Rootstalk

A PRAIRIE JOURNAL OF CULTURE, SCIENCE, AND THE ARTS

VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 1, SPRING 2022

Rootstalk, *Spring 2022*
Volume VIII, Issue 1
Supported by Grinnell College's Center for Prairie Studies
(https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers-programs/prairie-studies)
Rootstalk *is committed to promoting open expression and is hosted on*
Grinnell's Digital Grinnell server.

A note on this issue's multimedia features: In addition to this "print-friendly" number of Rootstalk*, we've created an interactive multimedia PDF of the issue, which you can download at https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu. Interactive issues of* Rootstalk *include content featuring hyperlinks and—occasionally—embedded audio and video files, including short film, computer animations and graphics, and our podcast, "RootsTalk!"*

To access these features, you'll need to have the Adobe Acrobat Reader running on your computer. If you don't already have the software installed, you can download a trial copy at https://acrobat.adobe.com.

You can also use the Rootstalk *link (https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu) to read all the content for this and past issues of the journal online.*

Grinnell alumnus **Keith Kozloff** *took the photograph we're featuring on the cover of this issue. It's titled "Hiking with Frank."*

Cover design: Mark Baechtel, Jonathan Andelson
Table of contents photograph: "Prairie Light" by Carl Kurtz
Layout: Mark Baechtel, Jon Andelson

Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

Jon Andelson *is the Publisher of* Rootstalk. *He is Rosenfield Professor of Social Science (Anthropology, http://www.grinnell.edu/academics/areas/anthropolog) at Grinnell College (http://www.grinnell.edu) and co-founder and director emeritus of the College's Center for Prairie Studies (https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers/prairie-studies).*

**All references appear in Endnotes in the back of the issue.*

Publisher's Note:

The Stories We Tell*

BY Jon Andelson

One bright spring morning nearly twenty-five years ago I was sitting with some colleagues around a seminar table in a Grinnell College classroom sharing opinions about a wide variety of topics. The occasion was a breakout session at an all-faculty retreat. We were talking about the curriculum, the demands of teaching, work-life balance, students, and the general state of the college.

"Grinnell is a good place to teach," one of my colleagues said at one point. "Too bad it's where it is." As I recall, she went on to lament that the college wasn't in St. Paul, Minnesota, but I think that was just a for-instance. Someone else agreed and said, "how about Santa Fe?" "Or Santa Barbara," another chimed in. What was it about saints, I wondered? (Our local coffee shop is named Saints Rest (https://www.saintsrestcoffee.com), but clearly that wasn't sufficient.) I remember feeling sad about the direction the conversation was taking, and a bit irritated, but I said nothing.

During the coffee break that followed the session I found myself sitting outside with my friend Jackie Brown, a member of the Biology Department (https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/majors-concentrations/biology), who had been in a different breakout session. I decided to share with Jackie what I'd just heard and how it had made me feel. Somewhat to my surprise he said, "I heard the same thing in my group, and it pissed me off, too."

"It's not as if the College is going to move," I said.

"They should settle in and get to know the place," Jackie said.

In fact, at that time the college as an institution was doing a pretty good job of ignoring its location, and even apologizing for it. One Admission brochure said something to the effect that "Grinnell might be in

the middle of corn fields, but it's a great school." A subtle—or maybe not so subtle–slap in the face . . . to the town, the state, and corn. As Jackie and I talked, ideas for pushing back against this attitude began popping into our minds. In the weeks that followed we brought together a number of other colleagues from across the college who we thought or hoped shared our views, or at least could be brought around to them. To make a long story short, the result was the decision to create a Center for Prairie Studies at Grinnell.

The Center's mission, as we conceived it, was to celebrate and use our location as a teaching and learning resource instead of ignoring it, letting our location, as one of our colleagues put it, "be our text, our stage, our canvas, our laboratory, and our archive." But how did we think of our location, and what should we call our Center? We considered Iowa Studies, Midwest Studies, Rural Studies, and some others that I cannot now recall, but in the end we decided to designate our location as "the pr2airie region of North America." In this we were influenced by a statement in a history of Iowa, prepared for the Bicentennial of the United States by Grinnell College historian Joseph Frazier Wall (https://carnegiemuseums.org/magazine-archive/1996/janfeb/wall.html). "The history of every state must ... begin with the land itself," Joe said. "For Iowa, the land serves as more than an introduction. It is the main story line."[1] In 1850, roughly 80 percent of Iowa was tallgrass prairie, the highest proportion of any state. Even though a century later 99 percent of the original prairie had been destroyed to make way for Euro-American agriculture, the prairie's influence on Iowa's development endures to this day.

Image Courtesy of Grinnell College's Center for Prairie Studies

I have told this story many times, but until now never committed it to print. Although the story is the same, publishing it here changes it. Putting the story in print makes it part of a more durable record. That is one goal of *Rootstalk: A Prairie Journal of Culture, Science, and the Arts*: to gather stories from the prairie region and to share them with our audience. Most of the stories are told in words, but some are told in images or in sound, and some in all three. The stories are literally everywhere; we just coax them into the open and put them in a storehouse or, if you will, a storyhouse.

I have been thinking about stories a lot lately. This seemingly straightforward category contains its share of enigmas. For example, I cannot decide if we once were the stories we tell, or if we become the stories we tell, or if the stories, like Janus—the Roman god of doors, gates, and transitions—face backwards and forwards simultaneously, connecting the past to the future. Are stories wisdom or wish or warning? The word's derivation is a story in itself. "Story comes via Anglo-Norman *estorie* from Latin *historia* ('account of events, narrative, history')."[2] We can trace the word farther back to the Greek *histor*, originally *widtor*, meaning "wise" or "knowing," thence back to an Indo-European root, *weid*, "to see or look."[3] Thus, seeing allows us to know things, and we give accounts of what we saw, and of what we know from seeing, in the stories we tell.

I notice stories everywhere, but this was not always the case. I used to think of stories as fictional narratives. I did not think of myself as collecting stories when, as an anthropologist, I would conduct interviews with people about their cultural practices and norms; I was collecting evidence—facts, not fictions. Nor did I think of the news on television or in newspapers as stories; again, these accounts were factual. (Editorials might be opinion rather than fact, but that still was different from fiction.) Scientific reports, also, were not "mere stories" but based on careful methods for systematically gath-

ering information, data. In my mind, the phrase "it's a true story" only highlighted the idea that most stories were not.

My perspective on stories began to shift under the influence of a current Grinnell student. I first met Emma Schaefer (https://www.facebook.com/emmakieranmusic) in the Spring of 2020 when she enrolled in the Digital Journal Publishing class that I co-teach every spring with Mark Baechtel, *Rootstalk's* Editor-in-Chief. Emma took the class, she told us, because she thought it might contribute to the independent major in Multimedia Storytelling she was pursuing. That sounded interesting, but, I thought, limited. However, the more I listened to Emma, and the more I began to pay attention to what other people were saying about stories, and the more I thought about the broad etymology of the word "story," the less I felt that stories lay on one side of the line I had drawn between fact and fiction. Put another way, stories transcend that distinction, which in any case is not the most important thing about stories. Rather, the most important thing about stories is that they convey a message about how things were, or are, or might become. They are tools for describing and illuminating the past, the present, and the future.

Janus, Roman god of doorways, gates and transitions. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Consider what the author Beth Hoffman says in her new book, *Bet the Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America* (https://islandpress.org/books/bet-farm), an account of the challenges she and her husband faced moving back to Iowa to take over his family's farm and move it in a more sustainable direction: "Yet as I outlined in the previous chapters, there is much that we can do as individuals, as farms, as groups of farms, and as a nation to improve the system [of agriculture], all of which start with changing the stories we tell about farming."[4]

Or consider what Keith Kozloff (https://www.governing.com/authors/keith-kozloff.html), formerly a senior environmental economist at the U.S. Treasury Department, said to me recently: "After spending much of my career working on climate policy, but seeing insufficient action, I came to the conclusion that one of the legs missing is the political and public will to make change. How do you mobilize that? It's got to be done by engaging people at the heart level. Story-telling has emerged as central in that."

Or consider what Kamyar Enshayan (https://ceee.uni.edu), the Director of the Center for Energy and Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, said at a talk he gave in Grinnell recently. His subject was how the world, and especially the United States, could meet our energy needs without pumping yet more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. "The future of energy is almost always framed in terms of supplies, 'where can we get more of this or that?"It is rarely framed in terms of demand reduction," Kamyar said. "Furthermore, solutions aren't always technological. What kinds of cultural transformations do we need to make? What kind of stories can inspire us to reduce demand?"[5] He proceeded to talk about things from the past like ice houses, electric public transporation, hanging clothes on lines to dry, and home gardening that used much less energy than their modern counterparts.

John Everett Millais, "The Boyhood of Raleigh" (1870), from the collection of the Tate Gallery, London. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

What Beth, Keith, and Kamyar are implying is that all of us live our lives—believing certain things and behaving in certain ways—based on stories we have heard. In the absence of a story, we might lack the will to act, as Keith suggests. If we have been taught untrue stories, our own actions or our tacit acceptance of the actions of others can be misguided, as Beth argues. If we have forgotten certain stories from the past, the options for action in the present are curtailed, as Kamyar believes. Ultimately, we need to tell stories, true stories, to inspire right action. Of course, fictional stories can also serve these ends; we can find great inspiration in the writings of our novelists, poets, and playwrights, whose stories are true though fictional. What we must be on our guard against are stories that are lies, or that cause environmental degradation, or that demean or incite hatred.

In this issue of Rootstalk, and every issue, we offer stories about the prairie region in hopes of shedding light on the region's past, present, and future, and in hopes of inspiring thought and action that will contribute to the health and well-being of its natural and cultural features.

Postscript: *This issue of* Rootstalk *contains photography by Keith Kozloff on the cover and a song by Emma Kieran Schaefer. You can link to the song at https://rootstalk.blob.core.windows.net/rootstalk-2022-spring/Mustard-Seed-Song-220317.mp3*

All images courtesy of the author, unless otherwise noted

Hannah Agpoon '22 *graduated from Grinnell College, redeiving her BA in Studio Art with an Environmental Studies concentration. She is from Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, (https://www.wauwatosa.net) the land of fireflies, and is proud to call the prairie region home. Many of Agpoon's best memories growing up are from going on long camping trips with her family and friends and playing outside at her grandparent's farm. In addition to her love of the outdoors, Agpoon loves crafting, candy, and Tetris.*

Periodically, we like to allow one of our Associate Editors to take over the Editor's column for an issue. We thought Hannah's extraordinary re-imagining of the prairie's changing seasonal colors deserved such a recognition.

Mark Baechtel, Editor-in-chief

Editor's Note: Exploring the Prairie's Palette from Spring to Fall

by Hannah Agpoon

If a fountain could jet bouquets of chrome yellow in dazzling arches of chrysanthemum fireworks, that would be Canada Goldenrod. Each three-foot stem is a geyser of tiny gold daisies, ladylike in miniature, exuberant en masse. Where the soil is damp enough, they stand side by side with their perfect counterpart, New England Asters. Not the pale domesticates of the perennial border, the weak sauce of lavender or sky blue, but full-on royal purple that would make a violet shrink. The daisylike fringe of purple petals surrounds a disc as bright as the sun at high noon, a golden-orange pool, just a tantalizing shade darker than the surrounding goldenrod. Alone, each is a botanical superlative. Together, the visual effect is stunning. Purple and gold, the heraldic colors of the king and queen of the meadow, a regal procession in complementary colors.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass,* page 38-39

In this passage from a chapter entitled "Asters and Goldenrod" in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (https://milkweed.org/book/braiding-sweetgrass), one of my favorite books, Robin Wall Kimmerer grapples with the relationship between artistic beauty and scientific understanding of nature. In thinking about Kimmerer's description of the intertwining of colors of prairie plants, I became interested in the intricacies of color and life present on the prairie. Many view the prairie region of the United States as "flyover country," deeming the region uninteresting, flat, and monotonous. With this project, I aim to illustrate the raw beauty, diversity, and color of prairie flora using a series of abstract landscapes, created with color swatches derived from plants present during a given month.

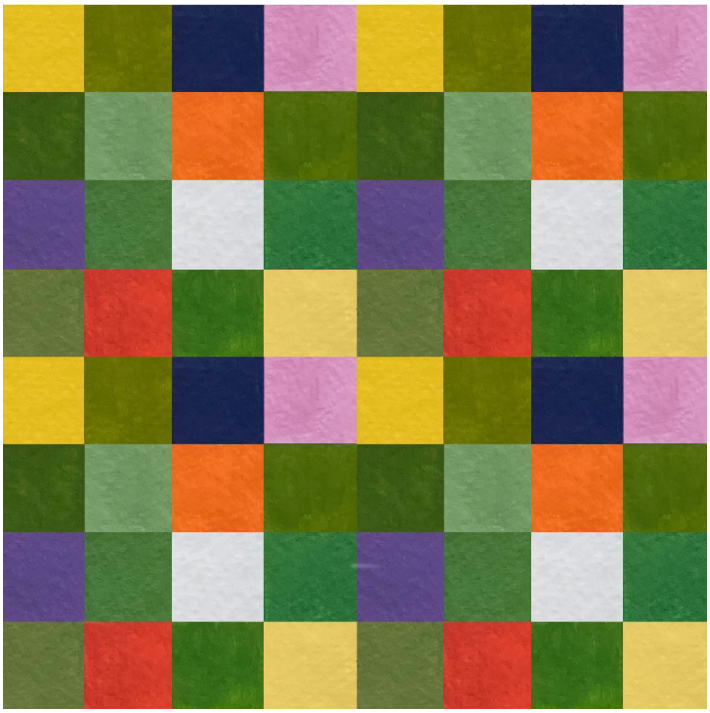
Photos by Jon Andelson

Having grown up in the prairie region, I have seen how plant life on the prairie shifts in color and variety with the rounding of the seasons. To undertake an artistic exploration of those changes, during a time of the year before the colors began to appear, I turned to images of the prairie in a field guide, *Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie* (https://www.uipress.uiowa.edu/books/9781587297960/wildflowers-of-the-tallgrass-prairie) by Sylvan Runkel and Dean Roosa, and in a short film, *Prairie Through the Seasons* (rtsp://libstream.grinnell.edu/CERA/PTTS.mov), produced by Grinnell College's Center for Prairie Studies.(https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/centers-programs/prairie-studies) I also enlisted the help of avid nature photographer and prairie farmer, Carl Kurtz (https://www.iowalearningfarms.org/page/carl-kurtz), who kindly allowed me to interview him about the plants that grow on his prairie n Marshall County, Iowa. I examined individual plant species and swatched the colors of both their stems and seed heads or flowers, mixing acrylic paint and ordering the swatches randomly in a sketchbook. I later photographed my pages of color swatches and cropped colors down into individual squares, arranging them digitally to create compositions representing the colors of the prairie in each month of the growing season. I hope that my "Palette of the Prairie" leads viewers to think about the beauty and variety of life present within the prairie and how that beauty is ever-changing.

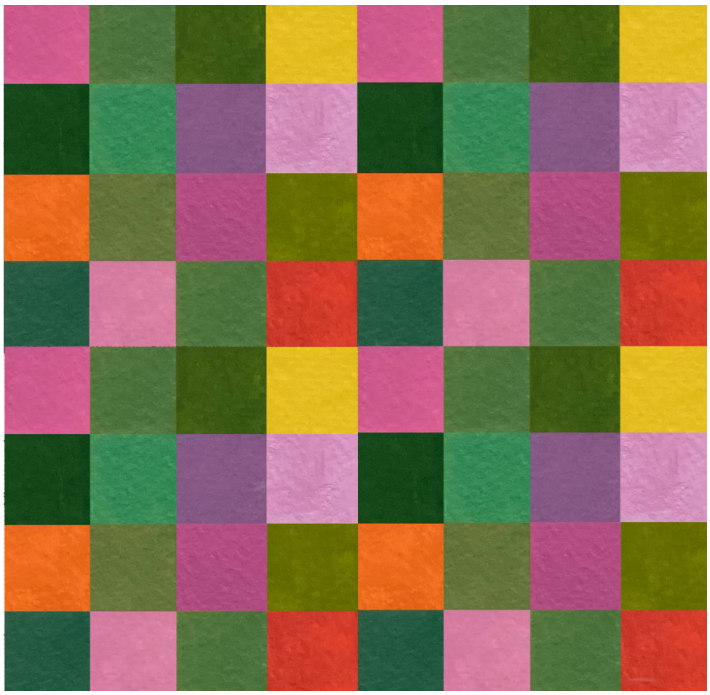
The prairie was gray and drab, no beautiful flowers brightened it, it had only dull greenish-gray herbs and grasses, and Mother Earth's heart was sad because her robe was lacking in beauty and brightness. Then the Holy Earth, our mother, sighed and said: 'Ah, my robe is not beautiful, it is somber and dull. I wish it might be bright and beautiful with flowers and splendid with color. I have many beautiful, sweet and dainty flowers in my heart. I wish to have them upon my robe. I wish to have upon my robe flowers blue like the clear sky in fair weather. I wish also to have flowers white like the pure snow of winter and like the high white cloudlets of a quiet summer day. I wish also to have brilliant yellow flowers like the splendor of the sun at noon of a summer day. And I wish to have delicate pink flowers like the color of the dawn light of a joyous day in springtime. I would also have flowers red like the clouds at evening when the sun is going down below the western edge of the world.

Melvin R. Gilmore, *Prairie Smoke (https://www.amazon.com/Prairie-Smoke-Melvin-R-Gilmore/dp/0873512073), page* 201

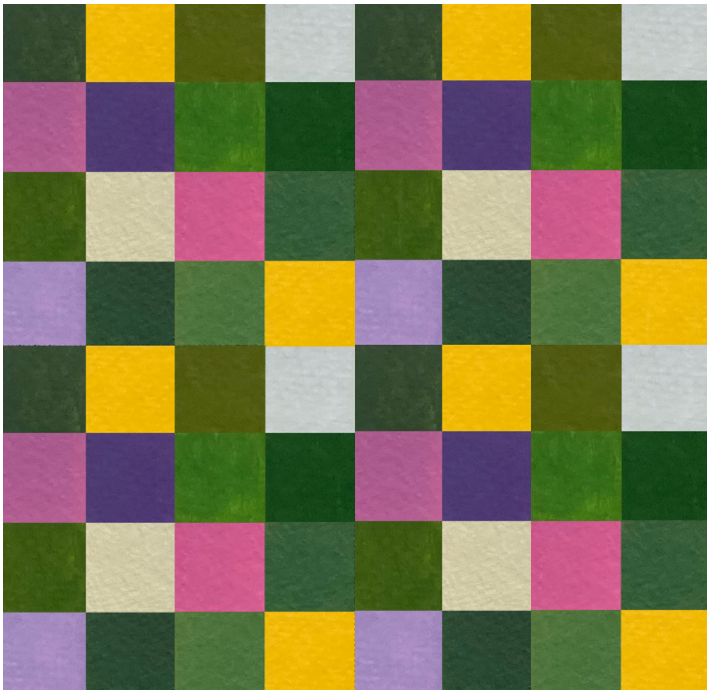
MAY



JUNE



July



August

September

Our language does not distinguish green from green. It is one of the ways in which we have declared ourselves apart from nature. In nature, there is nothing so impoverished of distinction as simply the color green. There are greens as there are grains of sand, an infinitude of shades and gradations of shades, of intensities and brilliancies. Even one green is not the same green. There is the green of dawn, of high noon, of dusk. There is the green of young life, of maturity, of old age. There is the green of new rain and of long drought. There is the green of vigor, the green of sickness, the green of death. One could devote one's life to a study of the distinctions in the color green and not yet have learned all there is to know. There is a language in it, a poetry, a music. We have not stopped long enough to hear it.

Paul Gruchow, *Journal of a Prairie Year (https://milkweed.org/book/journal-of-a-prairie-year)*, page 80

The Editors

The editorial staff for the Spring 2022 issue of *Rootstalk*. First row, from left to right: Editor-in-chief Mark Baechtel, Associate Editors Liz Neace, Taylor Kingery, Kendra Bradley, Harrison Kessel, Publisher Jon Andelson. Back row, from left to right: Carlie Duus, Xonzy Gaddis, Hannah Agpoon, Mikayla Trissell, Ian MacMoran. Absent from the photo are Associate Editors Robby Burchit, Avery Hootstein, Zainab Thompson, and Fernando Villatoro-Rodriguez. Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

Contents

In order of appearance

By category

Words

Images

Sounds

Winter into Spring: A Photographic Essay

BY OLIVER MUÑOZ

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF OLIVER MUÑOZ

Oliver Muñoz *is a classical violist who was born in the mining city of Rancagua, Chile, later settling in Santiago to follow his dream of being a musician in the big capital city by the Andes. Muñoz left Santiago with his American wife to live in Chicago in 2016, embarking on an adventure he never imagined when he was growing up. He has spent many joyful hours photographing Iowa's natural spaces and, like many musicians, has found inspiration in his relationship with music through explorations in nature. He remembers the words of Gustav Mahler, who composed his majestic 5th symphony in a little cottage in rural Austria: "My music is nothing more than a rumor of nature." Across the ocean, Antonín Dvořák found inspiration for his String Quartet No. 12, nicknamed the "American Quartet," from his natural surroundings when he worked in Spillville, Iowa, for a summer.*

For Oliver Muñoz, photography is a therapeutic pastime that challenges him to try to capture through a lens what he likes best about nature. In an act of conscious reflection on the gift of sight, Muñoz also uses the photos he takes to honor the 460 people who lost their sight to rubber bullets during his home country's recent protests. He sees Chile's social movement intersecting with art and music in that he considers them all to be expressions of social justice, beauty, and the human spirit.

Originally a city boy, Muñoz considers himself fortunate to have walked through Iowa's hilly landscapes. He has been moved by the diverse world of plants and animals he has found there, and by the beauty of the prairie and the changing of the four seasons (much like Vivaldi, another composer he admires). In this collection of photos, he focuses on tableaux—such as waterfowl surrounded with snow and ice on a frozen lake, or the happy accident of hoarfrost creating flower-shapes on a bare stem—through which he traces the re-emergence of life, taking the viewer from the stillness of deep midwinter into the gradual awakening that creeps over and, ultimately, transforms the prairie landscape.

"For Oliver Muñoz, photography is a therapeutic pastime that challenges him to try to capture through a lens what he likes best about nature."

"...Muñoz considers himself fortunate to have walked through Iowa's hilly landscapes. He has been moved by the diverse world of plants and animals he has found there, and by the beauty of the prairie and the changing of the four seasons..."

"[Muñoz] remembers the words of Gustav Mahler, who composed his majestic 5th Symphony in a little cottage in rural Austria: 'My music is nothing more than a rumor of nature.'"

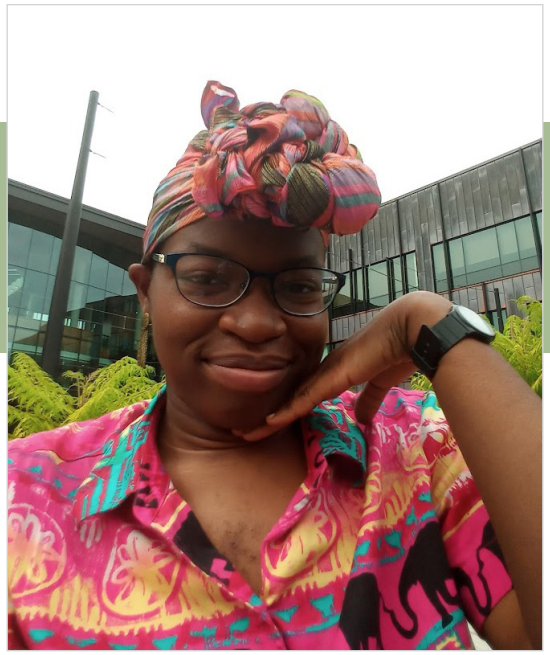


Photo courtesy of Zainab Thompson

Zainab Thompson *is an urban fantasy-horror author, a surrealist artist, and the Co-Editor-in-Chief of Grinnell College Press (https://grinnellcollegepress.com/archive/index.html). She has published short stories and art in* NOT AN [ANTHOLOGY], The *Paranormalcy Zine (https://paranormalcyzine.tumblr.com), and* The Grinnell Review (http://www.grinnellreview.com/)*, and is still riding the high of her February gallery show, Death, Decay, (Re)Defined (https://www.thesandb.com/article/death-decay-redefined-spreads-spores-at-smith-gallery.html) She is finishing up a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a concentration in Global Development Studies. She enjoys critiquing zombie movies, theorizing the psychology of fictional characters, and making close friends laugh.*

Dark Skies or Light in My Eyes: A Look at Light Pollution

by Zainab Thompson

I've never considered myself an avid astronomy fan, but I have always enjoyed looking at the night sky. Its distance makes it mysterious; a twinkle in the sky could be a star, a planet, a distant galaxy, or something else entirely. The mere knowledge that many of those pinpricks of light up there are the same ones that my ancestors also likely saw, marveled at, and told stories about, even if they were in a completely different part of the world, is magical.

I grew up in Dallas, Georgia, a suburb about 32 miles northwest of Atlanta. Its historic downtown boasts old boutiques and town museums rather than towering skyscrapers or sprawling centers like the state's capital, but it's still not the best place to do any sort of stargazing. This wasn't something I realized until I moved to the Midwest, specifically to the town of Grinnell, Iowa. One of my earliest realizations of the difference between the rural Midwest and the suburban Southeast happened the night that I was with a group of fellow science pre-orientation students in the middle of one of Grinnell College's athletic fields hoping to see the Perseid meteor shower (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perseids).

As we were walking to the field, I remember being struck by how far from any artificial lights we seemed (at least in comparison to where I was from), and how the darkness of the night on the prairie was darker than anything I'd ever experienced back in Dallas. We laid out blankets, and one of our upperclassmen guides told us to lie down and look up.

The stars sparkled like someone had spilled thousands of tiny diamonds across a deep black carpet. Backset against them all was a mottled blue-purple haze that I would later learn was the body of our Milky Way galaxy. Then, there were the Perseids themselves. They were quick flashes of playful blink-and-you'll-miss-it

streaks that had me staring for so long I had to remind myself to blink. We stayed out there until the stream of meteors slowed to a trickle. Even after the shower ended, I was still captivated by the sky. By that point, however, others were grumbling about being tired or cold and I didn't want to stay out there by myself, so we packed everything up and headed back to our dorms.

Over the following months, I tried to gain a more nuanced understanding of the night sky. I went to an Open House at Grinnell's Grant O. Gale Observatory (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant_O._Gale_Observatory) and attended a couple of Astronomy Club meetings, but I wasn't quite able to replicate the feeling of breathless awe that I had experienced during that original night of stargazing. As time went on, my sense of fascination faded into more of a passing interest. The night sky became merely a reason for me to crane my head upwards as I walked back to my room in the evenings.

For the purposes of this article I decided to revisit that interest. My initial inquiries led me to interviews with three people in the area who collectively have decades of astronomy experience: Professor Bob Cadmus, a longtime member of the College's Physics department; Dr. James R. Paulson, a local physician and amateur astronomer who built his own observatory about five miles east of Grinnell; and John Johnson, Outreach and Promotions Director of an astronomy group called the Nebraska Star Party. (https://www.nebraskastarparty.org).

Some, looking up at the night sky, feel miniscule. In the grand scheme of the cosmos, Earth is but a tiny celestial body floating amongst countless other celestial bodies. While the odds of life existing on other planets is high in our infinite universe (https://now.tufts.edu/articles/what-are-chances-life-another-planet) ,until we find evidence of complex beings such as ourselves elsewhere in the galaxy, we are alone on this ball of rock. To some, this is a daunting notion that engenders existential dread and creates questions about the meaning of our finite lives. Grinnell's Bob Cadmus has a completely different perception.

Watching a meteor shower from a field near Grinnell College's *Grant Gale Observatory.* Photo by *Scott Lew* (https://instagram.com/bellagio3?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=)

"[People] say, 'Oh, whenever I look at the night sky, I feel so insignificant.' And they seem depressed by this. That's the exact opposite of the way I feel. When I look at the night sky, I feel privileged and fulfilled... I can spend hours lying on my back and looking [up]."

Cadmus appreciates the night sky as an opportunity to relate to people, believing the view is a "resource for everybody." If understanding the stars and their celestial companions is enjoyable to him, the ability to introduce visitors and newcomers to the Midwestern night sky is equally rewarding.

Image of Comet Hale-Bopp taken by Bob Cadmus from the Gale Observatory in 1997. The lights of the City of Grinnell are blurred because the camera was tracking the comet. It is clear that the town's lights affect the view from the observatory

Dr. Paulson feels the same way. Despite joking that "amateur [astronomers] are nuts," he fondly recalls summers stargazing with kids from the town, showing his night sky photography at the Grinnell Area Art Center (https://www.grinnellarts.org) and at the Science Center of Iowa (https://www.sciowa.org), and even driving all the way from Grinnell to Car Henge (https://carhenge.com) in Nebraska to experience the 2017 solar eclipse with hundreds of others.

The passion Cadmus and Paulson feel for space and the stars makes them fierce advocates in the effort to preserve the night sky. Such advocacy is necessary, they told me, because the view that captivated me in my first year on the College's athletic fields is actually under threat.

This threat stems from phenomena both natural and human-produced which are obstacles to clear night skies. In addition to light pollution from populated areas, there are less-obvious phenomena which make astronomy difficult. These include heavy greenery, humidity, and large bodies of water. Paulson grew up near Lake Michigan, which often created clouds and haze, while Cadmus grew up near forests where his view of the sky was often blocked by trees. Humidity can cause light dispersion effects that create distracting halos of light around the very celestial bodies you're trying to look at.

Given that fairly little can be done about natural barriers to clear skies, the efforts of astronomers like Cadmus and Paulson have centered on a problem caused by human activity: light pollution. Researchers in a joint study (https://www.mdpi.com/2072-4292/13/16/3311/htm) published last year by the Complutense University of Madrid (https://www.ucm.es) the Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia (https://www.iaa.csic.es) and Exeter University (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/us-2/?mrasn=756487.940308.UQt7HFUi) estimate that the increase in light pollution from 1992 to 2017 was 270 percent globally, and potentially up to 400 percent in certain regions. The study's authors pinned the blame for the increase partly on solid-state light-emitting diodes, also known as LED lighting.

LED lighting has been championed as an energy-efficient, low-emission and low-cost method of illumination. That it's inexpensive compared to other lighting methods has made it a light pollution problem because, as more and more people and businesses use it to illuminate outdoor spaces, it further degrades the experience of viewing the night sky. Additionally,

this profligate use of artificial lights causes problems for nocturnal wildlife. According to Paulson, artificial light interferes with migrating birds, deprives bats of their insect food sources, disorients newly hatched turtles who use moonlight to navigate to the ocean, and interferes with the twilight used to guide arctic krill's daily rhythms. Paulson said this light can also cause spring to come early by prompting trees to bud before they should, as well as disrupting humans' sleep rhythms.

These ill-effects have led many to question what can be done about them. In Grinnell, Cadmus and Paulson have pushed for and helped pass a lighting ordinance, modeled on similar laws put in place elsewhere (https://conservationtools.org/guides/10-lighting-ordinance) which aims to preserve the view of the night sky and to minimize artificial lighting's harm to the environment.

Cadmus says he believes the ordnance passed in Grinnell because he and Paulson pitched it as protection for "a valuable natural resource that we should preserve for future generations."

Characterizing the night sky in this way is one strategy advocates for minimal artifical illumination use to convince local or federal powers to pass night-sky-friendly measures. For instance, Paulson was successful in lobbying Monsanto Corporation when it announced plans to build one of the largest agribusiness plants in the world about a mile from his observatory. Paulson contacted the plant's engineers.

"I said, 'Look, guys. There's this thing called 'dark skies' and it's gonna be a win-win for you. When you design the lights you're going to have around, if you make them dark-sky-friendly, [it'll be] great for you guys! You don't have to spend as much money for energy.' To my pleasant surprise, they did it!"

In citing "this thing called 'dark skies,'" Paulson was referring to the efforts of the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA; https://www.darksky.org), which was started in 2001 "to encourage communities, parks and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through responsible lighting policies and public education."

In practical terms, advancing this agenda has meant fostering conversations about the need to combat light pollution. The IDA has formulated an 11-step action plan to recruit dark sky advocates and create a loose consortium of places prioritizing reduced light pollution.

Cadmus points out that lighting ordinances don't actually reduce existing light pollution. Rather, they reduce the rate at which things get worse. Cadmus says that while such ordinances are an important early step, public education is equally important, to help people to understand why massive security lights are unnecessary for backyard illumination, or intervening before

Light pollution can be mitigated by replacing lights whose translucent globes lack shielding (top image) with partly shielded fixtures (bottom image) in which the fixture reflects light downward. Photographs on Grinnell College's campus by the author

problematic lighting gets built at all.

Unfortunately, this doesn't always work. Cadmus provides an illustration from early in his Grinnell career. At that time, there were translucent globe lights on campus that sent significant amounts of light upwards. He used his position on an important committee to try to advocate for the installation of more responsible fixtures. Acorn-shaped globes were one solution then, but the shielding they were equipped with was rudimentary. When the College began a new round of construction and expansion, Cadmus pushed for adoption of the more advanced technologies that had been developed in the interim.

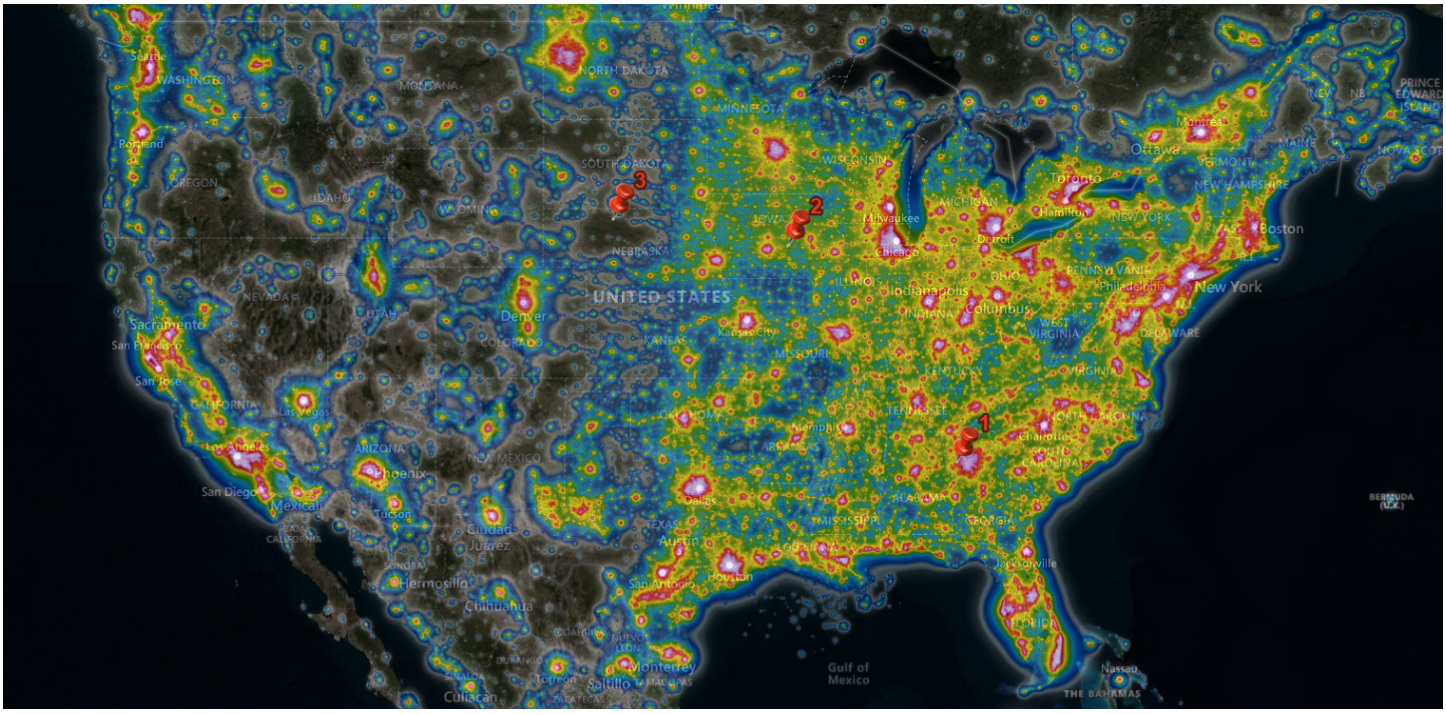
Unfortunately, the College president at the time liked the acorn lights, so many remained. Today, these fixtures stand in contrast to newer lights that provide softer lighting elsewhere on the college grounds.

"We had a great opportunity to really improve the campus and we blew it," Cadmus said.

The nine-class Bortle scale (https://skyandtelescope.org/astronomy-resources/light-pollution-and-astronomy-the-bortle-dark-sky-scale) measures the quality or brightness of the night sky for a given location. Class 9 represents an "inner-city sky" that is brightly lit, rendering many stars and certain constellations invisible. On the other end of the scale, Class 1 locations are "excellent dark-sky sites" which feature clear naked-eye viewing of celestial objects such as the M33 (Triangulum) galaxy and the path of our own Milky Way galaxy, which it would be difficult to see in a more light-filled environment.

