle because it can cause severe skin burns and is very irritating to the lungs and eyes. When the young man got back to the barn, he opened the container and threw it in a window. The chemical made all of the younger boys terribly sick and badly burned the arm of a student on whose arm it it landed. Almost needless to say, the battle was over very quickly after that. As one might expect, many people in town, and most certainly the college Administration, took a very dim view of such a breach of fair play and decency.

Troubles for the class scrap tradition came to a head in 1913 when a student at another school was killed during another, similar campus battle. Grinnell College President Main, who had never favored the tradition, threw his considerable influence behind the notion that the class scrap should be stopped forever. The presidents of the two classes finally agreed with President Main, and they were able to convince their classmates as well. They conducted these negotiations in secret, without letting either the other students or the public know, because they had a dramatic plan for mak-



A spoof from the 1917 issue of The Cylcone, Grinnell College's yearbook, in which the disappearance of the Peace Rock was explained. According to the note, the Junior and Senior classes of that year made a gift of the rock to a school in China, and the students sent this thank-you. The note offered no explanation for the presence of the Grinnell College gymnasium in the picture.

Second-year Grinnell student Lauren Edwards digs for the Peace Rock in the area where Byron Hueftle-Worley's research said it would be, near new construction on the College's Quad. Photo by Justin Hayworth

ing the announcement.

The night before the scheduled contest, the two classes left campus separately, ostensibly to camp in separate areas. In actuality, they met in a farmer's field two and a half miles west of campus, along the route of what would eventually become Highway Six. There, just at the edge of the road, was a large granite boulder which had long posed a danger to passing traffic. The farmer who owned the field was blasting the boulder into smaller pieces so that it could be moved away from the road, and the students obtained a large fragment, loaded it into a wagon, and hauled it back to town. By the time they reached the campus, many dozens of spectators had gathered to watch the expected fight. Instead, the students placed the Rock in the middle of central campus, after which there were speeches by President Main and the two class presidents, declaring the end of the class scrap tradition and promising peace for all time.

Not everyone approved of the loss of this decades-old tradition. In the spring of 1914, someone painted the Rock bright red and added the class year '18 in black. It was a week after this that the aforementioned explosion took place, blowing off a portion of one end, and waking up the north end of Grinnell with the sound and concussion of the blast.

Nor was this the final indignity the Rock was to suffer. About a week after the explosion, someone dug a hole next to it, rolled it in, and covered it over, apparently forever. The two classes included a photograph of the Rock in one yearbook, and a mocking picture of its burial site in another.

The class scrap returned the next school year in the form of a game of pushball, which is somewhat similar to a soccer game, but played with a leather ball that is six or more feet in diameter. After that, the scrap continued as the traditional wrestling match for another few years. Some vestiges of the tradition lasted at least until the 1960s as much more restrained competitions between the two classes.

After researching the Rock and its history, I shared the story with John Whitaker and Kathy Camp, two anthropology professors at Grinnell College who are also experienced archaeologists. The photographs in the yearbooks gave us enough information to locate the likely position of the Rock within a few feet, and John and Kathy worked with the college Administration to get approval to dig up the Rock during some construction work that was taking place on campus in April, 2017. They used the excavation of the Rock as a part of their

The Peace Rock, brought fully to light for the first time in 103 years. Photo by Justin Hayworth

Byron Hueftle-Worley stands by the newly excavated Peace Rock with Grinnell Anthropology Professor John Whittaker. Whittaker supervised students from his Archaeological Field Methods class in conducting the dig. Photo by Justin Hayworth

field methods class, with students doing most of the work and learning proper archaeological procedures in the process. Employees of McGough Construction, which was doing the construction work on campus, were interested and generous enough to help lift the Rock out of the hole and set it in public view. When the construction is completed, the Rock will likely be displayed as a physical reminder of an otherwise forgotten tradition.

It's interesting to note that a bit of further research has revealed that other groups followed the students' lead, using pieces of the original large boulder for historical markers. One large piece was used for a marker near the site of the Long Home, the first house built in Grinnell. Another was used for the tombstone of Billy Robinson, Grinnell's pioneer aviator, who was killed near town while trying to set the world's record for high altitude flying. A third was used to mark the homestead of J. B. Grinnell, the town founder.

The sad and ironic twist to this story is that some of the students who placed the Peace Rock on campus would not complete their college careers in peace. Two months after the Rock was buried, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo triggered the start of World War I. When the United States entered the war three years later, most of the male students on campus, along with many of the recent graduates, enlisted in the military. Many of them served overseas, and some never returned. For all of the young men who had been involved in declaring peace for all time, peace had taken on a much more complicated and difficult meaning.

A new generation of Grinnell students makes the Peace Rock's acquaintance. Photo by Justin Hayworth

This Old House

Photo courtesy of Sam Pérez

Sam Pérez *was born in Honduras and moved to the U.S. to pursue graduate studies. When she is not teaching Spanish literature at Grinnell College, she enjoys painting, spending idle moments by the beach, and listening to live music. Sam is currently working on a graphic novel exploring women's creativity.*

By Sam Pérez

We bought our house in a small town on the prairie a couple of months after I got a job offer there. I'm still not sure what overcame us to commit to this tall, dull brown, hundred-year-old girl. We had seen many houses on our search, but this was the one my daughter, my husband, and I agreed on. When Claudia walked in she stated in a matter-of-fact way: "Mom, this is a professor's house! It smells of wine and books." Despite the fact that the house had been empty and unoccupied for more than a year, she was convinced this was the house for us. We nodded in agreement with her.

Soon after we moved in we discovered the ups and downs of home ownership in the Midwest. We sealed windows, waterproofed a leaky basement, and insulated the attic. Our first tornado made its grand debut on a fine fall day. We watched it from the living room window not quite sure of what was going on. Winter arrived too fast and the furnace decided to go on strike one night at 11 pm. A guardian angel, posing as a repairman, made his way through the snow in -15ºF weather so that we could sleep that night. We became accustomed to the excitement. A squirrel running into the kitchen, a duck falling down the chimney flue, or a couple of raccoons hanging out in the backyard: bring it on!

We also came to enjoy our house's surprises. One day, an older gentleman knocked on the front door saying he had grown up in our house and asking if he could walk through it. He said that it would mean a lot to him. I smiled at him and his adult daughter and spent the next couple of hours walking through the house with them, hearing his childhood stories. His dad had been the town doctor and his mom had been a nurse. As we

walked through the house, he explained how our new bathroom had once been his bedroom. He paused on the stairs. His eyes shone as he recounted how he and his two sisters waited at the top of the stairs on Christmas Day to run down and open their presents. He showed me where his mom would set up the tree. He recalled how the only warm room in the winter was the kitchen and how he had to bring the heavy laundry baskets to the basement to help his mom with the wash. He pointed to the coal closet as he explained how the coal was delivered every week. His last stop was the fireplace. He put his hand on the mantle, lowered his face, and cried silently. His daughter and I looked at each other and understood; memories were too heavy sometimes. Soon after, father and daughter left our house replenished with the past. I stayed behind, forgetting their names but savoring every anecdote.

Photo by Ricardo Hernandez

This past summer I was contemplating the possibility of selling this old house. I was trying to talk myself into it: "A younger one with no stairs," I thought. "We are getting older after all. More space for everyone to disperse and to congregate...."

