In Northwest Colorado near Rangely is the Waving Hands pictograph site. Believed to be of Fremont origin, the site is named for a life-size pair of disembodied hands painted on a sheer sandstone rock face. The hands are mysterious. Are they welcoming or warning? Drowning or emerging? Celebrating a victory or pleading for deliverance? No one knows for sure, but the waving hands are arresting and thought-provoking, and remain a distinctly human statement in a remote wilderness.

Photograph by Bill Mitchem
Waving Hands Review, the literature and arts magazine of Colorado Northwestern Community College, seeks to publish exemplary works by emerging and established writers and artists of Northwest Colorado. Submissions in poetry, fiction, non-fiction, drama, photography, and art remain anonymous until a quality-based selection is made. Unsolicited submissions are welcome during the academic year between September 15 and February 15.

We accept online submissions only.

Please visit the Waving Hands Review website at www.cncc.edu/waving_hands for detailed submission guidelines, or go to the CNCC website and click on the Waving Hands Review logo.

The staff of Waving Hands Review wishes to thank President Ron Granger, the CNCC Cabinet, the Rangely Junior College District Board of Trustees, and the Moffat County Affiliated Junior College District Board of Control. Thanks also to those who submitted work and those who encouraged submissions.

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And the Railroad Never Came
BY KEN BAILEY

Ken Bailey

Fictional Scene: Uintah Railway locomotive entering Rangely Basin in the early 1940s. Locomotive No. 51—an enormous, articulated “tank” design steam engine—chugs into Rangely along what would one day be County Route 2 in this “what if” drawing by the author. What if the Uintah had not folded due to the Great Depression and the coming of motor trucks but, rather, had expanded into the Rangely Basin from the southwest? Had the Uintah lasted a decade longer than it did, the Railway could have supplied the Mancos shallow well oil drilling in Rangely and—eventually—been there on the ground floor for the coming of the deep Weber oil boom in the late 40s. The Uintah may even have junctioned with the Denver and Salt Lake “Moffat Road” in Rangely, had the latter also not gone bankrupt and fallen short of coming to town.
Original drawing by Ken Bailey, (c) 2018.

Prologue: The Railroads: With Great Power Comes . . . a Locomotive!

Ah, those old Western movies! They—and their TV show counterparts—ruled for decades. There were many characters, good guys and bad guys, but there were only so many plot devices, so repetition was inevitable.

One such device, oft repeated, was that of the railroad coming to the
western town. In the years following the Civil War, railroads fanned out, spreading their steel tentacles all over the American Midwest and West. Western towns that received a railroad prospered and grew into cities. Towns that were bypassed shriveled up and died.

Figuratively and, sometimes, literally, people and townships went to war with each other over who would get included on an incoming rail line.

Railroads attracted civilization to the frontiers. They brought people and resources to build the lines, and towns sprang up. Some towns prospered as more people came west (or east, from California and the Pacific Coast) along what were essentially conveyor belts for population, products, and raw materials needed elsewhere. Railroads brought in farmers to till the land and then took the farmers’ crops to markets bigger than ever before possible. Railroads brought in loggers and hauled out timber, miners and hauled out ore, ranchers and hauled out cattle. And railroads carried the news and the mail, linking towns not only with each other but also with civilization and the outside world.

Pity the western town that did not end up on a railroad line.

What follows is the story of a little western town than needed a railroad to change the world—that is, until it didn’t. Yes, it’s complicated—but it is a fascinating tale, full of thrills, chills, and reverses, worthy of the spirit of the best old Western movies.

Chapter 1: Rangely: The Little Town That Couldn’t But Did

Rangely, Colorado, is a little town of 2,500 souls along the White River on the high, hard Uintah Desert in Northwest Colorado. A Hudson Bay trading post with a history going back a hundred-plus years, yet not incorporated as a formal town until the mid-1940s, Rangely (until recently) never saw a railroad.

The town’s main street boasted no depot . . . no lonesome whistles blew. The Fast Mail never dropped off Rangely correspondence with the outside world; the night train never inspired Rangely poets with its passing in the wee hours of the morning.

But railroads were a player in Rangely’s fortunes, nonetheless—right from the beginning. And, without them, it is very likely that Rangely, as we know it, might not have happened.

To understand that, let me tell you its story.

“So this is Rangely, Colorado, fabulous Klondike of the 1940’s,” wrote Edith Endora Kohl on a frigid day back in mid-February 1947.¹ The great
Weber Sands Oil Boom was on, and this staff writer for the Denver Post had been sent to the Stanolind Oil Camp and a drilling rig sinking an oil well in twenty-below temperatures just outside the flimsy shack that was her quarters. Ms. Kohl's Rangely visit had come with the cooperation of the California Company, the largest of a dozen oil companies whose roughnecks, geologists, scientists, and engineers scrambled around scores of drilling rigs and derricks as the demand for petroleum during World War II transformed this sleepy, one-horse trading post into one of the great mineral success stories of the mid-20th century.

Housing had been scrounged with whatever materials were available; food was in short supply; protection from the elements was sparse; and the “roads,” the greasy ruts of mud-season or the frozen washboards of winter, were bone-jarring—lending credence to Kohl's comparison of Rangely's oil boom with the turn-of-the-century Klondike Gold Rush.

Out in the field—even within town limits—dozens of oil derricks simultaneously bored away at the earth. A mile below lay the vast Weber (WEE-buhr) Sands oil deposit, sitting atop one of the best-defined “anticlines” ever seen by geologists. By the time the boom was declared ended in 1951, almost 500 deep-well walking-beam pumpers bobbed up and down on “forty-acre spacing” to pull the “black gold” to the surface.

Rangely—the name a nod to an English Lord, not the old cowboy song “Home on the Range,” as might be expected—had become a town
notable around the world. It had become the largest oilfield in the Rocky Mountains and one of the top twenty in the United States. Some predicted the town itself would also boom and become a great city, as had certain settlements in Texas after their booms of the early 20th century. One source claimed Rangely’s population would swell to near 50,000 in a few short years!

But the story of Rangely and oil goes back a lot farther than the boom. And railroads—or the lack thereof—played a part in Rangely’s fortunes from the very beginning.

Chapter 2: In the Iron Horse’s Shadow Right from the Start

Ironically, railroads had an unintended connection with the birth of the oil industry itself. In the years following the Civil War, America and the industrialized world faced an energy crisis. Much of its manufacturing power came from coal and steam, but the lamps that lit homes and businesses were fueled by candles, kerosene (expensive and dangerous), or whale oil. Having been over-harvested, whales and whale oil were in short supply, and there was a need to find something better and/or more plentiful.

Oil (that is, Petroleum or “Rock Oil,” as it was originally referred to) was found on the surface in what were called “seeps.” Native Americans had been skimming it off the surface of waters for generations to use for medicinal purposes and as a lubricant; early settlers used it to lubricate the axles of their “prairie schooners.” It burned and could be used as fuel. But it was hard to get in large quantities.

A retired railroad conductor named Edwin L. Drake was hired by investors who had become convinced that it would be possible to drill for oil (down to the underground source of the seeps) and tap it directly from a well. Borrowing technology from the salt industry, including a tower and drilling apparatus called a “derrick,” Drake set up his rig near the western Pennsylvania town of Titusville and began to drill. People came out to laugh at “Drake’s Folly,” but the laughing stopped when, on August 28, 1859, the well struck oil at 69 feet. The boom was on, and soon many places in western Pennsylvania became covered with oil derricks—a phenomenon that spread into surrounding states.