According to LightPollutionMap.info, the 2015 Bortle scale designation of the area including my house in Dallas was designated Class 5. This means that the Milky Way was faint there, if not impossible to see. In contrast, the Bortle scale designation of the area including the soccer field where I watched the Perseids was a Class 4. Finding out that the soccer field was only middle of the pack as far as darkness goes was quite a shock. If what I saw was a class 4, then how much darker could the sky possibly get?

As I learned, this would be a good question to ask



A map depicting the zenith sky brightness, as measured by the World Atlas in 2015. Point 1 is the location of the author's home in Dallas, GA. Point 2 is the location of the Grinnell College soccer field where she watched the Perseid meteor shower. Point 3 is the location of Merritt Reservoir, where the Nebraska Star Party holds its annual event. Image Credit: lightpollutionmap.info (https://www.lightpollutionmap.info).

at a star party. These events, usually held in the summer, attract amateur astronomers who gather to stargaze together. The Nebraska Star Party (NSP; https://www.nebraskastarparty.org) is one of the most famous of these events. The NSP is the annual project of a loose coalition of individuals and groups which sponsor the gathering at Nebraska's Merritt Reservoir (http://outdoornebraska.gov/merrittreservoir, which, notably, is designated as a Class 1 on the Bortle scale). The 2022 event, set for July 24-29, will be the 29th NSP.

It is sites and events like this that really show how stargazing is unique in the prairie region, an area of North America in which there are large zones of low-density settlement. Less densely populated clusters mean less light pollution, which allows for experiences like the ethereal sensation of seeing shadows cast by the Milky Way on your hand. (https://www.space.com/7270-great-week-milky.html)

A Unihedron Sky Quality Meter (SQM) and its accompanying information card, given to the author by Dr. J. R. Paulson. SQMs are used to measure sky brightness, an important step in the process of applying to be a dark sky location. Photo by the author.

For John Johnson, the NSP's Outreach and Promotions Director, a large part of the joy he finds in astronomy comes not merely through the study of the planets and the stars themselves (though the hundreds of astronomy books he owns may suggest otherwise); it comes via sharing the experience of stargazing with other people. To him, it's a bittersweet feeling of "connecting with nature and being out there with this beautiful sky, and then the sadness of knowing that probably 75 percent of the world's population does not, can not, and will not have that experience." This realization forms the cornerstone of his conviction that people need to understand just how harmful the brightening night skies are.

"I get to the point where I just want to grab and shake people and say, 'Do you realize what we're doing?'" he said. "I've done all the studying. I've got videos, I've got proof, whatever proof you want, about how it's affecting society, humans both psychologically and physically, and it's obviously detrimental for nocturnal animals."

He has been working hard for decades to bring to more general awareness both the wonders of the night sky and the threats to experiencing them. He is a passionate advocate for the International Dark Sky Association (https://www.darksky.org/about/) agenda

Along with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the rest of the Nebraska Tourism Commission, Johnson has worked to designate Merritt Reservoir and the surrounding area as a dark sky sanctuary. According to the IDA's website, this label identifies the most dark and remote places in the world "whose conservation state is most fragile" but otherwise has few nearby threats to the quality of its darkness. Upon certification, the IDA works with a given site to promote their work and enhance their visibility to the world at large.

Like Cadmus and Paulson, Johnson has laid the case for the value of this particular dark sky sanctuary before the relevant federal powers by emphasizing the economic benefit of the designation.

"If a bunch of wild-eyed astronomers start beating on their chests saying 'Oh, we gotta shut all the lights off!! We got to be able to see the stars!' That doesn't fly," Johnson said. "What flies is when you [say], 'Well, you know how many more destination tours we could get out here? How much more money [tourists] would spend around the state if we had areas designated as dark sky sanctuaries where they could come out and

On August 10, 2020, a derecho with winds up to 120 mph (https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2020/10/17/iowa-derecho-damage-cost) pummeled the Midwest. The storm an estimated $7.5 billion in damage and knocked out power to a wide area. Grinnell was in the blackout zone. Peter Hanson, a Grinnell College faculty member and amateur astro-photographer, took pictures immediately after the storm while the power was still out (left) and again in the same spot days later when power had been partly restored (right). The effect of light pollution on the same stretch of sky is stark. Photo courtesy of Peter Hanson (https://sites.google.com/view/peterchanson/night-sky-imaging?authuser=0)

really see the stars?'"

As of this writing, Johnson and his fellow amateur astronomers are still trying to get Merritt Reservoir recognized as a dark sky sanctuary in order to preserve the pristine dark skies above in the area.

During Fall Break in 2021, I went on a camping trip with the Grinnell Outdoor Recreation Program (GORP). The trip happens annually, COVID years notwithstanding, and one of our destinations was Pikes Peak State Park (https://www.iowadnr.gov/Places-to-Go/State-Parks/Iowa-State-Parks/Pikes-Peak-State-Park) which is known for its sweeping views of the Mississippi River.

One evening while we were there, one of the trip's two student leaders invited everyone to go on a night hike. I was immediately game for the adventure. Our leader took us through the woods along trails that we'd explored earlier that day, which suddenly seemed so much more menacing as we kept getting spooked by the reflecting eyes of nearby deer and racoons.

We eventually reached a tiny trickle of a waterfall by the name of Bridal Falls. Directly behind the dripping curtain of water was a little hollow, likely from years and years of the water eroding away the rock. Our student leader was the first to slowly pick his way down the slippery dirt-turning-rock path to go sit in the hollow. The rest of us gingerly followed suit.

Directly in front of us and across the Mississippi River, we could see lights in the state of Wisconsin. The view was spectacular in some ways, with its clear path across the state border to hibitation miles away from us, but I found myself struck by the sight of the sky. Right above the cityscape was a halo of yellow haze being cast up into the air.

In the moment I had felt at peace, basking in the quiet with the other students after a long day of hiking. Looking back, though, I don't recall seeing a single star. The twinkling of the artificial city lights drowned out the natural sparkle and splendor of the stars above.

Despite the fact that the Midwest is a far better place to stargaze than my hometown, bigger urban centers like Chicago or the Twin Cities show that the Midwest is by no means immune to light pollution. People like Cadmus, Paulson, and Johnson are putting in hard work to protect the Midwestern skies as much as possible, but it's going to take a lot more than just them to make a dent. The more people that join the movement to protect one of our most overlooked natural resources, the longer we'll be able to save it for future generations to enjoy.

Visitors stand beneath the Milky Way at Grinnell College's Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA; https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/majors-concentrations/biology/facilities/cera). Photo courtesy of Justin Hayworth

Photo courtesy of Ian MacMoran

Associate editor **Ian MacMoran '24** *is a second-year student at Grinnell College, majoring in Studio Art. He grew up on the East Coast, living in the city and suburbs of Philadelphia. While he's still not certain what path he wants to travel academically, he plans to pursue film, creative writing, and other forms of creative expression.*

Finding Home on the Prairie

by Ian MacMoran

Moving to Iowa was a culture shock. Until my first year at Grinnell, I'd spent my entire life living in Philadelphia. Even though a lot of that time was spent in the Philadelphia suburbs, the area was nothing like Iowa. In Iowa, everything seemed different: the large and empty fields, the houses, the clear night sky. At home, any fields as large as those I've seen in Iowa were either used for parks or converted into golf courses. The tract housing surrounding Grinnell doesn't resemble the type of home architecture I would frequently see back in Philadelphia. Regarding the night sky, at home I'd be lucky to see even a few stars, while here, I see more stars than I could ever count.

I also find Grinnell quite different socially. To start, I found myself knowing no one and had to make a new social circle for myself. Through this process, I was able to learn more about many different people. Take for example one of my good friends. While growing up outside of Atlanta, in a deeply religious family, he was not able to express himself as who he really is. After coming to Grinnell, he came out as gay and has been able to find himself in ways he never could have outside of Grinnell. Originally, stories like these and others from different friends moved me to create poems about how Grinnell has changed people. But while Grinnell College is a wonderful place in many ways, it doesn't do a great job at representing the prairie region. The College is filled with students and faculty from all over the world. This creates a social environment vastly different from one you'd find a few miles down the road in any direction. Although a lot of my time has been spent within the College, I have spent some time outside its social environment. Whenever I've gone to a restaurant or store in

Iowa, the norm is for people to behave with kindness. People can be kind in Philadelphia too, but that kindess isn't a given as it is in Iowa.

While my friends and I have been able to become comfortable with the Iowa norm, and even to express ourselves in ways we never could have outside of Grinnell, I wouldn't say that we have made ourselves at home here. In truth, I've rarely thought about the prairie region surrounding me—something that working as an Associate Editor for *Rootstalk* has forced me to reconsider.

What does it take to find a sense of home in the prairie region? To answer this question, I decided to talk to four individuals who moved to Grinnell from outside the prairie region to take jobs at Grinnell College and, in the process, discovered a sense of home here. I asked them how they found a connection to this place. I asked how long that took, what the ways were in which they discovered this new sense of belonging, and whether this sense was, in their experience, unique to the prairie? Lastly, I asked if, after living in region for years, they considered themselves to be "locals."

In order to gain these insights, I interviewed Chris Hunter (CH), Sigmund Barber (SB), Betty Moffett (BM), and Sandy Moffett (SM). All four have now spent over half of their lives on the prairie, and have now retired in Grinnell. Here's what they said:

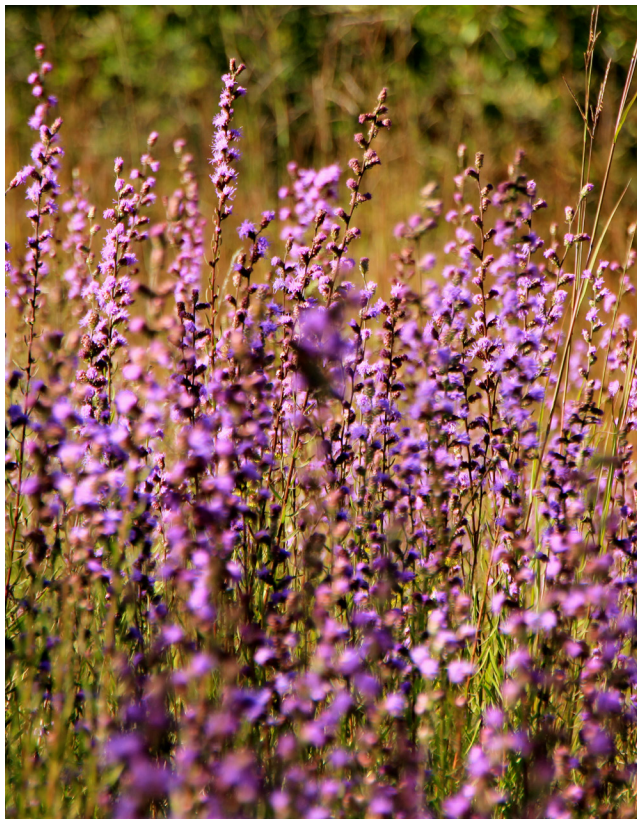
Rootstalk: Where are you from originally and what is it like there?

CH: I grew up in northern New Jersey. Northern New Jersey is sort of a suburb of New York City. You go from one town to the next and you have no idea you left one and entered another except maybe the houses are more expensive. The town I grew up in was just like that: one of the middle-class towns right next to the really rich ones. Coming to Grinnell itself was a bit of a shock. I realized, "Wait, I know exactly where the end of the town is here because there's a cornfield there." Some people got really upset by that, but I liked it. I appreciated knowing where things ended.

SB: [I was born in] Austria, but I've lived in many places. My stepfather was in the military, so I've lived in California, Kentucky, Colorado, but

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) at the Pleasant Grove Land Corporation. Photo courtesy of Sandy Moffett

mainly Germany. When I was eighteen, I came to the United States for college and lived in Upstate New York for ten years before moving here. I enjoyed moving around. It wasn't difficult for me. I never found it difficult to make friends so I would make new friends wherever I was and could adjust very easily. I enjoyed all the places except for Kentucky. With all the moving and the culture of the military, I had never encountered racism. It really bothered me. I wanted to go play with some new friends I made, and I was told I couldn't. I couldn't understand why this was the way it was.



Rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) at the Pleasant Grove Land Corporation. Photo courtesy of Sandy Moffett

SM: North Carolina. It's a great state. It has the ocean and the mountains. At that particular time, it was quite liberal, so we enjoyed the political atmosphere when we lived in Chapel Hill for a while. When we came here, we didn't want to leave North Carolina. I didn't want to come here, and I didn't want to stay here. My idea was to come here until I could find a comparable job in North Carolina.

BM: When we first got here, I thought I was going to fall off the earth because all the trees were gone. But now when we go back to North Carolina I feel a little claustrophobic. I'll always love North Carolina, but do I miss it anymore? No.

Rootstalk: What did you first notice about the prairie countryside when you moved?

CH: We didn't travel out of town very much. We did go to Des Moines some, and I remember that one of the things that struck both my wife and me was that you drive to Des Moines or Iowa City and there's nothing between here and there but fields. At first, I thought that was really ugly, especially in the fall, but I've since grown to appreciate the variations of brown in the countryside. Living on the prairie was not my life before then. It is now. The rolling countryside was something I really got to like. I was just noticing the colors when we came into town the other day and the variations in slight tinting of green now, which I didn't notice. Back home we had noticed it in the trees, but here it's somehow more subtle.

SB: Well, it was definitely different in many respects to what I had experienced before. I spent a lot of my first month when we arrived in August sitting on the front porch of the house we rented. When storms came through, which they did in August, I was fascinated by the openness of the sky and the lightning storms. The power of nature, which had always interested me, was in full display. This was something I'd never experienced before. I mean we had lived in rural areas, but nothing with the sky this big where you could observe the things that were going on. I was fascinated just sitting there watching the lightning go from cloud to cloud. It was the same thing for

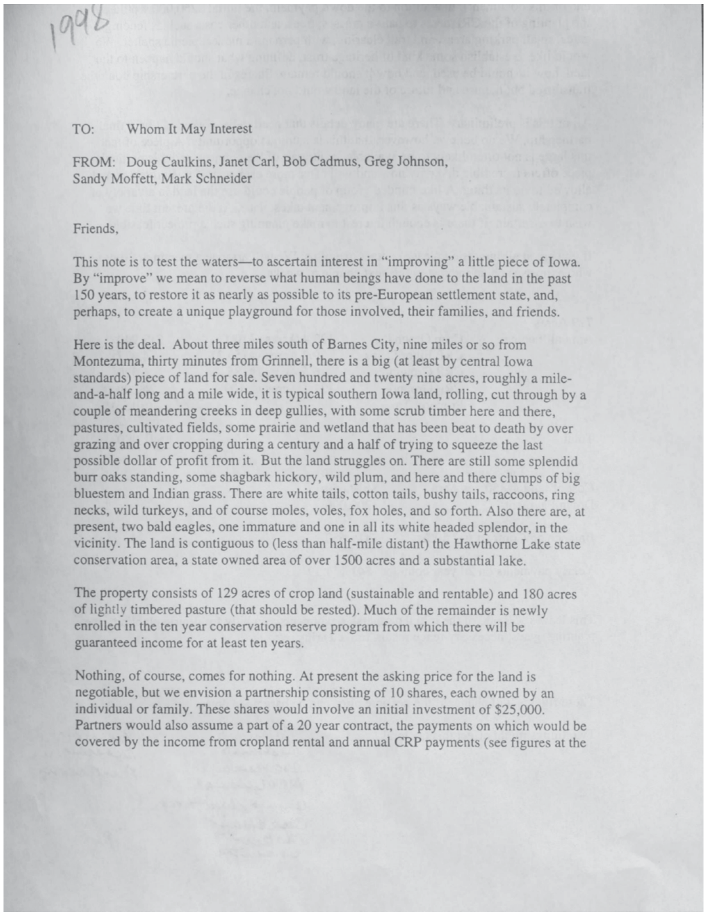
me when we had tornado warnings. It was hard for me to go to the basement because I wanted to see it, which was not a good idea.

SM: We lived in the country and almost immediately became aware of the landscape. It was different. The fields were much more ragged than they are now. There were bushes in the fence rows and the gullies. A lot of those have disappeared with new farming practices. But I became aware of the landscape. I realized it was a really rich landscape with lots of wildlife and lots of interesting things. There were probably more birds and animals here than there were in North Carolina even with all those woods and trees. It was a little-by-little incremental thing.

BM: It looked ragged at first. My father always thought that the prairie and anything that looked like the prairie was weeds. He came here a few times. He liked the fact that the corn grew as high as it did. One day we were walking, and he looked out across the prairie. That day, the wind was blowing, and he said, 'It looks like an animal's hide.' It's rich and full of deep colors. Also, we came from North Carolina in 1971, and then integration and segregation were a big deal. One of the things that was amazing to us when we came here was that it wasn't present. I remember going to a gathering and one of the women asked me if coming from the South I was concerned about integration. I told her no, and then she let me know that segregation wouldn't be a problem here. Coming from the South, being able to see integration and a lack of segregation was astonishing. Something else I noticed is that people were very kind. It wasn't a Southern kind, not, 'oh come on over to our house right now and I'll give you a big hug.' Rather, it was genuinely kind. One time I

"That day, the wind was blowing, and he said, 'It looks like an animal's hide.' It's rich and full of deep colors."

St. Paul's Episcopal church. Photo by Ian MacMoran


1998

TO: Whom It May Interest

FROM: Doug Caulkins, Janet Carl, Bob Cadmus, Greg Johnson, Sandy Moffett, Mark Schneider

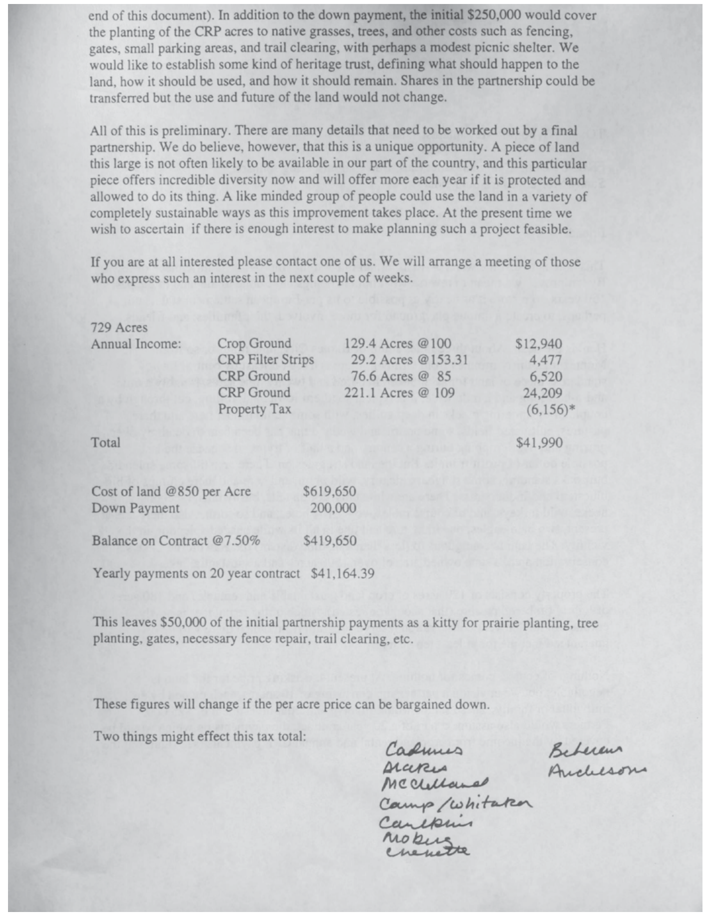
Friends,

This note is to test the waters—to ascertain interest in "improving" a little piece of Iowa. By "improve" we mean to reverse what human beings have done to the land in the past 150 years, to restore it as nearly as possible to its pre-European settlement state, and, perhaps, to create a unique playground for those involved, their families, and friends.

Here is the deal. About three miles south of Barnes City, nine miles or so from Montezuma, thirty minutes from Grinnell, there is a big (at least by central Iowa standards) piece of land for sale. Seven hundred and twenty nine acres, roughly a mile-and-a-half long and a mile wide, it is typical southern Iowa land, rolling, cut through by a couple of meandering creeks in deep gullies, with some scrub timber here and there, pastures, cultivated fields, some prairie and wetland that has been beat to death by over grazing and over cropping during a century and a half of trying to squeeze the last possible dollar of profit from it. But the land struggles on. There are still some splendid burr oaks standing, some shagbark hickory, wild plum, and here and there clumps of big bluestem and Indian grass. There are white tails, cotton tails, bushy tails, raccoons, ring necks, wild turkeys, and of course moles, voles, fox holes, and so forth. Also there are, at present, two bald eagles, one immature and one in all its white headed splendor, in the vicinity. The land is contiguous to (less than half-mile distant) the Hawthorne Lake state conservation area, a state owned area of over 1500 acres and a substantial lake.

The property consists of 129 acres of crop land (sustainable and rentable) and 180 acres of lightly timbered pasture (that should be rested). Much of the remainder is newly enrolled in the ten year conservation reserve program from which there will be guaranteed income for at least ten years.

Nothing, of course, comes for nothing. At present the asking price for the land is negotiable, but we envision a partnership consisting of 10 shares, each owned by an individual or family. These shares would involve an initial investment of $25,000. Partners would also assume a part of a 20 year contract, the payments on which would be covered by the income from cropland rental and annual CRP payments (see figures at the


end of this document). In addition to the down payment, the initial $250,000 would cover the planting of the CRP acres to native grasses, trees, and other costs such as fencing, gates, small parking areas, and trail clearing, with perhaps a modest picnic shelter. We would like to establish some kind of heritage trust, defining what should happen to the land, how it should be used, and how it should remain. Shares in the partnership could be transferred but the use and future of the land would not change.

All of this is preliminary. There are many details that need to be worked out by a final partnership. We do believe, however, that this is a unique opportunity. A piece of land this large is not often likely to be available in our part of the country, and this particular piece offers incredible diversity now and will offer more each year if it is protected and allowed to do its thing. A like minded group of people could use the land in a variety of completely sustainable ways as this improvement takes place. At the present time we wish to ascertain if there is enough interest to make planning such a project feasible.

If you are at all interested please contact one of us. We will arrange a meeting of those who express such an interest in the next couple of weeks.

729 Acres

Annual Income:	Crop Ground	129.4 Acres @100	$12,940
	CRP Filter Strips	29.2 Acres @153.31	4,477
	CRP Ground	76.6 Acres @ 85	6,520
	CRP Ground	221.1 Acres @ 109	24,209
	Property Tax		(6,156)*
Total			$41,990

Cost of land @850 per Acre	$619,650
Down Payment	200,000
Balance on Contract @7.50%	$419,650
Yearly payments on 20 year contract	$41,164.39

This leaves $50,000 of the initial partnership payments as a kitty for prairie planting, tree planting, gates, necessary fence repair, trail clearing, etc.

These figures will change if the per acre price can be bargained down.

Two things might effect this tax total:

Cadmus
McClelland
Camp/Whitaker
Caulkins

A partial copy of a Letter from Sandy Moffett and partners, soliciting participation in the Pleasant Grove Land Corporation in 1998. Document courtesy of Sandy Moffett

had the flu, and a woman from across the street brought me ginger ale and apple sauce. I think it saved my life. This woman didn't know me, but she helped me anyway.

Rootstalk: In what ways did you integrate yourselves into the community?

CH: My wife was strongly committed to public education. I got involved in MICA (Mid-Iowa Community Action, https://www.micaonline.org, a local agency that works with families in need). I was on the board for a long time. And now I'm on the Grinnell Area Arts Council (https://www.grinnellarts.org). We're a part of the community so we wanted to do things. College faculty who live here get asked a lot to get involved. But I also feel a commitment. That was different. I hadn't felt a commitment to where I lived before. I lived in the town. That was it. I didn't even go to school in that town. I didn't feel a connection [in New Jersey], and I had one now. After a while we branched out and we got to know people partly through church. We joined in part just to become more involved in the community. Some of those friends are still friends of mine. Those are the batches of friends we still have after all these years. I'm not even a religious person, but Grinnell is [a religious community]. We knew that one of the strong ways of connecting to the community was through the social world of the church. We picked St. Paul's Episcopal Church (http://stpaulsgrinnell.weebly.com) because it's politically more palatable for us. It was initially in large part because of our kids. We wanted our kids to have the experience of being a part of the

community and be seen as normal. Back then and maybe even now it was normal to be a part of a church. We got to know great people, so that was really important. But it wasn't faith-based motivation on my part.

SB: I can't remember how quickly it happened, but I became very active in the community and still am. I developed friendships with people not associated with the College. Eventually I was asked to be on various committees and boards and things like that. I had no problems assimilating into the community, which was a source of immense satisfaction to me. I became part of the community but not just the College community, but also the Grinnell community. I was able to navigate between these two cultures. Many of my College friends live in the community of Grinnell but are not an integral part of the community. They never went outside of the College culture, which is too bad because there's something lacking there. At the time in Grinnell, there were restaurants, but not as many as there are now. Because of this, our group created an international dinner club. We would meet once a month and focus on one particular culture. We would drive to Des Moines and get authentic ingredients.

> "In some ways it feels like you're native, but you're also making yourself native."

There also used to be something called Town and Gown, which was a fundraising effort between the College and the community. I was involved with that. My wife and I chaired the organization one year. We also began having kids in our second year in Grinnell, so we became involved in the schools and in parents' organizations in the town. I'm still a member of some organizations that are a grouping of College people and towns people. I was later asked to be on the hospital board and eventually become more involved in community theater. I acted in some plays and musicals, and eventually got into directing.

SM: [Grinnell anthropology professor] Doug Caulkins and I had an idea—kind of a dream of preserving some land. By that time, I was deeply into prairie restoration. Doug and I sat down, and we wrote a letter. Doug worked out the financial business, the cash flow, how much we'd have to invest and how we'd pay for it over the years. We circulated this letter around campus to some faculty and a few people in town. In the letter we asked if anyone was interested in this. If we could get 10 investors, we could do it. We ended up getting nine families that were willing to invest. Initially we were going to buy 720 acres of land in Mahaska County, but planned to sell back 80 acres so we could do it with the nine families. We bought it and the rest is history. We immediately began planting prairie, enhancing prairie, and burning to get rid of invasive species. This is an ongoing thing, and we are still doing this today. But we're all getting older and have decided to deed the property to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (https://www.inhf.org) when the last of us dies. It was kind of like a flyer that took off and we said let's try it and see what happens. I think we were all astonished that we were able to pull it off. I still am. Every time I go out there, I'm amazed that it happened.

BM: In a way, everyone at the College comes here new. I think we were all looking to see where we fit. That was interesting and astonishing. The women's movement was very strong at that time. I went to a consciousness raising group. At home in North Carolina, I was kind of used to being the instigator when women got together, but not here. These women were something else. These women were strong, powerful, educated, well-spoken, and eager to speak. I found myself needing to raise my hand sometimes to be

An American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) hen and her chicks at the Pleasant Grove Land Corporation. Photo courtesy of Sandy Moffett

able to say anything. I appreciated them, and I learned from them. For me, it was my association with women in groups like that. The offshoot of that was wonderful coffee, and we'd become friends. For Sandy, it's his associations with his colleagues. He was so amazed when we came here, and he did a [theater] production for the College. At the school we were a part of in North Carolina, a few professors would come to the shows. At Grinnell, many faculty came. Not only did they do this, but they read, they studied, and some of them even were in the play. When he saw this, he was delighted.

Rootstalk: In his book *Becoming Native to this Place (https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/675321/becoming-native-to-this-place-by-wes-jackson),* Wes Jackson discusses the idea that you can become native to a place where you were not born. Do you feel that you have become native to Iowa or the prairie in any way?

CH: I feel like it's partly true. When I walk on campus now, I don't know many of the people. That's a point of discomfort for me, my place. In town, I feel that way somewhat. There are places in town I've never been to. I've never been to Rabbitt's [Tavern], I've never gone to some of the bars, and I know for some of the students that

becomes their life and their culture. But I'm not a part of it, and I never will be. I feel native to parts of Grinnell, but I think that's true for anyone who feels native to an area. You don't feel native to everything about it or to all the people. But I certainly do—and have for a long time — feel more comfortable here than I do in New Jersey. We've been here 44 years. I think it's partly from having kids, because that draws you into the community really intensely. Very quickly we thought of this as our place. In some ways it feels like you're native, but you're also making yourself native. And I'm sure there are some churches that if we gone to them, we would've quickly run awayscreaming. In part this would've been because of the theology, but also because of the people's values. We carefully picked our parts of the community to join.

SB: I've lived in Grinnell more than anyplace else. I've lived here for 43 years. Grinnell is my home. I'm comfortable here with that. I certainly don't feel native to Grinnell. I'm accepted by those who are native to Grinnell. I think they find it a little exotic that I'm from a foreign country. I don't feel like I'm a native of anywhere in particular other than Austria. People have asked me if I could go back and live there now. And no, I couldn't. Austria is home, there's a deep connection, but culturally I'm too far away from that. I'm without a nation or native place. It's a unique situation that has to do with Grinnell and Iowa. I can amend that. I can feel native to Grinnell, but not native to Iowa. I think that has to do with the unique situation of Grinnell as an enclave. It's like a little island within Iowa. Grinnell is quite different. Culturally, I don't think I could consider myself a native Iowan, but I could consider myself a native Grinnellian. But again, that's the cultural aspect of Grinnell and the College. The cosmopolitan nature of the student body appeals to me and speaks to me.

SM: Absolutely. I do feel native to this place. We've lived here since 1971. That's most of our lives. When I was doing the political thing, people made a big deal about being born in Iowa. I would counter that by saying 'no, I wasn't born in Iowa. I chose to live in Iowa.' If you're born in Iowa, you don't have any choice. To me there is something to that. People make a big deal about being born somewhere, but I was born in China. I certainly don't feel like I'm native to China. Our social life here was based around the College, but until fairly recently I didn't feel a huge connection to the city of Grinnell. I felt a connection to [Poweshiek] County [where Grinnell is located]. The connection gets weaker and weaker as you get further away. I don't feel that connected to Sioux City, Iowa, or Davenport. At that point, I feel connected to the Midwest. And that border, Iowa, do I lose my connection once I get to the Mississippi River? I think I feel more Midwestern than I do an Iowan, but Iowan gives it a name.

> "I think there are compartments in my heart. North Carolina has a little compartment in my heart. That's where I came from. Where am I from now? I'm from Iowa, and I'm proud of that."

BM: Yes. I think there are compartments in my heart. North Carolina has a little compartment in my heart. That's where I came from. Where am I from now? I'm from Iowa, and I'm proud of that. I feel native to Iowa as a whole, maybe unfairly because there are parts of Iowa I've never been to. We have a relative who lives in Atlanta, and he says Atlanta would be a great place if it wasn't surrounded by Georgia. But I don't feel that at all about Grinnell. I think Grinnell

benefits from being surrounded by Iowa. I think Iowa helps Grinnell not to take itself too terribly seriously. If you're lucky, you're connected to what you're familiar with. This is what we're familiar with, and we're lucky because we like it.

Listening closely to what these four individuals said, I noticed everyone talked about how their assimilation—into the town, or Iowa, or the prairie—took time. The ways they assimilated were fascinating to observe. For all of them, it started with the community stemming from the College. Having children seemed helpful to some, as it forced them to be involved to enhance their children's lives. It was interesting to see how they all joined organizations within the community. For many, it was through a position of leadership, whether it be through being a board member or holding a political position. The integration through social groups outside of the college also caught my eye. Everyone seemed to have found their own way of being involved in social groups. Whether through church, a dinner club, consciousness raising groups, or land restoration, they all were able to establish a social network. Relating to Sandy's land restoration, I was intrigued to see how each of the interviewees was drawn into their surroundings by nature in some way. When considering how I would become native to some place, for me it would basically all be done through connecting socially. Seeing other ways that people have found their sense of home and how it is different from mine was something that I found compelling. How far each of their unique ways of feeling native evolved was also interesting. For Chris Hunter and Sigmund Barber, they only feel native to Grinnell as a town. For Sandy and Betty Moffett, they feel native to Iowa and, by extension, the prairie.

"Up to this point, I'd say I haven't had the easiest time connecting to the prairie because it's nothing like what I'm used to. Yet, seeing my friends love it here makes me feel great for them, and seeing them happy where they are helps me feel more confident about living on the prairie."

I think about my own assimilation to the prairie. Up to this point, I'd say I haven't had the easiest time connecting to the prairie because it is nothing like what I'm used to. Yet, seeing my friends love it here makes me feel great for them, and seeing them happy where they are helps me feel more confident about living on the prairie. Although I may not be as comfortable in Grinnell as my friends are, knowing that people who have lived here for a long time went through a similar acclimatization makes me hopeful that I could find what everyone else has in Grinnell. For me, I tend to think that my assimilation could be closer to that of Chris Hunter or Sigmund Barber. The prairie region that surrounds Grinnell is one that I am not familiar with, and I'm not sure if my four years at Grinnell will be enough for me to truly appreciate what surrounds the College. If anything, I think I could maybe become native to Grinnell. If this is the case, maybe I'll stick around and spend a lot more time within the prairie. And who knows? Maybe I'll become native.

Prairie sunflower (*Helianthus spp.*) Photo courtesy of Sandy Moffett

"Kanis Painting" by Tilly Woodward. Woodward painted the work (11 x 8.5 inches, Oil paint on paper mounted to archival mat board) for the Kanis family in 2021 as a trade for "a really nice saddle." The items in the painting include things from their farm—duck feathers and a duck's egg, a roweled spur, and a chess piece that resembles the marking on one of their first horses' nose.

Photo courtesy of Fernando Villatoro-Rodriguez

Associate Editor **Fernando Villatoro-Rodriguez '22** *is a LatinX graduate of Grinnell College, where he received his bachelors degree in a self-designed independent major titled Health Narratives/Studies. Originally from Los Angeles, California, his interests center on history, seen through a post-modern lens, and include film studies, English, public service, and education.*

Woodpeckers of the Prairie

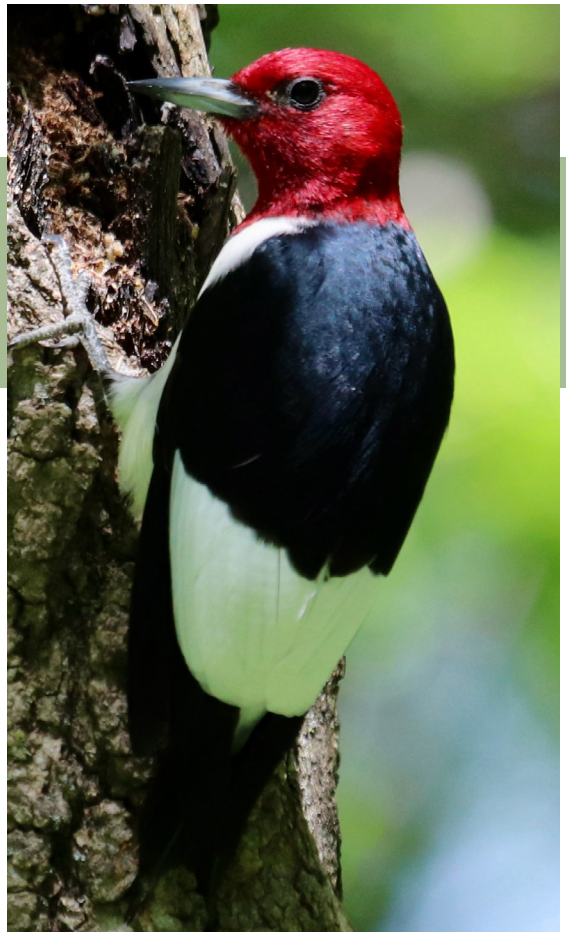
by Fernando Villatoro-Rodriguez

Woodpeckers are fascinating birds which are widely known for their method of gathering food. They use their sturdy beaks to drill holes in tree bark to find their insect prey, and to chisel nest holes in dead wood. Though the prairie is most closely identified with grasslands, there are multiple species of trees that are native to the area, and that's where woodpeckers are found.

Woodpeckers are a part of the *Picidae* family, which also includes piculets, wrynecks, and sapsuckers. While (according to the *Handbook of Birds of the World*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handbook_of_the_Birds_of_the_World) there are 254 species of woodpeckers, which come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, there are seven species that call the prairie region home.These include northern flickers, yellow-bellied sap suckers, and downy, hairy, pileated, red-bellied, and red-headed woodpeckers. These birds are non-migratory, though some temperate-region species do shift their range for warmth. Their diet mostly consists of insects, but some also feed on fruits and berries.

Woodpeckers are found throughout the world except for Australasia, Madagascar, and Antarctica, as well as some of the oceanic islands.

Frequent *Rootstalk* contributor Sandy Moffett took the photographs which accompany this feature, capturing all the images near his home in Poweshiek County, Iowa. The yellow-bellied sapsucker is the only local woodpecker that has eluded his camera so far, and it is the only species missing from this issue's "Birds of the Prairie" special feature. We've cheated a little by adding a sapsucker image we found in the public domain.



Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

Red-Headed Woodpecker*

Melanerpes erythrocephalus

The red-headed woodpecker is characterized by its bright-red head, neck, throat, and upper breast; blue-ish black wings and tail; and large white square areas on the rear part of its wings and upper rump. They are monogamous and territorial, with an average life expectancy of 119 months.