You get the idea. I was in the middle of these mind games when Claudia came screaming into my bedroom. "Mom, you remember the man who came five years ago wanting to see our house? Well, his brother-in-law is downstairs and wants to see the backyard. Something about some ashes." I scrambled downstairs to meet our visitor, who informed us he had been married to one of the doctor's daughters, one of our previous visitor's sisters. He had flown from California to deposit his late wife's ashes in two spots in town, and one of these spots was at our home. Apparently, his wife had been very happy growing up here. She had had advanced Alzheimer's disease and, in her last years, she believed she was back in town playing with her siblings in their home on Elm Street. He said the tree next to the alley would be a good place for her ashes. I looked at him, thought about his request for three seconds, and immediately told him to go ahead and deposit the ashes as he wished.

My husband and I watched him through the window as he walked slowly to the backyard. He placed his extended arm on the tree and lowered his face for a couple of minutes. I thought of his brother-in-law, a few years before. We watched as he fumbled to take out a Ziplock baggie from his jacket. He dumped it unceremoniously at the base of the tree, and the ashes settled softly as he attempted to take a picture. Ricardo and I, who had been eavesdropping on his intimate moment, went outside to be with him. How could he be alone? Maybe he wanted us to take his photo next to the tree? What if the baggie had held one of us? What would we have wanted? We accompanied him in the impromptu memorial service. We took his picture. We stared in silence at the ashes. We asked the one question we had not yet asked: What is her name? Who would be living with us now?

"Patricia," he said with a smile. "Her name is Patricia."

Welcome Patricia. This is your home.

Photo Courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

Michele Brennhofer *is a substitute teacher, primarily junior high and high school, who lives north of the Twin Cities in Wyoming, Minnesota. She has four adult children with her husband, Bob. She enjoys spending time outside, tending to her gardens, caring for her five backyard chickens, and fishing during the different Minnesota seasons. She wrote "Roots of Stone" to share an important personal piece of prairie life and to illustrate the impact of the interactions between three generations.*

Roots of Stone

Michele M. Brennhofer

Rays of sun stretch through the upstairs bedroom, sharp chirps from undetected crickets, fading pop-pop-pop-pop of tractor cylinders, bold aromas of coffee, and the anticipated cock-a-doodle-doo all resonate so clearly. The sensuous surroundings are forever embedded within me. To my extended family the farm was just home, but to me it was a special place of new adventure with each visit.

The road trip to get there, 165 miles southwest of the Twin Cities, traveled along US Highways 212 and 75. The open, rolling, farm fields along the drive were sparsely identified by silos set in tree-surrounded farms, and segmented by many small farming community towns, some only a few blocks long. A few rural communities had their own grain mill, while others featured a specific landmark the World's Largest Ear of Corn, for instance in Olivia yet they all supported a restaurant and gas station. My grandparents' 200 acre farm sat on the southwest edge of the second largest community of Yellow Medicine County, Canby, which nestled below Buffalo Ridge on Minnesota's prairie.

The roads turned to loose gravel. As the vehicle rounded the final corner to summit the last stretch, a billowing plume of dust, rising behind it, announced the arrival of visitors. There, built atop a hill just eight miles from the South Dakota border, stood the white two-story farmhouse dressed with green shakes and windows on all sides. The gravel driveway separated the hardwood grove from the house, wrapping into the center of the farmyard, surrounded with cut green grass and buildings. A short concrete sidewalk alongside the well pump and cistern led up to the outdoor porch where Skeeter, the family dog, bedded down.

With a rock foundation, dirt-floor cellar, a secret

hall on the main floor behind the kitchen and living room which led to the main bedroom and only bathroom, a closed-door staircase off the kitchen that headed up to three more oversized bedrooms, the house took on an imposing appearance. During the fall and winter, heat rose into the upstairs through an open square metal grate in the kitchen ceiling, along with the stories told by adults sitting around the yellow kitchen table below it. Trying to sneak out of the squeaky rod iron beds to lay by the floor vent and watch below without being caught was an evening event. Resting at the foot of each bed were heavy handmade multi-colored quilts assembled from remnants of worn clothing and with stories behind each piece.

Photo Courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

The view from the upstairs bedroom windows encompassed the grove, clustered yard and all of the buildings: barn, corn crib, pigpen, granary, garage as well as the chicken coop. The view through the east-facing windows covered a great distance from the stone arch bridge over Canby Creek, which flowed through the south pastures, to varying acres of planted fields waving in the prairie wind. Mouse traps were hidden behind living room furniture and discrete spots throughout the house and outbuildings. Against Grandma's wishes, traps were checked by us kids each morning to see who could find the most that were occupied. The wall-mounted country phone was a multi-party line with a distinct ring for each specific household. Cousins performed, using the secret hall as a backstage area, annual holiday skits. No one was too old to participate. Hymns and songs played on the piano filled the air when family gathered for a group dinner. I wish I could say I was there more often; however, my visits were mostly limited to holidays and summer vacation. When I was there, I insisted on many different farm chores. I wanted to be a part of this unfamiliar lifestyle of living on a farm.

The chores included feeding livestock, milking cows, throwing kitchen scraps to the pigs, pitching manure into the barn floor gutters, and chasing cats over the mountains of bails in the hayloft went on without change. The best year-round job of all was collecting eggs from the rows of straw filled nest boxes in the coop and cleaning them for sale.

I wouldn't have missed this last part of the process for the world. Sitting on the boy-stool next to the head farmer, Grandpa, the lesson began. I was fascinated with the electric platform, agitating left and right, swirling the water around the eggs to remove chicken debris without cracking the shells. One wipe with a sackcloth towel added the finishing touch before closing them into cartons.

As seasons changed, the farm and prairie took on a different appearance. Snow-packed two-lane highways with deep ditches, the roadbeds elevated from drifting snow, gave evidence of the strength of wind gusts across the barren prairie. The fields and pastures, lifeless to new growth, became entertainment encompassing this house. Toboggans and multi-person sleds left memorable indentations on the hills behind the barn from races, crashes, and the longest runs. With enough snow depth,

my uncle, a large-animal veterinarian, would bring out his clinic snowmobiles. Adventures through the uneven south pasture led to the creek banks, which to me resembled a gorge, holding an unfrozen stream below. The adrenaline rush from clinging to the driver, hoping to reach the peak of the steep inclines without the snowmobile rolling down was rewarded with a deep breath. Families of snowmen wearing homemade scarves, hats and mittens, with one occasionally smoking pa's old corncob pipe, would live in the side yard until the sun took them away.

As spring approached, farm animals began emerging into the daytime warmth of the sun. The birth of new calves, lambs, piglets, and chicks were daily announcements reported from my oldest uncle's nearby dairy farm. The partially frozen ground had isolated soggy areas amid new growth of green popping up throughout the farmyard. Identifying the sprouting rhubarb knobs poking through the garden's earth sent my taste buds yearning for fresh, home-cooked "hairy sauce", my grandma's classic rhubarb sauce recipe. Unthawing farmyard smells lingered in the air as though no breeze was noted for miles. However, even with tractors cultivating the remains from emptying the forty-bushel manure spreader, this permeating scent eventually subsided.

Outlining the yard's south edge of the garden plot stood rows of blooming crabapple, plum, and apple trees. The fragrant aroma of blossom-covered trees mixed with the smell of freshly upturned soil, igniting the urge to stay outside all day. Each year, sunshine and warmth meant the return of my youngest aunt from her west coast residence. Her visit wasn't considered to be complete before a spring thunderstorm put on its performance of dancing, outstretched lightning bolts and claps of bone rattling thunder during the night hours. A beautiful display of power against the darkness of the skyline. It was a wakeup call for everyone who was home. Storms of this magnitude happened often. However, one horrific storm brought with it a lightning strike known for setting the family television blazing. Grandma, though advanced in age, found a moment of unimaginable strength, carried the flaming television through the house, out the porch door and disposed onto the short sidewalk, leaving a charred memorable impression of courage.