Great strikes then came out of the vast Western territories as well—Texas, Oklahoma, and California—and soon “wildcatters” were looking for oil everywhere.

What would become known as Rangely was a little outpost on the southeastern edge of a vast natural bowl surrounded by mesas on all sides. Oil, it was long suspected, lay beneath, as seeps were known in the area, and—starting in 1901—oil companies and prospectors had moved in and
commenced drilling shallow wells into the Mancos Shale. These ranged from 500 to 1000 feet deep, and from the turn of the century to the 1930s, these shallow little wells would sputter into production, yield a bit of crude, and then peter out.

The area out in the bowl was known as “Raven Park.” A company so-named—Raven Oil and Refining Company—set up shop not only to drill wells there, but also to refine the oil right on the spot and market gasoline and other products to motorists in Vernal, Utah, and other towns scattered around. In those days, gas stations were a rarity in the West and supply chains tenuous and unpredictable.

But as oil companies moved in and out, it was long suspected that the Mancos Shale layer was not the main attraction in Raven Park. There was other oil down there—a LOT more of it—but a LOT deeper. Estimates on how much deeper varied wildly—but the lay of the land convinced geologists that it was there—and whoever got there first would inherit “gushers” that would unleash untold wealth and possibility.

Deep tests were contemplated; deep tests were attempted. Dangers were fraught; disasters were weathered. Two deeps tests ended when gas pockets ignited and blew the derricks to smithereens. The California Company partnered with the Raven Company to drill yet another deep test. Started in 1931, the “Raven A-1” pierced down through the rock toward the Rangely Anticline for two years! And then . . .

And then, nothing. Drilling was abruptly suspended. The well was capped. Everybody but a small security detail departed.

Rumors circulated around the Rangely settlement that oil had been
struck. But nothing came of it beyond that. For years, the well languished with no activity.

And then America entered World War II. Worldwide demand for petroleum skyrocketed. And the oilmen came back to Rangely. The Raven well was re-opened and put into production in 1943. Its output, approaching 300 barrels a day, dwarfed the paltry production of the shallow wells. In 1944, a second deep well was drilled. By 1947, when the *Denver Post* sent Ms. Kohl to tell the world about life in Rangely, scores of deep wells had been completed. Oilmen from fields all over the United States had converged on the Rangely Basin. Roads were punched through: west from Meeker and south from US40. On US40, the little settlement where the oil trucks turned off the last civilized highway toward Rangely became a known as “Artesia,” which today has taken the more tourist-friendly name of Dinosaur, Colorado.

Since the start of the boom, more than a quarter-BILLION barrels of oil have been pumped out of the Weber Sands. For half a century, it made Rangely the major field of the Rocky Mountain states and is one of the oldest still-producing oilfields of the country.

Why was such a bonanza—strongly suspected for two decades before its discovery and known but unexploited for a decade after that—allowed to wait 30 years before coming to fruition?

Ken Bailey | *Col. Drake and His Well.*
They were waiting for a railroad!

A railroad building into the valley could solve the logistical nightmare that was Rangely. A railroad could haul in the heavy materials—big steel derricks (larger and more durable than wood) and rotary table drilling rigging (rather than the more feeble cable-tool jobs); men and materials to build homes and oil camps; a supply line to bring food, clothing, pipe, and drilling mud (and to haul discovered oil outward); and, finally, a lifeline to bring civilization into the area to keep the place alive and enable it to grow and prosper after the oilfield was established and the wildcatters and roughnecks moved on to new horizons.

And a railroad was coming! Everyone said so. The Governor of Colorado himself proclaimed that a railroad was on the way. *The Vernal Express* reported on July 27, 1923, “Governor Bamberger promises railroad through the Uintah Basin. Salt Lake – Denver railway to begin soon. Surveys are being made as well as resources of the territory....” Additional assurances would follow.

In fact, two railroads had eyes on Rangely and had begun flinging their tracks against the Rocky Mountains in their quest to bring the “Iron Horse” to remote areas that included the Rangely Basin.

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*Ken Bailey | Combine Coach, Uintah Railway*

*Preserved at the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden, this car was an entire passenger train in one unit. Pulled by a steam locomotive, its spindly trucks were able to negotiate the tightest radius curves on the rough narrow-gauge line. Photograph, 2005.*
The first line to look at Rangely was a small, narrow-gauge route, the Uintah Railway, whose initial purpose had been to build north from the area west of Grand Junction to reach the Gilsonite fields of northeastern Utah. Hauling everything from minerals and ore to dinosaur bones from nearby Dinosaur National Monument (as it is called today), the Uintah wanted to expand into the Rangely area. Having already brought in materials to build Rangely’s first refinery as far as it could (the final leg of the journey from Utah had to be completed via horse-and-wagon!), the Uintah looked to haul pipe and supplies for the Mancos drilling in the pre-Weber days.

The Uintah’s locomotive roster included two immense narrow-gauge tank locomotives—among the biggest ever built in this country—needed to haul the Gilsonite cars up the steep grades and around the sharp curves of the tortuous Baxter Pass. Unfortunately, the Uintah ceased to exist in the 1930s, a victim of the Great Depression and the subsequent coming of motor trucks. The powerful steam engines never got the chance to chug into Rangely and claim a share of the deep Weber boom.

But there was another player in this railroad game who had Rangely squarely in its powerful headlight beam: the larger, sturdier, and much more
promising standard-gauge Denver and Salt Lake Railway, the brainchild of “the richest man in Colorado.” His name was David H. Moffat, a Denver banker with a dream and a whole lot of money to make it happen.

Chapter 4: They Said It Couldn’t Be Done

Sound familiar? Think back to the people gathering to laugh at Edwin Drake as he assembled a derrick in Pennsylvania and attempted to drill for oil like he was drilling for salt brine. Moffat was a similar case. His headquarters was in Denver, the premier city of Colorado that should have been on a transcontinental railroad line but wasn’t because it was shut off by a solid wall to the west: the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains.

Railroad builders had prospected a route into, over, and through the wall but had given up, turning their tracks north and south instead. A person wanting to travel westward from Denver to Salt Lake City or beyond had to choose first to detour as far south as Pueblo or as far north as Cheyenne, Wyoming. “Transcons” Union Pacific to the north and the Santa Fe Railway to the south were busy hauling passengers and commerce
east and west, but Denver sat, for all intents and purposes, at the dead end of a branch line. They said the wall was bigger and badder than any railroad baron who might throw down the challenge. But Moffat was determined to prove them wrong.

Marshalling money, talent, and resources, the determined banker started construction on his new rail line in mid-December 1902—just one year after the first shallow wells were sunk in Rangely. His target was Salt Lake City. A direct line west of Denver would not only put Colorado's capital city in the Transcontinental Railroad club but would cut almost 200 miles off the existing route through Pueblo.

As 1903 progressed, Moffat’s crews came up against the steepest parts of the Continental Divide. Wanting from the start to build a colossal tunnel through the Divide, Moffat was constrained instead to lay track over a tortuous mountain pass—Rollins Pass—and then come back later to do the
bore when time and money allowed. Two years elapsed before the tracks reached Fraser (west of today’s Winter Park on the Western Slope), and another year before Gore Canyon was accessed. The tracks finally came into Steamboat Springs in 1909 and sputtered into Craig at the end of 1913. While over a decade had passed since construction began, the railway was now almost halfway towards its goal of Salt Lake City, and Rangely lay just 90 miles over the next hill.