Red-headed woodpeckers live from the central to eastern United States, and in the lower tip of Canada. They are small compared to some other species within the same family. Their diet consists of a wide variety of insects, spiders, earthworms, nuts, seeds, berries, wild and cultivated fruit and occasional small mammals. Red-headed woodpeckers are also known to eat the young or the eggs from the nests of bluebirds and house sparrows, and they sometimes even consume bark. They prefer open woodlands, forest edges, clearings, and habitats with few tall, large-diameter trees. You can find these birds in river bottoms, open woods, orchards, parks, savannas, and prairies. Red-headed woodpeckers do not migrate in winter, but prefer mature forests containing larger, older trees where they can find an abundance of food, most notably acorns.

To listen to the vocalization of a red-headed woodpecker, and to learn more about the bird, go to Cornell University's Ornithology Lab and its "All About Birds" site at https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-headed_Woodpecker.

**You'll find the other "Woodpeckers of the Prairie" featured in this issue on pages 56, 71, 72, 82, 109 and 110.*

All photos courtesy of Denise O'Brien

Denise O'Brien *is a farmer and community activist from Atlantic, Iowa. She has farmed with her husband, Larry Harris, for 47 years. She is the co-founder of Women Food and Agriculture Network (https://wfan.org), the past Chair of the Board of Directors for Pesticide Action Network of North America (https://www.panna.org), and served as an Agriculture Advisor in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012, deepening her knowledge of women farmers on an international level. Denise currently serves on the board of the Iowa Organic Association (https://www.iowaorganic.org), is the Chair for the county Democratic Party, and is an Assistant Soil and Water Commissioner. Denise has received numerous awards for her community achievements and accomplishments and was inducted into Iowa's Women's Hall of Fame (https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/icsw/events-recognition/iowa-womens-hall-fame) in 2000. She has run for numerous public offices, including Iowa Secretary of Agriculture in 2006 and the Iowa Legislature in 2018.*

A Woman and the Land

by Denise O'Brien

Oats, peas, beans and barley grow.
Oats, peas, beans and barley grow
Do you or I or anyone know
How oats, peas, beans and barley grow?
First the Farmer sows the seed
Then he stands and takes his ease
He stamps his foot and claps his hands
And turns around to view his lands.

-British/American song from the late 1800s

There was no honeymoon for Larry and me after our early morning spring wedding. The guests had returned home, and our house was quiet after the festivities of the weekend. The baby pigs were nestled in their pens with their mothers' providing them with meals on demand. The pregnant cows were feasting on their breakfast of ground corn. We headed up to the home place that Lyle and Delma Harris established in 1949, to prepare the machinery for planting oats. They are sown in March, the first seedlings of the growing season. They can germinate in 40 degree soil. The corn and beans that follow require warmer temperatures.

"You'll be close by, right?" I anxiously asked as we started the daily checklist on the tractor and equipment. My hands were the happy recipients of new, soft leather gloves that protected me from the grease and grime I would encounter. The loud, whiny air compressor demanded that air be released as the tank filled. Larry and his father, Lyle, were there to teach me how to get machinery ready for the field. Lyle owned the equip-

ment and his supervision was necessary to launch me on my first outing as a new farmer.

Larry instructed me to twist the tab on the dipstick to check the appearance and quantity of the oil that lubricated the engine. Next, I took the caps off the valve stems of the tires and used an air pressure-gauge to determine if the tires were properly inflated. Tires are expensive and it was important to make sure they were well inflated for fieldwork. I walked around the large, red metal frame of the tractor with all its moving parts, absorbed in memorizing each detail. I was surprised that, despite all the pedals on the platform, I could not see an accelerator

"Where's the gas pedal?" I asked.

"There isn't one, the throttle is on the steering column," Larry replied, pointing to a rod sticking out from under the driving wheel. "You have to pull the throttle down to increase the gas to the engine and push up to slow down."

Two days after our wedding, it was time to plant the oats. The festivities of the past week quickly vanished from my mind as I set out to learn to farm the land; to turn the soil in preparation for planting the seed. Blood coursed through my veins in anticipation of what I was about to do. I could hardly contain either my excitement or my apprehension. Today, I would be on my own, my first field experience as an apprentice farmer.

I followed Larry closely and listened to his instructions. I breathed in the surrounding smells of the machine shed Larry's brother Steve had built. The tall shed was constructed with used telephone poles, lumber, and galvanized tin he had torn down from other buildings. It had four bays where two tractors, a planter, and a wagon were parked.

The Harris family equipment was red, signifying their allegiance to the International Harvester brand.

"Farmers like to stay loyal to a brand of machinery that has served them well", Lyle, a former International Harvester salesman, told me. "Green and yellow are John Deere people, blue are Ford folks, and orange are Allis Chalmers enthusiasts."

Even though old and tarnished, daily maintenance had kept them in good working order. Resourcefulness was a strong virtue in the farming world and today I was learning from the best. The Harris' lived by the rule that you take care of what you have; treat machinery with respect and they will do the job for you.

The tractor I learned on was an IH 560 model, a two-wheel drive, standard-tread, with 6-cylinder, 72.5 horsepower engine. It was manufactured from 1958 to 1963 and cost $5,500 brand new. I named it the Red Beast.

"Our tractors are pretty old but powerful," Larry said. "The oldest is a Farmall H built in 1946 and the next, a 1949 Super M. Our newest model is a 504 IH from the 1960s. The fleet has been easy to fix and does the job we need done."

I would come to love the Super M, manufactured the year I was born. It steered easily and was my favorite to rake hay and haul wagons. The seat had a large coil spring underneath that provided a fun, squeaky, bouncy ride.

The preparation made me impatient. I just wanted to jump on the tractor and drive to the field where I could finally work the land. I contained my eagerness while I helped the men work through the routine they knew so well. I was their student, and I had to learn from them. Larry understood far better than I the importance of teaching how safety was critical to a good job. What I learned prepared me for the days and years ahead.

"Okay, it's time to attach the disk," Larry said. He took a deep breath and watched me climb up onto the tractor.

"This must be scary for you to trust me on this machine," I said. "I think I'll do okay if I can just remember everything that you and your dad have taught me."

A large contraption, called the disk, sat ominously behind the tractor. The silver, slightly rusted, round disk blades looked like monster teeth, intimidating me. It seemed like they could easily slice off a finger or body part. It was my task to back up the Red Beast and hook on to that piece of machinery.

I pulled out the choke lever and pushed the black-rubber button to start the engine. Reaching down between my knees, I put the gear shift lever in reverse

and backed up slowly and cautiously. The knot in my stomach tightened as I tried to align the tractor bar with the disk. Missed! I tried again. My hands turned white as they grasped the steering wheel so tightly my arms ached. My foot slipped off the clutch and the tractor jumped backward so quickly that my body would have gone airborne if I had not gripped the steering wheel. The transmission gears ground loudly as the tractor rocked back and forth while I shifted between first and reverse. I concentrated my whole being to get that tiny hole on the hitch aligned with that tiny hole on the tongue of the disk.

"Always shift gears using the straight direction of an H," Larry instructed me."Push or pull the shift lever straight to neutral and feel it snap in before moving on to the next gear. This practice will help you from grinding the transmission and getting stuck between gears."

Denise and Larry

The third time I backed up was a charm. The tractor aligned perfectly as Larry dropped in the large hitch pin that held the pieces of machinery together. With the hook-up successful, I was on to the next item of business—attaching the hydraulic hoses to the proper female couplers on the tractor. Connecting the hoses made it possible for the oil in the tractor to raise and lower the wheels of the disk. Surprised that gender was used to identify equipment parts, I was taught to put the male end of the hose into the female coupler. I felt uncomfortable using those terms that accurately described the process.

Two black, slinky, oily, serpentine hoses lay in wait, teasing, laughing, as if they knew I was a novice. Connecting these culprits was a challenge. My left hand held the stationery connection on the back of the tractor while my right hand attempted to push the hose with the silver ball into place. I did not win the battle in the first round. The pressure behind the ball was so great that the hose blasted out of my hand and sprayed thick gooey oil all over me. The pressure in the hose was too high and had to be released. I gathered all the strength I had to fulfill the task, finally this human won over the stubborn machine.

"Farming has its own language, I'll help you get through that learning process," Larry told me. "The word 'zerk' refers to the grease fittings on machinery. The fitting needs lubrication to reduce friction wear on moving metal parts. It's extremely important to grease the disk daily and in fact, a couple of times a day if it is used for long periods of time. Well oiled equipment makes farming easier with fewer breakdowns and less time and money spent on repairs."

"This grease gun will be your best friend," Larry told me. "It's kept right here on the tractor next to your foot. If you hear a loud, screeching noise behind you, put the tractor in neutral, raise the disk up and check out where the noise is coming from. Be sure to grab the grease gun as you jump off the tractor."

I bent over and slipped the tip of the grease gun onto zerk. These were located on the disk where the most wear and tear would happen. It was excruciating work. I leaned over the sharp edges of the frame and sometimes had to contort my body just to reach the fitting.

"I didn't realize how much work there is before sitting on the tractor and driving through the field. It's not just a matter of jumping on the Red Beast and heading out." Larry laughed, "Prepping to go to the field is as important as the field work itself."

I wondered how in the world I would be able to manage all the tasks of machine maintenance. I took a deep breath and concentrated on what my teacher was

saying. I tried not to think about the consequences of going out to the field with no experience. Larry had prepared me well, but could I remember what to do? He assured me that he would stay in the field for a while to make sure things were going well. But when he left, would I be able to do the job on my own?

Finally, everything was ready to go. We decided that it would be best if Larry drove to the field. I stood on the platform on the side of the tractor as Larry pulled out of the drive and took off down the road. My hands gripped the handle on the fender and gravel spewed out from under the wheels. The wind blew across my face as we made our way to the entrance of the field. I hung on hoping not to lose my grip and fall underneath the wheel. We turned into the field at the bottom of the hill, next to a creek Larry named Little Buck in his childhood. I had arrived at my first job as a farmer. Could I do this? Would I crash into the trees or roll down the steep bank?

"A strong, musty, moist smell from the earth tantalized my nose as the disk blades churned. I loved it. The field was a half-mile long, so I had plenty of time to absorb the rhythm of the tractor and the disk."

Larry stopped at the edge of the field where corn had grown the previous year. Pale, old stalks of corn stuck up through the earth where they had partially decomposed over the winter. Disking turned them into the earth, creating a welcoming place for the oats we would be planting.

"The tractor needs to be lined up on this edge," he instructed me. "And because the disk is wider than the tractor you have to be careful to keep the furrows straight."

My farmer-teacher made the first couple of rounds to show me how the process worked. The long, narrow field ran along Little Buck. It was a beautiful field that sloped uphill to the east. It would become the pallet from which my artistry of farming would emerge.

With trepidation I moved onto the tractor seat and Larry moved to the platform. My chest swelled with the importance of the job I was about to do. I reached behind me to the right and pulled the lever that engaged the hydraulic system. The oil pumped through the hose. Whoosh! The wheels on the disk popped up like referees signaling a touchdown and the disc blades hit the ground.

Larry jumped to the ground and put me in charge. My mind focused on the pedals and throttle, trying to remember my instructions. What happens first, engaging the clutch or accelerating? Both hands and feet had to be ready to meet the demands of steering the tractor through the field. My whole body was on full on alert.

My left arm pulled on the torque amplifier that geared down the transmission to accommodate the heavy load. I lifted my left foot slowly and let up on the clutch. With my right foot poised over the brake, I flew off across the field.

A strong, musty, moist smell from the earth tantalized my nose as the disk blades churned. I loved it. The field was a half-mile long, so I had plenty of time to absorb the rhythm of the tractor and the disk. I looked back to see the pattern of freshly tilled soil created with the guidance of my hand on the steering wheel.

Worms suddenly appeared on the dark soil surface, unintentionally offering themselves to the birds that gathered for a morning meal. Suddenly, several red-tailed hawks circled above me, their keen eyes focused on the small rodents fleeing for their lives. I began to feel comfortable and less frightened. I disked the field in the noisy environment of a roaring engine and clanking machinery. I knew this was where I was supposed to be. I was a town girl, but I was becoming a farmer. With the wind in my face and the sun shining brightly, I was a woman on a tractor. A job that I had thought was only for men.

Lost in my thoughts about how wonderful it was to be farming, the fence line suddenly appeared in front

of me. Panicked, my mind went into overdrive as I recalled Larry's instructions. I heard his voice in my head say slow down! I grabbed the throttle and shoved it up, slowing the tractor down. My left and right feet simultaneously slammed down on the clutch and the brake. I held on for dear life. The adrenalin pumped through my veins until my heart nearly exploded. The Red Beast ground to a stop. My hands clutched the wheel, unable to release their hold. I shifted the gear into neutral and jumped down, my feet gratefully touched the earth. I was okay.

"You've got to leave enough room to turn the tractor *and* the disk!" Larry shouted as he ran up behind me. "You can't daydream at this job, especially when you get to the end of the field."

Deftly, he swung his body up onto the platform, sat in the seat, and performed the rescue operation. He had driven a tractor since the age of eight and knew exactly how to maneuver out of the problem I had created.

"I guess I should have paid more attention rather than watching the birds and the worms," I said sheepishly. "Thanks for the lesson in getting out of a tight situation."

The rest of the morning went without incident. Larry and Lyle got the Farmall H tractor ready for planting. They greased and oiled the power take-off driven broadcast seeder mounted on its draw bar. This piece of equipment had two hoppers, a large one to hold the oats and a smaller one to hold the pinhead sized alfalfa or clover seed.

I finished disking and the guys arrived at the field with planting implements. The H with a broadcast seeder attached, a wagon of oats to refill it, a couple of scoop shovels and a strong back were all the equipment needed to accomplish this spring ritual. Larry filled the seeder, a dusty, itchy job that required a shower afterward.

"Early season grains, like oats, wheat or rye, are considered a nurse crop for the tiny legume seeds," Lyle explained as they filled the hoppers. "When the big seeds germinate, they suppress the weeds and give the slower-growing legumes a better chance to survive." The legumes, I learned, would become hay for the livestock and provide nitrogen to the soil.

"Every year in July when we harvest oats, a wagon-load of the grain is set aside for the next season," Larry told me as he shoveled the seed into the hopper. "It's a way to save money on seed costs. Every three or four years we buy a new variety to keep our seed stock healthy."

Lyle pushed down on the clutch, engaged the gears, pulled the throttle down and started across the field spreading the seed. The grain flew out of the seeder in a wide arc, covering the ground with a light beige blanket. Soon it would turn to a rich color of green, a feast for eyes seeking color at this time of year.

Our first day ended with the oats planted, the equipment cleaned, parked, and ready to go the next day. A ritualistic cadence developed that spring—get up in the morning, do livestock chores, come in to eat breakfast, and go out to prepare for work that was determined by the season. Spring planting, summer cultivating, fall harvesting, winter rest, and getting ready for the next go around.

Larry and I headed home to do the evening chores. I reflected on the day's events.

This was the beginning of my transformation. I was becoming a woman of the land—a farmer.

Photograph from Bruce Leventhal's "Badlands Landscape" series To view more of the artist's work, visit the website he shares with his wife and fellow photographer, Tamy, at http://btleventhal.com. Leventhal has frequently contributed his photographs to previous issues of *Rootstalk*.

Photo courtesy of Jeremy chen

Jeremy Chen *is an artist and educator based in Grinnell, Iowa. He holds an MFA in Printmaking with area specialization in Sculpture from the The University of Iowa. (https://uiowa.edu). He currently teaches at Grinnell College (https://grinnell.edu) where he is a Senior Lecturer in Studio Art and chair of American Studies.*

**All references appear in Endnotes in the back of the issue.*

Grow Finish Unit Takes on "Ruthless and Insatiable" Industrial Ag*

by Jeremy Chen

On June 24, 2020, from my house in rural Grinnell, Iowa, I saw a billowing plume of dark smoke rising nine miles away. I later learned that the smoke came from a farmstead where an enormous fire was raging. There, the county sheriff and his deputies were in the midst of a seven-hour stand-off with Dwaine Bauman, a U.S. Army veteran armed with a shotgun, who was upset that a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation—a CAFO—had been issued a permit to move into his neighborhood.

CAFOs, according to the Sierra Club, are industrial-sized livestock operations which house anywhere from hundreds to millions of animals. The animals in CAFOs are most often dairy cows, hogs, or chickens. Most often in our region CAFOs are massive, windowless buildings where livestock are confined in boxes or stalls for at least 45 days or more per year, in an area without vegetation. The quantity of urine and feces from even the smallest CAFO is equivalent to the urine and feces produced by 16,000 humans.

In Iowa, the state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR; https://iowadnr.gov) freely issues CAFO permits—for operations housing fewer than 2,500 hogs—without site visits, input from neighbors, or any say from the county supervisors (who can only deny permission if the farm operation's Manure Management Plan does not meet the requirements). This is what had set Mr. Bauman off. One of his neighbors, seeking the extra income a CAFO would bring in, had decided to build one in Mr. Bauman's neighborhood, despite the adverse effects this was likely to have on the neighbors' property values and quality of life, as well as the damage it could potentially cause to the ecosystem.

Image from *Grow Finish Unit* courtesy of John Gerrard. To view a website that includes the artist's simulation, Enter this URL in your browser: http://www.johngerrard.net/grow-finish-unit-elkhart.html

Mr. Bauman launched his protest by setting fire to two vehicles, 100 bales of hay, and the rental house he was living in. The county sheriff's department got involved after one of Mr. Bauman's family members reported that he was acting strangely with a gun. The sheriff and deputies arrived and tried to talk to him, but when he discharged his shotgun into the ground the sheriff backed off, blocked roads, and waited out of sight. Friends implored the sheriff to let them speak to Bauman in person and de-escalate the situation but, intending to protect them, the sheriff didn't allow this. Law enforcement later arrived in force with an armored vehicle and tactical gear.

While one might argue with his methods, at bottom Dwaine Bauman simply wanted to have a voice in what was happening around him. His protest has inevitably brought back to my mind an artwork titled *Grow Finish Unit* by Irish-born artist John Gerrard (https://johngerrard.net), which Grinnell College's Faulconer Gallery (https://www.grinnell.edu/campus-life/arts-cul-ture/museum) hosted in 2015, the year *Rootstalk* began publication. Today the issue of industrial-scale agriculture—with CAFOs providing one of the most egregious examples of its effects–is as big as it ever was, making this call-back examination of Gerrard's work appropriate.

Using software simulations, Gerrard creates meticulously crafted generations of reality that are astonishingly real as they elapse over time. His works document the agri-industrial landscapes of the American

Great Plains, in recent years examining such subjects as the Dust Bowl, our dependence on petroleum, and the overuse of nitrogen in agriculture.

With Grow Finish Unit, Gerrard invites us to contemplate a ruthless and insatiable system that industrial agriculture has become, prioritizing profits over people and the environment, constantly creating more waste, and demanding more land, more hogs, more feed, and more sacrifices from those living in proximity to CAFOs. The work might protest with resignation, the system's exploitation and alienation of the essential workers who process (slaughter, cut, pack, and distribute) the meat, eggs, and milk these facilities produce.

Gerrard's visually stunning simulation depicts a confined animal feeding operation (CAFO) near Elkhart, Kansas, functioning in real time. The CAFO depicted in *Grow Finish Unit* is designed to contain thousands of hogs. The simulation, which was started in 2008 and has been running ever since, displays a computer-generated sun faithfully rising and setting in real time on a functioning CAFO, and follows relationships between humans, architecture, hogs and a landscape that is deceptively invisible.

Grinnell College's Faulconer Gallery was an appropriate venue for *Grow Finish Unit*. When Gerrard was researching the project, he visited a Polk County Facebook server farm in Altoona and a Poweshiek County liquid egg production CAFO unit near Malcom with a capacity of nearly 20 million chickens. Like many other rural locales, Poweshiek County—where the College is located--has been impacted by the exponential growth of CAFOs. Gerrard became fascinated by these contemporary monumental production systems, made visible in the rural landscape by their unassuming architecture.

The visually hypnotizing effects of *Grow Finish Unit* are generated on a video monitor screen by gaming software on hard drives. The entire artwork, like the system it depicts, seems sealed. But Gerrard's constructed reality simulation and the lived reality in Poweshiek County are terrifying shadows of each other. Gerrard's compelling virtual reality focuses on, yet segregates, the relationships that tie a small rural community to its land and ways of life and the world economy. The simulation describes a nearly lifeless and inhumane system devoid of sustainable ways of living. Eventually, in this system, even profit will not be sustainable. In *Grow Finish Unit* sustainability doesn't matter; the virtual sun will rise and set over the banal CAFO building in perpetuity, as long as the computer functions and there is electricity to run it.

"With *Grow Finish Unit,* Gerrard set out to comment on the ruthless and insatiable system that industrial agriculture has become, prioritizing profits over people and the environment, constantly creating more waste, and demanding more land, more hogs, more feed, and more sacrifices from those living in proximity to CAFOs."

It's possible to think of the industrialized rural landscape around me as a late reflection of a misguided utopian idea that seamless market efficiency, production, and profit ought to be the goals of our farming system. However, these utopian economic goals ignore the real costs and dystopian impacts on life and land. Inside Gerrard's gleaming CAFO building, the piglets grow into hogs that magically turn into meat for global tables— but primarily in America and China. Through "vertical integration" the local farmers don't own the animals or the buildings, but maintain both for the absent global corporation, which sets their compensation with thin margins. Farmers who sign on with these corporations to host CAFOs are caught in a conundrum. Pressed by corporations with their eye on the bottom line and consumers who have become accustomed to low prices, they are forced into making decisions that negatively impact the local land, air, water, real estate, economy, culture, and community. Huge global cor-

Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

porations like Smithfield or Tyson drive the local land use, the labor and work conditions, and the profits that largely leave any state from which they extract resources, leaving behind lasting negative environmental and human impacts for local communities to reckon with in the future.

Dwaine Bauman inflicted his physical damage on property. Thankfully, no human life was lost, and no one was seriously hurt during the incident.. As the fires burned, Bauman was eventually taken into custody by the sheriff's office and charged with second-degree arson and intimidation with a dangerous weapon. He was held in the Poweshiek County jail on a $250,000 bond.

The landowner, despite his loss, did not intend to press charges. Bauman's friends regret that a different law enforcement intervention and de-escalation didn't occur for a usually peaceful man who reached a tipping point of frustration and anger that drove him into uncommon actions in order to be heard.

Of course, Dwaine Bauman's violent actions were ineffective. The larger system continues undisturbed with the backing of the state, corporations, Iowa Farm Bureau, Iowa Pork Producers, and other big players in the food and farming system. Perhaps, to them, Bauman is an outlier, just an unstable war veteran who needs mental health services or prison time. Bauman's voice and the voices of others who protest civilly against the inevitable remain sealed off by systems that collude in the destruction of Iowa's natural resources and quality of life. CAFO production and exponential expansion continues unabated across Iowa and the Midwest. Likewise, Gerrard's simulation quietly continues undisturbed in perpetuity. While a simulation may be sustainable, the reality is not.

Photo courtesy of Mikayla Trissell

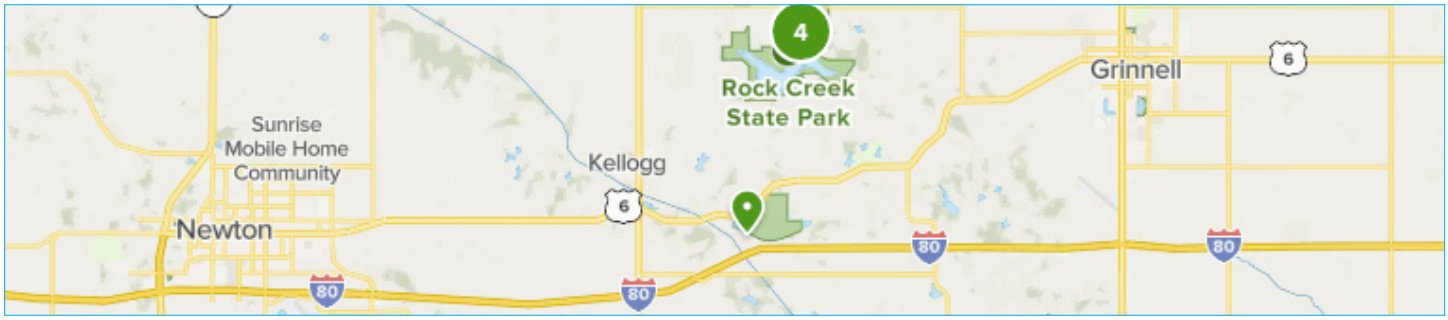
Associate Editor **Mikayla Trissell '22** *is a Spanish and Gender, Women's, & Sexuality Studies major in their last semester at Grinnell College. They were born and raised in Texas, then moved to Colorado when they were twelve, so they have spent their whole life in the United States prairie region. In their free time, Mikayla enjoys reading, painting, hiking with their partner, and playing with their dogs, Scout and Scrappy, and pet reptiles, Sanjay and Snakey.*

Food Deserts in the Midst of Plenty

by Mikayla Trissell

Living in the prairie region of the United States surrounded by endless fields of crops, I am struck by the irony of the lack of healthy, reliable sources of food available to low-income individuals. In fact, this problem has been widely recognized as a food desert, characterized by a large population of low-income households who have inadequate access to transportation or other resources that would allow them to gain access to fresh produce and healthy groceries that they can afford. Nutritious food is imperative to maintaining a vital community and overall well-being. Its lack–– particularly in rural and low-income communities–– is a huge problem that is only beginning to be addressed. I am currently working at a non-profit organization based in Des Moines, Iowa, that serves low-income households in several of the state's counties. IMPACT Community Action Partnership's (https://www.impactcap.org/) mission is to help lessen the burden of poverty by providing funds to help pay bills and access food pantries or gift cards for groceries. However, these resources only cover a portion of the need, and even then, people needing federal and state-provided funding must jump through several hoops to access it. To illustrate this problem, I have examined food inaccessibility in Kellogg, a small town in Jasper County in central Iowa.

Each year, IMPACT surveys families they serve in order to determine what programs are most beneficial to them. The infographic on the next page, taken from the IMPACT needs assessment, shows how 243 families responded when asked "Which food and nutrition needs could you or your family use help with?"



The small town of Kellog, Iowa, is roughly equidistant from Newton in the West and Grinnell in the east. Image courtesy of Alltrails.com (https://www.alltrails.com/us/iowa/kellogg)

The Jasper County Health Department also released an overview of the needs assessment (https://idph.iowa.gov/Portals/1/userfiles/91/CHNA%26HIP/2019%20CHNA%26HIPs/Jasper%20County%20CHNA%202019.pdf) it administered to its citizens. According to this report, "obesity (nutrition and exercise)" is a significant issue that needs to be addressed in the community.

Jasper County is one of the areas that IMPACT serves. IMPACT provides resources to low-income families in the county, including grocery allowances to spend at local stores. Typically, families have access to IMPACT's food pantries; however, Jasper County lacks a food pantry, so families there must find grocery stores where they can spend their gift cards. This makes things especially difficult for low-income families in the county's more rural areas, including Kellogg.

The 2020 Census reported Kellogg's population to be just 606, a population that has been fairly stable since the 1970s. Currently, there is only one store in town–– a combination gas station and convenience store named Kellogg Country Store. The nearest full-sized grocery stores are found eight miles west of Kellogg, in Newton, and ten miles east, in Grinnell. This means that any time a family needs more groceries or items than are available at the convenience store, they must travel to one of those two towns. Access to transportation sometimes poses a problem.

I made the trip to Kellogg to see what the town is like and to get a feel for the selection of items sold at the Kellogg Country Store. The images accompanying this article are meant to give some notion of the food items offered there.

What may not be obvious from the images is the lack of a complete array of healthy foods. There were no fresh fruits, vegetables, or meat. Instead, there was

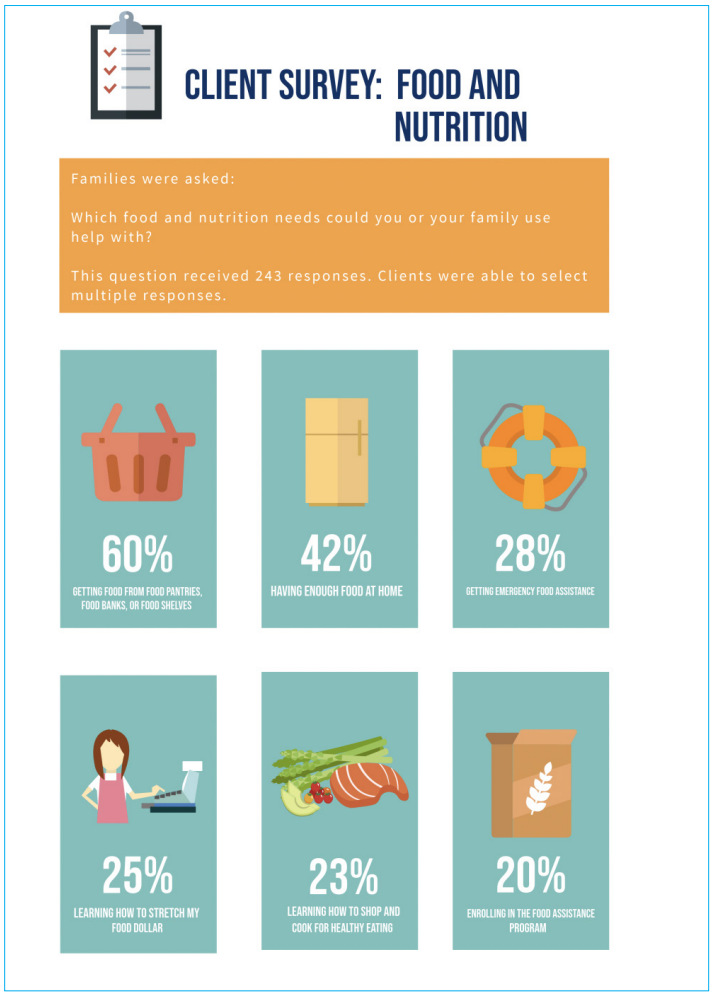


Image from the IMPACT Communnity Action Partnership Needs Assessment for 2019

a large variety of canned goods and microwavable instant noodles. The only category of healthy foods being sold were eggs and dairy products. Interestingly, there was a more expansive selection of these than is typically offered at convenience stores. Beyond the foods, there was a larger presence of condiments, cutlery, bags of pet food, laundry soap, and cleaning supplies. This could show the convenience store serves as a means of rectifying the inaccessibility to a local grocery store, or that it takes economic advantage of the situation being that the Kellogg citizens have no choice to make purchases from there if they cannot make a trip to Newton or Grinnell.

Even the signage outside of the gas station communicates that they carry products that somebody could need when they are not able to get out of the town.

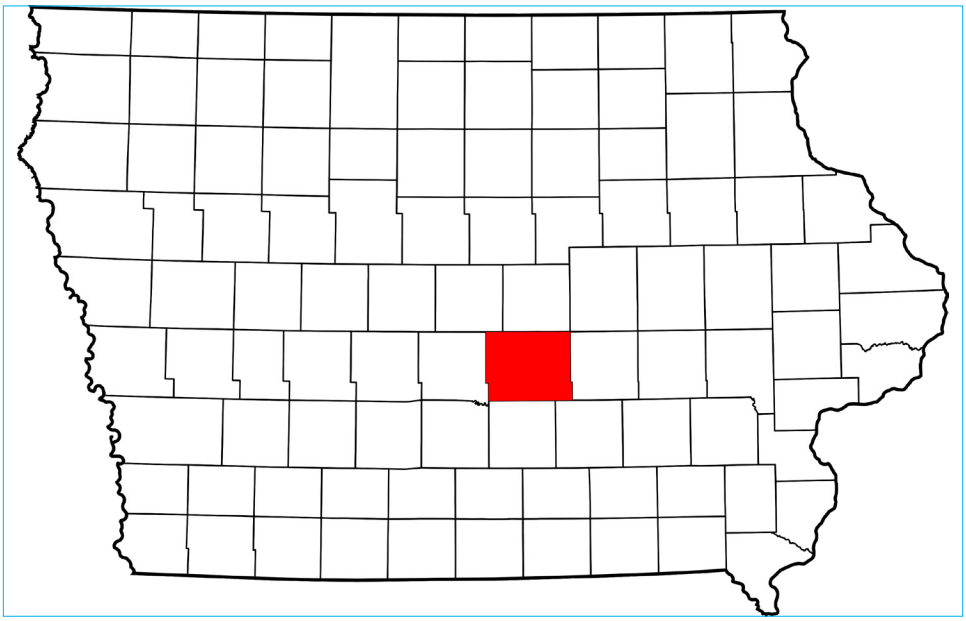
The Kellogg Country Store on March 15, 2022. The store offers gas, access to an ATM, liquor, bait, ice, and--finally--hot food and groceries. Note where food items are on the list. Image courtesy of the author

As this makes obvious, the Kellogg Country Store does offer a larger variety of items than most other convenience stores, but does not provide local, low-income families who have limited transportation options access to a reliable supply of nutritious food. It is clear that the lack of a grocery store in rural Kellogg is a problem for the local population. Beyond this simple fact is an unanswered question: Why can't the people of the region just live off of the food grown nearby?

To further contextualize the issue of food inaccessibility and discuss the reasons why, in an area with so much land under agricultural production, food accessibility is a critical issue, it is useful to look more deeply into demographic information. There are three main types pf farming: livestock, crop, and horticulture. In central Iowa, a majority of the land is dedicated to crop farming, whereas food fit for direct human consumption is classified as horticulture farming. According to the 2020 census, the total population of Jasper county is 37,813. An analysis of the "County Summary Highlight" section of the 2017 agricultural census (https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Iowa/st19_2_0001_0001.pdf) shows that Jasper County has a total of 986 farms, with a total of 378,175 acres of farmland. However, and the key point, most of the land is allocated to crops that cannot be directly consumed by humans. The crops primarily harvested in Jasper County are soybeans, corn for grain, corn for silage or green chop, and oats for grain. Little land in central Iowa is allocated to horticultural farming. This accounts in large part for why low-income people are not able to easily access nutritious foods.

Access to nutritious food is vital to maintaining a community and ensuring all members of the community are well-taken care of. Gaining access to reliable food sources should not fall on the shoulders of the consumers, nor on the local food producers. Solving this problem will take more than small overnight changes; there will have to be larger systemic changes before we can see a difference.

Food choices inside the Kellogg Country Store mostly consist of prepackaged food items with limited nutritional value. Image courtesy of the author



Kellogg is located in Jasper County, Iowa. Image courtesy of Wikimedia

What Do Iowa Farmers Think about Food Deserts in Their Area?

Some people have proposed that backing away from the industrial food production system and moving towards more local food sources could solve this problem. To gain insight into this possibility, I reached out to Suzanne Castello and Barney Bahrenfuse, whose farm operation near Kellogg, Iowa is largely dedicated to raising livestock.

Castello and Bahrenfuse primarily raise beef, sheep, pork, and chickens on their farm. They farm on the entire 450 acres they own, and also farm on an additional 40 acres that they rent. Castello said they have equal amounts of crop ground and grazing pasture for their animals, and they are currently trying to integrate grazing into their land dedicated to crops as well. A majority of the crops grown on Castello and Bahrenfuse's farm are fed to their livestock, but they also grow organic soybeans to sell on the market. Their family farm is especially unique in that they do not use pesticides when growing their crops, and they practice regenerative farming. Castello said that each year, they try to increase the number of acres on their farm that are certified organic. Right now, they have 142 acres of certified organic crops. Castello's and Bahernfuse's farming strategies allow them to regenerate the soil and the surrounding environment, so the land can be advantageously managed in order to prioritize healing the earth as well as providing for themselves and their livestock.

This is a balance that each farmer is forced to navigate—maintaining an economically sustainable farm and caring for the earth so that its resources can be used for generations to come. Trying to walk the line between making a living and prioritizing regenerative farming practices proves to be an issue for all farmers interested in sustainable farm management, not just for Castello and Bahrenfuse. More sustainable farming practices require much more time and financial investment, and can sometimes lead to smaller profit margins for the farmers. Through no fault of the food growers and producers, locally-sourced and organic food is typically more expensive, and therefore still remains inaccessible to low-income families who are experiencing the phenomenon of food deserts. This means that low-income families are then forced to buy the cheapest, and often least sustainably grown, food from larger corporations that can afford to lower the market prices.

As Castello pointed out, addressing the issue must start with larger systemic changes such as increasing the wages that low-income families are paid or creating more opportunities for local food to be distributed. Another issue concerns the knowledge that farming requires. Traditionally, such knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next and applies to particular parcels of land. In other words, the knowledge is local. As Iowa agriculture becomes increasingly industrialized and corporatized, the local knowledge becomes less relevant and with it the possibility of a more local food system.