As the rains nourished the ground, the work of preparing the fields came to its completion. Sowing of the fields, with crop placement shifting from year to year, forecasted a higher yield and replenishment of soil nutrients, as long as Mother Nature cooperated. Through the seasons of planting, growing, and harvesting, there was always an ongoing fight against the ever-belligerent enemy: rocks. They were as ruthless as weeds: always plentiful, and with apparent powers of spontaneous regeneration. Picking rocks and weeding went hand-in-hand, and impressive rock piles rose in random places, out of production's way. The exposed scattered mounds of picked rocks were soon hidden in the fields amidst the tall free-growing weeds and grasses.

Crop growth was measured by body height, with

The view from the barn toward the house. Photo courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

Hollyhock doll. Photo Courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

conventional farmers' wisdom saying the corn needed to be knee high by the Fourth of July if it was to make for a good harvest that fall. As crops in the fields took visible shape, so did the homes gardens, filled with rainbow arrays of marigolds, zinnias, cosmos, poppies, daylilies, roses, and bachelor buttons. Hollyhocks took their place against many of the buildings' concrete edges, using the wall for protection and support of their lavish flowers. I methodically selected several bright alley orchids to create the most beautiful summer day-dolls. The upside-down fully opened flower blossom made for a flowing ballroom gown, while the peeled-back tightly wound bud provided a colorfully dressed doll head. The dolls floated across bird-bath water as if dancing to music as the cooling breeze wrapped around the screen porch. The vegetable garden centered amid the flower beds grew mounds of cucumbers, tomatoes, peas, bush beans, and some berries. They were abundant enough to serve fresh, and were later preserved to last through the year.

In front of the garden stood a mammoth oak tree. A wood disk-swing hung suspended from a branch that was as big around as a light pole. It was the best seat outside on a steamy hot day, for it could be pushed to swing you almost horizontal to the ground, or spun to bring on dizziness.

In late summer, some livestock was selected for the market while chickens were processed right on the farm. The chickens were precisely selected, slaughtered, and plucked before scalded. I was not always present for this annual occurrence. Yet, I have vivid memories of a year gone awry. During the preparation, the party line rang and I charged through the unlocked screen porch door only to trip, submerging one arm in the scalding bath of water for the chickens. I arrived to the town doctor with it wrapped in ice cubes and towels. Burnt? Yes. Scarred? No. Don't remember what ever happened to the selected chickens.

Cooler evenings came to the prairie. Field work took long hours, as crops began lining up to be harvested. Off in the far distance you could hear the deep croaks of frogs and the snapping of grasshopper legs as they popped out of the tall grass. Walking away from the house, out through the side field, heading to the corn crib, Grandma always looked over her shoulder to see that she was out of Grandpa's sight before taking a prime opportunity to cut loose. She would roll up her slacks, and we would run to feel the cool breeze. It was always fun on the farm. The weathered slatted corn crib resembled a covered bridge. Its walls were beginning to fill with ears of corn and would eventually be compacted and firmly filled to the top. The crops were coming in and the fields were being put to rest. The harvest was processed or hauled away by semi-trucks. The grana-

The entrance to the park. Photo courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

ry door was closed and filled to capacity with overflow hitting the gravel driveway. Horned cattle were directed into a squeeze shoot to be debudded or dehorned. The discarded horns were preserved into useful items. Wood shelves down in the root cellar gained weight from a variety of Mason-jarred preserved vegetables and fruits. Sagging fruit trees and the overcrowded garden both showed varying colors in their tired leaves. Games of hide-and-seek often lasted for hours, with boundaries being the whole farmyard and all buildings off-limits. The arguing began when someone would hide under the arch of the corn crib insisting "under" is not "in". As years faded away, the farm animals appeared to get smaller, but memories were still stacking up.

After twenty years, I looked on as my grandparents decided to sell their farm. It was hard to imagine not visiting this memorable prairie farm. Walks in the fields, climbing in the hayloft, and the egg chore, were soon to be final memories. Many locals recognized me as a grandchild. My face had become familiar to family friends, business owners, and parishioners. We watched the town celebrate its centennial in 1978, with senior citizens dressed in authentic pioneer clothing primarily made from patterns by hand, and brilliant light shows in the sky. But 1985 was marked by the auction of family belongings, as my grandparents scaled back to a home on Walnut Avenue North in Canby, Minnesota.

These local events, people, and daily activities had brought the prairies to life for me. Things were changing and people were moving on. The trips to the farm with my grandparents' oldest daughter, my Mom, changed direction. As the buildings were emptied, it was announced that the property was sold to the Watershed Project. The farm buildings were to be preserved if possible, and the majority of the land would revert to the state it had been in before ever being cultivated. The Canby Creek was expanded at the old dirt road curve, right where the stone arch bridge crossed. Del Clarke Lake, the largest man-made lake in Minnesota, was constructed at the base of the big hill where the farmhouse had once stood. Plots of the land are still owned by some of my uncles, with the remaining portion of the land a park and reserve. My grandparents had the chance to attend the dedication of Del Clarke Lake, the opening of the new park, and were honored to name the park: Stone Hill Regional Park. Named by my grandparents, Stanton and Frances Stone, it is currently in beautiful condition, and will always be there to visit.

Del Clarke Lake. Photo Courtesy of Michele Brennhofer

The farmland and prairies of Southwestern Minnesota are woven into my metropolitan upbringings and provided lifetime, unforgettable memories. The boy-stool now located in my family's kitchen, along with other memorable visual items, holds deep memories. I now have a flock of five chickens, so the egg-gathering chore continues on. My memories have become a link from my heart to my heritage.

Photo courtesy of Keith Kozloff

Closeup: Keith Kozloff

Keith Kozloff's interest in photography began around the time of his 13th birthday, when he received a Yashica A—a twin-lens reflex camera whose exposure he set manually using a hand held light meter. The camera produced two-and-a-quarter-inch square negatives, and Kozloff built a black and white darkroom in his parents' basement to permit him to develop his own film. Since he began exploring photography through monochrome, he got used to visualizing images in grey tones.

Kozloff produced the images we're featuring in this issue of *Rootstalk* between 1973 and 1976, using a medium format camera similar to his original Yashica. Since he didn't have access to a darkroom during these years, he had the negatives processed commercially. The responsibilities of career and family pushed photography to the side until a few years ago, when retirement made it possible to revisit his passion, renew it, and begin to experiment with various techniques and subjects.

The advent of digital photography had lured Kozloff away from his former exploration of grey tones, but in 2017, he rediscovered a trove of his old black-and-white negatives in a shoe box. He had some professionally digitized, and he used post-production software to correct the various imperfections and scratches in the original negative emulsion.

"As a group," Kozloff says, "these images harken back to a somewhat romanticized view of rural life that I held at that early stage in my development as a photographer and as an adult."