The monumental task of conquering the Rockies, however, had conquered Mr. Moffat. He had proven his critics wrong and had done the impossible. But it had exhausted his fortune—both corporate and personal—and exhausted his own strength as well. Back East to drum up financial support for his tunnel and for pushing the line westward from Steamboat, David Moffat died in the spring of 1911.

And Nature wasn’t finished with his railroad, either. Severe Colorado winters made train passage over the towering, 11,660 foot Rollins Pass impossible when the line repeatedly snowed shut, and hopelessly expensive when it was open. The price of coal to power the line was costing $2,000 a day for the pass alone! By the end of 1912, the line fell into bankruptcy.

Multiple reorganizations brought the railway back under new leadership and different names, and some of Moffat’s fellow investors paid to lay the tracks to Craig, but there the westward expansion died.

Instead of building west to Rangely and beyond, a cutoff south was envisioned that linked to the existing Denver and Rio Grande line near Glenwood Springs. This new route opened for business in the summer of 1934. Various legal arrangements for sharing the tracks were discussed, but in the end the Rio Grande absorbed the orphaned Denver and Salt Lake, which ceased to exist as a separate entity on April 11, 1947—with the Rangely Weber oil boom in full swing.

The railroad had planned to come to Rangely; it had tried to come. But it had been headed off at the pass and had taken another route—just like in the Western movies!

Epilogue: Not the End of the Story!

“Life is strange with its twists and turns,” claims the beloved old poem “Don’t Quit.” Obviously, World War II changed the game enough so that the Rangely Deep Oil Boom happened without a railway. Roads were built, the equipment trucked in, the oil camps constructed, and the wells drilled. In the 1940s, the black gold flowed naturally; by the 50s, 500 “walking beam” pumpers sucked it up out of the ground like sweethearts sharing a milkshake. In the 60s, the field was “unitized” (put under a single
operator) and put on waterflood injection to boost recovery; by the 80s, water injection was augmented by carbon dioxide injection. As of this writing, the Rangely field is still generating about 20,000 barrels of oil a day, although Rio Blanco is no longer the largest oil-producing county in Colorado.

But the town never exploded into another Midland, Texas. More than seventy years after the Raven A-1 went on-line, Rangely’s population remains about 2,500 people. The town has seen boom and bust periods come and go since the streets were paved and the wildcatters moved on, but Rangely still gives the impression of clinging to the desert floor as if, were it to relax its grip, it might come loose and blow away. This is the legacy of the failure of railroads—both the Uintah before and the D&SL after the decision was made to go for the deep oil—to establish Rangely as a place through which commerce would pass on its frantic dash east and west. The very forces that held civilization at bay in the days before 1931— isolation, especially—still dog the town, despite a growing movement to develop tourism and recreation opportunities.

Perhaps the greatest irony of all is that today—since 1984—Rangely does indeed have a railroad. It is a full-size railroad: the Deseret Power Railroad, owned and operated by Blue Mountain Energy to service a coal-fired power plant near Bonanza, Utah. Three big General Electric locomotives haul 44 full-size coal cars back and forth between the Bonanza Power Plant and Rangley’s Deserado Coal Mine. Air horns at last echo off the rock walls just outside the Rangely Basin … but, in typical Rangely fashion, even this does not connect the town with the outside world. The track does not connect with the nation’s rail network but only the power plant with the coal mine. The nearest railheads remain near Craig, Rifle, and Grand Junction. Each of those 44 coal cars and the three massive engines had to be trucked the final hundred miles to Rangely!

But the real legacy of this story is of the indomitable human desire to succeed—for people to win, even when they lose. David Moffat broke himself crossing the Front Range with railroad tracks. While he never reached his goal, he did prove his critics wrong. Coal trains come down the “Craig Branch” onto his former main line to this day and then blast through the famous tunnel bearing his name—one of the longest in the United States—built after his death.

Beleaguered and battled on the floor of the Basin, Rangely watches over one of the nation’s great oil fields—built despite the railroads—and refuses to roll over and die. It battles on to reinvent itself while treasuring its past and vows to outlive the naysayers—even as Edwin L. Drake did all those years ago in Titusville . . .
A single coach from the Uintah Railway’s frontier passenger service, as well as a standard-gauge caboose from the Denver and Salt Lake Railway, reside at the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden . . .

In the Rangely Cemetery for many years was a gravestone with a carved image on one side of a giant Union Pacific steam locomotive – its owner and story lost to history . . .

A man hired by a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Railroad, A.C. McLaughlin, helped birth the dream of finding deep oil at Rangely . . . Texaco, a company working with the Union Pacific Railroad, managed a sizable portion of the Rangely field in the pre-unitization days . . . Lufkin Industries, which manufactured many of the original oil pumps in the field, had its origins working on steam locomotive boilers in Texas . . .

An abandoned railroad auxiliary water tank, brought to Rangely in the 1960s to aid a power plant, has become a music recording studio of such unique acoustics that musicians and the curious are coming from far and wide to sing, record, and listen therein . . .

A well-known Rangely local occasionally conducts day tours of the former Uintah roadbed and some of the ghost-town remains along the line. Another local rides the Amtrak trains through the western Colorado mountains as a volunteer history guide in the summertime . . .

And a train that connects with nothing helps keep the lights on and the heat going in remote Northwest Colorado.

Not bad . . . for a western town that never arrived on the main line.

Endnotes

3. The quote came from a Mr. Frank Scully in 1948, in the *Rocky Mountain Petroleum Review*; who went on to say that, by the end of the 1950’s, Rangely’s population might even go on to reach 100,000! (Haag, Robert, *The Reality of Rangely*, Revised ed. (Self-published, June, 2008, page 550).
5. The history of Rangely’s oil production in the years before the boom (1901-1945) is documented in detail in the book *The Raven at Rangely, An Illustrated History of Raven Oil and Refining Company*, Keeney, G.E. Bud, 1992, Datacolor: Irvine, California. Currently out of print but copies are occasionally found for sale on the Web.
Ken Bailey | The TANK

The Rangely “Tank” or Center for the Sonic Arts. Moved to Rangely in the 1960s to service a power plant, the Tank had been a water tank on a distant railroad line, most likely idled when steam locomotives were phased out. It was intended to service a power plant by gravity feed, but—when installed on this sandy bluff—the additional water weight was thought to be too heavy for the unstable ground, and thus the tank was never used. It sat empty for decades until discovered for its unique and haunting acoustics due to its shape and location. Today, it is gaining nation-wide fame as a music and sound studio for the professional and the curious alike. Photograph, 2017.

6. Ibid., pg. 38.
7. As per Wikipedia.

For Further Study:

The author’s general knowledge of Rangely history during and after the boom years has been greatly augmented by the massive work The Reality of Rangely by Robert Haag, Revised ed. June 2008, self-published.

There are a number of sources for the story of David Moffat and the Denver and Salt Lake Railway in its various incarnations, but an excellent short history (used in the preparation of the section in this article) is found in “Mr. Moffat’s Main Line” by Mike Danneman, Trains Magazine, special edition no. 16, 2016, published by Kalmbach Publishing Co., Waukesha, Wisconsin.

Further historical information (as well as historical photographs) about Rangely and the Rangely Oil Field(s) is available from the Rangely Outdoor Museum.

Wikipedia, the on-line web encyclopedia, was used to obtain general facts about the Uintah Railway and the Deseret Power Railway.
I Inherited Grief from my Mother
By Anita Withey

When Grief can’t escape
It takes refuge
in the corporate body.

Nestling in crannies of the heart it pushes outward
till those muscular
valves become stretched and sore.
And life’s pumping blood aches
endlessly
as the ongoing cycle of blue and red
creeps slowly around each vascular bend.