Barney Bahrenfuse and Suzanne Castello on their land outside of Kellogg, Iowa, where they raise livestock including beef cattle, sheep, pork and chickens. In their estimation, solving the food desert problem will take more than planting human-consumable food crops. It will take low-income families being paid a living wage, expanded opportunities for local food distribution, and the preservation of farming wisdom that should be passed on from one generation to the next. Photograph by Jon Andelson

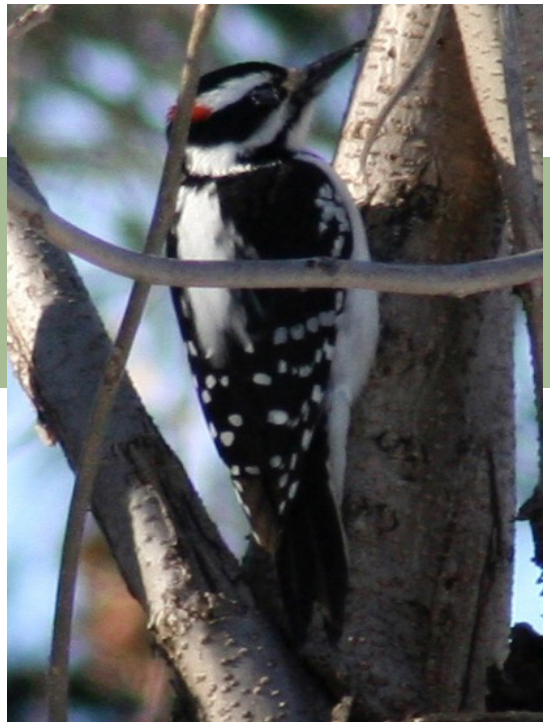


PHOTO TAKEN FEBUARARY 21ST, 2013, IN POWESHIEK COUNTY, IOWA, COURTESY OF SANDY MOFFETT

Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

HAIRY WOODPECKER

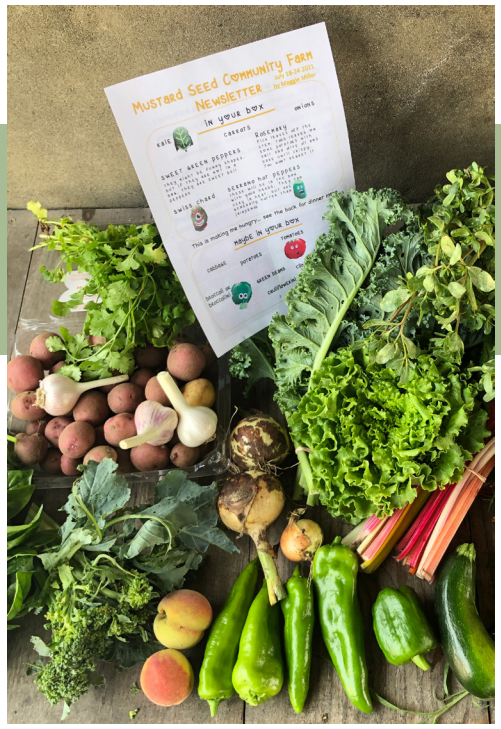
PICOIDES VILLOSUS

The hairy woodpecker has black and white streakings on the wings, with white outer tail feathers. The males have a red patch on the back of the head, a black crown, and black eye mask and nape of the neck.

The hairy woodpecker can be found throughout most of North America, ranging from Alaska to Newfoundland, Canada, and southern Mexico to Florida. In the eastern United States, they can be found in all types of forests. They can be found in forested areas and gather socially where dead trees stand. In the northwestern region, they can be found in western hemlock forests, open juniper woodlands, and in riparian forests. They can also be found in gardens and residential areas.

Some northern residents migrate south during the winter to Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Panama.

TO LISTEN TO THE VOCALIZATION OF A HAIRY WOODPECKER, AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRD, GO TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S ORNITHOLOGY LAB AND ITS "ALL ABOUT BIRDS" SITE AT HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG/GUIDE/HAIRY_WOODPECKER.



All photos courtesy of Mustard Seed Community Farm

Growing Kin: Voices from Mustard Seed Community Farm

As befits an article prepared by the members of a collective, no one person gets by-line credit for this piece. It was put together through the strenuous efforts of "a collective group of farmers and gardeners" working with Mustard Seed Community Farm, an agricultural operation which follows the CSA (community supported agriculture) model north of Ames, Iowa. According to Mustard Seed's mission statement, its workers are "inspired by the examples of The Catholic Worker (https://www.catholicworker.org), Gandhi (https://www.history.com/topics/india/mahatma-gandhi), and many others. The community seeks to create an environment in which everyone can participate in growing, distributing, and eating good quality food. We are committed to service: To our workers, to the land, and to the hungry."

Balance? What Balance?

by Alice McGary

When I got the message from *Rootstalk's* publisher, Jon Andelson, asking if we wanted to write an article about Mustard Seed Community Farm, my first response was, "*Oh no!*" This wasn't a simple, calm "No." That's because I knew that writing for the journal would be a good thing to do. I love our farm, which is 100 percent volunteer-run and dedicated to sustainable, simple living, love of our neighbors, and creating a community in which everyone can participate. I love that we grow healthy, chemical-free food to share with the community. I love the things we believe in and have been trying to bring together since we began in 2008—justice, agro-ecology, human scale economics, community, beauty. And I love the things that *Rootstalk* believes in—culture, science, art, prairie, place. It's a great fit to

have something about the farm in this journal. But trying to consider all this simultaneously makes me dread trying to create anything coherent and honest out of my confusion.

So much has been going well at our farm. We have accomplished so many goals and have such an amazing community, but really, my partner Nate Kemperman and I are more confused and exhausted than ever. Nate and I have been trying to farm in this wildly idealistic, collective, gift-economy way for fifteen years now with a slowly shifting team of founders and co-creators. Farming and living the way we do is not common in Iowa these days, and—in many ways—the Mustard Seed values are not those of the dominant culture surrounding us. You can see that difference just by looking at our small farm, vineyard, and prairie and the fields of commodity crops surrounding us.

As industrialism and colonialism have transformed our world, many everyday skills held by everyday people have been lost. These are simple but fundamental things, such as identifying plants and weeds, as well as methods of foraging for food, caring for animals and the soil, planting and saving seeds, pruning perennials, making compost, shearing sheep, processing wool, sewing, preserving food, or cooking with seasonal ingredients. As we lose these skills, we lose touch with our natural world and our cultures, and our communities lose the ability to be resilient in crises such as our current pandemic. Our rural communities are losing people and skills, and we are losing the ability to be good neighbors because we don't have the diversity of agricultural skills to help each other in times of need.

We face multiple challenges in fulfilling our mission. Farming is hard work. Climate change is crazy. Beauty and connection are what give us strength and joy; justice and truth give us purpose. But do people even want justice? Are we making any kind of difference? How do we build community, grow food, make music, weave, craft pottery, raise sheep, and share meals without running on empty? How do we make time for personal needs when there's so much work to do and we care about that work so much? Two years of pandemic and increasing drought have left us with more questions than answers. And in trying to answer these questions, we have also struggled to balance all our loves.

I've been trying to figure out how to balance being an artist, a farmer, and a person. I farm and make art to bring people together and to try to make the world a truer, better place. Sometimes that means feeling, thinking, and talking about hard things. Sometimes that means taking the time to really savor and celebrate the mystery, beauty, intricacy, and majesty of this world we share. Sometimes that means putting in the hard work to get things done. Today, it didn't mean trying to solo-write a creative article. Luckily, we don't have to do this work on our own: one of the blessings of being part of a community is that there are others on our team to share the load when things get tough. So, I asked some folks from our Mustard Seed team to help co-create this story. In what follows, you'll hear from Amie Adams, Zoë Fay-Stindt, Benjamin DuBow, and Emma Kieran Schaefer. Each brings a unique perspective to our story.

Winter Sowing

by Amie Adams

We first met to discuss this article by video call in March. We shared ideas, trying to envision how to weave a story from our voices. Three of us who hadn't visited the farm much over the winter felt especially challenged to find words about life and growth while surrounded by a bare, still-frozen landscape. But just a few days later, an unseasonably warm and bright-hazy afternoon found us out on the farm--coatless--greeted by pungent, muddy earth and rumbles of affection from the cats. Sitting on the warm pavers near the wash station with Shadowbeast on my lap, I listened to my friends share their ideas. We talked about the importance of beauty and of rest, and of how we need them just as much as food. "Bread and roses," Alice said. "It's from an old labor song." She tried to match a tune to the line "hearts starve as well as bodies, give us bread, but give us roses."

"Exactly," said Jen McClung, who had come to winter-sow poppy seeds. "Beauty is essential. But it's more–it's an invitation. When we plant flowers, we invite pollinators to share this space with us. To them, flowers are

more than beauty and attraction. They are food, safety, welcome."

We paused to absorb her words. "Yes," Zoë said, and the rest of us nodded in agreement. "And that's what we offer to people…"

"And all the beings we share this space with."

At the mention of insects and people, our conversation turned to the Shabbat dinner Benjamin had hosted the September before, and the masses of picnic bugs who had joined for the occasion. We laughed in good-natured disgust and told Jen about how we picked them off of one another's clothes, and out of our hair, saved them from our wine glasses, and most definitely overlooked and ingested some that hid among the seeds on the challah.

"It's gross, right?" Benjamin said. "But I think there's something to it."

"It's all connected, isn't it?"

We looked at each other and nodded in agreement.

"Okay," Alice said. "It sounds like we have something."

Wait. You're Farming?

by Amie Adams

Mustard Seed is the first place in Iowa where I planted vegetables. On one of my first days as an intern, I found myself alone with Alice, hoeing a furrow for kohlrabi seeds on an overcast April afternoon. As she demonstrated how to sprinkle tiny maroon seeds over the soil and press them gently into the row she turned to me and asked, "Do you feel how dry the soil is? We haven't had enough rain." I nodded and she went on, "It's stressful—sometimes I wonder if I'm crazy, trying to be a farmer during climate change."

To link to the first of four of Emma Kieran Schaefer's short videos on Mustard Seed Farm, follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVV58wMtWHE&t=2s

To link to the second of Emma Kieran Schaefer's short videos on Mustard Seed Farm, follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL4sxbOuT28

My family history in Iowa dates back to the mid-1800s when my ancestors immigrated from Northern Ireland and Germany to Kossuth and Chickasaw counties and started farms. The last farmer in my family was my grandpa on my father's side, who gave up farming in his 20s and moved "to town" (Ionia, current population 269) to run an automobile service station. The family farm where his grandparents homesteaded in the early years of Iowa's statehood now belongs to an Amish family. Lately, I've found myself dreaming about visiting and filling one of my grandmother's old blue Ball jars with handfuls of that soil.

What does it mean to belong to a place? Especially when an entire different culture belonged there first? What does it mean to belong to a state radically altered by generations of farmers, including my ancestors?

These questions, a sense of responsibility to Iowa—to soils, plants, animals, waterways, and people—and the persistent feeling that I wanted to belong to this place in a radical way, led me to Mustard Seed. I moved from northern to central Iowa by way of a four-year detour in Colorado, and I found at Mustard Seed a kind of alternative agriculture I had seen in the West but never experienced in my home state. It was as if all

"These questions, a sense of responsibility to Iowa—to soils, plants, animals, waterways, and people—and the persistent feeling that I wanted to belong to this place in a radical way, led me to Mustard Seed."

these possibilities were hiding in plain sight, on eleven sloping acres beside the Ioway Creek, where I interned for a season, helped plant and care for more varieties of herbs and vegetables than I ever knew existed, and fell in love with Iowa's wild and native plants as if for the first time—all while guiding my sore, dirty, sweaty body through an intense drought alongside Alice, Nate, and the other interns and volunteers.

I felt a special thrill as the seedlings I planted began to emerge from the soil, and I kept a mental list: kohlrabi, radishes, kale, cabbages, onions, lettuce, spinach. As the growing season stretched toward summer, I found myself basing entire conversations with my family members around a list of everything we were coaxing from the earth.

"Wait, you're farming?" family members asked.

"Yes, but not like you're thinking," I'd reply. "No corn. It's a small farm. We grow a bunch of fruits and vegetables. Let's see, there's asparagus, rhubarb, cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kohlrabi, radishes, onions, garlic, beets, spinach, lettuce, chard, peas, green beans, celeriac, melons, squashes, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, okra, potatoes, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, currants, honeyberries, blueberries, Aronia berries, cherries, apples, peaches, plums, grapes, basil, sage, fennel, lemon sorrel, parsley, cilantro, oregano, sunflowers, zinnias, poppies…" I'd go on for as long as I could.

No matter who I bombarded with this list, they were astonished, just as I continue to be. In 2021, these acres tucked within miles of commodity crops taught me the abundance of life in the prairie and savanna, edible and medicinal wild plants, chickens, sheep, and bees. To an Iowan whose whole framework for agriculture once hinged on industrial corn, soy, and hogs, Mustard Seed has been a revelation. It is a place, a community, a way of being in the world, that I'd only imagined before.

When I think about my first season on the farm, it's that early conversation over the kohlrabi seeds that strikes me. I recall Alice and me–she fifteen years into her life at Mustard Seed and wondering what the future holds–me, inexperienced and full of over-eager optimism. As Alice's fingers expertly plucked the delicate seeds from her open palm and dropped them along the row, she said "I guess I want to face reality…so I farm."

To link to Emma Kieran Schaefer's third short video on Mustard Seed Farm, follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVV58wMtWHE&t=2s

Members of the Mustard Seed collective gather for a meal. To link to Emma Kieran Schaefer's fourth short video on Mustard Seed Farm, in which members of the collective join her to sing and play her song "Miracle Seed," follow this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFGhan_q-lw

At A Long Series of Tables

by Zoë Fay-Stindt

We gather on the farm for Shabbat, listen
to Benjamin sing out across the corn fields

surrounding this small oasis, picnic bugs
swarming the sch'ug, tahina, hummus

curved into two cupped hands for oil
and paprika. The challah's black sesame seeds

start moving, growing small legs and wings.
Shadowbeast with his new sloppy haircut

(loosed burrs) meows between the grape stalks
while the sheep, missing one lamb for the feast,

sleep early. This is where we ride out the apocalypse:
dodging the bug swarm brought on by a dozen

cross-referenced climate change issues (the burning
boundary waters, the too-warm winter) while we gather

to give thanks, to sip our wine buzzing
with bodies that we try to life-raft out

with our dry fingers, abundance (read:
black raspberries, okra shooting up

through its wilted flowers, Brussels bulging
on their stalks) surrounded by a flatland

of leached soil, oceans of corn, each stalk
producing one perfectly tired ear. In the middle,

this small resistance.

Then We Feast

by Benjamin DuBow

I am a third generation New York Jew—not exactly the type one might expect to find on the Mustard Seed Community Farm, a Catholic Worker organization in Boone County, Iowa. But if you think about it, it actually makes perfect sense. (Bio)diversity is a key component in regenerative agriculture, after all, and the emphasis of this organization seems more on the worker than the Catholic; insofar as religion comes in, it's about love, mercy, kindness, and justice. And, of course, this farm is about food—so, yes, it does make sense I'm here.

The folks at the farm referred to it as an interfaith space, one where people from different backgrounds could come together in communal celebration. Since I got here in the summer of 2020, however, the pandemic had put all in-person events on hold. So, with the weather warming and the threat of infection receding with vaccines (a temporary reprieve, it turned out), I thought it might be nice to host a Shabbat (https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shabbat-101) dinner out on the grounds, among the plants that fed us.

The menu for the evening was perhaps a tad ambitious, but this was a celebration. An ode to the work we've put in and to the people who showed up. An ode to the land—drier than it should've been but still, miraculously, riotous with green, shouting the possibilities of collaboration. And an ode to community, and to this rest well-earned. Every item would feature at least one ingredient from the farm, of course, even if that was just a clove or two of amazingly flavorful garlic.

There was (egg) *challah*, of course. Eight loaves, by far my biggest batch yet, enough to feed the thirty to forty people who were joining this festive, holy meal. Then, for reasons both seasonal and personal, I decided to let the rest of the meal emerge from my roots, which run deep with love for Levantine food, and lean into the family-style smorgasbord of dips and salads—*challah* is especially good with dips—that feel so fitting for such gatherings.

Some dishes needed to be made days in advance, so their flavors had the chance to fully meld: the spicy green *sch'ug* (technically Yemenite, though by now a staple in Israeli cuisine), deep-red *harissa* (technically Magrebi, also spicy), and brick-red *matboucha* (also Maghrebi, likely originating in Morocco or Tunisia; Jews brought their recipes from all over the diaspora, and I guess what I'm trying to say is that there I was, doing it again, this time in Iowa). Other dishes, like the *tabouli* and the tomato salad and *kefta* mix, were best when given a few hours to marinate. And then there were some that had to be as fresh as possible, like the *babaganoush*, made from just-fire-roasted eggplants after they'd been drained but still held heat. These last dishes I decided to prepare at the farm. I hoped it wouldn't be too much trouble. I hoped everything would go smoothly, and I'd scarcely break a sweat, but realized that was unlikely. I planned to bring a change of clothes regardless.

For the mains, rice with dill (too much, in the end, and the large batch didn't cook right, either. I took note for the future, and remembered that so much of this work, which begins with a vision—both in the field and in the kitchen—is always about revising and trying again), a lemony stew of chickpeas and greens (which turned an ugly brown; I probably should've used plain water rather than a stock, and let the lemon do the

talking), garlic & herb potatoes (not as crispy as they want to be, given the lag between cooking and eating, but there was so much fresh rosemary and thyme and sage—all just plucked that morning—that it couldn't possibly have turned out badly), and *kefta* kabob, torpedoes of ground meat enriched with herbs and spices. The meat was lamb—a lamb that had lived on the farm just the year before.

I cooked the kabob last, on a blazing hot woodfire not forty paces from where the surviving sheep grazed. I wondered if they smelled the aromatic smoke (some rosemary twigs thrown into the fire for added juju) and knew. I wondered how they had experienced the loss, and I wondered, perhaps naïvely & self-justifyingly, if they recognized how we were celebrating their brother's life in the context of this local web of lives. I do know that, over a blazing-hot woodfire fueled by downed and pruned branches of chestnut and oak—trees beneath which this lamb whose flesh I now cooked likely once found shade—I tried my best to get those kebabs just right.

In Genesis 2:15, when Adam is settled in the Garden, his purpose is clear: the words used are לעבדה and לשמרה [*le'shamra* and *le'avda*h] and though the latter is commonly (universally, it seems) translated as "to till," it shares a root with *avodah*, which can either mean work in general or else, more specifically, ritual service in the Temple of God. Perhaps this multivalence is not accidental. Perhaps it's trying to tell us that the land, too, is Temple, that the earth is yet another manifestation of this spirit we call God. Perhaps the farm is a place of divine service, which would make this farmwork a form of worship. Surely it is a place that must be guarded, watched over, tended to with tenderness (*le'shamra*).

None of this is easy, of course. Which is why we have Shabbat, a day of rest. Shabbat is the reward for working all week long—the thing to look forward to. It is also, at the same time, the source of possibility—the day of rest that allows us to work the rest of the week. Ironic, then, that Shabbat preparation is itself so laborious. Or perhaps it's not ironic, but shockingly appropriate. Eating, as Wendell Berry writes (https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/wendell-berry-pleasures-eating), is an agricultural act—and if the farm work which allows for our eating is hard (which it is), it's fitting that the cooking should be demanding, too. By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, the Book says (Genesis 3:19). There are no shortcuts. None worth the eating, anyway. None that celebrate this, here, now.

The time came to gather around the table, set in a patch of grass between the honeyberries and the hazels. I saw my friends and coworkers sit; I saw the spread of dips and pairs of challah strewn down the length; I remembered what our work is all about. It's about tending and service, yes, but it's also about sharing. About community sharing a communion to celebrate the holy land that bears its fruit. And the picnic bugs camouflaged as black sesame that lost themselves among the seeds atop the challah, the ones we tried to pick off and shoo away, tired of all the pesky annoyances? We'd worked so hard to make things right, and these bugs seemed to be taunting us with their persistence, there in that unpoisoned place. But they, too, were part of it. God, I thought, they are so gross. God, I thought, they are so beautiful.

We raised our glasses, said *l'chaim* to the bugs, and ate.

Making Candles

by Zoë Fay-Stindt

We haul the old ones down in crates
from the second floor to melt into new,
glistening gifts for the Advent, despite
our co-tired that seeped into the soil
while we were peeling yellow garlic.
She asks what I'm processing today
and I say, *where the self ends and the rest
of the world begins.* See? Cloudy mass
of nonsense. She answers, *I don't think
you'll be able to answer that one before*

the end of the semester, and we laugh, lower
the candles into bigger selves. Pink wax
accumulates around the anchors and Barb
snips them free. We call them raspberry donuts,
yum yum, says Alice, dropping them in the tins
to melt again. Nothing wasted. It's a slow art,
this widening: eternal layers, wax building out

from inside, Russian dolls of pink, pink, pink.
Nate brings squares of chocolate peanut butter cake
for breakfast while the builders outside blast emo

punk-rock, re-siding the barn walls. Last week
Alice, worried the town would turn against her
for her art sabbatical, confided, *I wonder if everyone
thinks we're just loafing in the new buildings
the community helped pay for*, and I want
to shake her, tender, to draw a bath or make
a firm bed for her. For the rest of the afternoon,

passing the wicks and their gathering mass
back and forth over their heated, bubbling tins,
I chide her: *loafer. Hey, Alice, quit loafing
and help me with this set.* We speak intentions,
prayers into the gathering wax. I say *rest,
say listening, ease.* Into the still-warm selves,
Alice asks for *an end to exploitation
of land and bodies.* For so long

I wanted to be known. To shout my voice
so loud it'd echo across the gone generations.
Now I think I'd like to be melted into this growing
chorus, lit in someone else's home prayer
into *enough, enough, enough.* The room brims
with pink, glinting from glass-rippled sun,
lighting us possible again.

To Remember That We Love this Place

by Alice McGary

When I felt like I didn't have anything wise to say, I went out to check on the greenhouse, on the little plants in this wild wind and bright sun, thinking about rural regeneration. I was thinking: *remember that we love this place:* this place, big and small, right here. This land and these people and creatures and water and soil. Our wider community, extending slowly wider to the whole world. It centered me in my mixed-up-ness, a hope for myself, for my community, for rural people everywhere, for all of us on this planet: to remember that we love is to remember why, but also how.

Poppies and Perseverance

by Amie Adams

One rainy, early-May morning, a crew of volunteers weeded along a row of grapes dense with lamb's quarter, shepherd's purse, pennycress. Woody grape vines twisted up metal posts. Beneath the fast-growing weeds, tender poppy leaves unfurled. "Pull it all up!" Alice said. "But not the grapes! Oh, or the poppies!" She bent down to show us the difference between the young poppies and the plants to remove, but I was inexperienced enough that I wasn't sure I could reliably tell the difference. How much did it matter, really, if I pulled a few? They were so small, and surrounded by so many weedy companions, would they even make it to flowering? And on a cold, muddy day like this, there were more important things to do than protect the poppies–like warming my hands.

Weeks passed; tasks piled up. Each day we chose tasks from an ever-growing list. Mulch potato field. Trellis tomatoes. Wheel-hoe rodeo. Plant flowers. Finish grant application. Weed raspberries. Planting flowers didn't seem like a priority when there were crops to weed, mulch, water, and harvest. But we did anyway, and in time poppies bloomed blush pink beneath the grapes and a rainbow of sunflowers and zinnias spread between rows of cabbage and celeriac.

At a midmorning meeting in September, another intern—Maggie—said. "You know, a few months ago, I thought planting flowers seemed like a waste of time. Especially when it seemed like there was always something more important to do. But I've seen how happy the flowers make everyone, and I've changed my mind." Over in the rows of zinnias Jen smiled.

Something profound and live-giving is growing in my soul. Because of Mustard Seed, I'm reviving a connection between my body and the ecosystem and watershed I inhabit. This place is changing me—literally—through the food I eat. I've cared for plants, made friends with people and cats, dipped candles, attended Shabbat, and witnessed connections form across divides that might otherwise separate us (ideological, species, you name it). I think I'm beginning to understand how to belong to a place.

Toward Faith and Banquets

by Zoë Fay-Stindt

We snip peppers and toss them (gentle—
how easily they break) into brightly
colored floppy tubs while Alice

tells me about her faith, how some worry
about her trust these pandemic days,
because she asks for masks, for distance

in the fields: where is your faith in God?
She wants to reroute excess. To stoke
abundance into enough for everyone.

We could at least try that first,
she says, checking the undergrowth
for hidden greens. In their neon pink

tubs, the peppers grow into small mountains.
Behind me, the raspberries have turned
into a dilapidated buffet for the picnic bugs,

who bury themselves four to a berry, turn
the thing sour with their spit. But there's enough.
So much. Down the road, Food at First waves

bags of peppers away, the women's shelter
slicing and dicing all autumn long, our counters
all mounded rich. For a flickering moment,

abundance feels possible, coaxed
by these tired hands.

Alice McGary *is a farmer, fiddler, potter, mentor, fiber artist and community facilitator. She is one of the founding members of the Mustard Seed Community Farm and has recently been chosen as one of 11 Midwest Rural Regenerator Fellows with Springboard for the Arts. She loves working and being outside, the sky, bird migrations, honest conversations, singing, walking, and everyday miracles.*

Amie Adams *(she/her) is a creative writer whose essays have been published in* Midwest Review, Relief, Pilgrimage, *and* Pensive *among others. She grew up on the shore of an Iowa lake and is now a walking tributary of the South Skunk River. At Mustard Seed, she washes veggies, tends raspberries, and snuggles cats.*

Benjamin DuBow *(he/confused) is a writer and chef; in both of these roles, he's interested in how things relate to each in being-in-relation. Benjamin currently lives in Ames, IA, where he's pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing & Environment at Iowa State University while learning how to throw pottery and identify wild greens. His work has been published in* The Hopper *and* Gadfly, *among others.*

Zoë Fay-Stindt *(she/Z/they) is a queer, bicontinental poet with roots in both the French and American south. Their work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, featured or forthcoming in places such as* RHINO, Muzzle, *and* Ninth Letter, *and gathered into a chapbook,* Bird Body, *with Cordella Press. She lives in Ames, Iowa, where she writes, teaches, and digs up beets and other wonders at Mustard Seed.*

Emma Kieran Schaefer *(she/her) is a singer-songwriter and student at Grinnell College in Iowa where she is studying Multimedia Storytelling. She is originally from the front range of Colorado. Emma believes in the power that stories have to bring people together and inspire everyone to be kinder to themselves, each other, and the earth.*

In the summer of 2021, Emma Kieran Schaefer *spent two weeks at Mustard Seed Community Farm as part of an art residency she was awarded through AgArts. During her time on the farm, she created a docuseries about the farm, and was also inspired to write the song, "Miracle Seed" which you can hear by following this link: https://rootstalk.blob.core.windows.net/rootstalk-2022-spring/Mustard-Seed-Song-220317.mp3*

"Quad Cities #39." photograph by William Ojendyk, from his "Quad Cities at Night" series. Ojendyk contributed another image from this series to Volume VII, Issue 2 (Spring 2021) of *Rootstalk (https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu/volume-vii-issue-2/ojendyk/)*

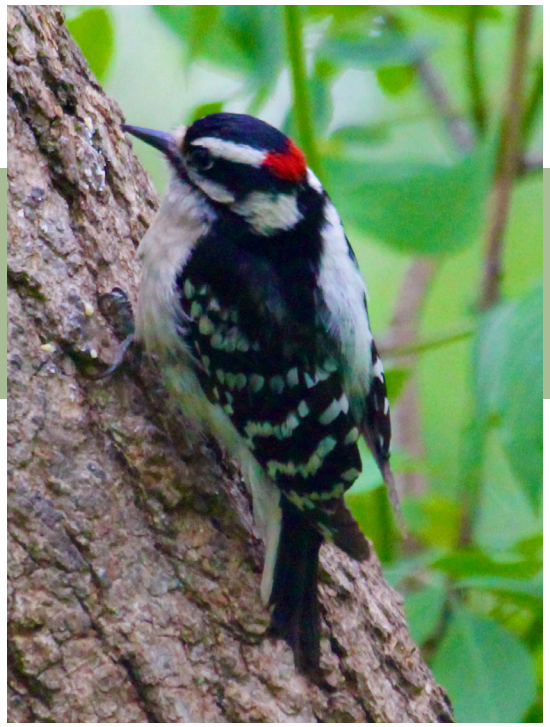


PHOTO TAKEN MAY 19TH, 2019, IN POWESHIEK COUNTY, IOWA, COURTESY OF SANDY MOFFETT

TO LISTEN TO THE VOCALIZATION OF A DOWNY WOODPECKER, AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRD, GO TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S ORNITHOLOGY LAB AND ITS "ALL ABOUT BIRDS" SITE AT HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG/GUIDE/DOWNY_WOODPECKER.

Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

Downy Woodpecker

Picoides pubescens

The Downy woodpecker is the smallest native woodpecker to North America, with a length of five to seven inches. They are mostly black and white, with white stripes and spots throughout their entire body. They are a monogamous species with a life expectancy of 143 months.

The downy is non-migratory and can be found throughout North America, from southeastern Alaska east to Newfoundland, Canada. Their range extends south to southern California and Florida. In the northern part of their habitat range, downy woodpeckers mostly reside in forests and woodlands. They're also common in cultivated areas such as orchards, and can even be found in urban and suburban areas. In the southern region of the U. S., they prefer the woods or moist, aspen-willow stands. Their diet consists of insects and other arthropods, fruits, seeds, sap, beetles, weevils, ants, plant lice, caterpillars, scale insects, spiders, and suet from backyard feeders.

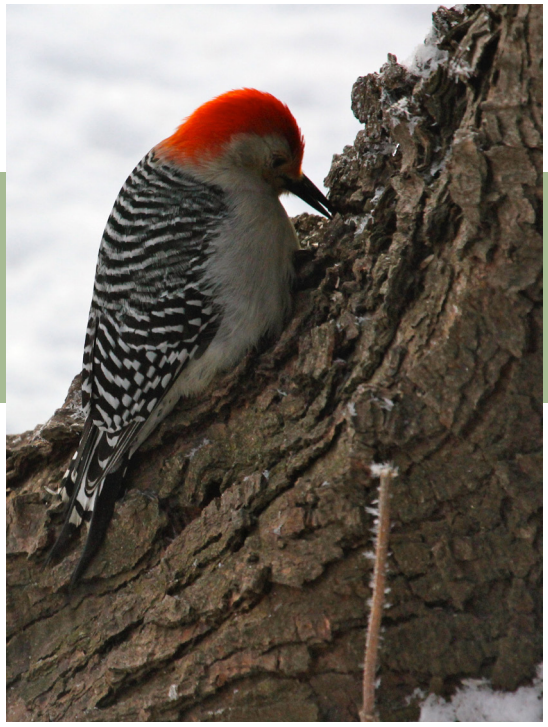


PHOTO TAKEN MARCH 3,2013, IN POWESHIEK COUNTY, IOWA, COURTESY OF SANDY MOFFETT

Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

Red-Bellied Woodpecker

MELANERPES CAROLINUS

Red-bellied woodpeckers are characterized by the bold black-and-white zebra patterns on their backs and—of course, given their name—some red on the abdomen, as well as bright, distinctive red coloring on the crown and nape of the neck. They also have long, chisel-shaped beaks. They are monogamous and have an average life expectancy of 145 months.

Red-bellied woodpeckers are non-migratory and can be found in the eastern half of the United States, including the prairie region. They are adaptable to various temperate forested habitats, but typically reside below 600 meter elevations in mature hardwood forests, mixed pine-hardwood forests, mesic pine flatwoods, heavily timbered bottomlands, swampy woods, and riparian forests. Their diet includes a wide variety of fruits, nuts, seeds, berries and tree sap, as well as ants, flies, grasshoppers, beetle larvae, caterpillars, brown and green anole lizards, tree frogs, small fish, nestling birds, and bird eggs.

TO LISTEN TO THE VOCALIZATION OF A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRD, GO TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S ORNITHOLOGY LAB AND ITS "ALL ABOUT BIRDS" SITE AT HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG/GUIDE/RED-BELLIED_WOODPECKER.

Photo courtesy of Avery Hootstein

Associate Editor **Avery Hootstein '23** *is currently a third-year Political Science major and football player at Grinnell College. Hootstein grew up in New York City. In his free time, he enjoys street photography, playing sports, and watching movies.*

The Streets of Dallas: A Look Into The Minds of Three Photographers

by Avery Hootstein

One doesn't just pick up a camera for the first time and immediately begin taking great pictures. Like other crafts, photography takes practice, but that shouldn't ever stop one from jumping in, particularly if one is passionate about learning to create. My interview with a trio of Dallas, Texas-area photographers—Omar Gonzalez, Jarrod Oram and Ivan Zapien—provides support for this claim.

For many people these days, a photograph is something they take with their smartphone to provide a visual element for their next social media post. For others, though, photography is their response to an inner drive to make art. Photography is a visual artform that allows storytelling to take place in an extremely intimate and authentic way.

There are almost as many approaches to photography as there are photographers. Gonzales, Oram and Zapien are practitioners of street photography (https://photographylife.com/what-is-street-photography).
In street photography one captures the world around oneself as it happens. Street photographers produce images that are extremely accessible, intimate and immediate, with no need for a studio. In fact, the world itself functions as their studio. While street photographers do sometimes stage their shots the way studio phographers do, most working in this genre use their cameras to capture a seemingly unmediated image of their environment. At its best, photography allows the

"Trinity River" by Omar Gonzalez

artist to show others exactly what the photographer is seeing. While this sometimes appears to produce images in their rawest, most basic form, in reality framing artful street photography requires the same skills: an understanding of proper camera set-up, shot-composition, and lens choice appropriate to the situation. Held in balance, these elements come together to transform a snapshot into a work of art.

The three Dallas photographers I spoke with have each achieved their own versions of this understanding. For Zapien it's showing off the people who he sees everyday who might go unnoticed by most other people, Oram finds value in bringing fresh eyes to the "old and rad stuff" he finds in his photo-taking expeditions, while Gonzalez uses the foundations that doing street photography had laid for him to frame more artful compositions. By sharing their idiosyncratic perception of the world around them, they make it possible for us to

"Bridge" by Omar Gonzalez

Untitled photo by Omar Gonzalez

have a real and uniquely intimate glimpse into places we might not otherwise have seen.

Omar Gonzalez

Omar Gonzalez is a photographer and videographer who started taking pictures at a very young age with an $80 camera from Radio Shack. He dabbled in other forms of art too, but realized none of them were for him. When he joined a photography club in middle school, it ignited his enduring passion for photography. In college at the University of North Texas in Denton he majored in journalism and minored in photography. Currently he works for a dietary supplement company and helps coordinate its digital content while freelancing on the side. Gonzalez started working in photography during college when a friend got him a job at a night club called Citizen (https://citizendallas.com). The first night he shot there he saw some of the players from the Dallas Mavericks but was told to focus on the other aspects of the club. "It's definitely just something that happened by accident," he said. "And I really didn't want to do it for [the friend who got Gonzalez the job]." Since he was only a college student, he wasn't sure if he would be able to deliver a high-quality product.

Photography offered Gonzalez a unique medium that allowed people looking at his work to see the world the same way he did.

"Street photography was something big for me," he said. "It really intrigued me, so I started doing a lot of [it]. I didn't really have a style [at that point]." These early experiences, including the work he was able to do at Citizen, helped him to develop his styles.

While Gonzalez resists identifying a favorite

place to shoot "because [he's] always in a different spot," there is a certain place that's tied to his best memory of photography: the top of Dallas's Sheraton Hotel. "Seeing the city in all its greatness…you feel like Batman or Spider Man," he says. "The best feeling I ever had was being on that rooftop with my camera and just enjoying the moment."

These days, because he's working a lot, that view from the Sheraton's rooftop is not one he often gets to have. "I haven't been on a rooftop in years," he says. Still, the feeling that he had on top of the Sheraton has contributed massively to why he loves photography.

Jarrod Oram

Jarrod Oram is, a "lifelong creative" who describes himself as an "Old Stuff and Rad Things Fine Art Photographer." He started his career working on rap music videos in New York City before moving back to Dallas, and he currently works as a freelancer, developing digital content for a few companies. Oram doesn't limit himself to Dallas's confines. He travels to wherever he can find what he calls "beauty in decay." His favorite things to shoot are "run-down buildings, old signs, things with history…[Dallas] is a city where a lot of things with historical significance go away."

Preserving history is very important to Oram because, as Dallas modernizes, he sees the "Old Stuff" he loves so much beginning to fall out of quaintness and into active disintegration. When it comes to finding the "rad things" which remain, Oram follows his eye into fertile visual ground. Oram adds his own flare to what he finds by using the rule of thirds (https://digital-photography-school.com/rule-of-thirds), a compositional technique that places a subject on the left or right third of an image while leaving the remaining two thirds of the image more open, to help fill the frame as well as employing the natural light of the scene to create a certain mood.

Oram emphasizes that photography is more than just a side hustle to him, and also more than a passion. It is a way of filling a void. He said: "Something wasn't 'right' inside me and I thought I was depressed, you know, so I would go to therapy or take medication to ease my depression, but what was really happening was there were areas of unmet needs inside me. So, the thing that I discovered early to numb the pain was alcohol. [For a while] it actually worked, if that makes sense. It calmed my nerves and it eased my tensions. But what happened was there was no solution to anything. All I

"I'll Be Your Mirror" by Jarrod Oram

"To Live is To Fly" by Jarrod Oram

was doing was stuffing it down and not addressing it, and the only thing I knew to do, the only thing I knew that worked, was [more] alcohol. And so that's the whole thing with alcoholism it's that you keep going back to it expecting a different result.