Photo taken at Antique Tractor Pull, sponsored by the Union Thresherman Club, Symco, Wisconsin, July, 1976

"Corn Cribs," outside rural Hortonville, Wisconsin

"Smoking Man," outside rural Hortonville, Wisconsin

"Tree in Field," outside rural Hortonville, Wisconsin

"Kids Gang," Grinnell, Iowa

"Attic Clock," outside rural Hortonville, Wisconsin

"Boys with Puppy," outside rural Hortonville, Wisconsin

Photo courtesy of Bill Graeser

Bill Graeser, *a Long Island native, has worked as dairy farmer, carpenter, teacher of Transcendental Meditation and is currently the Locksmith at Maharishi University of Management, Fairfield, Iowa. In 2016 Bill placed second in the adult category of the Iowa Poetry Association. In 2012 he won their Norman Thomas Memorial Award. Published in* North American Review, Michigan Avenue Review, Lyrical Iowa, Chiron Review, Long Island Quarterly, Dryland Fish, *and* This Enduring Gift. *He is the author of* Fire in a Nutshell, *available at Lulu Press.*

Two Poems

by Bill Graeser

American Gothic

I stand before you
a poem etched pitchfork
in my hand,

though you offer me yours
with nothing etched in the handle
but the wear of work.

The woman beside you
wears an expression
from so long standing beside you,

and behind you both
the house.

Though hay lies in the fields
I etch another poem in the handle
like grooves wagons leave in mud,

or like the house itself
to those who step inside.

After the Iowa Caucus

Finally the circus left town...
with its trapeze acts, its knife
throwers and clowns,

and the quiet of cornfields
returned to the town square,
and to coffee houses

between thoughtfully
planted rows of conversation

in which we can again agree
on such matters as topsoil,
sunshine
and rain.

PHOTO BY JOHN LAWRENCE HANSON

Photo courtesy of Ken Saunders II, taken April 11, 2018, at Lake Ponderosa, Iowa

Birds of the Prairie: Common Loon

Gavia immer

The eerie calls of **Common Loons** echo across clear lakes of the northern wilderness. Summer adults are regally patterned in black and white. In winter, they are plain gray above and white below, and you'll find them close to shore on most seacoasts and a good many inland reservoirs and lakes. Common Loons are powerful, agile divers that catch small fish in fast underwater chases. They are less suited to land,

Song: Common Loons are famous for their eerie, beautiful calls. Among these are the tremolo, a wavering call given when a loon is alarmed or to announce its presence at a lake. The yodel is the male loon's territorial claim. Each male has his own signature yodel. If a male moves to a different territory, he will change his yodel. The wail is the haunting call that loons give back and forth to figure out each other's location. Hoots are soft, short calls given to keep in contact with each other. Parents might hoot to a chick, or one mate might hoot to another. (Description courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.)

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of the Common Loon, captured by Lance A. M. Benner, courtesy of xeno-canto.

Roots Talk! Episode 4:

"The State of CAFOs"

A Podcast Interview with David Osterberg, Professor, University of Iowa & Co-founder, the Iowa Policy Project

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

In the fourth *Rootstalk* podcast, audio producer Noah Herbin and editor Eva Gemrich interview **David Osterberg** of the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of Iowa about Confined Animal Feeding Operations—also known as CAFOs. Professor Osterberg is also cofounder of the Iowa Policy Project, a "nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 2001 to produce research and analysis to engage Iowans in state policy decisions." Osterberg has lead a multitude of outreach events, talks, and demonstrations, all focused on translating research through community engagement. During his talk at Drake Community Library, Grinnell, IA, in February of this year, David Osterberg discussed the CAFO policies in place throughout Iowa, and around the world, as well as the impact CAFOs have on water quality and public health in Iowa. In this podcast, Professor Osterberg answers *Rootstalk*'s questions about the problems and potential solutions surrounding CAFOs.

To hear an audio recording of this issue's podcast, click the audio link above.

Photo courtesy of Ann P. Hall

Ann P. Hall *attended St. Catherine University and the University of Wisconsin at River Falls, earning degrees in Economics and Business. She has worked as a financial advisor, but now owns and runs a restaurant, Table 65 in New Richmond, WI.*

From My Table to Yours

by Ann P. Hall

Wisconsin, St. Croix County, New Richmond. A town made up of a diverse group of locals with roots up to 100 years old, and mud-ducks, i.e.: transplants. This town has gems of good business, as well as plenty of upstanding community members keeping balls in the air to maintain a vibrant community. The town was small enough to have only one coffee shop, and—a few years ago—this shop had to abruptly move to an obscure location due to landlord issues. A friend made an energetic announcement during a party that my husband and I should start a new coffee shop in town. This suggestion immediately piqued my interest and, having an entrepreneurial spirit, I started a business plan the very next day.

I knew that in this small town I didn't want to step on any toes by replicating what others were already doing, so we wrote the business plan for a simple sandwich/coffee shop. Once I felt we had the plan in order, we set out to find a location. While looking into spaces, we quickly realized there was no way we were going to be able to afford leasehold expenses in a raw space, but I persisted in talking to people about this project anyway. I talked to local community members, all of whom suggested we not take on this venture, since too many restaurants had failed in recent history. Still, one of the gentlemen I consulted suggested I take the concept to a local community "what's happening" meeting. I presented the idea there, and after the meeting was over, one of the attendees asked us to meet him at a location that he owned the next day. He said he had listened to my talk and thought his space (which was housing a pizza place that was on the verge of closing) would be perfect for our concept.

We saw that this space had leasehold improve-

ments already in place, including flooring, wallpaper, restrooms, plumbing, and electrical. We saw that we could pull this off if we were willing to pay a higher rent, rather than coming up with thousands of dollars to start from scratch. We dove in headfirst.

I was raised to be a coordinator, organizer, and host. I have always been most comfortable at parties and events when I was working rather than mingling. My parents hosted large well-planned-out parties and events that included their delicious, homemade food. My dad had deep farming roots that stemmed from a family history of growing food to survive. He cultivated an acre garden that was on a lot well-hidden behind a collection of small suburban homes. People would be peacefully taken away by his tours of the space, which featured carefully thought-out rows of Tomatoes reaching out of their wire supports and cucumbers hanging from their climbing vines.

"Here, try that," Dad would say, handing me a spiny crunchy cucumber and a salt shaker. Dad always had a salt shaker in his pocket late summer when the produce started revealing itself. I think of my dad as one of the originators of Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA). But Dad did not take money for his hard work. Instead, he would build garden baskets to share with neighbors, friends and members of the church. He would be busy every night year-round planning and working on his garden or prepping the food to be stored in our Fruit Cellar.

Once a year, my dad put on the "Super Bowl Sunday" Sunday luncheon at Church. Every year he would laugh and share how he had the most attendees of all the Sunday luncheons because early in the morning, after he put his huge beef roasts into the ovens, he would go around and open all the vents in the church to get the aroma of the roasts moving around the church to tantalize everyone and encourage them to stay for the amazing lunch.

Within the first three months of starting Table 65, the most random things seemed just to fall into place—stuff that my father-in-law or dad might have hunted down for me, if they had still been walking the earth. I took great comfort in believing they were having a little fun doing sourcing for the restaurant. In conversation, I might say: "I need a cook…" and the person with me would say "I know where to find one," and poof, I had a great cook. Then I'd say "I need a meat slicer," and the person in front of me would say, "Go to this location right now and they will sell you a meat slicer for $400."

There were other acts of kindness and compassion that really gave us a shove forward. For instance, our coffee vendor introduced me to the owner of a patisserie who was hoping to sell a beautiful red espresso machine. They said: "Give us a thousand down and send us a couple hundred a month." No application, no drivers license, no credit check. Just "Send us the money." The same thing happened with our gelato machine—the guy shipped it to me without asking for anything but a couple hundred a month. Our restaurant just unfolded like that: with most everything falling magically into place.