Resting, Grief reposes heavily in the crook of the gut,
jostling and thrashing to make a snug seat,
befuddling sensations of hunger and pain until
health and wellbeing are confounded.

Aroused, it scales each vertebra,
an alpinist’s dance of balance and grasping.
Summiting,
only to discover a constricting skull
can barely sequester
its own mass of nerves and neurons.

There is no room for Grief here.
Descending an alternate route, pursuing flight,
it doggedly pummels the windows inside
until all is darkness
pricked with painful light.

Strong shoulders sag
under the weight of useless arms and flaccid hands.
Tears too costly pool unwelcome,
acidly blurring bright cavities accustomed to gazing
hopefully on beauty.

No medicine can cure it.
No drug can obscure it.
Grief is a fever no vaccine can hold at bay.
Beloveds,
armed with antibodies of kinship,
find reprieve
in cool washcloths against flushed cheeks,
the body resisting nourishment, fed.
Until at last, the indistinct image of life
revives,
with sharper edges and altered, yet more saturated, hues.

Isolated sufferers lay listless,
awaiting stamina and yearning for hopeless rescue.
Until
God willing,
arising dehydrated and weak,
undertake once more a forkful of the feast,
not first, but least,
as they observe the banquet steadily decay.

Motherhood
BY ANITA WITHEY

Motherhood,
a fistful of wildflowers
pressed into hastily gloveless hands wiping goose poop from the tub.
Janice singing in the background…
Come on, Come on, Come on, Come on.
Take another piece;
here, I serve it to you gladly upon this plate,
my heart, yours already
but
mine also,
a guide as we
walk this path together,
son.
Strangers crowded the vestibule of their local Mexican restaurant, the one where they could share an order of steak nachos and she could drink two-for-one house margaritas and they’d barely break a twenty. A fleshy arm pushed against Evan’s back. It felt like a long, under-filled water balloon, loose and cold. An inauspicious beginning, he thought. He shifted nearer his wife, draping his arm in an awkward half-curve around her waist, his hand blocked by the jacket that she held like a leather guardian against her stomach. She stiffened. Only for a moment, but in that moment he felt like one of the strangers and fought the urge to give her space. There was no space to give. Wasn’t that why they were here, to invade space in this monthly ritual? Emotionally, at least. The physical invading would come later, if he was lucky.

A chuckle tickled his chest; over a decade of marriage and still hoping to get lucky at the end of a date. She tilted her face in his direction, seeking an explanation for his laugh.

Gets more crowded every time, he said.

A tightening of her mouth showed she’d heard. Her gaze returned to the greeter’s podium.

A free babysitter, you, and a crisp twenty, that’s all I need, he said. He felt his breath, warm against her ear.

She pulled away, saying, You didn’t brush your teeth.

We’re about to eat a plate of nachos, he said, I didn’t think it was important.

Well, don’t breathe in my face.

He refused the pull on his mouth, the pull that would make his expression mirror hers. One frown meant a bad day. Two frowns warned of a bad marriage, and they weren’t that couple. Besides, he thought, honesty was their goal; it was the knotted rope they climbed together, and one day they’d ring that bell. If only his portion of the rope wasn’t slicked with grease. She climbed easily. All she did came easy, and she smiled her tight, disappointed smile each time the gap between them widened. No offered hand. He was sure she couldn’t ring that bell alone.

The rest of the night was a script they’d co-written over the years.
She’d sip her margarita, a pale green liquid that smelled like citrus and sugar and filled a glass the size of a soup bowl. With an unaffected stare she’d watch the nachos disappear. I’m not hungry, she’d say, go ahead. This was a signal that she felt fat, but he wouldn’t argue. Not because he agreed, but because an empty stomach meant the alcohol would hit sooner. The tequila would do the work he couldn’t. Her mouth would form a genuine smile. It was the smile he’d fallen in love with but rarely saw. Emboldened, he’d order a second plate of nachos. The lines across the bridge of her nose would pinch, disgust flitting to the surface before the tequila-filter could smudge it away. With a half-smile he’d spoon another chunk of steak onto a pale, salty chip. He’d wait for the second margarita to iron out the deeper creases, for frustration to drift into contemplative acceptance. He’d watch his wife slip a notch down that rope.
I have to laugh at the National Rifle Association. The organization seems overly concerned with American rights to have 10, 15, or even 30 shot magazines on pistols and rifles. Yet those of us who hunt know that if you can't kill a deer or an elk in three shots, you'd either better get closer or spend more time on the rifle range. The sad fact is that probably at no time in American history have there been more guns and fewer hunters.

The sportsmanlike pursuit of wild game has been one of the great American traditions on public land. Most hunting rifles are limited to five rounds—one in the barrel and four in the magazine.

Hunting isn’t about killing. It’s about being outdoors with friends and family and the camaraderie around a campfire after a solid day of hiking with mud on your boots and twigs in your coat.

As a boy with a Daisy air rifle, I’d follow my father down the long rows of corn stalks waiting for pheasants to fly. I have fond memories of those fall afternoons in South Dakota with pheasants lined out on the wagon tailgate and the smell of coffee laced with brandy being poured from a thermos. I still have the .22 Winchester single shot rifle I learned to hunt jack rabbits with on Colorado’s high plains. I grew up hunting. I grew up with the smell of Hoppes nitro solvent used to clean rifles and shotguns as we swabbed out the barrels after a day in the field.

One of my adult sons has his Hunter’s Safety Card and the other one likes to target shoot, but neither one is interested in hunting. Across America hunters are aging, and without younger hunters to carry on conservation traditions, wild game and habitat will suffer. We have over 300 million Americans but only 12.5 million hunters, or a mere five percent of the adult population. Just as my hero Theodore Roosevelt was a bird and big game hunter and an expert on North American large mammals, he was also a “wilderness warrior” who protected over 230 million acres of American public lands. Because he hunted, he embraced the goals of conservation.

National Geographic notes, “The great irony is that many species might not survive at all were it not for hunters trying to kill them.” Since 1934 for the right to shoot ducks, hunters have paid out $700 million dollars, some of which purchased 5.2 million acres for the National Wildlife Refuge System.
We need younger hunters. It’s ironic that with the recent craze for organic food, free range chickens, and adherents to a “paleo diet,” there are fewer folks willing to get up before dawn to study habitat and hunting. Anyone who eats meat should learn to shoot, hunt, and field dress his or her game, whether it’s blue grouse found in high altitude pines or mule deer bedded down in oakbrush. As humans we’ve hunted for millennia, and anthropologists posit that coordinated hunts spurred language development, culture, and art.

There has always been a spiritual bond between hunter and prey. Hunters know it’s about humility. Native Americans have long believed that game comes only to hunters who are mentally and spiritually prepared. It’s not about how many bullets you have in your rifle, it’s about your patience and persistence as the weather changes. It’s about your preparedness as snowflakes drift down across the game trail, and having all your senses fully alert as animals begin to move.

Fewer parents are hunting with their sons and daughters. Practicing marksmanship, moving quietly through the woods, looking for animal spoor and sign, these are skills that need to be taught. Young hunters need to be mentored.

The goal is to be outdoors, walking through the landscape and learning about camouflage and ecosystems, learning to see and smell in the wild. Listening. In some seasons the largest thing I’ve cut up with my hunting knife is an orange. Killing game is not the sole reason to hunt, and for true hunters, firearms are only a means to an end, not an end to themselves.