"Eventually it stopped working. I had no idea about unprocessed childhood trauma; I had no idea about any of those things. I would go to people that didn't have the answers to [becoming sober], they'd ask me 'Well, Jarrod, why don't you just quit?' And I would tell people 'You don't get it; I can't,' and they didn't understand that."

"I Know The End" by Jarrod Oram

In 2007 Oram finally realized that it was time to get sober. When he did, he found that the problems of the past persisted, except now he was without the solace of alcohol. Eight years into being sober he found he was still in a lot of pain, and he realized that dealing with that pain was the real work. He began working with a therapist to untangle the pain of the past. "I was feeling empty… my therapist was talking about abundance and 'filling abundance,' and I'm like how the f**k do you fill abundance? What does that even mean?"

For Oram photography became an answer. It became something that was therapeutic, evolving into a way for him to see things differently and to see himself differently. In what he has realized is the lifelong process of "filling abundance," photography has given him a path to be a more complete version of himself.

Ivan Zapien

Ivan Zapien is a 35-year-old amateur photographer who was raised in Dallas and began taking photos in high school, but nothing beyond simple snapshots. Like Gonzalez, he explored other art mediums such as drawing and music as well, but he found his passion when he returned to photography. In the last few months his interest in photography has spiked. When I asked him why, he told me about a conversation with his wife.

Untitled photo by Ivan Zapien

Untitled photo by Ivan Zapien

"[I told her], 'I kinda want to get into this photography thing and see where it goes.'" His wife responded with, "'Why don't you do it?'" He replied that "photography's expensive!" But she ended the discussion saying: "Well go buy a camera!"

So, he did. Having no formal photography training, he built his skills as so many others do these days: by watching videos on YouTube. One of the photographers who inspired Zapien was Faizal Westcott (https://faizalwestcott.com), a street photographer from Boston. Zapien took inspiration from Westcott's work, because, as Zapien puts it, "You just go out, walk, take pictures of things, people, dogs, like whatever, I just… you know, something clicked."

Zapien's photography style is influenced by film, and he often decides what to photograph by asking

Untitled photo by Ivan Zapien

himself: "Could this be in a movie scene?" When discussing his style Zapien mentioned that he tries to avoid editing his photos like Peter McKinnon (https://www.petermckinnon.com) or Pierre Lambert (https://pierretlambert.com), two photographers with large YouTube channels. Their style generally involves an image that is incredibly sharp while also included very vibrant colors that make an image really pop. Zapien prefers to use cooler, bluer tones in his edits. This allows him to create a more cinematic feel.

When asked about how shooting in Dallas has impacted his perception of the city he said: "I like going out to streets where most people wouldn't even think about going. I live in a part of town where it's not so good. I've even tried to venture out and go out with a camera where it's not so safe and kinda get that side of Dallas; most people think that's horrible, but there's so many good things, even in neighborhoods that people think are dangerous that no one sees, and I want to bring that out."

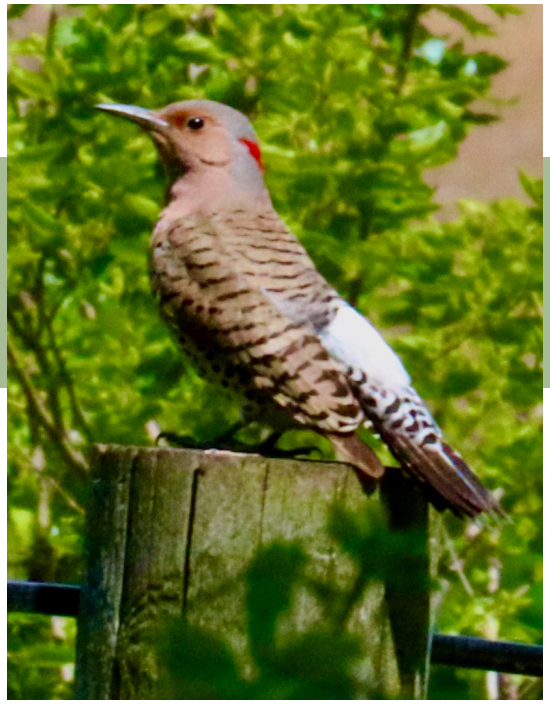


PHOTO TAKEN MAY 30, 2017, IN POWESHIEK COUNTY, IOWA, COURTESY OF SANDY MOFFETT

Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

Northern Flicker

Colaptes auratus

The northern flicker is identifiable by its unique gray-brown barred back and white rump. They are a monogamous species with a life expectancy of 110 months.

The northern flicker is a migratory species, with habitats ranging from Alaska eastward to Quebec, then south throughout the United States to northern Mexico. They can also be found in Cuba and range as far as Nicaragua. During winter they prefer the southern part of this range and northern Mexico because of warmer climates. They live in wooded areas that have stands of dead trees, open areas, forest edges, burnt areas, agricultural lands, and residential areas. Their diet consists primarily of ants, however, they also consume grasshoppers, crickets, termites, wasps, aphids, beetles and their larvae, caterpillars, spiders, cherries, the berries of dogwood, Virgina creeper, poison ivy, sumac, hackberry, blackgum, weed seeds, acorns, and other types of nut kernels.

TO LISTEN TO THE VOCALIZATION OF A NORTHERN FLICKER, AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRD, GO TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S ORNITHOLOGY LAB AND ITS "ALL ABOUT BIRDS" SITE AT HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG/GUIDE/NORTHERN_FLICKER/SOUNDS

Getting Lost in Ohio

Photo by Henry Sharp-Horan. All other photos by Sam Horan

by Sam Horan

I live in Columbus, Ohio, which is in the central part of the state, and the majority of my work is based in a circle around the city of 100 miles or so. I just pick a direction and drive until I'm far away enough from town that I feel gone. I honestly couldn't begin to name where 99 percent of my images were made. For the Instagram locations I use, they're often estimated as to where I think I was. If I see something that I think needs to be remembered, I take it. Photography for me is quite literally an escape, and I make it a point to wing it.

For these images the goal was to have no goal. Living in the metropolis that is Columbus, I often find the need to escape the din of the city and open myself up to the heartland of rural America. When I don't put expectations on what I am trying to see and therefore capture, the places and things I photograph will often reveal themselves to me. There's a simplicity in the openness of these places, and when I put myself there, I can allow myself to get lost. This feeling of the unknown forces me to observe and hopefully record what I believe should be recorded. I think photography is a medium that allows a level of selfishness. I can steal these things for a frame or two and that is therapeutic for me.

Sam Horan *lives in Columbus, Ohio (https://www.columbus.gov) with his son Henry. He says his son was the reason he began taking pictures. Like most parents, he wanted to document his son's growth, so he purchased a "real camera" to do just that. Now, hundreds of thousands of photos and nearly 16 years later, that desire hasn't gone away, but he has expanded his horizons. He got a degree in Digital Photography from Columbus State Community College (https://www.cscc.edu) in 2018 and has continued to learn about what makes an interesting image.*


LOVED

"There's a simplicity in the openness of these places [that I photograph], and when I put myself there, I can allow myself to get lost."


KONTZ FRUIT FARM

"I just pick a direction and drive until I'm far enough away from town that I feel gone. I honestly couldn't begin to name where 99 percent of my images were made."

Photo courtesy of Katie Kregal. All other photos by the author unless otherwise noted

Associate editor **Harrison Kessel** *is a third-year political science major at Grinnell College. He was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona, where he often visited jobsites with his father, a general contractor. After Grinnell, he hopes to combine his passions for design and helping others by becoming an architect practicing community design. In his free time, he enjoys playing basketball, hiking, and sketching.*

**All references appear in Endnotes in the back of the issue.*

Prairie Style: Wright, the Griffins, Sullivan, and Their Impact on Iowa Architecture*

by Harrison Kessel

This spring, I went on a wildflower walk at the Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA; https://www.grinnell.edu/academics/majors-concentrations/biology/facilities/cera), a prairie reserve owned and managed by Grinnell College about 10 miles southwest of Grinnell, Iowa. It had just rained, and the wind was blowing dark storm clouds towards us from the west. Surrounded by the sound of swaying trees, we hiked through a forested section of CERA where bunches of newly green plants were sprouting delicate, white flowers. I was reminded of a statement from the famed architect Louis H. Sullivan (https://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/architecture-dictionary/entry/louis-sullivan): "observe how rhythmically the seasons follow the sun. Note their unfailing spontaneous logic, their exquisite analyses and synthesis, their *vital, inevitable* balance"[1] (emphasis original). He was telling architects to imbue their design with abstract characteristics such as beauty, rhythm, and balance—characteristics which make real contributions to the way we feel when we are in nature. Following Sullivan's urging, a group of American architects that included Frank Lloyd Wright (https://franklloydwright.org), Walter Burley Griffin (http://www.wbgriffinsociety.org/griffins-bio.html), and Marion Mahony Griffin (Walter's wife; https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/marion-mahony-griffin) would introduce the long, horizontal lines that characterize much of the prairie environment throughout the American Midwest into their design. Iowa, close to the movement's epicenter in Chicago, Illinois, would become home to numerous examples of Prairie Style (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prairie_School#Prairie_School_architects) buildings

The City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel.

which would form an important part of the state's architectural history.

I was first exposed to Prairie Style in a place not known for its prairie: my hometown of Phoenix, Arizona. My father was a general contractor, and our family lived in a home he built in north Phoenix when I was young. My parents were both fans of Frank Lloyd Wright, so they asked their architect to design a Wright-inspired home. They had another request, though, which was that the house not feel "cold," a side effect of modern designs which employ a large amount of steel and concrete or maintain the monotone colors of industrial materials. A "warm" modern house could be described as mixture of a modern house and a traditionally styled house; instead of steel and concrete, it employs materials like wood, stucco, and brick. Instead of flat roofs with no chimneys, it employs peaked roofs with broad chimneys. In Frank Lloyd Wright's body of work, his Prairie Style houses most fit this description, so my parents essentially built a Prairie Style house in the desert. They told me I was living in a Prairie Style house even though I had no conception of what a prairie looked like.

When I moved to Grinnell, Iowa, for college, I did not realize I would be within walking distance of two important Prairie Style buildings: the Merchants' National Bank (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6vo2QW_Bdc), designed by Sullivan, and the B. J. Ricker House (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7TVcR7t2v8), designed by Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin. Only after I discovered these buildings did I realize that, since I was now in the prairie region, I could expect to see more Prairie Style architecture. Yet, aside from the examples built in the early 20th century, around the time Frank Lloyd Wright was practicing in his Oak Park, Illinois, studio, Prairie Style architecture is relatively rare in Iowa. This raised an interesting question: why is a style named after the prairie no longer popular in a state practically defined by its prairie? To find the answer, I examined three Iowa buildings designed by three different Prairie Style architects: the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel by Frank Lloyd Wright in Mason City, Iowa (https://visitmasoncityiowa.com/places/united-states/iowa/mason-city/culturalhistoric/frank-lloyd-wrights-historic-park-inn-hotel), and the B. J. Ricker House and Merchants' National Bank Building, both in Grinnell.

The City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel

In 1972, H. Allen Brooks (https://en.wikipe-

dia.org/wiki/H._Allen_Brooks) published one of the definitive histories of Prairie Style architecture, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries* (https://www.amazon.com/Prairie-School-Wright-Midwest-Contemporaries/dp/039373191X). According to Brooks, Frank Lloyd Wright designed this unique combination of a hotel, bank, and law office in Mason City, Iowa, in 1908. J. E. E. Markley, a bank director and attorney, commissioned Wright after he visited his eldest daughter at the school she attended in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Her school, the Hillside Home School (https://flwright.org/researchexplore/wrightbuildings/hillsidehomeschool), had been designed by Wright, and Markley was impressed by it.[2] Wright faced a challenge when designing the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel, however: he had been commissioned to design in one building three separate spaces whose purposes sometimes conflicted with one another. For example, a hotel should appear inviting to potential guests, but banks at the time were meant to be imposing to convey a sense of security. The building is therefore a balancing act, but in masterfully striking this balance

The City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel skylight room

Viewed from Mason City's Central Park, the left side contained the City National Bank; the lower, middle section housed the law offices of Blythe, Markley, Rule and Smith, while the right side housed the Park Inn Hotel. Today, the Park Inn Hotel takes up the entire building, with the City National Bank side converted to a ballroom and the law offices now housing hotel management. Immediately visible are characteristics which defined the Prairie Style: the roof is long and low, extending off the building to create large eaves. Bands or ribbons of windows characterize the facade and are complemented by geometric ornamentation in the form of colorful tilework. The roof line, windows, windowsills, and even the brickwork all emphasize the horizontal, while vertical elements such as pillars or broad, anchoring chimneys create contrast. These characteristics define the Prairie Style: using horizontal, simple forms, they create a sense of monumentality and rootedness within the site.

The Prairie Style also entailed innovations in interior design, as architects such as Wright and Griffin began to open up the compartmentalized interior spaces that were common in older architectural styles. The interior of the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel offers a Wright masterclass in manipulation of light and space. A ribbon of geometric stained-glass windows beckons potential guests off the street into the hotel. Once inside, I was immediately greeted by the imposing wall forming the balcony of the second-floor mezzanine. Underneath the mezzanine is the check-in desk, which is intentionally cramped by the mezzanine ceiling. Through a set of folding doors behind the check-in desk is a two-story room lit by the soft light of geometric stained-glass skylights, a scene that stunned me when I first walked into the building. Wright designed the stained glass to reflect the colors of autumn, and, combined with the natural colors of the Arts and Crafts style (https://www.theartstory.org/movement/arts-and-crafts/history-and-concepts) furniture, the light in the room had a pleasantly warm effect, a startling contrast to the cold Iowa weather of that day.

I would be remiss not to mention the restoration of the building by the Wright on the Park Foundation (https://wrightonthepark.org), which was formed to restore the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel following considerable alterations and deterioration that occurred over its history.[3] A contributor to this restoration was Scott Borcherding, an interior designer with the Mason City architecture firm Bergland + Cram

(http://www.berglandandcram.com). I interviewed him about the restoration and his thoughts on the Prairie Style, and he described an exhaustive restoration process that took place over several years involving multiple stakeholders, including the National Park Service and the community of Mason City. Preparations for the restoration included interviews conducted with former hotel guests and construction crews that had worked at the building, while restorers poured over Wright's original plans and determined the evolution of the building over its history. Many parts of the design had been cannibalized over the years: security bars originally installed over the bank window had been used as a fence for a home in Clear Lake, Iowa, and one of the statues of the Roman god Mercury that had stood in the bank is rumored to have ended up in California. Scott said the core of the restoration effort from the beginning was a conviction that "we didn't want to be the ones who tore [the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel] down. We had to save it."

Both Scott and the docent of my tour at the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel, Jim Collison, told me that one of the most exciting moments of the restoration involved the beautiful art glass in the skylight room. Almost immediately after the hotel opened, the skylight panels began to leak, so they were taken down and essentially lost to history. They were rediscovered, however, in a Prairie Style building in Mason City: the Walter Burley Griffin-designed Blythe House (https://www.iowaarchitecture.org/discover/project-details/james-blythe-house/c463927703fb3a5e). An expert in the Prairie Style who stayed in the home (which is still a private residence) was meditating in the sunroom, looked up, and realized they were looking at a priceless collection of Frank Lloyd Wright original art glass! The homeowner, also a Prairie Style expert, then donated the glass to the Wright on the Park Foundation, and it was restored to its original position in the skylight room.

B. J. Ricker House in Grinnell, Iowa

Scott said that there were many in Mason City at the beginning of the restoration who were worried about the price tag and the potential involvement of taxpayer dollars. The group went ahead with the project regardless, and when they opened the building to the community, a line of hundreds stretched into Central Park. Scott said that "we changed a lot of minds that day. People came up to me and said, 'I thought you were crazy, but I was wrong.'"

The B. J. Ricker House

Nestled on the corner of a residential neighborhood at 10th Avenue and Broad Street in Grinnell, Iowa, stands a home designed by Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin in late 1910 or early 1911 for B. J. Ricker.[4] Walter Burley Griffin was a pivotal contributor to the Prairie Style movement, and the B. J. Ricker House amounts to a departure from the influence of Wright, with whom Griffin had worked at Wright's Oak Park, Illinois, studio. The house bears the hallmarks of the Prairie Style: the Broad Street facade had two ribbons of windows, with windowsills, roof line, and brickwork forming long horizontals, as well as wide, anchoring chimneys. Burley Griffin, in contrast to Wright, employed gabled instead of hipped roofs. His work, including the Ricker House, also has a greater sense of monumentality. The roof seems to rest on four great pillars, one to each corner, and the house rests on a wide concrete foundation, a relatively new building practice in the era.

The decorative panels between the windows on the second floor are tile, brick, and plaster, and were designed by Marion Mahony Griffin, an excellent architect and draftswoman who helped define the Prairie Style. She also designed a centerpiece Japanese-motif tile mosaic above the fireplace as well as the geometric ornamentation of the windows.[5] Determining the exact contributions of either Griffin to the designs the

An exterior decorative panel designed by Marion Mahony Griffin

couple produced is a difficult task, as "Mahony Griffin was such a fierce cheerleader of her husband…that she happily painted herself in his background."[6] Before she worked with Walter, Marion maintained an impressive solo career. When Wright abruptly left for Europe in 1909, it was Marion who finished most of his remaining projects, culminating in a design for Henry Ford in 1912.[7] Eventually, she would produce the renderings for Griffin's winning submission for the design of Australia's capital city of Canberra. Her renderings of the B. J. Ricker House are at the Grinnell College Museum of Art. Despite her architectural training and impressive design portfolio, architectural historians dismissed her design work, focusing instead on her renderings and relationship with Walter. For example, historian Allen H. Brooks hypothesized that "she lacked the imaginative mind to create a wide and rich variety of outstanding designs."[8] In reality she was a pioneer in a traditionally male-dominated field and a gifted architect whose contributions to the design of the B. J. Ricker House are illustrative of her talent.

The interior of the home employed an L-shaped plan, an innovation of Walter's, who was a master at laying out interior space. By organizing the kitchen, dining room, and living room around the fireplace, Walter created a natural flow between rooms while still maintaining their separate functions.[9] You can walk into the dining room from the kitchen, and from the dining room you walk around a fireplace (forming the L) to get to the living room, the natural location for the hearth. Walter also fit five bedrooms and three bathrooms onto the second floor, with the tops of each corner pillar forming sleeping porches. A garage addition designed by Prairie Style architect Barry Byrne (https://www.oakpark.com/2013/09/10/who-was-barry-byrne) was added later.

The Griffins would go on to design Rock Crest Rock Glen (https://wrightonthepark.org/product/prairie-school-walking-tour), a neighborhood development in Mason City that rests on bluffs flanking Willow Creek. It was while they were completing their work there that Walter won the Canberra competition and was hired by the Australian government to oversee construction. Had he stayed in America, his body of work might have gone on to rival Wright's in terms of its significance to American architecture. His career was tragically cut short when he died at the age of 60 of peritonitis while in India working on another commission.

Like the homes of Rock Crest Rock Glen, the B. J. Ricker House--formerly owned by Grinnell College but now the home of Ryan Ferguson and his family. I took pictures of the B.J. Ricker House at Ryan Ferguson's gracious invitation, and I had the chance to talk to him about his thoughts on living in a Griffin designed home. He also sent me an essay he wrote about the experience for the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America (http://www.wbgriffinsociety.org). In his essay, he writes that "Walter Burley Griffin is noted for designing wonderful floorplans, which perhaps can best be appreciated by active children."[10] Ferguson and his family face the unique situation of living in a piece of architectural history. Their home is furnished with period-correct Stickley furniture, but Ferguson worries about the hard wooden edges his kids keep running into, and the family purchased a more comfortable Ikea couch for their living room. He faces a constant stream of projects to maintain the home, so he has to balance his desire for preservation with the rest of life's demands, including spending time with his family. Despite these and other challenges (they've done lots of insulation work to keep heating bills manageable for a home built in a time without modern insulation), Ferguson's family enjoys living in the B.J. Ricker House, a testament to the strength and beauty of Griffin's design, as well as the passion and pa-

The Merchants' National Bank 4th Avenue Facade

tience of the family.

The Merchant's National Bank

Titan of architecture Louis H. Sullivan designed the Merchants' National Bank in Grinnell in 1914.[11] Located on the corner of Broad Street and 4th Avenue, the building is essentially a cube which Sullivan lined with art glass windows to introduce light into the interior. The 4th Avenue facade contains a rose window, while the facade facing Broad Street contains a ribbon of art windows separated by tall, narrow columns. The roof of the bank has a stained-glass skylight colored in a brilliant blue. The result is an imposing exterior that hides an ethereal interior, providing authority and a sense of wealth like that of a cathedral. It is a beautiful composition of form and light that characterizes the work of Sullivan and so many other Prairie Style architects.

The bank's exterior emphasizes authority and opulence, similar to Wright's National Bank in Mason City. In contrast to the simplified geometric designs of Wright, however, Sullivan employed his signature terracotta ornamentation of swirling leaves and organic forms to surround the entrance and the rose window. Two winged lions flank the embedded columns framing the front door, further establishing the prestige of the bank. The narrow columns which intersperse the art glass windows on the Broad Street facade emphasize the verticality of the building and the thinness of the brick walls. The facade is capped by more terracotta decoration, which form spike-like clusters against the sky. For Sullivan, this intricately detailed exterior sculpture was a way to integrate natural forms into his architecture, a philosophical idea he would articulate for the Prairie School in writings and speeches like the one I quoted at the beginning of this essay. He believed nature was characterized by "the beauty, the exquisite spontaneity, with which life seeks and takes on its forms in an accord perfectly responsive to its needs."[12] It was from this belief that he derived the famous axiom, "form ever follows function"[13]—meaning the design of a building should reflect its purpose, as the forms of nature reflect the needs of organic life. The adornment of the Merchants' National Bank, therefore, celebrates the role of the bank in facilitating commerce, and enshrines this function as occurring on the same level as the fundamental processes of nature.

The interior is marked by diffuse light from the art glass windows and more of Sullivan's ornamentation. Oak trim and blackish-green marble counters recall natural colors and provide richness, while organic terracotta forms and two planters placed at the rear of the bank frame the entrance to the vault. When one walks from the rear of the bank towards the front entrance, the intricate rose window above the door comes into view, sitting above the oak trim of the entrance hall as if on a pedestal. Entering the Merchants' National Bank was the second time during my research that I entered a

The Merchants' National Bank skylight

space and was astounded by the light and color it contained. Like the first time I walked into the skylight room of the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel, it was a cold day, and after feeling a sense of compression due to a low ceiling in the entry way, I suddenly found myself in an ethereal space full of warm colors and bathed in richly colored light.

The Merchants' National Bank was one of the last commissions Louis H. Sullivan would receive in his life. The pinnacle of his career was in Chicago, where he pioneered the architecture of skyscrapers with his partner Dankmar Adler (http://www.shapell.org/roster/stories/dankmar-adler-courage-architecture-and-the-american-dream). Following Adler's departure, an economic crash, and a revival of interest in older, more traditional styles of architecture following the 1893 Columbian Exposition (https://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/architecture-dictionary/entry/world-s-columbian-exposition-of-1893), Sullivan's career went into decline. His autobiography (*The Autobiography of an Idea;* http://brothersjudd.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/reviews.detail/book_id/1929/Autobiograph.htm) ended with a denunciation of traditional architectural styles, and he died impoverished in 1924, with former associates contributing funds to pay for his funeral.[14] His legacy was that of his work in Chicago and his philosophical influence on the field of architecture. Many monumental architects, including both Wright and Griffin, cited their work with him and his views of architecture as being formative. The Merchants' National Bank, though it was designed at the nadir of his career, is a breathtaking building in which Sullivan's ideal of form following function is eloquently expressed.

The Prairie Style in the Modern Day

The City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel, B.J. Ricker House, and Merchants' National Bank all illustrate the primary characteristics of the Prairie Style. They draw inspiration from nature and prioritize function over form, though in the end they weave function and form together. These architects brought natural light into innovatively designed interiors through ribbon and stained-glass windows. Their design was rooted in an appreciation of nature and a philosophical belief in the importance of artistic innovation. Their buildings also had a lasting impact on the communities they were built in. The official branding of both Mason City and the town of Grinnell employ Prairie Style motifs, and Prairie Style buildings serve as anchors for their respective downtowns.

Given the artistic significance of Prairie Style buildings, why is the style not more popular in Iowa today? First, it should be noted that the Prairie Style originated in Chicago, and what Jim Collison told me after our tour at the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel is true: "the Prairie Style name is a misnomer." Yes, Prairie Style architects cited the prairie as inspiration for the long horizontal lines of their architecture, and most of their buildings were in the American Midwest. But Brooks says that they thought of their movement as the Chicago School [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_school_(architecture)], as that is where it had formed and been perfected. The term "Prairie Style" was only applied later by art historians to distinguish the style from a preceding movement in Chicago commercial architecture which is best known for the birth of the modern-day skyscraper.[15] So, despite the word "Prairie" being in the name, outside of its higher integration with nature compared to preceding traditional architecture, Prairie Style architects were designing for the prairie simply because it was where they were receiving commissions.

Second, the Prairie Style abruptly lost popularity around 1914. Brooks claims the sources of the style's demise were "cultural [and] sociological changes that culminated with the 1914-18 war"[16] that changed client preferences: a revival in traditional styles dried up Prairie Style work. The Prairie Style could not coexist with traditional styles, like Victorian or Colonial Revival, which were antithetical to the design philosophy articulated by architects such as Sullivan and Wright. Scott Borcherding described the Prairie Style as "kind of a reaction to Victorian design—[which, in comparison, was] very opulent, decadent, and layered, with surfaced things applied to make things pretty. A lot of those things had no function, only aesthetic, and they were honestly a little competitive with your neighbors." When traditional styles experienced a resurgence of

Integrity in Thornton. Photos courtesy of AJ Brown Imaging

popularity before World War I, many Prairie Style architects had to return to the older styles or stop practicing—they could not adapt their style to the changing times.

Third, while the style as it existed in the early 20th century is not widespread in Iowa, many of its characteristics would go on to influence modernist and contemporary architecture, which is currently popular across the state. Modernism (https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Modernist_architecture) developed in Europe following World War I, but it was influenced by Wright's pre-war work. Prairie Style cast off the rigid rules and opulence of traditional European styles and instead drew inspiration from nature, which allowed Prairie Style architects to simplify the designs for their buildings. This simplicity would be expanded upon in Modernism, with architects such as Mies van der Rohe (https://www.miessociety.org) simplifying residential architecture to essentially steel and glass boxes in projects like the Farnsworth House (https://edithfarnsworthhouse.org). Most current contemporary architecture is not this extreme, but it does integrate itself with nature and employ the simplified forms first experimented with by Prairie Style architects such as Wright, Griffin, and Sullivan.

An example of contemporary Iowa architecture which integrates elements from the Prairie Style is the Integrity in Thornton Project (http://www.berglandandcram.com/portfolio/residential/integrity-in-thornton), a residence designed by Bergland + Cram Senior Project Manager Joe Anderson (http://www.berglandandcram.com/about-us/people/joe-anderson-as-soc-aia). The house employs hipped roofs, ribbon windows, and is integrated with its site by occupying the crest of a small hill. Natural light pours into the home from ribbon and clerestory (above eye level) windows, both used extensively by Prairie Style architects. Natural materials including warm woods and stone are used, a broad chimney anchors the home, and there is no superfluous decoration. The home's beauty comes from the home's structure and materials. The interior is logically designed and flows throughout rather than being compartmentalized. The Integrity in Thornton Project, like much of cutting-edge architecture across Iowa, employs design characteristics that were first employed by Prairie Style architects—characteristics, however, which transcended the style, becoming critical components of modernist and contemporary architecture as well.

I talked with Joe Anderson about his thoughts on the Prairie Style and the role it plays in his work. He told me that Iowa punches above its weight for creating cutting edge architecture, and that energy codes and sustainability concerns are driving architects to design region-specific buildings, which means the built environment in Iowa is increasingly responding to its prairie surroundings. He also said that "just like any good architecture, the Prairie Style was a snapshot in time that provided a look into how we wanted to live, not how we were living." Those words perfectly describe the Prairie Style: a step forward in our relationship with the built environment that would help define modern architecture, an important part of which took place in Iowa.

Photo by Oscar Lanau. All other photos courtesy of Kay Henry

Kay Henry *is a writer with roots in the American Midwest who now lives with her husband in the Catalunya region of northern Spain. She holds her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts* (https://vcfa.edu/programs/mfa-in-writing). *Her nonfiction work has appeared in* The Writer's Chronicle (https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/writers_chronicle_overview), Numéro Cinq (http://numerocinqmagazine.com), *and* Collateral Journal (Collateral Journal; https://www.collateraljournal.com), *and her essays have been selected as finalists for prizes including* Ruminate *Magazine's VanderMey Nonfiction Prize* (https://www.ruminatemagazine.com) *and the Orison* (https://www.orisonbooks.com) *Anthology Award in Non-Fiction. She is currently working on an essay collection whose topics include why Catalunya reminds her of Kansas.*

Havensville

by Kay Henry

My father has left me 118 acres of pastureland, just north of the once-prosperous town of Havensville, Kansas, (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Havensville,_Kansas) where my parents met and courted. I am not sure what to do with my new holdings. I never thought much about what I would inherit from my parents, though I knew they owned their own home as well as a farm in Missouri, plus two properties in Kansas. I've known most of my adult life that when they died, I would own half of their land and my sister, Kit, would own the other half. In my parents' wills, the Missouri properties were to be transferred on death to Kit and me in 50 percent shares, whereas the Kansas farms were deeded separately. Kit's name is on the beneficiary deed to the farm my father inherited near Goff, where he was born in 1919. My name is on the deed to the Havensville property.

Though I view my inheritance through the blurring scrim of grief, I gratefully welcome the farm's economic value. I came to modest prosperity late in life and do not take money for granted. Yet the land's material worth does nothing to untangle my confused emotions about being its new owner. I am grateful for my father's bequest to me after a lifetime of his careful attention to the land that is now mine. I am sorrowful that he and my mother are no longer here to act as a bridge between my present-day life and our family's long history. Most of all, I am perplexed about how to manage both the emotional significance of my new land and the functional operation of a farm I can't find on a map and until recently was not sure I had ever set foot on.

My first visit to Havensville after inheriting the land brought to light long-dormant memories. It had been over forty years since I had last made that journey. Had you asked me to recall the way the Kansas hills roll away off Highway 63 south of town, I could not have

remembered. I could not have recalled the pond nestled two-thirds of the way to the horizon off to the left, nor the chunks of pale flint erupting from the spring grass on certain hillsides. Yet when I turn north off Highway 16 from Holton towards the faded buildings that still line Main Street I think, "There's that pond," and "I remember those rocky hills." I feel light, joyous, like I used to as a child when we spent every vacation in Kansas and the sight of that pond and those pale stones meant that the long drive from our Arizona home was over. I would soon be eating one of Aunt Minnie's sweet rolls and running through the yard with my cousins.

I could not have recalled the fact that when Highway 16 jogs a little and continues to Onaga, Ellis Road stems straight ahead at the intersection with Route 63. Yet I know I could find the site of the old farmhouse where my mother's oldest brother, Bo Ellis, lived for seventy years with his wife Edna and a dozen dogs, generations of chihuahuas and spitz. Bo's son Larry tore the old house down and built a modern one for him and Connie, his second wife. I don't mind too much until I remember the walnut stairway that used to ascend from the dark living room, how beautiful the wood was and how my great-grandfather had harvested it from that very land when he first built the old farmhouse at the beginning of his marriage. But Larry and Connie have worked hard in their lives and deserve a comfortable home, especially now that Larry is dying of cancer and Connie, with bitter and desperate humor, is trying to imagine life without him.

Havensville's watertower

I remember precisely, though, the way my Uncle Doo and Aunt Min's house sat on a slight rise next to the white clapboard Christian church with its modest steeple. When I was a child, that rounded hilltop seemed tall as a mountain. My uncle had dug out a dark cellar smelling of damp stone whose door conformed to the hill's incline, making it even more mysterious, a magic portal that concealed worlds deep under the earth. My cousins and I would sometimes hide there among the musty jars and scare ourselves in the darkness. In reality, the cave's dark shelves held little besides home-canned peaches, green beans, corn salad, and pickles.

After Doo and Minnie died, their daughter R.Meta sold their house and with it, I thought at the time, my deepest memories of Kansas. The new owners demolished the old house and built a new one, leveling the hill in the process. They used the dirt from the hill to fill in the cellar.

R.Meta's unusual name combines "R" from Russell, her father, and "Meta" from her mother, whose full name was the rather ponderous Wilhelmina Katerina Meta Blasky Ellis. R.Meta lived her whole adult life with her husband, Don, across the street from her parents. Don died a few months ago, and she and their daughter Debbie have taken over his small cattle operation. R.Meta is twelve years older than I am. When we were growing up, she

"I have to make sure someone is keeping the brush down and the pasture full of silky, thistle-free grass for the cattle..." The 118-acre Havensville acreage Kay Henry inherited from her parents.

seemed like a different generation, more aunt than cousin. She married Don at age eighteen. I used to stare at her wedding picture in Doo and Min's living room and wonder what it would be like to be a bride. She stared back at me through thick, heavily framed glasses that did nothing to detract from the allure of the white brocade dress that clung to her curvaceous figure. For the duration of my childhood she embodied glamour for me.

R.Meta and Don adopted their two children, who left home once they were grown but got no farther than Kansas City, less than a hundred miles away. Debbie came back to Havensville after nursing school to work and raise a family. Her brother Kenny stayed in the city. I haven't seen Debbie since 1976, when I, in my early twenties, returned from a year of studying in France and visited Kansas with my parents. Debbie would have been about eleven then. Now, we're both middle-aged, and I'm her landlord.

I use the term "landlord" because I can't bring myself to say that I am a "landlady." That word is too slight, connoting a meddling fussbudget or else an unkempt soap opera addict whose grey roots show at the part in her fake-auburn hair. A landlady is disorganized, lets things fall to ruin. A landlady of this sort is what I fear I will become. A landlord, though, knows her responsibilities. She treats her tenants with respect, never condescension. She maintains her property and charges a fair price. When I realize the sexist turn my thinking has taken, I remind myself that "actor" has become gender-neutral, as has "author." "Landlord" could, and should, be next – at least the kind of landlord I want to become, if I want to become one at all. But I am one, I remind myself with trepidation. I inherited that role along with the farm.

As with so many other parts of my life, I'm convinced that my father was much better at this business of land-owning than I will ever be. He would be astounded

to hear this. Modest to the point of self-doubt, he sought excellence in all he did, from stringing fence to, in later years, carving wood and weaving white-oak baskets. If he saw his children as imperfect creations, as he surely did, he never let us know. Owning land brought him the peace he sought during his Navy service in World War II, when after surviving the bombs at Pearl Harbor he spent three straight years in the Pacific Theatre without once returning home to the Kansas he loved, nor to the woman from Havensville who would become his bride and lifelong companion.

The Kansas hills and the dark bottomland along the creek, the peaceful world he had left behind in 1938 to join the Navy, became an imagined refuge during his twenty years at sea. He dreamed, he told me once, of returning there to farm, to spend his days with the cattle and the crops and his evenings playing pitch with my mother's raucous family. He must have envisaged a life as distant as the salt-laden air of the South Pacific.

"After 30 years away, he still cherished his homeland and dreamed of returning, but he never did. Instead, he took a job in Missouri, close enough to drive to Kansas in half a day if he needed to, as he put it, 'check on things.'"

He retired from the Navy in 1957 when I was four years old. I can imagine that my parents felt a new freedom then, unconstrained by his various deployments which had structured their entire marriage. Instead of returning to the Kansas of his boyhood, though, he moved with our family to Arizona. From the day I was born, I had suffered from asthma. Doctors offered hope that the dry desert air of Tucson would help my breathing. It did. Our family grew to love the Southwest over the twelve years we lived there before moving to Missouri for my father's work. But we always knew that Kansas was our true heritage. In 1967, a decade after he retired from the Navy, my father had the opportunity to buy the Havensville acreage from the estate of his father's brother Jack, who with his wife Bonnie partly raised my father after his parents' divorce. After 30 years away, he still cherished his homeland and dreamed of returning, but he never did. Instead, he took a job in Missouri, close enough to drive to Kansas in half a day if he needed to, as he put it, "check on things."

My father rented his Havensville pastureland to various friends and neighbors until the early 1980's, when he began renting it to R.Meta and Don. They grazed their cattle there every summer. Though they paid way less than the going rental rate for Nemaha County, they took good care of the place and never asked my father to pay to put in new fence or spray for thistles. They sent my father a check twice a year and included a newsy letter about the land's condition and the price of cattle and feed. The letters bragged about Debbie's children and Kenny's successful banking career. In the years just before my parents' death, the letters turned darker, documenting R.Meta's hip surgeries and Don's lengthy chemotherapy treatments for lymphoma. I was sad to get such news when my mother would bring me up to date on our Kansas relatives. It seemed to me as if their drama was playing out in a distant place, one at once deeply familiar to me and completely foreign. I was connected to their family by blood and memory. Yet Havensville was too far away, emotionally if not geographically, for me to feel anything other than a distant pity for my Kansas cousins.