I had learned early on from my Dad that food was meant to be shared. He taught me that the dining experience was something to be relished and enjoyed with family and friends, so there was something really natural about me starting this venture. We developed our menu to have a global perspective, which naturally brought variety. I believed that, to be successful in a small town, we would need to appeal to a variety of tastes. As time has moved on, we realized there are defined fractures within the population. Then, as we moved through time, we realized there were fractures within families about who wanted a burger and who wanted a fresh torn salad or sautéed veggies with no gluten. We went back on our initial determination never to have a burger on the menu—but we did it with our neighbor's fresh ground beef. That made a delicious burger fit naturally into our global perspective.

During our first year we quickly connected with Bill and Helen, who had started our local area farmers market years before. Much like my Dad in size and stature, Bill also had a huge garden a lot away from his home. Walking into his garage was a little like coming home. I'd spy bushels of tomatoes, stacks of squash and cucumbers, and just feel giddy! Anyway, we started running over to his garden to get tomatoes but much as with the department store, you go in for one thing and come out with so much more. I was excited to bring

these offerings in through the front door of the restaurant, opening my bags for guests to see and smell. The prospect of bringing fresh produce into the restaurant year-round was a big part of what continued to thrill me with our little bistro.

We also initiated a relationship with our local hydroponic greenhouse for their amazing basil. We could go to their greenhouse in the most inclement weather to get that pound of basil. They used Tilapia—an often-farm-raised fresh-water fish—as an integral component to their set-up and the circulation of water. They had huge, huge, blue hard-walled plastic containers filled with burbling oxygenated water and a ton of Tilapia. After tasting their fish, frozen Tilapia tasted muddy, almost grimy, and believing they were probably not raised under the best of circumstances made it impossible for us to serve anything except the local operation's toxin-free fresh fish. Eventually, I came to hate every blackened tilapia we served that hadn't come from our hydroponic grower. We eventually just took it off the menu.

Photo by Ricardo Hernandez

Nowadays, through the heat of summer and fall, our long- standing produce relationship is with Mike and Jody Lenz (of Threshing Table Farm) and family. For the first few years, our kitchen scraps went to their piggies. It was fun, it was adventurous, it was playful and it was cute. Working with Mike and Jody is where the fun really starts, because I can walk over or call and ask what they're growing that's is in abundance, and that's what we end up showcasing.

How do you say "no" to bags of fresh picked tall, just-right asparagus being offered by a guy who is just as excited to hand them over to me as I am to receive them? He says "Pay me market price," and I say "You bet! Yay!" Then, on another day, when another of my suppliers—Phil of Star Prairie Berries—knocks on my back door and gives the restaurant a couple of flats of fresh-picked lettuce, I cried. I just cried about this amazing gift we had just received, and about how luxurious Phil's lettuce was.

We decided we wanted to connect with people more, so Name Droppers was born. We knew that in our small town there were many hardworking, dedicated, people who volunteered their time, money and energy for the greater good of the community, and the world. It occurred to us that we could raise funds for the town's various causes and build awareness of the groups supporting them. While this would support and recognize the hard work of others, we saw that this could also be a great way for us to get the restaurant name in front of the town, and get people in through the door.

The first few years we designated a week, created a table card with a specific non-profit biography and the name of their leaders, and gave our patrons the opportunity to 'namedrop'. We'd ask the guest to say they were there for, say, Katy and the Gap Fund, and we would then give ten percent of the ticket to the non-profit whose name the diner had dropped. Our goal was as

much to build awareness of these groups and their activities as it was to raise money.

This year, we've tried something new. We had eight groups ask to participate, and each has created a poster for our easel, table tents & cards to define who they are and what they've accomplished during the year. We've also created a donation form that allows us to charge the donation to the patron's card, and then hand the form over to the group.

This has been very successful. Our waitstaff has been excited for each cause, and has asked diners to consider contributing. Most staff have even gone so far as to learn a 15-second "elevator speech," detailing the work of the group.

As time moves on, we are excited to do more for this community. It has given us the opportunity to share what has been shared within my family for years—fresh beautiful food—while spreading love and support for the place we call home.

Photo by Ricardo Hernandez

Photo courtesy of Kelly Hansen Maher

Kelly Hansen Maher *lives in Grinnell, Iowa, and is the author of one collection of poetry, Tremolo (Tinderbox Editions, 2016). Her work has appeared in Briar Cliff Review, New Orleans Review, and elsewhere. Kelly teaches creative writing in prisons, and is currently working on a new book about prairie, loss, and memory.*

Pieta Brown in Concert

by Kelly Hansen Maher

Musically as well as figuratively, Iowa-born singer-songwriter, Pieta Brown honors the long sustain—a fact which was amply evidenced by her sold-out fall 2017 performance in the Grinnell (Iowa) Area Arts Council's gallery space, backed by Grammy-award winning guitarist Bo Ramsey. Her layered refrains make for a straightforward but lush musical atmosphere that recalls traditional folk and blues, while her strong yet breathy vocals run more indie and alt-country. It's an infectious blend that ably supports Brown's clear sense of tradition and place. Put another way, her music epitomizes contemporary Middle-America songwriting.

Watching her play, I found myself watching her fingers on the guitar neck at the end of each song. On each song ending, she pressed the strings and gently waved the neck, drawing the final sound out in a reverent, lasting fade. This impression of that night has stayed with me: that resonant, purposeful close, which was really an intention to remain. After the concert, playing Brown's music over the long Iowa freeze, I managed to stay mindful of what was alive, woven as kith, under the cold ground of our prairie winter. The roots that anchor the tallgrasses, summer coneflowers, and September asters exemplify the sort of anchoring that flourishes in Pieta Brown's music. Her artistry honors that long sustain of kinship and season.

"I really believe in the land-music connection," Brown said.

Brown's Iowa roots do run deep. She played the Art Center with renowned guitarist and producer, Bo Ramsey, her accompanist and frequent collaborator. In addition to his Grammy-winning guitar skills, Bo is a highly respected producer and songwriter, and an inductee

of both the Iowa Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame. Two of Ramsey's sons, Alex and Benson Ramsey, are in the band The Pines, which played in the first joint-offering from the Grinnell Arts Council and the Center for Prairie Studies, back in January of 2017. Ramsey is also a long-time friend and collaborator with Pieta Brown's father, Greg Brown, another colossal Iowa music talent. Greg Brown is known for his hybrid style of blues, folk, and rock, and for songs like "Iowa Waltz." Greg Brown's wife—Pieta's stepmother—is the singer-songwriter Iris DeMent.

"I grew up in Iowa," Brown told the crowd. She described childhood memories of living in a remote, rural home somewhere outside Iowa City, a "shack, really." She said she had driven around in recent years looking for that house, but couldn't find it again.

That image of driving blue highways looking for a remembered home, a lost home, stuck with me. It's an image that matches Brown's dreamy, memory-scape sound. She said that her father often took them out on "this sort of southern Iowa circuit," and she recounted the excitement of reaching a giant firework stand each time they'd cross the Missouri border.

Pieta Brown's childhood, she told us, was full of music. She was often surrounded by family members playing various instruments—her grandmother on the pump organ for one—in spontaneous jams. But judging from her remarks throughout the night, being rooted in song means more to Brown than having a musical pedigree or serving as a link to Iowa music royalty. It means a lifelong appreciation for other musicians, and feeling a sense of musical kinship that is woven into her life as a songwriter and performer. Throughout the evening, Brown referred to her work in music, and to life on the tour-road, as one rich with collaboration, and full of admiration for other artists.