One of our greatest conservationists and early ecologists, Aldo Leopold,
learned about land through hunting. He also learned about himself. Leopold wrote, “at daybreak I am the sole owner of all the acres I can walk over. It is not only boundaries that disappear, but also the thought of being bounded.”

I hunt the third rifle season. I hunt for meat, not for antlers to hang on the wall, though I have those, too. If I see younger hunters, I give them all the encouragement that I can because we need younger hunters. I may walk for days and never fire a shot. But that does not matter. I’m outdoors in Colorado, enjoying the sagebrush, the pines, those glorious autumn days, and maybe, just maybe, I’ll get a big buck in the crosshairs of my rifle scope or a good broadside shot on a cow elk. If not, I’ll just keep looking, learning, trying to understand animals and their habitats, which is why I was so worried a few years back.

* * *

I knew we were in trouble when I saw the third snowshoe hare. Don’t get me wrong. I like bunnies and I was not in danger. After all, it was almost noon on the first day of elk season in early November. I had a knife, hunting rifle, and adequate ammunition. Yet what I realized made the hair

Andrew Gulliford | Hanging Carcasses
For hunters, there’s nothing like the success of “making meat” and bringing home bucks to hang for a few days for the venison to cure. Big game hunting is an important tradition on the Western Slope passed down from generation to generation, but across the nation there are fewer and fewer hunters each year.
stand up on the back of my neck. I felt immediately threatened. As we all are.

Here in Colorado we have not felt the initial impacts of climate change. No oceans are lapping at the shores of Denver and no glaciers are calving off Mount Garfield near Grand Junction. Yes, we read about polar bears in the Arctic having a difficult time of it because ice breaks up earlier and seals are harder to pursue and eat. On some islands in the Pacific, natives worry about being re-located and abandoning their ancestral homes. Scientists clamor that we’ve passed the tipping point and that humans in a new geological era labeled the Anthropocene have warmed the atmosphere, but in the Rockies we have yet to discern the beginning effects of climate change except in our dwindling snowpack.

Although the weather has been odd. Too cold in some places and too warm in others. The beetle infestation keeps killing hundreds of square miles of pine trees, and aspens may migrate to higher elevations, but unlike other parts of the world, on the Western Slope it is difficult to perceive climate change as occurring right now.

“It was taken for granted that the process was not something that could be observed in real time, an assumption that has now been proven false,” writes Elizabeth Kolbert in Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature and Climate Change. Kolbert explains that over a period of two million years, earth’s temperature has swung wildly yet remained in certain limits. She adds, “The planet has often been colder than today, but rarely warmer, and then only slightly.” Kolbert cautions, “It is only in the last five or ten years that global warming has finally emerged from the background ‘noise’ of climate variability. And even so, the changes that can be seen lag behind the changes that have been set in motion.”

Elk hunting in Colorado’s magnificent high country, the last thing I had in mind was climate change. There had been a little early snow, so I’d finally bought insulated high top boots that I should have purchased years ago. With toasty toes and warm gloves, I felt ready to hunt all day. My partner Ron and I had topped the ridge by 9 a.m., seen elk tracks, though not fresh ones, and gone our separate ways, vowing to meet at camp by noon.

So I was on my way downslope when I saw my first rabbit. Pure white, the snowshoe hare quivered in a snowdrift next to fallen timber. He was doing his bunny best to be camouflaged, but on that south-facing mountain the previous week’s snow melted fast. Forty yards further I spied bunny #2 with his nose twitching and pink ears swiveling. He ran off and hid near more snow, but he had to cross bare ground to do it. That was when I found the third rabbit almost at my feet. He glared white against tan pine needles, and I sensed something was wrong.
Hunters must be wary of approaching storms, and no precipitation had been predicted for several weeks. In that time the snow crunching under my boots would be gone, yet the bunnies would still be white and totally vulnerable to predators. Snowshoe hares should know better. Why were they white in early November with limited snow on the ground? What was happening?

“I’ve seen and had many reports the last three years about mismatched hares and habitat, mostly in the fall when hares are turning white before much snow cover,” explains Scott Wait, Southwest Region Senior Biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. “But I’ve also seen white hares in the spring when some of our snow has melted from dust storm deposition leading to early snowmelt.”

Snowshoe hares survive by mimicry, or camouflage, and the species evolved to be brown in summer and white in winter. Wait told me, “Color change is initiated due to daylight length, which might be related to snow accumulation on an evolutionary time-scale. If snow accumulation varies from normal, the hare continues to change color but might find itself wearing the wrong color, white on a brown background, or brown on a white background.”

So that was it. Snowshoe hares have adapted not to snow on the ground but to the length of daylight. That first day of 3rd rifle season, or the first weekend in November, there should have been more snow, but there wasn’t. The rabbits had planned on winter snow cover that had already begun to melt. I had seen climate change in action, or so I thought. Scientist Scott Wait isn’t sure. He added, “Are the mismatches seen by many elk hunters in recent years due to climate changes, annual variation, or merely an increase in hare abundance?”

I hope he’s right. I hope what we hunters are describing is an increase in snowshoe hares that will provide food for raptors, coyotes, and the introduced Canadian lynx, a federally endangered species. Dr. L. Scott Mills at the University of Montana goes even further to suggest that genetic variation may already be resulting in rapid rabbit adaptation.

Maybe. But not where I was hunting. I saw three bright white bunnies in small snow patches on an otherwise dull brown turf. I hope they make it through the winter. I hope they can adapt to climate change. I wonder if we Americans will.

* * *

Then there’s the magic of hunting. Those opportunities in the woods when things happen that cannot be explained by scientists, only by folklore, by native shamans, by hunters who have walked miles alone listening,
looking, becoming one with the habitat in which they hunt.

I had shot the elk the day before, and we had hauled out half the meat, bagged, and on a hunter’s orange sled. Now we’d come back the next morning for our cache to bring down the last of the elk before the weather changed and snow closed our route. The sky had turned steely gray. No clouds. The barometer was falling. As we tied down the last of the elk on our sled, I remembered that I had left the ivory elk’s teeth still in the cow elk’s skull. Elk are the only North American mammal that have two ivory teeth, which they use to whistle and call their mates.

Andrew Gulliford | Highway Sign

During the oil shale boom in the mid-1970s, highway signs in the Piceance Creek Basin warned drivers of migratory big game herds and livestock.

The teeth are proof of being a good hunter. Among Plains Indian tribes, for a young Native American suitor to claim a bride, he had to give his future mother-in-law 100 elks’ teeth to prove his ability to feed his future family. That was an ancient and revered tradition. The elk had offered itself up to me. Before I even touched it with a skinning knife, I had given it a sip of water so it could be refreshed on its journey to the next life. I had learned to make that simple offering as Natives do. But I’d forgotten the teeth.

I moved back up slope, disoriented, unsure of where I’d made the kill. We’d brought the meat so far down the mountain that I was having a hard time remembering exactly where on that aspen-covered slope, leafless now, I’d dropped the animal.

I went through the trees, pistol at my side in case of encountering bears choosing to claim our meat. The silence of the forest settled on me.
Moisture in the air meant no snap and pop to the downed leaves glazed from frost. I moved through a world of flat light with no top or bottom, and I honestly could not remember where I’d shot that elk. I was a little frightened by the stillness, by my lack of direction. Then I heard it.

Just once. The deep-throated quark of a raven. Ahead of me and to the northwest. That was all the guidance I needed. The raven knew. Within minutes I found the carcass and extracted the ivories to make earrings for my wife. I hurriedly turned downslope to get the sled off the ridge and to begin the long drive home before snow closed the forest road.