Now, as I prepare to see those same cousins for the first time since my early twenties, I follow the highway down a slight incline and see a familiar sign: Havensville, Population 142.

Even though, or perhaps because, my parents lived long and full lives that spanned nine decades, I've had trouble defining myself now that they are gone. The Kansas inheritance is a new puzzle piece. Previous generations of my family on both my father's and my mother's side were Kansas farmers. My parents' grandparents had settled in northeastern Kansas in the late nineteenth

century. They were drawn to the fertile bottomland near Havensville and Goff, towns created a century and a half ago as a safe haven in a still-wild territory, towns that offered both services and companionship. Farmers could gather there to forge a broader community, fall in love, create and educate children, buy and sell goods and land. I grew up knowing that these strong-willed people were my people, with all their hidden tragedies and modest victories. I am like them in ways that have nothing to do with geography. My parents, while they were living, maintained those connections and reminded my siblings and me that we had come from Kansas stock and were, in truth, Kansans. I would not wholly define myself that way today. With my parents gone, my self-concept has become more nebulous.

"I grew up knowing that these strong-willed people were my people, with all their hidden tragedies and modest victories. I am like them in ways that have nothing to do with geography."

As I drive into Havensville, I consider what it will mean to care for my inherited land in a way that honors my Kansas ancestors. At first, I think—with some despair—that it will mean living there or visiting frequently. That option does not fit into the shape my life has taken. My husband and I have moved from St. Louis to a retirement property in Spain, a small farmhouse on eleven acres. Yet, I reason now, my father found ways to care for the land from a distance; maybe I can, too. I have to make sure someone is keeping the brush down and the pasture full of silky, thistle-free grass for the cattle, the fences mended, and the pond clean and stocked with bass. Debbie and her dad did a good job with all these things while my father was alive. He knew what needed doing, and so did they, without being asked. Will it fall to me now to oversee these tasks? I fear it will not take long for my cousins to spot me as a novice. I will have to trust them to be my proxy.

I remember my father coming home from work on weeknights and clearing undergrowth on the Missouri farm until it got too dark to see. He spent his weekends lopping cedars, felling dead trees, hauling brush to sinkholes, and doing battle against encroaching *Rosa rugosa*. He knew what to do to make the woods and fields beautiful and the land valuable. I appreciated the beauty he created, but I didn't understand how much work went into it, how nature had to be bent to his designs. I loved the briar rose for their blossoms, but he saw them as a thorny enemy that, if left unchecked, would clog his open pasture. I have neither the skills nor the will to work on my property as hard as he did on his. Yet the path of neglect is not an option.

In addition to managing the land, I am uncomfortable with managing tenants, especially tenants who are relatives. I want to get fair rent for the pasture, but I don't want to boot my own family off the land in the process, nor do I feel good about increasing their rent to meet the market rate. I am also tempted to sell while land prices are high and invest the proceeds for my retirement. It would make sense, I tell myself, since I have no intention of living in Kansas. My financial advisor agrees.

Since my parents died, though, it has become clear that emotional as well as economic factors will drive the decisions I make about my Havensville inheritance. I have now become the custodian not only of a piece of land, but of a nearly vanished way of life, a history that is as much a part of me as my name, but which I will never live out for myself.

My cousins, on the other hand, live in much the same way that our parents' generation did. They have made their home in the town they grew up in, and it seems they don't want to change, though I realize that what I see from the outside may not be the whole truth. I am their opposite, I tell myself. I've travelled internationally since I was in high school, finding something of a home everywhere I went, though I admit I never really felt that I belonged. One learns to live with this paradox; being a stranger isn't all bad. I have thrived on experiencing new cultures with their unfamiliar people, food, and customs. I have learned foreign languages. I am married to an Algerian. Still, when people ask me

where I'm from, I don't know how to answer. My cousins do.

On the day of my visit to Havensville, I drive slowly down Commercial Street past the old tavern that Don and R.Meta ran when they were still young and beautiful. Back then, they served up beer and hamburgers and joked with customers they had known all their lives. Now, the tavern sits empty. Across the street and down a block, I recognize the red brick post office, now closed, where the postmistress used to steam open everyone's mail and read each letter before resealing and distributing it. She also, in a perfect confluence of careers, wrote the gossip column for the town paper. On my left are the vacant windows of what used to be Harley's drug store. When I was a kid, you could still get an ice cream cone at Harley's for a nickel. My sister, Kit, opened a charge account there when she was four, and caught hell from my mother when the bill arrived at the end of the first week. Or maybe old Harley caught hell for letting her do it.

I detour to the left so I can see the old schoolhouse, solidly built of hewn stone, whose boarded windows have succumbed to ruin and whose yard is a tangle of weeds. When they bloom, we'll call them wildflowers, I remind myself. I circle past the Christian church and the corner where Aunt Minnie and Uncle Doo's house once stood. The new house disorients me, even though it is a surprisingly close copy of the old one. I pull my father's white Toyota parallel to the sidewalk across the street.

I hesitate briefly before deciding that the neater and less-decayed of the two houses at the end of the block has to be R.Meta's. As I mount a rickety step to the porch, I see a slender, serious woman slide down from the driver's seat of a dented white pickup truck. Unsmiling, she walks toward me. I know she is my cousin Debbie, but I am taken aback by her haggard beauty: her wide grey eyes, her high cheekbones and proud nose, the long, straight, white ponytail, the easy fit to her jeans. She wears a flannel shirt and rubber-toed work boots. I

"Debbie pulls up beside a pond. As soon as I see it, I remember fishing there as a little girl."

think: this is her uniform. This is what she wears every day. We hug and I feel myself tearing up. She looks at me without blinking and I can't tell whether she is crying, too, or not. I decide that she is.

On the porch of her mother's house, within sight of the corner where we played as kids, Debbie introduces me to her boyfriend. Rowan is built like a block of wood, rectangular and solid. His mouth remains unsmiling beneath his thick brush of white mustache, but his eyes meet mine in welcome. Then R.Meta opens the screen door and walks out onto the porch to give me a hug. When I last saw her, she wasn't yet forty, and still resembled the young woman she had been when I visited Havensville as a child. Now, she has morphed into her mother or any one of my other aunts--short, with permed grey hair and a softness about her body that belies her strong character. After not quite enough of the small talk I had counted on to ease us into our new reality, she invites me in and sits me down on the cloth-covered couch. She looks at me hard through her thick-lensed glasses. "Don't you sell that land," she says. It is more a threat than a plea.

On the drive to Havensville, I had felt prepared for any conversation with my cousins. I had imagined myself benevolent and thoughtful, getting to know them again, building a relationship, as they say in business. I would make them feel that they were my partners in stewarding the land. I might even suggest that I had much to learn from them. Later, much later, I had thought, I would gently inform them of the land's true worth and hint that it might make sense to sell. Or at least raise the rent. But faced with R.Meta's blunt command, I drop my eyes and stammer.

"Oh, no, I have no intention of selling, not now," I say, my voice too shrill. I mentally grab onto the "not now" as evidence I'm not really lying, or worse, making a commitment I cannot keep. "It's too soon," I continue. That last part is true, at least. My father's recent death has unmoored me, and I see the wisdom in the common advice not to make major decisions for a year after such a loss. R.Meta continues to glare. I turn to Debbie.

"My father was glad to hear you like raising cattle," I tell her. Another true statement. "He said you and your dad always took good care of the pasture." Debbie nods and gives me a wistful half-smile, acknowledging our shared grief. From the corner of my eye I can see that R.Meta is softening.

"Well, make sure that if you ever do sell you give Debbie the first chance at it," R.Meta says, her tone still brusque. This is just the way she talks, whispers a small voice in my head. She's always talked this way. Now I remember.

I rearrange myself on the sofa and face R.Meta. "You must be feeling lost without Don," I say. I speak the word she had used on the phone when I called to give my condolences: "I'm just lost without him," she had said then. I can see now that it is true.

"'My father was glad to hear you like raising cattle,' I tell [Debbie]... 'He said you and your dad always took good care of the pasture.' Debbie nods and gives me a wistful half-smile, acknowledging our shared grief.

"He always did everything around here," she says. "I never even had to write a check." The four of us sit in silence. I look over at Rowan. He has only been with Debbie a few months, and they have been hard ones. First, Don learned he had lymphoma and underwent a series of debilitating treatments. No longer tall and strong, he spent most days at home tethered to an oxygen machine even after his cancer was in remission. Then, just before Christmas, he and Debbie both broke their necks in a car accident. Debbie still hasn't quite healed.

R.Meta takes and releases a deep breath and focuses on an empty recliner in the corner.

"He got over his cancer," she says. "It's that damn C.O.P.D. that ruined his lungs and killed him." She pauses. "I heard him get up in the night, and I asked if he was ok. He said he couldn't sleep and was going to sit up in his chair for a while, see if he could get to breath-

ing better. I found him right there the next morning." We all stare at the recliner. I can see him slumped there, his weakened frame still too big for the chair. I notice a photo on a nearby shelf. Don, as handsome as I remember him, stands behind his wife giving the camera a lecherous grin. R.Meta leans into his arms. Her glance is coquettish behind her glasses, and she stretches out a shapely leg adorned with a garter. I can almost hear their laughter.

The present-day R.Meta follows my eyes to the photo. "That was when we had the tavern," she says. "We'd had a couple of drinks that night." She smiles at the memory. I cannot speak.

Debbie asks if I'm ready to go see the farm. She must think it's incredible that I don't even know how to locate the property she loves. I tend to agree with her. I'm lucky enough to own a piece of prime pasture and I can't say what side of the highway it's on, let alone drive there. I have no idea what the land even looks like. Why, I wonder, did I not visit the property while my parents

"[R.Meta] looks at me hard through her thick-lensed glasses. 'Don't you sell that land,' she says. It is more a threat than a plea."

were alive? I must have gone there at some point, but I can conjure no memories. A month before he died, my father and I opened up Google Earth on his computer and located the land my sister now owns. I recorded our conversation as we labeled each landmark: his father's pond, Uncle Buck's house, Grandpa Henry's truck garden, the road to Fostoria, the property lines. I saved the map, pleased at having captured all that knowledge. We agreed to map the Havensville property next time. His illness worsened quickly, and there was no next time.

Rowan says goodbye and drives away. R.Meta and I squeeze into the cab of Debbie's old truck – her Dad's, I learn – and we drive north out of town and take the second left. I tell myself to pay attention, to remember each turn so I can drive there on my own. We follow a stretch of road and turn right after half a mile or so. Debbie points out an old boxcar on the corner, a landmark. We take a few more corners and I lose track. Instead, I look at the rolling landscape and think how my father would have known every hill, draw, and fencepost, as well as all the neighbors and their stories and how much land they had and when they had last added onto their house. For me, by contrast, the plots of land blur together into a single expanse of green, and the houses are peopled by strangers.

"...I look at the rolling landscape and think how my father would have known every hill, draw, and fencepost..."

A car approaches and Debbie raises her index finger in greeting without removing her hand from the steering wheel. The other driver does the same. I remember this from childhood as a sort of secret Kansas handshake. Sometimes, as a joke, my father would raise his middle finger instead, but the gesture was without venom. His hand faced forward on the wheel, mitigating any obscene reference. We kids thought the finger wave was hilarious in all its forms, and we urged our father to try it on city streets where cars passed in a constant stream instead of a few times a day. Now, seeing my cousin make the same familiar gesture gives a strange comfort.

Debbie stops the truck, gets out, and swings open a gate. She slides back behind the wheel and drives west toward a ribbon of trees. "It's all pasture," she tells me. "Except for that draw there." On our right is a hedgerow of Osage orange. The draw is to our left, a couple of dozen trees I can't identify growing out of a shallow, meandering ravine. She points out a new fence.

"Dad and I put that in last year."

I nod. "Pop sure appreciated it."

"The neighbor's going to replace that fence over to the south." She indicates other sections, half-sections, boundaries. I don't even speak this language.

R.Meta is quiet. Debbie pulls up beside a pond. As soon as I see it, I remember fishing there as a little girl. I must have been with my father, or with one of my uncles, my mother's brothers, most likely Uncle Doo, Debbie's grandfather. I remember sitting quietly on the bank

holding the pole with great patience and anticipation. I might have caught a sunfish. My father or uncle would have thrown it back, and that would have been all right with me. The process of doing something as important as fishing with a grown man far eclipsed the mundane product, the day's catch. I recall lying back against the bank and watching clouds gather overhead. The clouds quickly took the form of a giant hand spreading across the sky. Looking back nearly six decades, I'm sure I didn't know whether the hand would protect or destroy me. Years later, my mother would tell me that she once saw the same formation as she rested in a Kansas field, pregnant for the first time, feeling the earth turn below her and watching the clouds above her form into gentle fingers.

Relieved that I had at least once walked on this land I now own, I follow Debbie around the pond's western edge. It has been a drought year and the water level is low. Debbie picks up a handful of dry earth and lets it flow through her fingers. I do the same. We look like we're in a movie, I think. I don't know what I am looking for in the dirt I hold, but it is important to look, to touch, to feel. I want to understand this place.

"Debbie picks up a handful of dry earth and lets it flow through her fingers. I do the same. We look like we're in a movie, I think. I don't know what I am looking for in the dirt I hold, but it is important to look, to touch, to feel. I want to understand this place."

Debbie says, "If you come back this summer, we can go fishing." She looks toward the far bank. "Have a barbecue right here by the pond." Her invitation both moves and frightens me. What about me, I wonder, made her think I could fish? I had said nothing about my sudden recollection from childhood. I worry that I won't be able to bait a hook. My husband has to remind me how to operate a reel every time we go surfcasting at the beach during our annual South Carolina vacations. He strings shrimp or sardines along the hooks of his seven-foot poles, casts out, and puts the butt-ends of the poles in pieces of PVC pipe he's twisted into the sand. If we get a bite and I'm closer to the pole than he is, I'm supposed to flip back the reel's wire trap, give the pole a yank, and bring in the fish. Mostly, though, I walk on the beach or keep my nose in a book. As to cleaning the fish we catch, forget it. I'm not squeamish but I have no experience in slitting open bellies and removing guts black with offal. I'm betting Debbie does.

But what I say is, "I would enjoy that." Then I add as a hedge, "My husband does most of the fishing these days."

We see R.Meta watching us from the truck and we walk towards her. I own this land, I think. It's mine, and my father, before he died, gave me permission to sell it if I wished. We had been sitting out by the woodstove in the narrow room where he had slept every night since my mother died three years earlier. "I don't feel attached to that place in Havensville," he told me. "It never hurts a fellow to have some land, but if you decide you want to sell it, you go right ahead."

"You told Kit to sell to Gold if she ever sold her piece," I reminded him. The Gold family owned the land adjacent to the Goff property and had been renting it since the forties. I needed to know my father's wishes for the Havensville farm. I waited for him to say, "Sell yours to Debbie." Instead, he said, "Sell it to whoever'll give you the best price."

My father always appreciated Don, I remember as Debbie and I walk back to the truck, but their relationship was not without complications. For a while, Don sublet the pasture, renting part of it out to another farmer. It irked my father that his nephew, who was already paying below-market rent, was actually making money off the property. Don also left a light on in the barn at the old Ellis family place where my mother grew up, and the barn caught fire and burnt down. But he was good with cattle and he was nice enough to R.Meta's folks. He seemed to have done a good job raising Debbie and her

brother. He stayed married. He never left Kansas, and he lived a life my father might have chosen for himself had things worked out differently.

Debbie and I climb back in the truck, and we drive silently away.

"I thought I'd take you by the old place," Debbie says after a few minutes.

"She wants to see her cows," says her mother. "That girl is nuts about them cows. Treats 'em like pets." Debbie smiles and looks sideways at R.Meta. The "old place" is the Ellis family farm, where my mother and R.Meta's father and their siblings, six in all, were raised. The house is gone now, along with the barn that Don burnt down. I haven't seen the farm since I was in my twenties, but I do own the bed that came out of the upstairs bedroom where my mother and her brothers and sisters were born. Through the bed, I feel tied to the place and to my mother's family. The bed is made of iron, gilded over with flaking paint. I've taken it along wherever I've lived. Once, I thought it had been stolen from a storage container in my parents' small Missouri town. I was heartbroken: all that family history lost, and the bed would have no value to anyone outside our clan. A few months later, to my great joy, it turned up in our attic in St. Louis.

We pull off to the right and Debbie parks under a stand of oak trees dense with foliage. I can almost sense that these trees do talk, as my mother believed they could. I can see where the barn stood before it burned. I can trace the foundations of the house. My mother's parents had moved into the town well before I was born, and yet their old farm seems familiar to me, more familiar than the land we just left.

The cattle, twenty head or so, amble toward the fence. Debbie is already out of the truck, walking toward her animals. R.Meta and I slide out and follow. Most of the cattle are black Angus, with a couple of red-and-white-faced calves. Debbie pulls up handfuls of grass and holds them out to the wet noses pushing between the wires. I bend down to the grass and pull up a fistful and let the cattle's huge, black-spotted tongues wrap themselves around the blades as if accepting an offering. Their liquid eyes gaze at me obliquely as they chew. I pull up more grass, and more. "Hey, forty-two," I call to one cow, reading off the number on her ear-tag. My father used to call his cattle by their tag numbers. "Come on over here, seventy-four." Debbie leaned on a post and looked content. "Forty-two had trouble during calving season this year," she tells me, "But she's ok now. That's her baby over there." She points to a calf that to me is indistinguishable from the others. As if it had heard its name, it walks toward us, stopping to nuzzle its mother.

"The unspoken truth is that things will go on as before. I won't sell. Debbie will mail me a check every six months. She'll pasture her cattle on my land this year and next year and thereafter until something changes."

R.Meta joins us beside the fence and we all stand and watch the cattle. "I'll take them up to pasture next week," Debbie says. The unspoken truth is that things will go on as before. I won't sell. Debbie will mail me a check every six months. She'll pasture her cattle on my land this year and next year and thereafter until something changes. Debbie, maybe with Rowan's help, will repair the fences and keep a watchful eye out for thistles. In the fall, she'll take some cattle to the slaughterhouse, and she'll rent the neighbor's bull to sire another round of calves. R.Meta will grow old watching her daughter do the chores.

In a few months I'll probably make another trip to Havensville. Maybe this time I'll drive Debbie and R.Meta out to the pasture that used to be my father's, and I'll know that the gate is on the left just past the old boxcar. Maybe we'll bring a picnic and build a cooking fire, and Debbie and I'll pull bluegills out of the pond while her mother tends the coals. I'll lie back on the grassy bank. Clouds will reach toward me with airy hands.

Photo courtesy of Pasha Buck

Pasha Buck *began her career teaching at the University of Kansas (https://ku.edu) in her last two years in her native state, helped start and taught at the Westmoreland County Community College (https://westmoreland.edu) in western Pennsylvania a dozen years later, and has spent nearly all her 88 years working in the garden and writing short stories, articles, poems, and books. "One of the Stories" demonstrates her love for the Flint Hills (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flint_Hills). One project, while she was directing a program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID; https://www.usaid.gov) was a photo-documentary,* Farmers Feed The World: A Tribute To Women In Agriculture *(https://www.kshs.org/index.php?url=dart/units/view/47107), copies of which are literally all over the world, especially used by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO; http://www.fao.org) in Africa. Pasha now lives in Grinnell, Iowa, in the Mayflower Community (https://www.mayflowerhomes.com), with her husband John. Her short-story, "One of the Stories," appeared in Volume VI, Issue 1 (Spring 2020; https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu/past-issues/volume-vi-issue-1/buck) of* Rootstalk

In My Kansas Pasture

by Pasha Buck

That fall, as the pasture grass grew thin,
I climbed to the hay mow and threw down the bales.
My husband knew then he was on his last fall-
No doubt he was already thinking of sales!

Our prairie may not have beautiful rocks
But it serves very well for our cows.
Every year, though, came decisions to make:
Keep the cattle or just the two sows?

More often than not the thin little stream
Had dried up before September.
But that year the weather left the pond intact
And one scene I'II always remember.

Two big blue herons lived not far away;
Our safe little pond was nearby.
So they brought their youngster to our waterhole
To teach it to swim! It could fly!

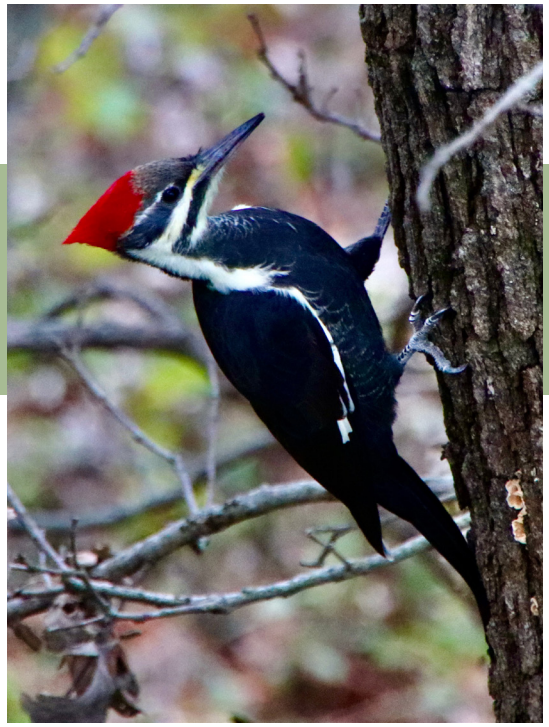


PHOTO TAKEN NOVEMBER 4TH, 2021 IN MAHASKA COUNTY, IOWA, COURTESY OF SANDY MOFFETT

Woodpeckers of the Prairie:

PILEATED WOODPECKER

DRYOCOPUS PILEATUS

The pileated woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in North America, with a wingspan of up to 30 inches, which makes it comparable in size to the crow. They're distinguishable by their large, dull black body and red crest. The life expectancy of this species is approximately 155 months.

The prefered habitat of this non-migratory bird is mature deciduous woodlands of nearly every type. You can find them across Canada and the U.S., from the Northwest to forests in New England, to the swamps of the Southeast. They prefer nesting close to streams and in hollow trees with multiple entrances. Their primary food source is carpenter ants, but they also feed on other insects as well as fruits and nuts.

TO LISTEN TO THE VOCALIZATION OF A PILEATED WOODPECKER, AND TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRD, GO TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY'S ORNITHOLOGY LAB AND ITS "ALL ABOUT BIRDS" SITE AT HTTPS://WWW.ALLABOUTBIRDS.ORG/GUIDE/PILEATED_WOODPECKER.

Sandy Moffett, *Professor Emeritus of Theatre at Grinnell College, joined the faculty in 1971 and continues to teach and direct plays on campus on occasion. Currently he spends most of his time restoring prairie, writing songs and stories, performing with The Too Many String Band, and catering to the whims of his grandchildren. His writing has appeared in* The Wapsipinicon Almanac *(http://www.wapsialmanac.com) and* Salt Water Sportsman *(https://www.saltwatersportsman.com), and he has frequently published his writing, photography and music in* Rootstalk, *in Volume VI, Issue 1 (Spring 2020, https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu/past-issues/volume-vi-issue-1); Volume V, Issue 2 (Spring 2019); Volume III, Issue 2 (Spring 2017, https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu/past-issues/volume-iii-issue-2); Volume III, Issue 1 (Fall 2016, https://rootstalk-archive.grinnell.edu/issue/4); and Volume II, Issue 1 (Fall 2015, https://rootstalk-archive.grinnell.edu/issue/2).*

The one that got away. The yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) is the only woodpecker native to the prairie that has thus far eluded Sandy Moffett's lens. Photo captured at a bird-banding event by Chelsea Steinbrecher-Hoffmann (https://www.linkedin.com/in/chelsea-steinbrecher-hoffmann-82723755), biologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Eastern Ecological Science Center (https://www.usgs.gov/centers/eesc)

Photo courtesy of Mike Lewis-Beck

Iowa City writer **Mike Lewis-Beck** *has work appearing in* Alexandria Quarterly *(http://www.alexandriaquarterlymag.com),* Apalachee Review *(http://apalacheereview.org),* Cortland Review *(http://www.cortlandreview.com),* Chariton Review *(http://charitonreview.truman.edu),* Pure Slush *(https://pureslush.com),* Pilgrimage *(http://www.pilgrimagepress.org),* Seminary Ridge Review *(http://seminaryridgereview.org),* Taos Journal of International Poetry and Art *(http://www.taosjournalofpoetry.com),* Writers' Café *(http://www.writerscafe.org) and* Wapsipinicon Almanac *(http://www.wapsialmanac.com), among other venues. His previous contributions to* Rootstalk *include poems (Volume IV, Issue 1, https://rootstalk.grinnell.edu/article/two-poems), and a review (Volume VI, Issue 1). His book of poems,* Rural Routes, *recently came out from Alexandria Quarterly Press. His short story, "Delivery in Göteborg," received a Finalist prize from* Chariton Review *in 2015.*

Born to Fly

—for AUR*

by Mike Lewis-Beck

My name's Chester Whitcomb Riley, named after our state poet, who wrote "Little Orphant Annie" and "Waitin' fer the Cat to Die," my favorite, though I lack the knack fer pencilin out poems myself. My pals call me 'Wick,' short fer Whitcomb, say it like in a burnin candle 'wick,' guess cause I'm fired up fer the ladies. But this story's not only about me, it's about me and my best buddy Ulysses, leastways I called him Ulysses. Well, actually, I called him 'U,' as in 'Hey You,' that's how ya say it, 'You,' just plain letter 'U.' But his full name when he come into this world—the eighth day of August 1880—in a long sorry labor on a 120-acre hog farm outside tiny Poling Town, Indiana, was Alexander Ulysses Kidd, christened so by his lovin mother, Myrtle May. She give him, she told me, the name Ulysses cause he come into the light at dawn, and she membered the schoolmarm's homeroom recitation of the Odyssey, where Ulysses set out from dawn's 'rosy fingers'—way she membered it.

*Author's note: *This story, a work of historical fiction, was inspired by the life and aeronautical innovations of Albert Ulysses Rupel, born in 1880 in Jay County, Indiana. He achieved much, including the building of an airplane in 1903, which flew successfully as a glider. He was working on its engine when he died young, from tetanus. (For a fuller account, see Eugene Gillum, "From the Ground Up," Jay County Historical Society (https://www.jaycountyhistory.org), Portland, Indiana, 2011.) There are many facts that could be underlined, such as the truth that the Wright brothers attended his funeral. However, my construction of his social life with neighbors, family and friends is, as far as I can know, fictional.*

Then, too, Ulysses was General Grant's known name, and Myrtle May's own dad, Cletus O'Toole, had served under him—First Sergeant in the Battle of Shiloh— where he caught a minniball in his right leg, right above the kneecap. The ball stuck there fer all to see, she said, and he took sick and went to heaven, even though they had sawed the green part off. They buried him, along with his missin leg part, in high ground overlookin the White River, water's edge fer Indianapolis back then. That monument there in Indy, fer the Union vets, she said she wants her dad's name cut into it, cause he was a good pa—woulda been a great soldier, only he'd had more chance. She knowed, she said, her son Alexander Ulysses would be great, like Alexander the Great, since they was both born with one brown eye and one blue, difference bein one conquered the earth but her Alexander would conquer the sky. So there you have it, a Hoosier boy headed fer greatness, headed fer the stars— to fly like no man had ever done.

"She knowed, she said, her son Alexander Ulysses would be great, like Alexander the Great, since they was both born with one brown eye and one blue, difference bein one conquered the earth but her Alexander would conquer the sky."

U studied hard in high school, just three of us in the whole class, seven in the whole Poling High School, that's a fact. Me and U was the oldest, so we had duties. In winter, I'd stoke the stove with dry hickory, four-way splits about a foot-length out, and U would warsh the blackboard with bucket rags, makin sure at least one long length of chalk hid in the tray, fer the teacher to find. Before the lesson Miss Hearn, our teacher, would turn her backside to us, fiddle her gray bun, and square the overhead George Warshington pitcher. I reckoned that where President Warshington, the father of our country, was hung, that direction pointed north. Anyways, U studied birds and triangles whenever he could, I studied gettin up mornins in time to rob eggs from the hen nests in the hen house, then slow-footed it to school. Next to the school, a one-room house, was a water pump and a cherry tree, planted by the class of 1892, to honor George Warshington.

One May day, right when that cherry tree decided to blossom, a new student showed up, a girl, makin fer a class of four. Her dad did only popcorn, farmed the fields next to the schoolhouse, so it was easy fer her to get to school. Just hiked up her skirt, shinnied over the wire fence, careful not to catch her calico. Name of Beatrice, Beatrice Bettendorf. Bee—what we named her—was made to do the daily verse. U liked her versifyin, I liked her looks. She had the prettiest pigtails, blacker'en dirt. Her work apron fit her real nice. She helped teacher put out the lunch, too, skillet biscuits and fresh milk (from my dad's cows).

The other girl in our class, Hazel Wilt, her dad did dairy, too—Holsteins. She griped the school didn't serve up her pa's milk. I said cause we had Guernsey's, what give out better butter. Her pa come over to our dairy barn to poke our cows. Hazel come along but got bored lookin at udders. That's when I walked her to our pig pond, to show her my prize porker, called General Sherman. "Why'd ya name him that?" she asked.

"Cause he eats up everthing in sight," I said. That's when she took my hand, over to the shade of the willow tree by the wallow. I give her a kiss, on the lips. She let me. I told U.

"Hazel cannot do long division," said U. Both his eyes looked like clay marbles, the blue one more glazed. It drilled right into me.

"Might be, "I said, "but she looks made for milkin."

Pretty soon, the township shut our high school down, eight students not bein sufficient. That made U mad, since he reckoned on doin higher sums. He knowed he really needed more rithmetic fer his flyin projects, so he went back with the eighth-graders to do-over the drills. He liked do-overs, said it left the les-

sons in your noggin, like a photo-somethin, it was. He did that Greek theory over and over on his chalkboard. After school he bagged birds with his squirrel rifle, a handy one-shot .22 Remington. Pigeons it was, shot them off the beam over the hayloft. Once he had hold of a dead pigeon he'd chop it up with his jackknife, turnin over drawins in a bird book, pickin at its guts, measurin its wings. Saturday mornins he watched white pigeons waddle around the chicken coop, peckin at bits of gravel, just gettin off the ground after a wobble, barely clearin the barn or not, when they got brained. He liked to look at the white ones, he said, cause he supposed angels had white wings, too.

"Why do pigeons fly so badly?" U asked me.

"They ain't angels," I said.

"Don't make a joke." U's face went red.

"Why ya wanna know?" U always had to ask me trick questions.

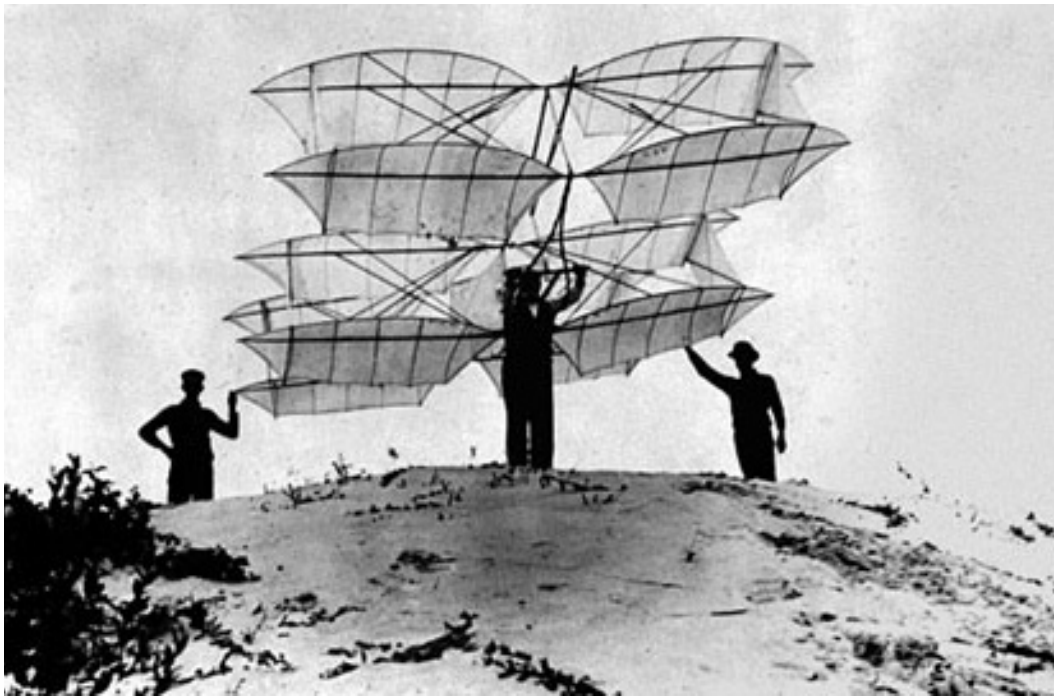
"You know why, Wick." He pushed out his knobby chin, his signal for wrasslin.

"Ya wanna fly like a bird?" I flapped my arms like a goose.

"I want to fly high and mighty," he said, as he tossed me one of his Flyin Eagle pennies he kept around.

With no high schoolin left, we had time to loaf, leastwise after chores. But when you're goin on eighteen years of age you got lots of vinegar, so our loafin kept us movin. We'd go to my dad's barn, unhitch the big Belgians and race 'em, slow as they was. On scorchers we'd swim in the crick, below the barn, just before the stand of sycamores. Sometimes we'd rig sulkies and go all the eleven miles to the county seat, Portland, where we shot eight-ball penny a rack at Klemmer's Pool Hall. Myrtle May got in a stitch over that, specially since she smelled tobacco on us. U didn't take tobacco but I did, chewed Mail Pouch, just like my dad. I liked this loafin around, but mostly I liked girls. I'd roam farm-to-farm askin to help with the plantin and such, farms with daughters not in school no more, daughters who heaped up the mashed potatas, piled the fried chicken, set out the pies—rhubarb fer me cause it bit.

Another way I'd meet girls was durin detasslin corn time, July, maybe August. Once me and Priscilla Gablehanger went to pull the same tassle top and one



Franco-American aviator Octave Chanute (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octave_Chanute) prepares to launch his "Katydid," a twelve-wing glider of his own design, near Gary, Indiana in the summer of 1896. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

thing led to another. Like I told U, "Before I knowed what fer she had her hand on my dogwood."

"What did you do then, farm boy?" asked U. He never did take to such tales.

"Not 'nuff. The corn rows was all scratchy, no layin down."

"I do not have time for girls," U said. Truth told, he didn't have time for farmin, neither. Walkin the beans in late summer fer pocket money was about it. Most of all he hated to slop the hogs out by the horse tank, the bristly red Durocs he had to feed the kitchen scraps, keep their pen shoveled clean. When I tell my brother Jake he keeps our sleepin porch like a pigpen, I know what I'm sayin. Pig shit, now that's somethin U knowed he didn't like. Who wouldn'ta knowed that?

"He wanted to fly. He had to fly. He sent away fer an advanced study course—Engine Mechanicals—from Anthony Wayne Technical Correspondence School, out of Fort Wayne."

But he also knowed somethin peculiar. He wanted to fly. He had to fly. He sent away fer an advanced study course—Engine Mechanicals—from Anthony Wayne Technical Correspondence School, out of Fort Wayne, some fifty miles from here.

He was puffed up about the course one day and we went to tell his ma. Myrtle May stood over a tin tub in the kitchen, a barlow knife in her hand, diggin caterpillars out of a head of cabbage. We sat on the edge of the table, chompin corn bread and strawberry jam. All at once, U swallered his corn bread hard then declared, "Ma, I want to build a machine that flies, beat those Wright boys to it." The cords in his neck got tighter, like he was reinin in his words.

"Machines don't fly, son, they run," said Myrtle May. Then she snapped shut the jam lid before she spoke. "But yer blue birth eye has got you lookin at the sky."

"Got to make the right engine, Ma." U had his peepers on the flypaper danglin from the ceilin.

"Ya was born to greatness, Alexander." She put her hand over her heart.

Ulysses dropped his towhead, his big curls bobbin. Then he stood dumb, like a statue.

"My Eastern star," she said, studyin the jam mess we made and thinkin, I reckon, about his tomorrow.

"I'll fly you to the sky, Ma," he said, sightin a fat summer cloud with his thumb.

"Just mind ya don't come to harm, son."

Startin June first 1902, I daily drove U in a two-seater buggy—sometimes his dad's, sometimes his own— over to Berne to the postal station, seven miles by the markers, so's to see if the worksheets from his study course had come. On the twentieth of June, with red clover full in the culverts, the clover smell smotherin the smell of the horse turds, the worksheets got delivered from Fort Wayne, wrapped in gray pulp paper, all covered in green George Warshington two-cent stamps. On the buggy ride back to Poling Town, I said, "U, ya goin on the hayride this evenin?"

"No. You go." He lifted his heavy head up from fussin with the worksheets.

"Bee wants ya to go with."

"She knows Latin. We do declensions together. You go with Bee."

"I take to Bee but she don't take to me. She likes the great Ulysses." I shouldn'ta said it sharp like that, but I did. "Sides, I'm goin with Sadie Yoder."

"The Amish girl?"

"Yeah, heard tell they dance bare-nekked in the rain."

"That all you care about?"