That image of driving blue highways looking for a remembered home, a lost home, stuck with me. It's an image that matches Brown's dreamy, memory-scape sound.

This appreciation and admiration was evident on stage with Bo Ramsey. Though it was Brown's name on the ticket, she wanted us to realize that we were fortunate to be there with Ramsey, whom she described as a guitarist with "a unique gift." Brown's humility and gratitude cohered into a kind of formality, which Ramsey shared. This formality carried into their dress and stage presence, which had a sort of country-hip mystique, but

PHOTO COURTESY OF PIETA BROWN

also seemed old school polite—a "thank you for having us tonight, ma'am" kind of respectfulness. Their mutual attitude was, to me, one of sincere tribute, to both the night and the work. Brown and Ramsey created an intimate musical space. They were prepared, but also improvisational. Ramsey, in his signature cowboy hat and quiet demeanor, played from a selection of guitars to beautifully crystallize the sense of yearning and tenderness at the heart of Brown's songs, and he complemented Brown's acoustic strumming with expressive notes and tremolos. I could see the two actively listening to one another, for one another, and I did in fact feel fortunate to be there.

"I don't mind this old world," Brown said, smiling. The comment instantly reminded me of the Lucinda Williams song "Sweet Old World"—a song that, incidentally, Ramsey has played with Williams. But then during a mischievous pause, before Brown got about as politically pointed as she would all evening, she said: "It's easy to mind it a little bit these days"—some laughter of agreement from the crowd—"but deep down, I don't really mind it."

While most of Brown's set list dug into her own solo roots—which go back eight albums to her self-titled release in 2002—she also played several songs from her March, 2017 album, *Postcards*. For *Postcards*, Brown had invited long-distance collaborations with other musicians, people she admired and sought to work with despite being miles away. Viewing music "as a collaborative pleasure," she said that each song on the album had been co-written across the miles through musical correspondence, or "musical postcards." Postcard collaborators include Calexico, Mason Jennings, The Pines, and Mark Knopfler (of Dire Straits fame), among others.

In performing "Street Tracker," the song she collaborated on with Knopfler for *Postcards*, Brown even sought to collaborate with the audience. She pulled us into participation, not in a raucous call and response, but into soft echo after each verse. When she prompted, "I don't want to," we sang back, "don't want to go home." And we didn't.

Album cover courtesy of Lustre Records and Pieta Brown. Click on the image at left to listen to "In the Light," a cut from the album, Postcards.

Photo courtesy of Kristine Heykants

Closeup: Kristine Heykants

While she seems to be equally comfortable shooting portraits or landscapes, what drew us to the work of photographer **Kristine Heykants** was the way she combines the two, bringing her figures into the prairie in a way that neither renders her human subjects tiny nor robs the space of its quiet grandeur. There is simultaneously an intimacy and mystery in her compositions.

Heykants is interested in pictures that tells stories—that, as she says, "[make] sense of the human experience, while searching for beauty in the familiar and mundane." She explores women's roles, domesticity and sources of neo-classical architecture, searching them for the themes which inform her personal projects. She was born in Iowa City, Iowa, but has made her home in Minneapolis for the last 20 years. The photos we're featuring in this issue of *Rootstalk* are drawn from "Uprooted," a series through which she has been exploring the town of Belmond, Iowa, population 2,300.

About the project, Heykants says: "Five years ago I began revisiting Belmond, a place where my paternal grandparents ran a small farm. I never lived there, but the farm remains in the family. Greeted by familiar topics of news headlines—Brain drain, withering small towns, rural poverty, the high-tech nature of industrial agriculture requiring fewer workers, and the new wave of (non-European) immigrants—I was nevertheless struck by constants I remembered from my youth 30-odd years ago.

"I aim to create insight surrounding the challenges of positive human connection, particularly at a time when the economic perspective of city dwellers is at odds with those living in the country, while shedding light on the paradoxes, complexities and social realities of rural Midwestern life."

"Wright County Fair, Eagle Grove"

"Morning Corn Harvest"

"New Years Eve, Church Parking Lot"

"Concessions at Football Stadium"

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Snow

Stephanie Snow *is a writer and musician, who currently lives on the Meskwaki Settlement in central Iowa with her family. She is part of a group that has been nominated for several categories in the Native American Music Awards. Two of Snow's other poems appeared in the Spring 2016 number (Volume II, Issue 2), of* Rootstalk.

Gnosis

by Stephanie Snow

Strands of onyx
Carry the power of Universe expanding
Telling stories of interconnectedness as it
Mirrors the night sky
Created Life
Motherland Universe
Tongue-less words
Starstruck Hearts
Whetted Thirst
Deja vu love under the swipe of the Milky Way
In the sunshine, on the grass
The flicker of cottonwood leaves overhead
Covered in raindrops
Blending your raindance with my sundance
Southwest Sky
Woodland Dreams
Bloodline Streams
NDN Hands
Caballo Knees
It is yours since time began
Years pass by in each reincarnation
Until instantly I recognize your spirit
Souls crisscross millenia, drawing a network into infinity

Photo courtesy of Colin Lewis-Beck

Finding the Lost Duck

by Colin Lewis-Beck

As Iowa City expands, it takes longer to break though the outer ring of strip malls, office parks, and housing developments to see a classic Iowa landscape—a pastiche of Grant Wood's *Stone City*. But drive a few miles down Highway 1 towards Kalona, and the land clears out to rolling hills that are marked off with farm houses pushed against the road. I'm in the backseat of a mini-van; my arm rests on a red cooler full of sparkling water. My father sits on the other side. Four of his buddies fill up the rest of the van. It's early morning and we are off to explore southeast Iowa. This is not the kind of extemporaneous road trip I used to take in college: then, planning consisted of inviting someone with a car, buying a case of Genny Cream Ale, and borrowing an E-Z Pass for free tolls.

This trip is more like those I took when I was growing up, when our family drove all over the state. My parents didn't want to fit the stereotype of Iowa City snobs who never leave Johnson County unless the destination is Europe or Manhattan. I have memories of winning a quarter of a hog at a county fair, the tulip parade in Pella, and lots of festivals ending in "Days": Beef Days, Sauerkraut Days, Steamboat Days, Sweet Corn Days, and Ice Cream Days. A few years ago, I moved back home after living on the East Coast, and realized most of my Iowa travel memories had faded. My dad would mention an old trip we had taken and I'd blank, or only remember a small detail—like the buffet line of Jello salads at the United Methodist Christmas potluck in Springdale. I decided to start taking my own weekend trips to explore Iowa as an adult. Sometimes I'd travel with my dad, sometimes I'd take a lady friend. Eventually, I suggested inviting some of my dad's pub buddies. I knew them from when I was growing up, and

Colin Lewis-Beck *has a BA from Middlebury College, an MPP/MA from the University of Michigan, and is currently a PhD candidate in statistics at Iowa State University. He grew up in Iowa City, and is returning there this fall to start a job as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Iowa. In his free time he enjoys gardening, reading Trollope, and exploring the Midwest.*

I had often heard about their road trips to breweries around the state. The trips sounded fun—lots of swearing, drinking, and derision.

The planning for this particular trip started a month ago. Emails went back and forth, containing links for possible places to eat and attractions to visit: Mexican food in Columbus Junction, the Canteen diner in Ottumwa, a new goat cheese farm north of Keokuk. The only stop everyone agreed on was the Lost Duck Brewery.