Weeks later I realized that the raven’s call was no accident. The raven had guided me to the carcass. Somehow that magical bird, hero and villain in a hundred folktales from Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, knew I wanted to re-locate my kill. He knew what I sought without my even speaking. He read my mind. Ravens have guided hunters for millennia because they enjoy the spoils, the leftovers.

I should have thanked the raven as he had thanked me. I will next time.

Andrew Gulliford is an historian and an award-winning author and editor who divides his time between the mountains of Durango, CO and the canyons of Bluff, UT. Dr. Gulliford recently edited The Last Stand of the Pack: A Critical Edition, which details the trapping, poisoning, shooting, and killing of wolves in Colorado and why we should bring them back. Reach him at andy@agulliford.com.
1986

BY MICKEY ALLEN

This is the poem I was going to write in 1970
But didn’t.

Remember 1970?
Three men in a spaceship they had the gall
To call 13.
They were going to land on the moon again
And bunny-hop around in their funny suits,
But something went terribly wrong
And for a terribly long time it seemed
They’d slipped those surly bonds of Earth
A little too well.
It was then I was going to write this poem
But didn’t.
But like the most improbable Buck Rogers script,
They did some space age chewing gum and baling wire tricks
And even managed to float down right on target.
And I was so filled with that old but oft forgotten wonder
At how tough and how smart we are,
We hairless little primates
Who can survive the ice and the fire
Of Greenland and the Kalahari,
Find water, shelter, food.
Survive.
Even find our way home from airless space.
And I didn’t write this poem.

Well, we all knew it couldn’t go on forever
Without a hitch,
And this was the year it happened.
They roared and they soared
And they blossomed
Like a great gaudy jungle flower
In the cold winter sky.
They say they kept on soaring,
Rising another three or four miles
Until gravity canceled momentum.
They must have paused up there at the apogee,
Stood motionless on airless air
As eagles stand on the wind,
And then they fell.

Already dead
Or unconscious and unknowing
Or wide awake and screaming unheard,
They fell.
Back into thickening air
And at last into Mother Earth’s ocean,
Salt into salt.
Down to the continental shelf
To be rocked in the Gulf Stream’s cradle.
Until at last we found them,
Fished them out and planted them in Mother Earth’s earth.

We got them back again.
They’re here.
Like every molecule that ever had life,
Down all the ages since this lovely little planet
Took shape and began to whirl
Around the sun.
They’re here
Since the beginning,
All that has lived here has returned here
And fed its protein back into the unending circle,
Life into death into life.

But it will happen.
A shipload of those smart little primates
Will blast free of our gravity
And not be able to find its way back.
When they know,
Perhaps they’ll look back at the dwindling blue ball
And squander the air with screaming.
But I hope there’s one who’ll nibble at the precious oxygen,
Who’ll tend his human spark
And keep it glowing as far into the star-studded blackness
As he can,
And black out grinning at the wonders he’s seen
That no one has seen before.

And all we survivors,
We earth-bound humans,
As it all sinks in at last . . .
They’re gone. We can’t get them back.
If we are very quiet
I think we’ll hear the Earth
Keening for the first children
She has ever lost.
Ashes of Husbands
BY JOYCE WILSON

My aunt keeps my uncle on top of her boxes of shoes. It horrifies my cousin who thinks she disrespects the dead. She can’t see the treasure he is in his small box, the evidence of love, present even if most of him isn’t.

My father’s ashes have lived in my mother’s closet for ten years. The evening he died, the local medical school received his body. Months later his ashes came back.

Mom missed him while he was gone, though parts of him had been disappearing for ages. The part that survived testing by fire keeps company with her loneliness in living a tenth decade.

There aren’t many left who know what she knows, so she has Daddy sit on a shelf near the bed they shared. She talks to him occasionally, remnants of pillow talk, those times he’s the only one who will listen to her.

When she’s gone, he’ll go too. We’ll put them together again, ashes with ashes, to scatter somewhere. I know how they’ll feel, those fragments we’ll release one day. It’s not something you ever forget.
Ducks and Lux  
By Deborah Miles Freitag

Sump pits were ponds of oil field sludge. Black and shiny, they were man-made death traps of greasy waste that blasphemed the pristine sky they reflected. Back before the EPA, Chevron would periodically burn one off in the Rangely “patch.” A tower of rank and roiling smoke would rise up and then slump in a mushroom cloud of heavy toxic filth. It was a sin and it stank.

The world first saw that waterfowl and oil don’t mix in 1989 when the Exxon Valdez ran aground in Alaska’s Prince William Sound, spilling 10.8 million US gallons of crude into the bay. My older sister Joan and I, however, experienced our first black tragedy back in the 60s when two ducks flew into the sump pit behind the Rangely Junior High. Imagine their surprise when the “sky blue water” turned out to be thick and stinking crude that burnt their webbed feet and globed heavy on their feathers. Dad saw them land, rescued them, and put them in a box. By the time he brought them home, the birds were slick, black, and dying.

We were watching TV when Dad called us all to come out and see what he had. Mom, Joan, and I looked into the box he held. We were astounded and sorrowed by the condition of the ducks, and we went into action. Joan and I changed clothes because this was going to be dirty business; Mom had already flashed us “the look” for just thinking about touching a pitiful, greasy black duck.

Dad began pouring handfuls of fine dirt on their wings while he instructed us in the art of duck washing. Explaining how the dirt would soak up the oil, he showed me how to hold the hen while Joan worked dirt into her feathers. Meanwhile, Dad worked on the mallard. Mom got the washtub out of the garage and filled it with water from the hose, and Dad yelled for her to bring the Lux liquid.

Once we had covered the ducks with dirt and rubbed it in, Dad put them in the tub of water. Mom squirted pink dish soap on their backs, and we began to rub it in. There were no suds, just oil and dirt and pink. The water in the tub became murky with an iridescent sheen. Mom changed it while we put more dirt on the ducks. Then more Lux. Then more dirt. We repeated the process until Dad said it was as good as it was going to get.

Mom got an old towel, and Dad gently dried each duck. He was squatted down with a cigarette in his mouth corner, cradling the mallard in his arm. “Poor bastard,” he said as he put the duck in the box with the hen. We then
put some straw in the box to keep them warm. They laid on it with their
necks stretched out—a pathetic and moribund position for a duck. “Are
they gonna die?” Joan asked. Now that there was no more work to be done,
we were overwhelmed by pity for the animals. Such horrors and treason
they had seen that day! “They’re damn sick, Joan. We’ll leave them in the
garage and check them after supper.”

“Go get cleaned up,” Mom ordered. She glared at us. We were covered
with dirt and oil, mud and grease. Our fingernails were a disgrace. “Take
your shoes off before you set foot in that house!”

Duck care was all we thought about. We had never had ducks—they
spoke a foreign language. They were so sick at first that they couldn’t feed
themselves. Mom made a thin soup out of oats and milk, and we fed it to
them with a red bulb syringe (the same one that I distinctly remembered
Mom giving me an enema with when I was younger—useful tool). Once,
Dad squeezed the bulb too hard and gruel came out the mallard’s nostrils.
We took that to heart and were much more careful with the bulb syringe
afterwards. The mallard was eating well, but the hen was slow to recover.
We worried about her chances. Dad told us to expect the worst.