I cared considerable about Bee, but I didn't say so. "Bee's got the eye fer ya, U."

"I have got to build an engine, a flying engine." He lost himself starin over toward the sun, settin just then.

U begun his flight trainin for real. His engine studies showed him stuff the Wright brothers were workin on. Ah course, since Wilbur was born in the next county, that got his competitive blood goin. He wanted

to be first, Hoosier first. In his attic room, on his bed quilt, he dumped out the study package, saw a leather lesson book and its 'question pages,' each startin with a commandment, like "Think. Do not simply recollect or repeat." U saw the wherefer of that, saw that memorizin weren't 'nuff. He spread out the first-week packet, thinkin on new words: fasteners, sealants, gaskets; magnetism, cycles and components. The next week, he thunk on fuel lines, air induction, ignition. The third week, it were engine disassembly, cylinders, valves. Before long, he started goin to Smitty's, the blacksmith shop on Boundary Pike, and buildin small gasoline engines for bike pumps, butter churns, and ringer warshers. After that, he made a thrashin machine engine, not small a'tall. Engine exercises, he called 'em.

German aviation pioneer Otto Lillienthal (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Lilienthal) makes a flight attempt in 1895. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Engines was the cat's whiskers in these Hoosier parts—the gas boom in Gas City, backyard strikes of oil, Elwood Haynes the inventor of the first automobile nearby in Portland. But U didn't care about any kind of engines except winged engines. He turned his brain to the workins of how to fly, called, aerodynam-somethin. He hammered together kites that got tore up in Myrtle May's clothes line. She made him stop that. Then, he did model airplanes out of horse glue and balin wire, stretches of shaved hickory for wings. He'd hurdle through the waves of green timothy, pullin eight-foot wings with binder twine. The tall grass cut his arms but it didn't matter to U. Once one of these model planes caught a hot air patch and shot up, landin after twenty-seven seconds 'without incident' as U bragged to the neighbors watchin from the Back Forty. On a fencepost next to me sat Bee, purty as a picture and payin me no mind. She was all out for U, hollerin and hollerin. He heard her voice and froze her face when he shot her a wink.

That was a big day fer U, but it liked to make me feel small. All I had was a stockboy job stackin boxes at Ross's Dry Goods in Bryant. Well, it weren't all I had. I could eat penny candy till my dad's cows come home. Tootsie Rolls mornin, night, and noon. They busted my gut. I et lots of licorice twists fer that. Plus, the owner's daughter, Crystal Caster, took a shine to me. She worked the yard table, rollin out bolts of cloth, markin em for dresses. Like I told U, pretty soon she got hold of my bolt, back where they stored the feed sacks. U thought I shoulda been more of a gentleman. Maybe he preached that way cause he'd started with Bee, a lady I'd give my own heart.

U was her hero. She baked him cherry pies—gold lard crust laid on like a picket fence—and made a pine box fer his draftin pencils. She took piano lessons from Widow Jones, best teacher in the county, so's to play keyboard fer him, even sing Saturdays. U fancied her, but he didn't do nothin much about it cause of his dream. That give me a try with Bee, when U wudn't lookin, him busy makin a bigger plane, a bigger engine, to lift him to the sky. He went on and on about wings of angle iron, ribs of steel, billy goat skin.

One hot sticky mornin, of a Sunday when the church bells was clangin, he was ready, and so was I. We took a hay rope, hooked it to the flying contraption—named 'Blind Pig'— then latched the other end to his uncle Earl's car fender. U drove the car, clutched it to top thirty-five miles per, when it stopped dead. U cut loose the rope and the glider flew up over the pasture like from a slingshot, waggin its wings like Taft's top hat, before comin down buryin its wheels into the mud. U jumped out the car and pushed hard on a stuck wheel. He had nature's own strength, like he was born a bear. It got unstuck sorta, then fell back, right on his left foot. Four toes crushed. Bee was there, standin tall and fine in the alfalfa, and saw it all.

Luck saved his big toe, the others didn't wiggle no more. Bee cried like a bobcat caught in a mole trap. She cycled over to his home place ever night after fer days and days, to rub his foot and soak his toes in Epsom salts. Didn't make no difference. She wanted him whole. One night I was there whittlin on the front porch swing, heard 'em wooin in the parlor, after she had sung to him about pickin violets in spring. It tore me up.

"Ulysses," said Bee.

"Yes?" said U.

"Your toes. I prayed. I'm prayin yet."

"Well, the big one works." U never let on his pain.

"You are brave. They have to hurt." She whimpered.

"Best get back to Smitty's."

"You're my flyboy, Ulysses— all the way to the moon." I heard Bee move, like her dress was swishin. Then the rocker rocked more. I tried not to listen.

Bee kept her faith, in U and the Lord Almighty. At the Church Social, she showed strong, sipped her lemonade. I watched her paint a valentine on the cool wet of the pitcher, put in it 'B + U.' Then she went all still. U's ma, Myrtle May, had went gray with worry over the harm he could come to. She turned poorly, took too many nips of Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup. U told me she kept the syrup on that walnut chest-o'-drawers in the pantry, next to them cans of lard. He told Bee and Myrtle May he knowed it would all work out cause—like he said—he could do what had to be done. He rose up like a gladiator, ready for the lions.

The rest of the summer, U pounded and banged. He built a gliding plane, wide as twenty farmhands standin side by side. Also, he hammered on a big engine, six cylinders. Winter settled in, frost froze its fuel. He parked that whopper of a flyin machine in Cheever Tate's main storage barn, covered the engine in sheep's wool. With spring a thaw come on. The bog sprouted lily pads, the toads hopped out their holes. Once the dandelions yellowed up, he knowed he could try again. When the wind was right, he could try his glider. It would fly high, then he would mount the engine and shoot for the stars.

"T]he rest of the summer, U pounded and banged. He built a gliding plane, wide as twenty farmhands standin side by side. Also, he hammered on a big engine, six Cylinders. "

The *Weekly Commercial Review* put out a broadside—"Poling Man to Fly"—advertisin over three Indiana counties—Jay, Blackford, and Randolph—not to mention nearby Ohio counties, includin Dayton. Lots of folks puttin money down, talkin about an "airplane." One late May day of 1903, circled by young'uns playin Ring-Around-The-Rosie, me and U hitched four two-thousand-pound Clydesdales to the Blind Pig II, in Laff Lybarger's high-ground field, where we'd been practicin. Word went out the township, and spectators, eighty-seven by one count, showed up, ready to roar fer U. They hooted and hooted, louder and louder, once the horses started jinglin and snortin. The team, the finest in Eastern Indiana, belonged to Harry Hardroe from out Winchester way.

Harry shooed the ornery kids with the flat end of his whip. At ten o'clock on the dot, the sun breakin full over the last daffodils, Harry slapped the lead horse on his haunches, makin 'em all thunder acrost the rotted fall cornstalks. These broad beasts, chestnut chests full of pant, did not fall, did not falter, hoofs rising and falling in a rural reel. The Blind Pig II did rise, too, U riding

the glider as it got hauled along. When it climbed high as the cottonwood tops he waved to Bee, who fixed a love look on him. I couldn't see much of it cause of her parasol. Then the glider lost the pocket and it drifted down just past County Road 47, missin a silo, missin the gravel pit, but finally stopped, twistin in the Gibsons' bramble bushes.

Fer no reason, when the plane plowed into the brambles, the crowd rose up a hymn, a hymn everbody knowed. U's aunt Marthy, most particular, belted it out: 'Oh come, come, come, come, come to the church by the wildwood…' After she took a breath, Norval Reidenbach, U's neighbor from the farm over, said, "Guess U was right, people fly better'n pigeons." Everbody got a laugh. Next thing I knowed, a bunch of young fellas yanked U's red bandana off his neck, hoisted him out of the plane, heaved him on a wagon bed, where the Clydesdales was hitched. Harry beat his belly like a drum, drove his team and U all the way to the Lob Lolly General Store, everbody yellin and throwin cattails and cow pies at U from the ditch. At the Lob Lolly, Issac Brown—the proprietor—give him free pickles, many as he could eat. Bee had been waitin for him in the store, over by the laundry soap. When U waved her over to the pickle barrel, she went all pink. I coulda done with some of that color.

> "The Blind Pig II did rise, too, U riding the glider as it got hauled along. When it climbed high as the cottonwood tops he waved to Bee, who fixed a love look on him."

The way back home on my buckboard I felt grouchy as a bull with a pug ass, like dad would say. I was plumb wore out from handlin the glider and the horses, and my butt was plain sore. U was full of hisself. "That crate flies, Wick. I can fly! The people cheered me. You see Bee's face?!"

"I did," I said. "She's moonstruck fer her man." I didn't say that no one wasted a word or a wink my direction, cept when Bee yelped at me fer steppin on her Sunday shoes.

We bounced the rest of the way, keepin to ourselves, till the smell of a dead skunk hit us at Gallager's Swamp. "Pee-yew!" said U. "Worse than your farts." I'd never heard U talk like that before.

U knowed now the contraption was sky-worthy, would fly fine. All it needed was his guidin hand, him at the helm, with the right engine at his fingertips, to power the propellers. He set about finishin the engine— just a four-banger for better size, with air-holes, to fit tight under his seat. Time was runnin out. I heard tell Sarah Worth, the Wright boys' cousin in Bryant, had wrote'm about U and his flyin notions. So U had to double up. Slavin long hours, mostly by kerosene, forgettin his farm chores, he bunked out at Smitty's on an army cot, up at dawn. U told me Bee would bring him bacon and egg sandwiches at noon, then split an apple with him, before he walked her back to the gate. He didn't tell me what they did there.

The mornin of the eighth day of August 1903, his twenty-third birthday, hammerin away to finish the pilot seat, he turned to grab a board from the wood bin. He slid out a slat had a nail in it, halfway. His left-hand, his workin hand, gripped into the nail. He yelled out and Smitty come, wrapped a piece of burlap around it, and trotted him to Doc Gillum. Smitty collared me to go over to Doc's place and wait with U.

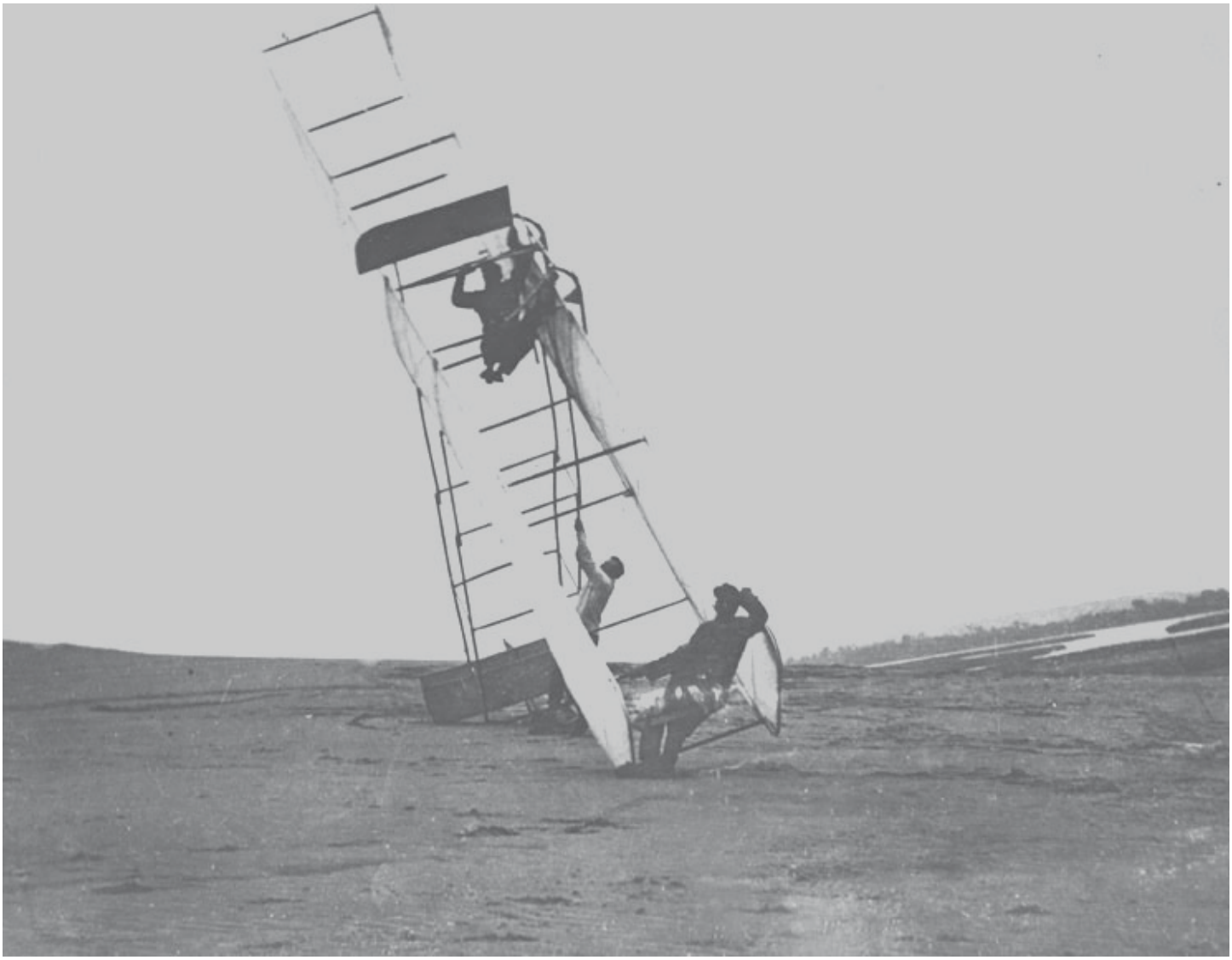
Doc pulled the board up and the nail come with it, out of U's hand. U turned white, a white stone. Somethin to watch. He doctored U, I bundled him home. A few days later, when I went to his attic hideout, it was 99 degrees fairinhight. "I can't get him downstairs," Myrtle May said, as she warshed his face with cool well water. "Feel his forehead, hotter'n this attic." I put my palm on his temple. It liked to burn me. I heard Bee's voice, comin up the steps, wailin like a widow-woman.

When she swung open the door, she changed. "Wick, get out of the way. Myrtle, please fetch me some washrags and that bottle of witch hazel. Let me take out that attic window." She knocked loose the window jam and air come in.

"I'll ride over get the Doc back," I said.

Doc Gillum diagnosed, "tetanus—incurable." That learned me two words I'd never forget. I confess I could hardly hold up. Ever day I went over and rubbed U's arms, told him how we was gonna go up again, get them gas gliders goin. Sometimes he didn't know me, would cuss me out. He was better with Bee. She cooed and warshed his eyes with cold water, one at a time, first blue then brown, back and forth. A true special lady. Next thing, afer we knowed it, his neck don't turn, his face twisted up like a Halloween mask, couldn't even keep down Myrtle May's special chicken soup. His jaw locked like a vise, and he'd have crazy man fits. U died a week later. Without U to horse around with, I was a blank slug. Mostly, I just swigged Old Crow.

The funeral service, held at Bear Creek Methodist, brought folks from five Indiana counties, and next door—Ohio— counties. Even the Wright brothers made the trip. They'd been meanin to get to Poling Town ever since cousin Sarah had wrote about her neighbor—the



Orville Wright crashes one of the early Wright Flyers at Kitty Hawk, NC, in 1911. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

boy 'Born to Fly,' she'd put it. Now they come, Orville and Wilbur, as pallbearers, sad to say. Their testimony got to the mourners and the church choir salved 'em by repeated rounds of "Rock of Ages." 'Rock of ages, cleft for me/ Let me hide myself in Thee…' During everthin, Bee kept a distance, upright under the shade of an old oak, in a black dress. She didn't have nothin on her head or face. I wanted to talk to her but I couldn't.

The Wright Brothers' first successful flight, December 17, 1903. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

After the mourners had gone, I stood over the grave. I took off my itchy collar, rolled up my sleeves, reached in my tote and pulled out a pigeon, a dead white one, put it on the grave dirt. U had finally flown better'n a pigeon, just as he was born to. My best buddy winged his way to the Pearly Gates. I wandered off into a field of corn, summer sweet, like U and I had done ever August, before start of school. U never got sick from it, I always did. I et one ear raw, then shucked another and et it, and another, till I got a powerful bellyache.

At Christmastime, the August heat made for a distant memory. The ground froze, the cornstalks hard stubble, the fields dusted with snow. I stumbled over clods of soil, crost a field onto the Kidd place, went to a grove of pines, chopped one down with my axe, tied it to my buggy, and took it over to Bee's. She saw me tetherin my pony by the root cellar and waved me up to the house. I dragged the tree to the parlor, stuck it in a warsh tub next to the wide window overlookin the road. She put a tinsel star on the top, one she'd made for U. She cried till she couldn't cry no more. I felt too low to cry. I had felt too low to even come see Bee, to my shame. Here I was now, to make a try.

"Bee, our U's gone, gone almost six months," I said.

"Yes, over the moon, he is. More like four months. One-hundred-and-thirteen days, actually," said Bee.

"Seems longer."

"Seems like my lifetime." With bony fingers, she tugged at her gingham dress, liked to wipe off the black-and-white checks. She said nothin else, just stroked her dress.

"When ya lost U, Bee, ya lost yer world. I lost mine, too. Now we got nothin left but our feelins for U. A candle still burnin." I got up out my straight-backed chair and went down on one knee. "Will you marry me?" .

Bee went back to her scissors and thread, her thimble, went to the davenport, returned to the string of popcorn she had been workin on.

"No, Chester. Thank you. No."

Day after New Year's I left the farm and Poling Town, moved into Portland, got a room over Klofenstein's Hardware, paid the rent by sweepin the store. Didn't feel much like chasin the ladies, not since Bee. I did run into her at Stabler's Drug. She said she'd quit the farm to work at the county courthouse, acrost the alley. Put up a museum there—stuffed owls, arrowheads, gas lights, old maps, carved canes, soldier medals, toads in jars. I visited it once. They was bird wings, all sorts, wings from hawks, pheasants, larks, robins, jays, crows, chickens—you name it, except for pigeons. A piece, too, of wooden wing from the Blind Pig II, with a label she sewed on. It said, Alexander Ulysses: Conqueror of the Sky. Myrtle May never did see it. She did tell me once that on U's birthday she read aloud over his grave, from the *Dayton Daily News*, the big story about Orville and Wilbur Wright. "The headline says 'First in Flight.' We know better." I didn't have the heart to say otherwise.

All images courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted

Fly Fishing in the Driftless Region

by Michael Burt

I am obsessed with fly fishing for trout. In Iowa, trout are only found in far northeastern Iowa streams. When weather and water conditions are favorable for catching fish, I make every effort to get to one of my favorite Iowa trout waters, tolerating the 340-mile round trip for a day of fishing. I will fish long hours in the heat or cold any time of year; I will walk far and work hard for the chance to catch trout. I target unstocked sections of streams or tough areas with difficult access to find water with limited pressure, which often improves my chances for success. I've only fished trout for ten years, using spinning tackle and artificial lures for four years before taking up fly fishing. During this time, I've worked diligently to improve my trout angling skills, dedicating countless hours to bettering myself. It has been a labor of love to pursue trout in this beautiful part of the state.

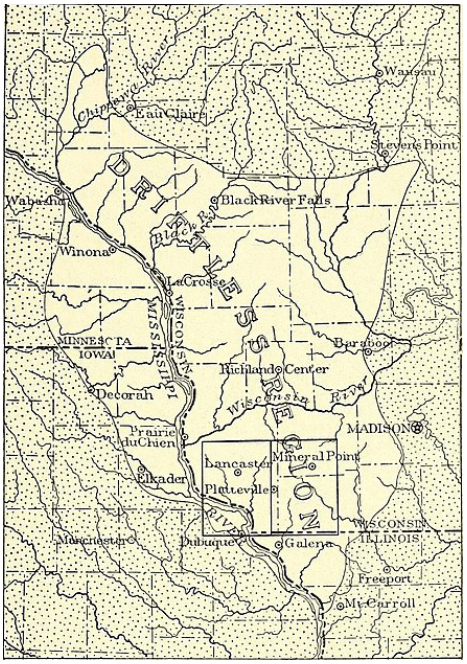
Nymphs imitate the immature larval stage of aquatic insects, like caddisflies and mayflies, and subaquatic species, like worms, scuds, and leeches. Nymphs can be drifted to fish with a tight line presentation using "sighter" line to detect strikes or with any form of strike indicator attached to the line functioning like a bobber. This aids the fisherman in determining if a fish is interested in the bait and, if lucky, if a fish has taken the bait. Dry flies imitate mature adult insects, including many kinds of stream flies and terrestrial insects, like grasshoppers and beetles. Dry flies are cast directly to the surface-feeding fish or drifted to fish using stream current. Streamers imitate small baitfish and crawfish

Michael Burt *recently retired from Grinnell College after working nearly 33 years in Facilities Management as Associate Director for Grounds, Landscaping, and Hauling. Mike received his BS degree in Horticulture from Iowa State University in 1983 and MS from ISU in 1989. Mike has been married to Diane for 40 years, and their four children, Bailey, Ben, Hannah, and Sam, all attended Grinnell College. Since retiring, Mike is finding more time to walk his golden retriever, Rosie; keep up the yard, garden, and 110-year-old house; hunt waterfowl and turkeys; and fish—mostly for trout!*

**All references appear in Endnotes in the back of the issue.*

and are fished with an active retrieve by pulling line in quickly.

Fly fishing requires a myriad of gear and accessories, and between fishing trips it is critical to spend time at home keeping it all in good working condition and organized. Quality waders and wading boots, fly rods and reels, and nets are essential. A good vest or pack is required to hold everything within easy reach that could possibly be needed streamside. The weather dictates clothing needed, and a change of clothes is a good idea, as wading accidents will occur. I stay connected to fly fishing by reading and rereading classic fly fishing literature, with a book always open on the nightstand. Indeed, it is virtually my only reading done for pleasure. YouTube provides me with hours and hours of fly-tying instruction, fly fishing how-tos, and awesome fly fishing adventures from around the world. I have always liked to fish. It seems now I live to fish.



1911 map of the Driftless region[1] of Iowa and Wisconsin.[1]

To stay connected to fly fishing when at home, I tie all my own flies: nymphs, dry flies, and streamers. Additionally, I make all my own leaders, which primarily protect the main fishing line from damage and breaking, by fastening 20-pound test camouflaged monofilament to my fly line. And, tying progressively smaller diameter camo monofilament together forms the taper to a short section of brightly colored or bicolored monofilament that makes strike detection visible to the wielder. To finish it off, the tippet then connects to this "sighter" line, allowing flies to be attached to the leader. Because in Iowa we are allowed to fish two flies per line, I tie a new two fly tippet and prepare some spares at home prior to the next fishing trip.

Driving into northeast Iowa, one sees and begins to feel a change come over the landscape. The land is more rugged and roads are no longer oriented north to south and east to west as is common in the rest of Iowa. They switch back and snake along stream valleys and over ridgetops. Agricultural fields of northeast Iowa often are contour farmed, and the large, rectangular farm fields common to much of the state are replaced by fields in seemingly limitless shapes and sizes. The timber thickens and the steep, inaccessible ridgetops create a sense of remoteness and ancientness. Even driving, you imagine yourself in a remote ridgetop timber beneath the dense canopy, planted on the sun-starved forest floor. In appearance, the contrast that this area provides to the rest of Iowa is remarkable.

During this drive to Decorah's Pulpit Rock Campground (https://parks.decorahia.org/pulpit-rock-campground) for a three-day fishing and camping trip with Diane, my wife, and our friends Steve and Lisa, I think about why this particular trip seems so important to me. Perhaps I just need to get away and try to forget about things. It has been hard not to dwell on our country's intensely polarized political climate fueled by rampant misinformation, our resulting dysfunctional government, and the ongoing threat to our democracy. The long-lasting pandemic, with so many in our nation more concerned about their individual rights rather than for the greater good of others, provides little hope for the immediate future. Affecting my family very directly, the death of my mother to pancreatic cancer in summer 2020, and my father's terminal liver cancer diagnosis in summer 2021 has taken an emotional toll on my sisters and me. We are nearly two weeks into Hospice home care for dad, and he isn't doing well. I have been apprehensive about what lay ahead for him and the end-of-life decisions we will again be facing.

The past two years have been difficult for me. I find myself regularly distracted, anxious, and impatient. I've often commented that it seems the only thing that has gone well for me during this time is fly fishing. May-

be this trip is important because I am just looking forward to fishing. I get completely absorbed in the moment, clearing my mind and focusing only on the task at hand—catching the next fish. For me, trout fishing is peaceful and calming, and I am grateful for the solace found on trout waters. Between dad's health and my work, I have had little opportunity to fish since mid-summer, but I am thankful for the time spent over the past few months with dad and my sisters and hope to return home with at least some renewed faith and optimism for the future.

I began fishing with my dad as a very young boy. Dad taught me about fishing equipment, how to find and use live bait and what to use for artificial bait, how to locate and catch fish, and how to clean fish and prepare them for the table. We fished ponds, Big Creek Lake (https://www.iowadnr.gov/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Lakes-Ponds-Reservoirs/LakeDetails/lakeCode/BIC77), and the Des Moines River (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Des_Moines_River) catching bluegill, bass, crappie, and catfish near our home in central Iowa. Dad would often share helpful insight when I couldn't get fish to bite, telling me I wasn't holding my mouth right. Or, when a fish would strike and I couldn't hook it, he would tell me that I really missed that one. He seldom fished as he got older, and Dad never fished for trout.

"Dad would often share helpful insight when I couldn't get fish to bit, telling me I wasn't holding my mouth right."

Trout fishing in northeast Iowa is excellent, and anglers can fish year-round with no closed season. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources keeps the streams well stocked with ten to thirteen inch put-and-take rainbow trout. The spring-spawning "Rainbows" don't reproduce naturally here. However, rainbow trout tolerate the hatchery conditions far better than brown and brook trout and thus are much easier and more economical to produce. In Iowa streams, fall-spawning brown trout are now reproducing naturally, providing self-sustaining populations that produce good numbers of fish. Because of this sustainability, there are no plans to continue to stock brown trout in Iowa streams. Brook trout also are fall-spawners and the state's only native trout. Due to their more specific spawning and habitat requirements, particularly cold, clean, high-quality water, "Brookies" reproduce and thrive only in a select few streams. Brook trout are stocked only as two-inch fingerlings in area streams with habitats conducive to their reproduction and survival.

The Driftless Area (https://eaglebluffmn.org/resources/driftless), which people there simply refer to as the Driftless, comprises southwest Wisconsin, southeast Minnesota, northeast Iowa and a small section of far northwest Illinois. Approximately, 85 percent of the Driftless is found in the southwest quarter of Wisconsin. This area was not covered by ice sheets during the fourth, final Pleistocene glaciation called the Wisconsin Glacial Advance. Because of this isolation, the Driftless lacks drift: the clay, silt, sand, gravel, and boulders left behind by the receding glaciers. Common landscape features of the Driftless include steep hills and bluffs, called Coulees in Wisconsin, thickly forested ridges, deeply gouged streams and river valleys, karst topography, and the heavily fractured bedrock of limestone that surface water flows through to erode and form caves, disappearing streams, surface water sinks called sinkholes, shallow ground aquifers, and underground streams that often resurface as cold-water springs. These springs supply the cold, clear, oxygenated water to area streams. This high-quality water combined with the limestone dominated stream beds and their variable stream bed composition, flow gradients, and water depths provide the habitat trout need and the support for plant and insect life that trout depend on. Trout live in beautiful places, and the Driftless is a beautiful land of diverse habitats: a topographical island in the otherwise flattened Midwest landscape.

On Sunday, the last day of our three-day camping and fishing trip, Steve and I leave the campground well before sunrise on a gorgeous mid-October morning in the Driftless. It is warm with a light breeze and

the many visible stars tell us that we will be seeing the sun at sunrise. We are heading to Waterloo Creek to fish the restrictive, regulated stream section that mandates catch and release of all fish and only artificial lures. Catch and release angling usually eliminates the need for put-and-take stream stocking programs, and results in larger, "wilder" trout better adapted for long term survival in the streams. I practice catch and release when trout fishing, releasing all brown and brook trout netted and only occasionally taking for the table put-and-take rainbow trout. The use of artificial lures is much safer for the trout than fishing with live bait. Fish tend to swallow live bait, and the hooks are usually impossible to remove without injuring or killing the fish. I always use barbless hooks on the flies I hand tie. They are much easier to remove and thus inflict little damage to fish.

We were hoping to be the first anglers to the parking lot, but a wrong turn ended up taking us well out of the way and cutting into our precious angling time. Checkout time at the campground would be 1:00 p.m., and Steve and I figured we would need to be off the stream and heading for my truck by 10 a.m. We got to the stream parking lot as the sun below the horizon began to illuminate the eastern sky. The parking lot was empty, thankfully, and Steve and I rigged up our fly rods and put on our waders and boots.

We crossed the stream near the parking lot and found the water to be very clear and at normal level. The dry summer and fall had led to reduced stream flows and very clear water that had made fishing challenging. Despite these conditions, Steve and I had enjoyed the usual good fishing on South Bear Creek (https://www.iowadnr.gov/idnr/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Trout-Streams/Stream-Details?lakeCode=TSB96) on Friday, catching a mix of brown and rainbow trout in good numbers, but nothing big. We found the fishing at Coon Creek (https://www.iowadnr.gov/idnr/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Trout-Streams/Stream-Details?lakeCode=TCN96) Saturday morning slow, catching only several rainbow trout and many very small brown trout. I fished Twin Springs Creek (https://www.iowadnr.gov/idnr/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Trout-Streams/Stream-Details?lakeCode=TTS96) right behind our campsite Saturday afternoon and had great fun catching many rainbow trout from the shallow, clear water. As Steve and I hiked downstream at Waterloo Creek (https://www.iowadnr.gov/idnr/Fishing/Where-to-Fish/Trout-Streams/Stream-Details/lakeCode/TWA03), two bald eagles flew upstream, apparently also starting their fishing day. Bald eagles are commonly seen in the Driftless, often trying to catch trout. Just as we got to the stream, the sun topped the bluffs to the southeast, and the morning's first golden sunlight danced on the stream's broken surface.

Steve and I had been catching fish all morning, including a nice 15-inch brown trout just hooked and landed. I consider any Driftless trout 15 inches or larger a good fish, and we remained optimistic that we may yet find a big fish in the great looking water upstream. I checked my phone, and it would soon be 10 a.m. and time for us to head to the truck. Steve stayed to fish just downstream of the deep corner pool fed by a fast, shallow riffle with the fastest water flowing closer to the far bank and hard around the corner. The deepest, darkest water of the pool was between the faster water and the shallow gravel bar where I positioned myself. Because of the bright sunlight and gin-clear water, I expected the best fish in the pool to be holding in the deepest water and where the current moved food directly to them.

I cast my hand-tied, tungsten bead-headed pine squirrel leech fly (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMIHeu7DP54) upstream and across into the faster water and let it drift downstream. The fly stayed in the shallower, faster water along the far bank and around the corner—not the drift I or a hungry fish wanted. I placed the next cast upstream right at the inside seam between faster and slower water. The fly rode the current downstream, but this time found the slower water at the top of the pool and sank quickly into deep water. I fished the fly slowly, felt a slight tap, set the hook, but no fish. The next cast repeated the same drift and as the fly again settled into the slower, deep water, I felt a solid take and responded quickly with a downstream hookset. I instantly found myself fast to a good, heavy fish that took line easily even though swimming upstream into fast current. Not liking the shallow water it found there, the big trout turned back downstream making for the deep corner pool, content to settle this fight in the deepest water with violent head shakes and short runs.

My heart pounded from excitement during the difficult, lengthy battle with the fish and from the fear of potentially losing it. I remember last year in this same stream section, when I broke off a very large brown trout. That memory haunts me. Though my angling skills continue to improve, and I've become a more confident angler and have netted progressively larger trout with each fly fishing season, I wasn't certain I'd net this fish. Keeping steady pressure on it by slowly backing downstream, I took line when possible and allowed line to be pulled off the reel during the fish's frequent runs. Eventually, I worked the big fish close enough to determine it was a large, male brown trout, and it appeared to be hooked solidly in one corner of its mouth. After making it to a shallow spot to net the fish, I held my ground and slowly worked the big brown trout towards me. My first attempt to net the fish was a failure. It spooked as I extended my net and made its last long run to the far bank, tiring as I worked him ever so slowly back towards me. The second net attempt was successful, and with the great brown trout in hand, I

was an elated fisherman. After a few hollers and high fives, I easily removed the barbless hook, and Steve and I worked quickly to get a few more photos, measure its length, and release the great brown trout unharmed back to the stream, perhaps one day again to be caught by another lucky Driftless angler.

The beautiful male brown trout (https://www.iowadnr.gov/Fishing/Iowa-Fish-Species/Fish-Details/speciescode/brt) measured twenty-one inches long, and due to the thickness and height of its body, I estimated that it weighed well over four pounds. The photos show its big square tail and huge, bright sunflower yellow fins, a distinctive kyped jaw, and a stunningly beautiful, dark olive spotted back and bright golden spotted sides that transitioned to its amber underbelly. I am thankful to have had the chance to hook, land, and release such a wonderful Iowa Driftless brown trout, and to have shared this experience with my fishing buddy. The pictures he took really capture the beauty of that fish and the stream that is its home. My goal over the past three fishing seasons has been to land a twenty-inch brown trout because I hadn't caught one previously, and fish that size are not all that common in Iowa's Driftless streams. During this quest for the twenty-inch brown trout, I caught several dozen fish over sixteen inches with a few fish topping nineteen inches. However, all those fish paled in comparison to the size and beauty of the brown trout in this story. My next fly fishing goal will simply be to catch a larger Driftless brown trout and to enjoy every moment in pursuit of it. I will fish as often as possible when weather and stream conditions are favorable especially during the spring and fall, fish the better Driftless streams that can support large fish, continue to improve my angling skills, and hope to have good luck on my side.

Diane and I packed up the truck, said and hugged our goodbyes with Steve and Lisa. Once we were back on the road and without the excitement of fishing, camping, and friends, my mind wandered back to my dad and his terminal liver cancer diagnosis: the man who taught me to fish, starting me on a fishing life that is now an obsession for catching trout with flies. An obsession that leads me to sanctuary, solitude, and great sport in this beautiful, distinctive Driftless Iowa landscape. I called my sister to see how dad was doing. She said he had continued to decline and would be moved from home to the nearby Johnston Hospice facility the next day, Monday. As we continued the drive towards home, I thought about the amazingly unique, limestone dominated landscape that is the Driftless, the great time we had with our old friends, the battle I was lucky to win with that great brown trout, and how I value this wonderful cold-water fishery and the serenity and solace I find there. But mostly, I thought about my dad.

My father, Gene Goode Burt, would pass away peacefully on Friday October 15, 2021, with our family and the Johnston, Iowa, Hospice staff by his side. He is missed.

All All images and videos shot by Madigan Burke

Making Art with an "Eloquent Invasive"

by Hannah Taylor

Queen Anne's lace is ubiquitous in the Midwest, nodding in the breeze along nearly every roadway and trail, sprouting among the other prairie flowers so prolifically that one could be forgiven for thinking it's always been there. However—as any prairie restorationist will tell you—it's an invasive species, introduced as an ornamental by European settlers decades ago. But while prairie gardners might want to eradicate it, artist Hannah Taylor has found a reason to celebrate it, making it the subject of an art installation she created during her time as artist-in-residence at the Wormfarm Institute (https://www.wormfarminstitute.org).

Taylor hung her installation on the top of a hill in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin (https://driftlesswisconsin.com) on August 28, 2021. She began pressing the wild carrot a week before installing the piece, which only remained on the hill for a few hours, long enough for Taylor's videographer, Madigan Burke, to capture the finished project as it danced in the wind.

Hannah Taylor '21 *uses red thread to construct sculptures and record relationships with surrounding ecosystems. With a B.A. in Studio Art and Psychology from Grinnell College, she asks how human perceptions combine with the memory embedded in landscapes to shape understandings of the natural world. Taylor's work emerges from her formal craft training at the Vermont Woodworking School, seasons of building and maintaining trails in Colorado, and most recently, her time as a student and artist in residence in the Midwest. She currently lives and works in Summit County, Colorado. You'll find more information on her website (www.hannahctaylor.com) or you'll find her on Instagram @hannahtaylorstudio.*

Daucus carota

Wild carrot, also known as Queen Anne's Lace, continues to enchant me. I'm interested in plants that grow in spaces that cannot be categorized as natural or manufactured, and in how this plant life interacts with human life.

During my residency at Wormfarm Institute, Wild carrot has greeted me in the morning when I walk outside. I look up to the hillside and see the light coming through all of its faces. I see wild carrot along the roadsides, especially on the road where I have to go to take phone calls. I see it lining the edges of forests and nesting in pockets of land between cornfields.

Daucus carota is ecologically invasive. Looking around, this makes sense. There is a certain overwhelming strength to it, a hardiness. At the same time, I find it full of eloquence.

Since the flowers only stay pressed for about a day before they begin to fold, I wrapped and balanced the plants during the morning leading up to the installation. After drying and pressing dozens of the flowers, I carefully picked up two at a time and wrapped the parallel stems together with thread. With this done, I took two more and overlapped them across the existing pair, making an X. I have to balance the thickness of the stems and the weight of the intricate flowers, adjusting the pairs by sliding them up and down the stems. I don't tie the thread, but instead I pin it between the sturdy stems once they are wrapped. I make these mobiles as mechanisms to celebrate these delicately strong plants.