A brewery seems to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for these trips to come together. The Lost Duck is in Fort Madison, a river town along the Mississippi in Southeastern Iowa. This is the poorest region of the state. Over the last 30 years manufacturing has left the state and the agricultural economy has shrunk. Lots of once-thriving small farm and river towns are now desolate: the only buildings bookmarking their Main Streets are a post office or Casey's gas station. There are exceptions, however, and using a combination of the 1930s Iowa WPA guide, local newspapers, and decades of experience with living in the state, the pub guys and I outline a circuitous route that points us towards the Mississippi.

The van feels relaxed. There is no yelling or bravado. The pace of conversation is similar to a Quaker meeting: no agenda, people speak when moved.

"Does anyone remember a blonde Norwegian woman that worked at Pleasant Valley? She was a cashier there in the 80s. I think her name was Anna. A real babe. She was really dishy. I mean really dishy."

"I was probably about 5 years old then," I reply.

"You would remember her then," says Brent.

Without turning around, from the front passenger's seat, Richard says, "You know, Brent, I must say my memory of beautiful women doesn't extend back that far." Richard's cadence is measured, like an old school debater. Everyone in the van laughs.

The query has concluded, but Brent wants the last line: "You guys need to make more space in your brains for beautiful women. She was super dishy."

The topic of beautiful women from Iowa City days past returns, but is interrupted as Phil points out a stand selling Amish-made furniture. Before I can decide whether I want to get out and look, we've passed the stand. Despite the desultory nature of the trip, Phil insists the van continues forward. "It's not worth stopping. I'm pretty sure those chairs are made in Indiana, anyway."

We pull over at a gas station in Wellman so Kory, the driver, can look at a map. Cell phone service is spotty, which makes the drive feel more adventurous—even though with Phil's Iowa knowledge it would be impossible to get lost.

"Fairfield's the next stop," says Phil. "I went on a date once with a TM-er. She said she could levitate."

"Did you see her do it?" I ask.

"No. She wouldn't let me watch. She made me listen from another room. After ten minutes she said she levitated, but I didn't believe her. No empirical evidence. We didn't go out again."

"You should have turned back there!" barks Phil.

We take the next left, which points us towards Keota.

"Do you remember the farm woman, Cecile? She

Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

used to live out here with a cowboy in the late 90s. She baked her own bread in a wood-fired oven. Raised goats. Men were nuts for her." An hour in and we've already covered two decades of Iowa City women. I'm quickly realizing that, despite being the young guy in the van, the group dynamic is familiar. The vocabulary is at a higher level, references are more erudite, but the topics of male conversation are timeless.

A replica of the Maharishi Golden Domes announces Fairfield. A new addition to the school? We pull in but realize we've been tricked by an office park crafted to look like a spiritual center. Last time I was in Fairfield was for a tennis tournament at the Parsons College gym. The rumor was the gym was going to be torn down because its entrance did not face east—a requirement for all Maharishi architecture. The gym was saved, however, after a new door was added to the east side of the building. From then on, the tennis courts were spiritually copasetic with the principles of Vastu architecture. On the outside, the gymnasium still looks the same.

University Housing, Maharishi University of Management. Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

"Hey Phil, did you know anyone who played basketball at Parsons?" my dad asks. Phil grew up in Iowa and rumors are he was the first man off the bench on the University of Iowa basketball team in the 60s.

Phil quickly answers: "They had good players. Mostly kids that weren't good enough to play at U of I."

From the driver's seat, Kory adds "My parents used to tell me if I didn't study hard enough I'd have to go to Parsons."

Phil interrupts, "They would take anyone that could pay tuition. I think some kids from the Pennsylvania Hershey family went to Parsons."

In contrast to Keota, downtown Fairfield is alive. The Maharishi buying the college was a boon for the town. More than a few times when I've told someone I'm from Iowa the first thing they ask is if I've been to Fairfield and seen people levitate.

We pass a new arts center, a fancy stationary store and, posted on a telephone poll, a sign advertising free pistol lessons on Fridays. The homes are grand, with large front porches, turrets, and windows with ornate glasswork on the edges. Although Parsons is gone, Fairfield still feels like a college town. We pass a purple colored house with an organic garden out front. Looks like a Co-op.

"Hey Phil, maybe that TMer you dated lives here. Want to stop?" Phil ignores Brent's zinger, a repartee amongst old geezers.

Kory links us back to Highway 1 heading towards Keosauqua to see the Hotel Manning. Expectations are high. Phil claims Mark Twain stayed at the Manning on his comedy tour. I picture a big old historic hotel like the Winneshiek in Decorah, but downtown Keosauqua is desolate. The Manning quietly appears at the edge of the Des Moines River. The structure of the hotel has its features: a classic Western movie balcony running across the second floor with HOTEL MANNING in paint-chipped block letters underneath. However, the hotel feels forgotten, tucked between the river and a cheap roadside motel next door. We take another loop though the town. Other than a couple smokers outside Tillie's Tap, the streets are empty.

"Anyone want to get out and walk around?" Kory asks.

We haven't yet been out of the van and I'm ready

to stretch my legs. I hope our trip doesn't turn into one of those European mega bus rides where retirees drive through quaint Austrian villages without setting a foot on the ground.

"What stop is next?" inquires Richard.

"The Dutchman," answers Kory.

"We should save our energy for The Dutchman then," replies Richard.

The plan is to stop in Cantril and walk around The Dutchman, a Mennonite version of Paul's Discount in Iowa City—a local store selling everything from broadsides with trite inspirational quotes to camouflage Iowa Hawkeye baseball hats. As we pull into Cantril, the guys go around and list items they hope to purchase. The objects are quotidian, but the possibility of finding, say, a straw broom at the Dutchman turns an everyday household product into a collector's item.

Brent leads off, "The Amish make the best paring knives. They last forever. Never lose an edge. I want to buy at least seven."

"If they last forever, why do you need to buy more than one?" Richard asks.

Brent doesn't take Richard's bait to start debating. Kory adds 10 pairs of Eclipser glasses to his wish list. "You never should look directly in the sun," he advises. I don't have a wish list, but decide to buy some sort of kitsch souvenir to remember the trip.

Downtown Cantril is one block long, and the Dutchman takes up the whole right side. I step out of the van and the Iowa summer heat hits me for the first time. There is no shade, so everyone heads straight into the store. There is a tacit understanding to reconvene at the van after everyone loads up on supplies. I cool off with a soft-serve ice cream and wander over to a display of Red Ryder BB guns hanging above a collection of small garden gnomes. Unlike most big box stores, the Dutchman is tightly packed, creating a cozy feel. Our crew is efficient and I see Brent with a handful of knives approach a row of Mennonite girls waiting to ring people up. The others follow suit, quickly finding their items, and head outside to the van. Maybe it's the Mennonite spirit, but the pub guys are fast. I'm the last one in the store and impulsively grab a jar of Amish-made hard boiled eggs pickled in red beet juice. The red color attracts me, but it's too shiny, like a candy apple. I leave the store and wonder how Amish the eggs really are: the second ingredient on the back of the jar reads red dye number two.

"No more stops till Fort Madison," Phil declares as we leave Cantril. It's almost 1 o'clock and lunch takes priority. Kory read about The Fort Diner on a food blog, and starts a discussion of whether anyone will order a Wally burger, the Fort's featured menu item. We easily spot the diner; it's across the street from a Fort Madison replica, right alongside the Mississippi. A sign saying "Eat the Fort" sits atop the entrance to a small trailer. Windows run along the side and a menu board with items spelled in black tiled letters rises behind the counter. Inside, the Fort has all the fixings of a classic American diner: a waitress with a deep smoker's rasp, a white board listing special pies, and a short order cook sweating over a grill and small deep fryer.