One day, after about two weeks of intensive care, we came home from
school to find the hen better. She and the mallard were strutting around
the garage, splashing in the washtub and quacking with vigor. This
happened to be one of Mom’s bridge game afternoons. We knew what was
what, and we entered the house with our agenda and our most upright
behavior. There was a German chocolate cake sitting in all its coconut
pecan frosting glory, uncut, on the counter. The fancy dessert dishes were
sitting beside the glass cake pan. There were only four plates. We greeted
the bridge ladies and turned to Mom. She was smiling at us. She must have
been winning. I went for it. “Mom, can we have…?”

“You can after your supper.” The air whooshed out of me, and with
it my duck-optimism. Joan, who wasn’t as emotionally involved with
German chocolate as I, spoke up. “Guess what?”

“What?”

“The hen is better, and they are running all over the garage.” The ladies
giggled. They had been told the whole duck story earlier in the game. Joan
asked, “Mom, can we bring them inside to show the ladies?”

Mom hesitated. Free and dirty birds in the house was not a thing she
had considered before.

“I wanna see these famous ducks,” Catherine said.
“Yeah, bring ‘em in,” said Ula.

“Okay. But don’t you dare let go of them, and if one of them makes a mess in this house, you will clean it up.” We rolled our eyes. The standard rule of the house was You Will Clean It Up. Mom gave us a look that slapped the eye roll right off our faces.

We tore out to the garage and chased flapping and quacking ducks. They knew that we would not hurt them; they were just feeling better and enjoyed flapping around and making noise. We finally caught them and cradled them under our arms, stroking their long necks and feathers that now had their own oil.

We entered the kitchen, and the ladies looked up and oooed, aawed, and giggled.

“My God, Helen. They’re huge!” said LaVerne.

“Let me see that beautiful boy,” Catherine demanded.

I had the mallard. As I walked toward Catherine, a wing struggled out from under my arm; the legs began to paddle. Then there was all manner of flapping, squealing, and outright hollering. I shut my eyes and the duck was loose. Joan made a grab for him and dropped the hen. I opened my eyes and saw the cards go flying as the duck winged across the card table as if he were taking off from a pond. The ladies were shrieking and ducking ducks. The ducks swooped and flapped. The mallard cruised through the kitchen at eye level and landed on the counter. “Get that goddamn duck!” Mom snapped. The hen flapped up to join the mallard on the countertop. Joan and I lunged for them. The mallard spied the cake, hopped in with both webbed feet, and began scooping billfulls and flinging them across the kitchen. The hen followed as the mallard waddled across the stovetop, tracking coconut pecan frosting. My mother stood in the kitchen with her mouth open. A tail feather floated to the floor. The mallard stopped at the end of the counter and raised his tail feathers. “No!” Too late; the mallard messed a big puddle and flapped to the floor. The hen followed him, waddling and quacking. I grabbed her. Joan grabbed the mallard and out the back door we went as duck droppings dripped down the side of the cupboard.

The bridge ladies were still in a flutter when we came back in. Mom was laughing, but it was a polite laugh. We were ordered to change clothes and watch TV. The bridge party broke up and went home, and Mom cleaned the kitchen with a vengeance.

Dad came through the door at five o’clock and said, “Whew, it smells like Clorox in here.” Mom turned to him and put her hands on her hips.
“Those ducks are leaving tonight.” She turned back to the spotless kitchen and started supper.

With Dad still in his work clothes, before drinks, before supper, before the newspaper, we loaded the ducks in a cardboard box, put it in the back seat of the car, and headed for the river. We told Dad all about the bridge party and the loss of the German chocolate cake. He chuckled. “If they are healthy enough to eat cake, they’re healthy enough to be let go.” Joan agreed with this statement. I mourned the loss of the ducks as much as I did the destruction of the cake.

We got to the river and pulled over to the side of the road. Dad carried the box of muffled quacks down the bank and to the water’s edge. Joan opened the lid and the ducks stood for a moment, basking in the sound and smell of river. I reached down to pet the mallard, and he flew out of the box and winged across the river as if it were a card table. The hen put her bill upward, quacked, and took off. She was midstream when down from the top of a tall cottonwood swooped an owl and nabbed her. She quacked and flapped and then hung her head. The owl glided out of sight in the dusk.

For a moment we stood unbelieving, much as my mother had stood while she watched her cake flung in gobs across the kitchen. Joan and I began to sob loudly, and Dad pulled us both in and held us for a minute. He led us up the bank to the car and listened to us sniffle all the way home. We ate dinner in silence that night. There was no dessert.
Reliance on the earth
Demands sacrifice.
Blood. Blisters.
Bows in reverence.
Last year’s bounty
Split and dried.
Offered up. Buried.
Memories endowed
To soil begging
For acknowledgment.
Essence stolen from
Ancestors invested
In the future.
Energy converted
Pushes reproduction.
Things dead return
If only one
Provides the offering.

Dust Bowl

Curtains hang unrusted. Still.
Breezes abandoned us long ago.
Sweat traces my cheek to spill
Down to puddle on the unswept floor.

I stare out as if my hope
Could stir up a wild, white thunderhead
To soak this barren hellhole
Or whip away this feeling of dread.

Each day opens like a hole
Already filled with monotony.
Repetition kills the soul
As surely as complacency.
JOSEPH LANSING | Thompson Springs
Light Shade

By Samantha LightShade

In that room
I played with dolls and talked to the mice
My mom would return at night her voice like a shining light
In the solitude of my own mind
I knew that I was getting left behind
But I understood or I thought I did
Why it was better safe and hid
Behind a locked door
Behind the barricade of trash
I had so many questions that I didn’t ask
Like what about school? My hair is in rats
I’ll read all the books on this shelf from the past
What about my body it’s always sick and it’s getting stretched
Can I go to my dad’s? I feel strange there but he makes me laugh.
But I’ll miss you mom so I’ll stay here
I’ll play with the dolls until you come home
When you go to sleep I feel so alone
Counting each hour
I still hate that feeling
When all I hear is silence and the sound of sleep breathing
When the sun comes up I’ll see you again
I tell myself as I swallow the poison of knowing I’m getting left behind
I think I might be losing my mind
The dolls don’t talk back
I don’t recognize myself anymore
I’ve become like the trash forgotten on the floor
Out in the world I don’t know how
To relate to my peers
So I stay quiet and know they think I’m weird
I read all the books on the shelf
Even though I’m always sick I still want to better myself
The people think I’m dumb because I haven't been in school
I have to leave this house
I'll move into my dad’s
Nobody’s there but I’ll have my own room
I miss you when I’m there like the sky without a moon
Mom I understand you wanted to keep me safe and hid
With all your heart I know you tried and did the best you did
I know what it’s like
To feel alone
Left behind
In garbage dolls and mice
Looking back from different eyes
Now my hair is long, body strong, no longer sick or lost
I made it out
To the other side
Of a locked door
And a broken mind
When you see me
And call me beauty
See that I chose this
Pulled the thorns out of roses
Took the poison in doses
Made a light out of darkness
Understand I grew a deep sense of loyalty
To protect the real
Each voice like a breath of relief
That I'm not alone in this silent sea
That was poured over me
I see each soul as a beautiful being
A world of its own
I wanted to hear sing
My mom sang to me every night before bed
Same song every time sang it twice it's still stuck in my head
Years went by
Inside that room
My friend Amanda came by
She opened the door and saw me for the first time
A former shell of myself
But she showed me how to be free
The world outside
What it meant to be me
No longer alone even to this day
We wrote in journals over the phone for the last few years I lived in that home
Her family of wolves accepted me
Each one magnetic, fearless, and uncontrollable
Her mom considers me a goddaughter
In the desert of the deserted they were to me like water
A new chance a new life
Taught me I had teeth, claws, and a will to fight
I knew I had to say goodbye to the past
Broke my heart and you can still see the glass in my eyes so I keep them hid
Can't deny or justify
How I disappeared in plain sight
Or how I turned shade to light
Justice is that I became
Who I always was, the brightest flame of Samantha LightShade
“Once upon a
who the heck knows when

native people believed
this ancient massive wind and weather carved
sandstone bridge

functioned

as a window
a passage
a gateway

into the world

and later
they’d pass
through a second time
on their return trip
to the other side.”