I wrote the following poem when I first climbed up the hill on which I installed the mobile, on August 7th, 2021:

I sit on a hill with wild carrot
The white flowers turn their faces to the sky
They play on this hill, layers and layers
Swaying in the wind

Welcome

Come and sit with us. Turn your face to the sky
To follow the breeze
To surround yourself with the density of being alive.

To see the first of two short videos Madigan Burke made documenting Hannah Taylor's wild carrot installation, follow this link:https://rootstalk.blob.core.windows.net/rootstalk-2022-spring/In-the-sky.mov

To see the second of two short videos Madigan Burke made documenting Hannah Taylor's wild carrot installation, follow this link: https://rootstalk.blob.core.windows.net/rootstalk-2022-spring/Approach(2).mov

"...[W]ild carrot has greeted me in the morning when I walk outside. I look up to the hillside and see the light coming through all of its faces."

Photo courtesy of Xonzy Gaddis

Associate Editor **Xonzy Gaddis '22** *is a native Venezuelan who has lived in Texas for nearly two decades. She is a graduate of Grinnell College, where she earned her degree in Political Science and Latin American Studies. Over the past year, she served as a Data and Policy Intern for the Justice Administration Department for Harris County, Texas, through the Leadership, Experience, & Employment Program and the Texas Legislative Internship Program as well as a Project Associate for the Texas Center for Justice & Equity (https://texascje.org).*

To watch Xonzy Gaddis's full video interview with Blossom Aloe, enter this URL in your browser: https://youtu.be/3z74fF-CLoU8.

Interview:

Blossom Aloe Extends Roots Across Texas

by Xonzy Gaddis

Blossom Aloe (https://www.instagram.com/blossomaloeband/?hl=en) is a Texas band from the Houston area that has been making a name for itself on the indie music scene. Associate Editor Xonzy Gaddis conducted an extended interview with the group this spring to find out about its history and inspirations. The following transcript was edited for readability.

I grew up swimming and going to school with Jafet Lujan, Aaron Ruiz and Henry Huelskamp--all members of the musical group Blossom Aloe. I knew Henry played guitar, but when I saw he was in a band with Jafet and Aaron, and that they had been featured on NPR's World Cafe (https://www.npr.org/sections/world-cafe) playlist, I dug around on Spotify (https://www.spotify.com/us) and found one of their top songs, titled "Holding On," and found myself listening to the rest of their discography. Their music features tranquil synths and a sound that rivals that of Tame Impala (https://official.tameimpala.com/#). For me, it's a perfect soundtrack for a soothing drive through the rolling hills of central Texas.

Blossom Aloe is an indie band comprising five members, including Jafet Lujan (lead singer), Josh Vargas (producer), Ian Morales (drummer), Aaron Ruiz (bassist), and Henry Huelskamp (lead guitarist). The band members all hail from Houston, Texas, but have continued to expand their range, building a following in central Texas and beyond.

The band started out nearly a year ago when lead singer Jafet pulled in Josh's production talent and Aaron's bass skills, and Ian and Henry joined along the way.

Now the group is celebrating the completion of their first album called *A Place We Used to Be* (https://open.spotify.com/album/36Wm5HxoJI6aIM8ux54HuI). The rising fame the album brought them in Texas won them a spot in the lineup at the annual Float Fest (https://floatfest.net/?) in Gonzales, Texas, right next to big names such as Chance the Rapper (https://open.spotify.com/artist/1anyVhU62p31KFi8MEzkbf) and Cage the Elephant (https://www.cagetheelephant.com/home).

I conducted a video interview (https://youtu.be/3z74ffclou8) with the group to learn more about their growth in the world of music. This is Blossom Aloe.

Rootstalk: Tell me a bit about yourselves and your roles in the band.

Josh Vargas: I'm Josh and I play guitar, sing, and I also play keys in Blossom Aloe. And I'm also the producer for the band.

Ian Morales: I'm Ian, and I play drums for the band. And yeah, I do all sorts of things in my free time, but I never thought I'd be a drummer. So here we are.

Henry Huelskamp: I play lead guitar in Blossom Aloe, but I also do like drums and bass at home, and I play with a lot of pedals in my alone time. That's kind of what I do. And I try to bring the pedals and the songs to life in the live setting.

Aaron Alejandro Ruiz Davila: My favorite place to play is in the comfort of my room, just feeling whatever music I'm trying to play or am listening to. I'm the bass player. The reason I play is because I love playing alongside my best friend, Jafet, and I also love playing the bass.

Jafet David Lujan (aka Bluff): My favorite place to perform so far would have to be The Concert Pub (https://www.theconcertpub.com/TCP-North.html) north of Houston. I have many positions in the band, for example, I play the guitar, I play the congas, but then I also write the lyrics and song structure to most of the songs I sing in, but I also let the band help as well. Then last but not least, I perform because I love seeing people actually enjoy the music we play/created and also it's just so freaking *fun*.

Rootstalk: How did Blossom Aloe start out? What are the band's roots?

Vargas: Actually, on the album, there's a little Easter egg at the end of "Lost in My Dreams" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCUodk8_Sfw), where it was a sample. And that's the first song that we made together because [Jafet] brought in the song and [Jafet] only had a verse and a chorus, there wasn't really like a bridge or [anything]. And he said that he had the song complete, but when he came through, he only had a few chords. So, he wanted me to help him out to finish a song. And we finished the song that day;

Blossom Aloe (L to R) are: Jafet Lujan, Ian Morales, Henry Huelskamp, Josh Vargas and Aaron Ruiz. Photo courtesy of Micahl wyckoff

we took five or six hours and completed [it] right then and there. And [Jafet] was like, "Dude, this song's so good. I never thought it would sound like this. We should work together again."

You know, sometimes there's, like, a [hindrance] on creative freedom, at least [with] the bands that I've been in. So that's why I was put off [about] being in a band. So whenever [Jafet] asked me that, I was like, "Yeah, I don't know. We'll see, whatever." So [Jafet says] "Dude, I know this drummer," or "I know a bassist. He's my buddy, Aaron. He could play bass for us." And that's when Aaron came in the picture. And [Jafet] also says that Aaron knows this guy that could play drums for us, and that's how we ended up getting Ian. And it was going well. The chemistry was just working, and we ended up completing that song in about a day or two, and [Jafet] puts out that song and, once we completed the recording process, he said "Dude, you got to be in a band with me. It's going to be great. You're so good at what you do, and you [really] know how to play guitar and I really like your style and...." And at the time I really appreciated that. And I also liked working with Jafet and Aaron.

Photo by Mark C. Austin

It felt like something. It had [something] that I never really felt before when working with other musicians. And then at that point, I was, like, "You know what? Yeah, like, I'll be in a band with you guys. Let's do it."

[At first] we were going to be called "Pocket Animals" or something. I don't know, like "Eucalyptus Daydreams" or something like that. [O]ne of [the names that we thought of] was Blossom Aloe. And that was just kind of a random name. But it just rolled off the tongue just a little better than the other ones. And [the other band members] voted on it. Like, "Yeah, we love this name. Let's do it." So that's how Blossom Aloe became Blossom Aloe.

Rootstalk: What does the rehearsal set-up look and feel like, especially during COVID-19?

Morales: It's just very interesting to finally get together with other people and do something. I think a lot of us [just thought] "Oh, I just do this for myself and I'm just in my room." So it was fun to just interact, feeding off somebody else's energy. It [was] a stress reliever, just playing, and sweating, and everybody having a good time.

Then Henry [joined the band] with all his pedals. And that blew my mind, the noises that he was making, I was like, "How did you do that with that?" And then we started playing at Aaron's house, outside, which was a whole different vibe... There's a little pond and it was mostly super-nice [to be outside until] it got cold. And [even] then we were still out there. Looking back, that's respectable, because I don't like to hang out in the cold just for no reason. [But] we were [still] all out there just doing it, and it was just really fun.

[So we have] fun though sometimes it can be very serious, and we usually just go through the set a few times. I think it sounds better in practice. [But] then we get out there and we play a show and I'm like, *damn*."

Rootstalk: How have you seen the band's reach grow and change demographically? How do you see yourselves inspiring others?

Huelskamp: I'm noticing that now we're getting more shows in the inner city, whereas before we were playing North Houston. And I'm noticing a huge demographic change. The audiences are more diverse. And to me, that's way better than what we were doing before, where [we were playing] in some of these hard rock bars, where it was just white people. I want to play to all kinds of people: young, old, people of color and just everybody. And I feel like Houston is the perfect place to do that.

> " I want to play to all kinds of people: young, old. People of color and, like, just everybody. And I feel like Houston is the perfect place to do that."

Personally, I don't really get stage anxiety just two minutes before the show. I get pumped. But I'll feel it a week before, or the day before. When I wake up on the morning of the show, something inside of me is, like, "Let's go. You're ready."

Morales: Actually, just recently, after they announced the Float Fest lineup, one of my friends from [when I went] to Texas State [got in touch and he] was like, "Yo, we're proud of you. It's awesome that you're really trying to do what you love." [Back then] I just had Garage Band [software] and a guitar. And I would make something, and I would show the guys there and they'd be like, "Oh, that's so cool. Like, that's really cool." They were very supportive. And then I came back [to Houston] and we still talked, but not as much as...when I lived there.

[But when my friend contacted me he said]: "Ever since you showed us your first stuff... like, your very first demo thing, it inspired me, someone who doesn't really like to put themselves out there. [It showed me that you can] influence people without even knowing them.

I believe that anybody can do what we do. And it's not about getting this awesome line up or having to do extravagant shows. I think it's more [about] people getting together and just making stuff and just hanging out. And that's what I found to love.

When we first started, it was just like "Okay, I had a shitty week. [But then we'd] get together and just hang out. And that would be the highlight of my week. So, I think to anybody who is looking to us for inspiration, I [would say] "Just do it. You can do anything, and it's not about getting famous or getting streams. It's about playing and just doing what you like to do.

Rootstalk: What has inspired each of you to be musicians?

Huelskamp: [For a while] I tried to market myself and join other bands and there were some obstacles. [For instance] one dude didn't show up to a Craigslist meeting. We were supposed to meet one day and he straight up didn't show. So, there were some challenges at first. If you're posting videos of yourself online playing music, just keep doing it. Especially if you're doing it because you love it. You'll catch someone's attention, and you could join a band like Blossom Aloe.

Vargas: I was really into this solo artist named Dayglow (https://dayglowband.com), and this guy puts out this song "Can I Call You Tonight?" (https://dayglowband.bandcamp.com/track/can-i-call-you-tonight) in 2018 before we even had a full-length album. And he instantly blows up. He is also from Austin, Texas, and he just mixes and produces all these songs by himself.

Now, a year later, he's already playing festivals and headlining. He did what he loved, and he blew up from it so quick. Considering that he's from Texas, you know, just like all of us, I feel like I can be like that guy or I feel like we can make something and, you know, get some kind of traction like he did. Because he had a bunch of supporters from his family and friends that pretty much helped him make music videos and his music, and look where he's at now.

Morales: Back when I was in kindergarten, I [forgot] my baseball cards for show and tell, and everyone said, well, sing a song. So I did a Beatles song. That's the first time I ever thought, "Okay, this is cool," because people were clapping and I thought, "Okay, nice." But yeah, I just always wanted to make music. And I did. I made a little solo project, just me, and I did all kinds of [stuff] to it. It was just experimenting. And I love bands like Modest Mouse and I like Mac Miller a lot and indie bands, [I could] just list a bunch. But…these guys [in Blossom Aloe] inspired me as well. Josh is a good producer. Henry is, like, f***ing amazing at guitar. Aaron is just a god at bass, and Jafet has this energy that, you know, Jafet, he's just very outgoing and it's like, okay, I can be that as well. Josh challenges me [and I ask myself], okay, can I play this beat? Can I keep up? So it's things like that. I'm just very grateful to be part of it.

Photo Courtesy of Blossom Aloe

Huelskamp: [In my] first musical memory I was riding in the car with my dad, listening to Incubus, which is like some band from the nineties. I owe a lot to that, just listening to music with my dad and going to shows with him when I was a kid. Just growing up around music. I'm grateful that my parents got me lessons when I was eight years old and got me an electric guitar when I was ten. So, things like that contributed to [what I'm doing today].

Roostalk: What are you looking forward to as the band's roots continue to spread?

Huelskamp: Float Fest. I'm definitely looking forward to that. It's already such a milestone, just even being on the artist list. I wasn't in the group when [Blossom Aloe] made the album, so I haven't had that experience yet and I'm super excited to do that. I guess a long-term goal would be to go on tour and play in a bunch of cities around the United States. That's a lifelong dream of mine, for sure. And I'm sure it's also a dream of everyone else in this group. And yeah, maybe score a record deal along the way. You never know. I'm definitely remaining optimistic about everything but, you know, enjoying it day by day, remaining conscious that you need to enjoy the journey and not the end result. So I've got to en-

joy where we are right now. I can't just always focus on what's next.

Rootstalk: Leave us with a final message to your fans!

Vargas: Do what you think is right. Follow your heart. Follow your dreams. If you think it can't be done, it can be done. Nothing is impossible.

Morales: Do what you want to do, but make sure that there's some good that comes out of it and come hang out with us sometime and everybody just be safe out there. Thank you.

Huelskamp: I'd say no matter what skill level you are, always make time for your creative outlet. Whether it's music, art, theatre, put some time away to do those things because you never know where it's going to go.

Be sure to check Blossom Aloe out on Spotify, Apple Music, and all other music streaming platforms. Enter this URL (https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6alHG9nqV5BBXVTa9fyQ62?si=cfeed586d5a04fff) to link to Blossom Aloe's setlist, featured at Axelrad in Houston.

You can catch the group at Float Fest in July and keep up with them on Instagram, Twitter and all other platforms through their Linktree (https://linktr.ee/blossomaloeband). Also, make sure to check out the full video on YouTube at https://youtu.be/3z74fFCLoU8.

Screen grab from the author's interview with Blossom Aloe, courtesy of the author and the band. Enter this URL (https://youtu.be/3z74fFCLoU8) in your browser to listen in on the conversation.

Photo courtesy of Kendra Bradley

Associate editor **Kendra Bradley '22** *(they/them) is a queer Psychology major with Neuroscience and Linguistics concentrations. They were raised in south Mississippi and currently live in Grinnell, Iowa. They mostly like to research language acquisition and processing, especially in the context of disparity.*

Looking for Community: Queer Scientists' Search for Connection in the Midwest

by Kendra Bradley

When I was asked to create content for a multimedia online journal about the prairie region, as a STEM major through-and-through with little to no experience with non-academic writing, I knew immediately I was a fish out of water. However, it is a central tenet for *Rootstalk* that too-often-unheard voices have a place on its pages. As a queer scientist myself, I realized that this was a perfect opportunity for me to collect and tell the stories of queer scientists in the Midwest.

For context, I am a queer person from Mississippi, and as I write this I am in my last semester as a Psychology major with concentrations in Neuroscience and Linguistics. Most of my stress dreams these days are focused on the question of my future as an aspirational scientist. Additionally, when I began this article I had just passed six months since I started medically transitioning, so navigating that was another thing to consider as I began searching every job that seemed tolerable. As any overeager about-to-be-grad would do, I began to scour Reddit for anyone with with professional and personal experience even remotely comparable to mine, thinking I would ask them for advice. I came up completely short in just about every regard, though, further emphasizing the need for stories like mine.

My original idea was to cast a wide net, mostly using social media, and thinking I would highlight the experience of as many queer scientists from or in the Midwest as I could find. I immediately ran into trouble. Turns out, finding openly queer scientists is diffi-

cult anywhere, and even more so in the Midwest. I got a couple of responses to my queries, but in the event I could only arrange interviews with two scientists—Alex Keyes, a fifth-year graduate student in the pharmacology program at the University of Iowa, and Asia Perkins, a third-year PhD student in the clinical psychology program at the University of Connecticut. I continued to reach out even more openly to other queer scientists and was even less successful in arranging meetings.

I next thought about reaching out to undergraduate students as a different demographic. I searched for which Midwestern universities had an active chapter of oSTEM ("out in STEM," an LGBT STEM organization; https://www.ostem.org) to contact students directly. However, oSTEM couldn't really provide contact information, since insuring that everyone remains safe and in control of their own identities means discretion is a priority. From there, I individually contacted LGBT groups at major Midwestern universities to gauge interest in my project. Still, I got no responses.

I considered a couple other options: cast yet another even wider net with professors and other scientists to whom I hadn't reached out to before, hoping that my luck would turn. Unfortunately, as my emails continued to go unanswered, I was reminded just how hard the next couple years would be as I continued through my daunting life transitions without the comfort of people who knew what I was going through. Furthermore, what could I write about? I began to consider giving up on the concept entirely. But then I realized that the difficulty of gathering the stories of LGBT scientists in the Midwest was, in fact, the story.

Asia Perkins is a queer woman of color who grew up in Oklahoma. She earned her undergraduate degree in 2015 at the University of Oklahoma (https://www.ou.edu) in Psychology and English Language and Literature. There, she noticed a lack of mental health resources, a lack of support for diverse populations, and general bigotry. Currently, she focuses primarily on the cause and identification of disruptive behavior disorders generally and how those disorders interact with psychopathic traits to impact development more specifically. Additionally, she studies the factors that influence racial and ethnic diagnostic disparities apparent in these disruptive behavior disorders, and how provider and teacher biases contribute to inaccurate and ineffective treatment recommendations.

When I asked about the most rewarding parts of her work with the children in her research and advocacy work struggling with these disorders, Perkins said, "I used to hear, 'There's nothing we can do for you. You're always going to be this way. You're probably going to end up in prison.'" Because this attitude was being imposed on impressionable children, Perkins felt called to find the intersection of her clinical and research work and childhood development. She uses her position as a queer woman of color to empathize with the position these children often from minority groups are put in and to intervene with appropriate support. Her empathy, informed by her own experiences with bigotry in the Midwest, shows these children that they are not lost causes, and that someone is willing to sit down and

oSTEM (which stands for "out in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math") is a non-profit professional society focused on supporting LGBT people in STEM careers. oSTEM has over 100 active chapters at colleges and universities, as well as in professional settings in both the U.S. and abroad. Logo courtesy of oSTEM.

say, "Hey, I really care about you. I want to learn about you as an individual." It's this work that Perkins feels can make a huge difference. Perkins also helps these groups by working with the Connecticut Psychological Association (https://connpsych.org) and the American Psychological Association (https://www.apa.org) on behalf of high school kids. This work connects them with psychologists of color to support their growth in the classroom as well as potentially connecting them with psychology as a potential field of research.

Asia Perkins, from Oklahoma, now a third-year PhD candidate at the University of Connecticut

Alex Keyes grew up in Tucson, then attended college at Linfield University (https://www.linfield.edu) in Oregon, where they studied Chemistry and Biology. Keyes then moved to Iowa to attend graduate school in pharmacology at the University of Iowa.

Keyes' research is in determining the role of neuro-immune interactions within the spinal cord in pain sensitization. This line of research has been a consistent interest of Keyes since they were 15. "I knew people that had severe chronic pain that current therapeutics couldn't treat," Keyes says, "There are people with chronic pain out there; approximately a third of the population has some form of chronic pain, and it needs a lot of addressing because there really isn't a lot of good treatment out there." As a disabled trans person, Keyes' firmly believes that science should always be done at the guidance, and for the benefit, of those most affected by the subject being studies. They endeavor to support marginalized scientists and marginalized community voices in every area of science. This goal drives their passion in science communication online, as this mode of communication allows for those outside the field to have access to the information as well as furthering representation of their minority identities.

One of Keyes's notable experiences was working informally on a YouTube video that was debunking the Wakefield vaccine hypothesis (which posits that vaccines lead to autism). "One of the things that I really want to work on is [promoting] science communication," Keyes said. "Especially to people that have don't have as much science background, got pushed out of the sciences, or, for whatever reason, didn't have access to good science, education, anything like that."

A common theme when I asked Perkins and Keyes about community and its importance was just how difficult it is to find and situate yourself in the queer science community or to find diverse representation. As Perkins said, "I hadn't really noticed any decent representation until I got to grad school. I don't think I had a single queer or, like, racially or ethnically minoritized psychology professor, or anyone to look up to when I was in college or younger."

Coming from the Deep South, I had the impression that "at least the Midwest isn't as conservative as the South," so I was frankly surprised about what I was hearing as well as what I was not hearing. My top choice graduate program is at the University of Iowa, and I felt so excited at the prospect of joining that community. However, I was hearing that even in a place that has a progressive reputation, at least in terms of LGBT+ rights, there still isn't a community.

One possible explanation is that the Midwest has a unique brand of bigotry. While places in the South are much more obvious about their bigotry, a lot of the

problems in the Midwest are more covert. From vague comments about length of hair to assumptions about the gender of an alluded partner based on perceived gender of the speaker, it's much smaller things that clue you in to the covert judgments constantly being made. Compared to slurs yelled out of pick-up trucks and overt violence that can be suffered merely walking down the street, these examples seem minor and not exactly newsworthy; however, these examples still make those impacted feel alienated and unsupported. So, the next question is why, in this supposedly progressive area, are people so bad at accepting LGBT+ identities?

Alex Keyes, from Arizona, now a fifth-year PhD candidate at the University of Iowa

Keyes made an excellent point about this problem: the Midwest is incredibly rural and spread apart. Even most of our metropolitan areas would barely be considered notable towns in the more populated coastal regions, and the space between the cities is almost entirely empty. Keyes says, "A lot of it out here in Iowa is genuinely just visibility, because most of the time, I'm the first trans grad student that people have come across." Queer youth are not used to enough openly queer people being around to even begin to create a community. Add the STEM aspect, in which anything other than cisgender heterosexual, wealthy white men is still considered a minority, the possible community is even smaller. Even worse, those that have these queer identities may choose to "just stay in the closet" (which is painful in its own right), which even further lessens the visible community. This lack of visibility of your own identities makes it easy to feel like you just don't belong in this space.

In response to Keyes's point about this lack of representation, Perkins said, "I got to grad school, and it's still not necessarily very diverse, but I know where to look now. I know who to talk to. And I know how to network, how to get connected and find the people who do share different aspects of my identities now. It's just difficult because you have to find them and search for them." Keyes further echoed this, noting that "it took until this year to work with an openly queer professor."

Are Keyes and Perkins saying that I'm doomed to constantly search for a community which may or may not even stick? No, in fact they both have a lot of advice about how to find that community.

Both emphasized how important student connections are: senior peers, graduate students from interesting labs, even random students on social media. Peer connections are invaluable for finding others in the community. Both said how exciting it is to interact with those interested in their field. Keyes advised emailing current graduate students. "If there's research you're really interested in, email us," they said. "We'd love to talk about our research. We're generally open to cold emails." Those connections more easily help find others that share identities, as, anecdotally, it only takes one person to introduce you to a community. Additionally, Perkins highlighted the task forces -- nationally, regionally, and locally -- that specialize in minority populations where you can find community.

Finding such a community may take work, but it is worth the effort. These communities are vital for combatting imposter syndrome, as minoritized populations much more often than others are more susceptible to believing they are not good enough and don't belong

in their space. As Perkins said, "if I didn't find people who look like me and have been in the program or in the field, then it would have been rougher than it is. It is very, very important to find your people and find a sense of community. I cannot say or talk about that highly enough." As she found her community related to both her racial and queer identities, she said "I found several communities where it feels so safe, it feels so warm."

Minoritized populations in science aren't important just for community. As Keyes said, "you realize that pain affects predominantly minoritized people… And usually, the more marginalized identities you hold, the higher risk you are for developing chronic pain. And so being able to find scholars that even look at that, or are part of those communities themselves, it helps in terms of advocacy work and what we are able to push for." Further, Perkins said, "whatever background you have, if there's research you're passionate about, you can do it. Sometimes coming from a background of either your marginalized identities or just the classes you've taken, your education can really inform a perspective that is potentially course-changing for the research that you do."

Despite the challenges I have described above, I want to emphasize that the effort it takes to make it into the science field is worth it. There are many obstacles, and we must support each other. Add in the imposter syndrome that many minority populations struggle with, and it truly is something to celebrate how we succeed despite the challenges finding our community. We may have to put a bit more elbow grease into it, and that can be discouraging, so I will end with a quote from Keyes on pushing through the discouragement:

"You are worthy of being there."

The combined laboratory, classroom and greenhouse at the Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA), Grinnell College's state-of-the-art teaching facility for the environmental sciences, is the centerpiece of the College's multi-year prairie restoration project

All photos courtesy of Robby Burchit

Associate Editor **Robby Burchit '23** *is a third-year sociology major at Grinnell College. Robby considers himself both a Midwestern and Southern boy, as he is originally from the small town of Waverly, Iowa, but relocated to Bentonville, Arkansas as a child. Beside being a full-time student, Robby is also the Student Government Association Concerts Chair at Grinnell College and is involved in numerous other extracurricular activities such as Mbira Ensemble. Outside of school, Robby enjoys cooking, travelling, making music, and roller-skating.*

Warped Cherubs and Tasmanian Devils: A Tattoo Artist in Fairfield

by Robby Burchit

As I walk into Arrowhead Tattoo studio (https://www.arrowheadtattoo.com) in Faifield, Iowa (https://cityoffairfieldiowa.com), I'm immediately struck by Dom Rabalais' bold personal style. The 32-year-old multimedia artist, tattooer, and Fairfield native (http://www.domrabalais.com) is sporting tight leopard print leggings, a cropped Chippendales t-shirt and a platinum bleached hairdo. His style matches his bright and extroverted demeanor as he greets me and introduces me to the studio. He hands me a thick binder bursting with sketches of tattoos, and although the purpose of my visit to the studio is simply to talk to him, I find myself curiously flipping through his sketch-book. Rabalais' tattoo work is vibrant and playful, with a childlike sense of wonder and mischief that emanates from each design. After surveying his sketches of flower chains, small scarab beetles, and wolves, I remember one of his designs that I had liked that I saw online: a small jester. I mention this to him and before I know it, he's furiously scribbling at his desk, rendering the vintage Halloween-inspired design, ready to tranfer it from the page to my skin. Next thing I know, I'm sprawled out on a table in the studio getting prepped for a spontaneous tattoo as we discuss his work.

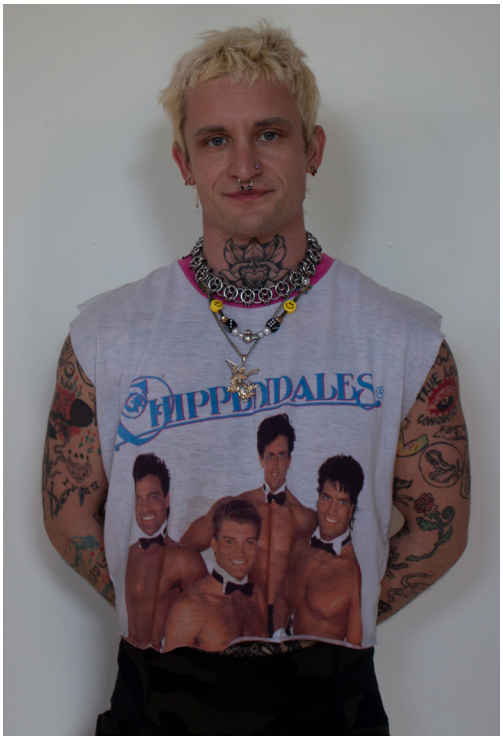
Rabalais' tattoo work and paintings have gained significant traction online lately, largely through platforms such as Instagram, where he posts his work for thousands of followers that include other notable and emerging artists. His colorful, cartoony work feels fresh and of-the-moment, and it's clearly resonating with

people in the Fairfield area, as he has been booked and busy since his return to Fairfield in 2020. Despite his growing following, however, Rabalais didn't set out specifically to become a "tattoo artist."

"I never thought 'and someday I'll be a tattooer being interviewed about tattooing' or something like that. I was kind of like, 'Well, my friends want tattoos and I shall give them some.'"

Rabalais' tattoo journey began when he was a teenager in the 2000s, when he discovered stick and poke tattooing (https://sticknpoke.com/how-to-stick-and-poke) through a feature titled "The DIY Guide to Everything" in the punk 'zine Razor Cake (https://razorcake.org). A "stick-and-poke" is a type of tattoo that's created by spreading ink on the skin and then using needle-sticks to introduce the ink beneath the surface of the skin. Because the equipment is relatively inexpensive and the technique requires less precision, it's often seen as the go-to tattooing method for beginners. From there, Rabalais began tattooing in what he calls an "evil manner," using safety pins to scrawl designs on himself. "Occasionally, my friends would want something abhorrent tattooed on them, and I could do it in a very rudimentary way."

Later in his 20s, Rabalais developed his tattoo skills further while living as a touring musician. He recounts the story of his former bandmate and late friend who bought him his first tattoo gun. Stick-and-poke tattoos can be time consuming, and since he wanted lots of tattoos done quickly, he ordered Rabalais what he referred to as a beginner's "Baby's First Tattoo Gun." Rabalais would then use this gun to tattoo his friends, bandmates, and the owners of whatever house they were crashing at that night during their tour. "As a result, I gave a lot of tattoos that were not the world's best , but were very much the kind of tattoos that one gives and receives in a punk house." In those days, punk houses were spaces where members of a given punk scene lived, performed to packed local audiences, and partied. It was through the trial and error process of rendering these punk house tattoos that Rabalais refined his craft, learning things about the process that he could only learn b giving a lot of tattoos.



"There's a bond between the tattoo-er and the machine, the wielder of the tool and the tool itself, that can only be built through experience," he says.

> "[T]hrough the trial and error of these punk houses Rabalais refined his craft, learning things about the process that he could only learn by giving a lot of tattoos..."

One can see the youthful, rebellious energy of DIY music channeled into Rabalais' designs like his series of warped cherubs or his offbeat sketches of the Tasmanian Devil from Looney Tunes. Later, he explains that music was and in many ways still is his primary artistic outlet. "My main thing is playing music and going on tour all the time." He explained that before the pandemic, his

Dom Rabalais poses wth two of his canvses and, of course, the canvas he has made of his body

plan was to be on tour indefinitely, and it wasn't until recently that he was able to dive deeper into tattooing and painting as other outlets for artistic expression. He explains that music, art, and tattooing are often tied together through the imagery they feature. He describes the "dialectical back and forth" between his paintings and tattoos, with each borrowing designs from the other. When I ask Rabalais how his focus shifted largely to tattooing, he jokingly admits that it's all about attention.

"OK, I'm not trying to be like, 'Oh, no one likes the music,' but as far as things that I have been successful at doing, I feel just in general, people seem to respond really well to the paintings and tattoos, which is great because I mean, in the end, all I want is validation and attention."

He says this last part with a smirk and a chuckle, but the attention he has received for his visual art and tattooing is no joke. From residencies and shows in galleries in Ohio and Washington to becoming a regular tattoo artist at Arrowhead Studios in Fairfield, Rabalais has managed to build a successful career out of his visuartwork, allowinl g him to quit his indexing job and pursue his art full time. Rabalais' major shift in focus toward tattoo art came after returning home to Fairfield after living in New York City for several years.

He was born and raised in Fairfield, a small college town located in southeast Iowa. At first glance, the town might appear to be like many other small towns in Iowa: sleepy, unassuming, conservative. However, Fairfield boasts a unique history as the home of the Maharishi International University (https://www.miu.edu), a private college centered around the practice of transcendental meditation where Rabalais' mother worked during his upbringing. The college, founded in 1973 by Indian yoga guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maharishi_Mahesh_Yogi), has gained a sort of cult following known locally as "the Movement," and has created the small Iowa town's singularly offbeat culture. This unique, non-conformist culture has influenced him in many ways.

When I ask him if growing up in Fairfield has affected his art or style, Rabalais replies with "Well, definitely in the way that my mom was very supportive." "I acknowledge and am aware that growing up in Fairfield was unconventional. It was also the kind of thing where 'I don't really know what I don't know.' I have no baseline to compare it to. My perspective on it has changed a lot over the years." Growing up, he attended what he describes as the Maharishi equivalent of Catholic school run by the Movement. After graduation, he later attended the university's art school where he began

The Evolution of an Artwork: After consulting with his client on the design, Dom Rabalais bdgins by outlining the figure (left, and left below)

A tatoo design sometimes requires several visits before a it is fully developed, particularly if—as here—Rabalais is working on several tatoos at once. During later sessions, the artist will add detail and color

"There's a bond between the tattoo-er and the machine, the wielder of the tool and the tool itself, that can only be built through experience."

Rabalais seated at a workstation dedicated to another of his passions: music

to develop his artistic chops. It was during his time in school that Rabalais began to pick up on "the secret history of America."

"Just to go full tinfoil hat here, there are things about the Movement that I find to be kind of buck wild. I wouldn't even say these are conspiracy theories. It's history. It's fact that people don't generally talk about."

From here, the two of us both go "full tinfoil hat" as we dive into a long and winding conversation surrounding the Movement's connections to geopolitics and culture, its alleged ties to COINTELPRO (an FBI backed program run from the '50s-70s, designed to surveil, infiltrate, and disrupt leftist political organizing in the US; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COINTELPRO), and its relationship to '60s counterculture and LSD. The conversation was fascinating—albeit, a little off topic—but more than anything it lent context to Dom Rabalais as a man and artist. While his upbringing in Fairfield might not play an explicit role in his art, I could see how these components of his past—the Maharishi schooling, the punk house life, the constant touring—all come together to influence Rabalais' wonderfully zany and unconventional signature style.

While returning home after living in New York City has brought Rabalais lots of new opportunities, his move back wasn't under the best of circumstances. It was the passing away of his father during the pandemic that prompted him to return to Fairfield where he could take care of his mother. "It was hard to be like, 'Ok, Mom, just deal with that.'" Rabalais tells me about how he moved himself and his partner out of New York and across the country, back to Fairfield, with his partner eventually relocating to Minneapolis. While his plan isn't to live in Fairfield for the long term (he already splits his time relatively evenly between Minneapolis and Iowa), he has found comfort and solace in returning to the prairie.

"I can come back and spend time with my mom and help to fix things around the house. I mean, in a more existential/emotional way, I need to figure out being alone and experiencing solitude without having a mental breakdown at the same time. I feel like now I have to confront that part of myself that is so afraid of solitude. And yeah, small-town Iowa is a great place to [do that]."

In between bouts of Iowa solitude, you can catch him traveling all over the country working on projects from an arts festival in northwest Arkansas to doing tattoo residencies in Portland to painting fences in Nashville and putting on his own visual art shows in Ohio.

Rabalais finishes the final touches on my tattoo and snaps a few pictures to post on his Instagram account. I admire the new piece of art on my leg: a playful ode to my birthday being on April Fools' Day. As we exchange goodbyes, I find myself already craving another tattoo and make a mental plan to return one day for another new piece.

Endnotes

Publisher's Note: The Stories We Tell

[1] Joseph Frazier Wall, *Iowa: A Bicentennial History* (The States and the Nation Series, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, p.xvi)
[2] John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York, Little, Brown and Company, 1990, p.504)
[3] Calvert Watkins (ed.), *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 3e (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011, p.99)
[4] Beth Hoffman, *Bet the Farm: The Dollars and Sense of Growing Food in America* (Island Press, 2020).
[5] Kamyar Enshayan, personal communication, March 15, 2022

Grow Finish Unit Takes on "Ruthless and Insatiable" Industrial Ag

[1] https://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/why-are-cafos-bad#what-is
[2] https://www.kcrg.com/2020/06/25/man-charged-with-arson-after-a-7-hour-standoff-in-poweshiek-county/

Prairie Style: Wright, the Griffins, Sullivan, and their Impact on Iowa Architecture

1. Louis Henry Sullivan, "The Young Man in Architecture," The Architectural Review 9, no. 54 (1901): 214

2. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Midwest Contemporaries*, (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 242

3. "WTOP History," Wright on the Park, 2022, https://wrightonthepark.org/about-us/wotp-history/

4. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 173

5. Ryan Ferguson. "Ricker House, Ryan Ferguson Perspective," 2020

6. Claire Zulkey, "Meet Marion Mahony Griffin, Frank Lloyd Wright's best frenemy: The two architects are forever intertwined," Curbed, June 8, 2017. https://archive.curbed.com/2017/6/8/15755858/marion-mahony-walter-burley-griffin-wright-drawings

7. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 164

8. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 164

9. "Walter Burley Griffin in his Own Right: The Griffins Architecture Interviews Producer's Notes," PBS, June 4, 1999, https://www.pbs.org/wbgriffin/index.htm

10. Ryan Ferguson. "Ricker House, Ryan Ferguson Perspective," 2020

11. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 231

12. Louis Henry Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," Lippincott's Magazine, March 1896, 408

13. Louis Henry Sullivan, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," 408

14. H. Koeper, "Louis Sullivan," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed April 8, 2022 from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-Sullivan

15. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 12

16. Allen H. Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 344

Fly Fishing in the Driftless Region

[1]Isaiah Bowman, PhD, *Forest Physiography: Physiography of the United States and Principles of Soils in Relation to Forestry*. (New York and London: John Wiley & Sons, 1911), p. 495.