> Both sides are lined with trees and woodland brush. Across the river, the historic Keokuk lock and dam stands out like a lighthouse.

The booths hold two people so I, along with Kory and Brent, sit at the counter.

"Only two pieces of key lime pie left, so order now," the waitress bellows.

Richard orders pie and a Wally burger without hesitation. "Just to let you know, the only thing you'll be doing after that Wally burger is sleeping," the waitress says. Richard laughs but, undaunted by the warning, he starts in on the teal colored pie, which arrives first. Richard used to be a weightlifter, and still has a big frame with wide shoulders. If anyone can take down a Wally burger it's him.

As the rest of the food comes out the waitress offers a rundown of local news starting from the 1950s when employees from the Shafer pen company would line up outside the Fort for lunch, till last year when a couple

"Keokuk Power," photo by David Ottenstein

convicts broke out of the state penitentiary and stopped for a beer before skipping town. We take our time so Richard can work through his pound of well-done beef covered in gravy, mushrooms, and onions, everything a monochrome light brown. He eventually capitulates, but everyone is impressed—less than a quarter of the gravy soaked bun remains. My dad texts his wife a picture of Richard's Wally burger. She messages back: Gross. Looks like guy food.

After a meal where the only green item consumed was key lime pie, the air-conditioned van makes a welcomed sanctuary. We approach Keokuk from the Illinois side, crossing the Mississippi and following I-96 though Nauvoo. Parts of the road nudge right up against the Mississippi, giving the best view of the trip; I've never seen the river so close from a car. Both sides are lined with trees and woodland brush. Across the river, the historic Keokuk lock and dam stands out like a lighthouse.

Brent asks the group if anyone knows the correct way to say Keokuk. "I think they drop the kuk. More like, Keo-Kha."

"Who cares," Phil says. "The guys from Keokuk were always assholes. That's never changed. The only thing they're good at is stock car driving."

"You never went out with a girl from Keokuk?" Brent asks.

"Ha. If you wanted to get beat up. Keokuk guys saw you were from out of town, they'd tailgate your car till you left. I stuck with Pella girls." Pella is a small prosperous Dutch town in Iowa. Every year they have a tulip festival celebrating Dutch culture. A few years ago, the festival set a world record for most people dancing in wooden shoes at the same time.

"Did you ever date the Tulip Queen, Phil?" Brent asks.

"Not that I remember," says Phil.

"You'd remember if you had," says Brent.

Like many river towns, Keokuk is struggling to keep its downtown alive. Most of the storefronts are empty or filled with chain restaurants and cheap beer bars. We loop down to the railroad tracks and pull up to the historic Keokuk Union Depot. The station, however, stands boarded up as part of a renovation. Brent says we can call a guide to come down and open it up for us, but the Depot's so far from finished it's not worth it. In the 40s, when the Zephyr Rocket trains connected cities all over the Midwest, this Depot was probably quite grand. Now a dozen sets of railroad tracks sit empty.

"I'm ready for some beers, let's go," announces Kory. No objections. Everyone seems to feel like we've seen all that Keokuk has to offer.

We return to Fort Madison for one last stop. A view of the State Penitentiary welcomes us back. We enter the Duck, which we discover is a block away from The Fort diner. The brewery is dead except for a lonely woman drinking alone by the window. The woman

watches us, waiting for an invitation. She seems friendly, but Phil doesn't give her an opening. Inviting women to the beer table is discouraged. Having seen women occasionally join pub group I can see why: they get all the attention as the guys try and impress the ladies rather than indulging in each other's rants and discussion of medical ailments.

Phil and I walk to the bar and order two mixed samplers. Everyone picks through the beers, taking sips as they work their way around the tray. The beers are colorful and refreshing, but taste the same. The real highlight of the bar is the up-close view of the Mississippi. We watch the river speed by. Conversation pauses for the first time all day; the current commands everyone's attention.

Brent breaks the silence. "My favorite part was The Dutchman. I wonder if they have a website where I can buy more paring knives."

"Do we want to stay and have enchiladas at The Elks Club?" Kory asks. "The sign out front says they are having a fundraising dinner tonight."

"You know, Kory, that Wally burger is still with me," says Richard. I take some group shots of the table and my dad takes a photo of me and Richard. Having made it to the brewery, I feel like the trip is winding down, and I want some memories that will last longer than the fake Amish eggs. Phil, the trip leader, heads to the minivan parked behind the Fort. "Let's roll," he says.

No one argues; we made it to the Duck and it's time to head home. Kory takes a shortcut to highway 218. The road loops around a large chemical plant surrounded by high wired fences. The plant looks like it should be off the Jersey turnpike, not stuck in the middle of Iowa farmland.

"I think our trip mojo has run out," says Kory. "Let's just stick with 218 the rest of the way."

For the first time all day, the van goes silent. Corn and soybean line both sides of the road, directing the way home. Most people probably wouldn't consider southeast Iowa a vacation spot, but everyone in the van is content. Lots of these small towns still have life left, even as the population and economy shift to the bigger Iowa cities. It just takes a little more effort and planning to find places other than a Casey's gas station to explore. Most of the interesting locations are not on Yelp.

The trip is not over, but I'm struggling to not fixate on the end. I remember the guys in the van giving me checks at my high school graduation, and now they are no longer only my dad's pub buddies, but mine as well. I am hoping we can continue to arrange these trips more often.

We get out of the van grabbing our goods from the Dutchman. As we walk towards the house Phil shouts from the van, "I think we should do Burlington next. It's supposed to be one of the best spots to watch the solar eclipse. I'll bring Eclipsers for everyone."

Photo by Eva Gemrich

Birds of the Prairie: Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus

Photo courtesy of Ken Saunders II, taken February 19, 2017, at Otter Creek Marsh Wildlife Management Area in Tama County, Iowa

The **"Hooded" Merganser** is something of an understatement for this extravagantly crested little duck. Adult males are a sight to behold, with sharp black-and-white patterns set off by chestnut flanks. Females get their own distinctive elegance from their cinnamon crest. Hooded Mergansers are fairly common on small ponds and rivers, where they dive for fish, crayfish, and other food, seizing it in their thin, serrated bills. They nest in tree cavities; the ducklings depart with a bold leap to the forest floor when only one day old.

Song: Hooded Mergansers are usually silent, but they call during courtship and around nest sites. A courting male makes a deep, rolling sound like the call of a pickerel frog, earning it the nickname of "frog-duck" in Georgia. Females give a hoarse gack call during courtship. When females call in flight or to newly hatched ducklings, they use a rough croo-croo-crook similar to that of many sea ducks. (Description courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.)

Click the icon below to hear an audio recording of the Hooded Merganser, captured by Jim Berry, courtesy of xeno-canto.

Endnotes

"The Heart of the Oblates' North: the Lac La Biche Mission"

Mueller, “The Lac La Biche Mission – The Heart of the Oblates’ North”
Great Plains Research Consultants, 1990. Notre Dame des Victoires: A Land Use & Structural History.
Maccagno, Mike, Date Unknown. Rendezvous: Notre Dame des Victoires. Publisher Unknown.

The Rootstalk Editorial Staff: from left to right (standing) Publisher Jon Andelson, Associate Editors Cam Hall, Dru Greenwood, Noah Herbin, and Editor-in-Chief Mark Baechtel. Seated are Associate Editors Eva Gemrich (left) Noah Jacobson (right) and Kaitie Hess (bottom). Not pictured: Tim Brennhofer