I listen to the ranger and like the idea—
life and death
in the guise
of a cosmic revolving door—

but in my own case
if there is truth to the tale

I’ll have to be dragged through
shrieking and drumming my heels—

I like it just fine
in the here and now.
This Should Not Happen on a Chilly April Morning
By David Morris

A large dust-colored rattler
nearly invisible amidst sparse sage

leaps to greet me
the unknown and inadvertent invader
of her personal space.

She’s fast:

she sounds the alarm with frantic shakes of her tail
while zeroing in
jaws agape and fangs displayed—

but I’m fast too
already high in the air and away
in an acrobatic
backwards
lofty
leap.

River Otter
By David Morris

Over and over and over again

with a flick of her whip-like tail she
frog kicks down
to the cobble-stoned mossy river bottom
only to rocket back up
into the bright light of a cloudless August morning
to unabashedly stare

as if I’m the one providing the entertainment
as if it’s just me
and not her too
who can’t
get enough of a good thing.
Writing on the Wall
BY DESIREE MOORE

I take in a deep breath and make my way to the beginning of my journey. The small church is decorated with white lace bows and orchids. I look forward and see the people nicely seated in the rows of maroon upholstered chairs and the pink petals that are scattered daintily along the white runner. I rub my hand along my swollen abdomen and savor the sensation of the beautiful lace and intricate beading. I see he is looking at me and I am overjoyed. I funnel all of my energy into the pace of my walk, working hard to not run to him. As I pass the rows of chairs, adoring faces look my way. Their reassuring smiles make me proud to be here. When I finally make it to my destination, to my destiny, my eyes are locked on his. His lips form the words “You are beautiful,” and I can feel the muscles in my face began to ache from the smile I can't help but show. David's warm brown eyes steady on my face as the pastor conducts the service.

The sun causes my skin to tingle, and I know that if I don’t go inside soon my pale, freckled skin will become red and sore. However, I love the sun too much to care. I then remember that I read somewhere that too many UV rays will destroy folic acid, and without folic acid, a fetus can develop Spinal Bifida. The memory causes me to change my relationship with the sun from one of love to one of fear.

I walk into the house and realize I never finished cleaning the kitchen. I was in the middle of taking out the trash when the sun distracted me. The dishes from the night before sit on the counter taunting me. I hate dishes. I decide that I am not ready to wash them. I am tired, and, since I am pregnant, I tell myself I am entitled to a little more rest than the average homemaker.

I dream of laughter. The joyful kind. I sit on the couch bouncing a smiling infant on my knee. David is beside me laughing heartily at our baby. He smiles at me, his face warm and loving. Then I look back at our baby, and I am not holding her anymore. She is sitting without support, and she begins to topple backward.

“What the hell are you doing, Melissa?” screams David.

I startle awake and blink hard in an attempt to make my eyes adjust faster to the light. I reach down to my stomach trying to assess whether I was just dreaming. David is standing over me, his nostrils flared, and his brows pushed together creating a deep V. I look up at him and I know I look confused, but that is because I am. What is he doing home already?

“I must have called you 20 times to pick me up from work! I was about to walk home. Luckily, Nate gave me a ride home!” shouts David.

“Oh my goodness! I am so sorry. I just fell asleep, and I must have left my phone in the kitchen,” I say, pleading for his forgiveness.

“I’m glad you can just sleep all day while I work my ass off in a coal mine to
support you! You can’t even pick me up!” he yells.

“I’m sorry,” I say again.

I hoist myself up from the couch to embrace him. I hope that it will help soothe his anger, but before my arms have a chance to touch him, I feel his hands heavy on my shoulders, and I am propelled back. I shift my weight to catch myself. The excess weight in front of me causes me to lose my balance and, instead of falling back on the couch, I hit the coffee table hard and fall to the floor. A glass cup that was sitting on the table shatters, and my arm is immediately covered in blood. I can feel the pain in my side from where I hit the table, and I hold my breath. When I finally come out of my moment of shock, a large cry erupts from my throat, and he is there, on the floor with me, concern in his eyes.

“I didn’t mean for that to happen,” he explains as he reaches to examine my arm. I pull my injured arm into my body.

“Get away from me! You hurt me!” I say, and I can feel the warm thick tears rushing down my face. He makes another attempt to touch me, and I shrink away and yell again, “Get away from me.” In one swift movement, he stands up and walks out of the room. I had seen him lose his temper before, but never like that. This will be the last time I get hurt.

Mia and I are sitting on her deck watching her children jump freely on the trampoline.

“You really banged yourself up,” Mia says, examining the bandages on my arm.

“Yeah, I’m so clumsy,” I say, trying to sound lighthearted about my injuries.

“It’s good that David was home to help you,” she replies, looking me. She seems skeptical as she says this, but then I’m probably just imagining it.

There is no reason for Mia to suspect anything. She has the perfect marriage and wouldn’t understand why I am incapable of producing the same.

“I know. He is wonderful. I don’t know what I would do without him,” I say, diverting my gaze to the gleeful children flying through the air temporarily before they are caught by the black net beneath them. In an attempt to change the conversation, I say, “Talking about accidents, shouldn’t you have a net on that tramp? What if one of the kids fall off?”

Mia laughs awkwardly, “Yeah, you are probably right.”

We continue to watch the children, and I have to force myself not to let my welling tears escape. It really was just an accident. He didn’t mean to hurt me. It won’t happen again.

David and I are driving to the store to grab some groceries. He got paid yesterday, and it is a relief after spending the week eating canned ravioli and ramen noodles. All I want is some chocolate cake and corn dogs. These dang pregnancy cravings. A Green Day song plays over the radio, and I tap my fingers to the beat, feeling optimistic about the day ahead.

I think back to this morning. David woke me with a vase full of flowers
and blueberry pancakes. I really am blessed. I feel a jolt as the car begins to sputter uncontrollably and look over at David. His hands tighten on the steering wheel, and his face darkens. He pulls over to assess the problem.

“It’s probably just overheated,” I say, trying to offer a simple explanation for the car’s behavior.

He gives me a quick and annoyed look and opens the door to jump out. I sit in the car, unsure of what to do with myself. I think I should try to help him, but I don’t know the first thing about cars. Before I can make my decision, he slams down the hood, and I can see sweat beading along his brow. David walks to my side of the car, and I roll down the window cranking hard to try and make it go faster.

“I don’t know what the problem is. I’m going to call Nate and see if he will pick us up,” he says.

“Okay. Can I do something to help?”

He looks at me with exasperation on his face, “You could call a mechanic.”

“Okay,” I reply.

He goes around the car and enters in on the driver side. “Just what I fucking needed today!” he yells more at himself than toward me.

I try to smooth over the situation and say, “It’s probably something easy to fix. I’m sure it will be okay.”

David snarls at me, “Do you think I’m fucking stupid, Melissa? If it was something easy to fix, I would have been able to figure it out.”

“No, I don’t think you are stupid. Why do you have to get so mad at me? I am just trying to help,” I say with hurt in my voice. I raise my hands in front of me to show that I don’t mean any harm. Then his arm flings out from his body, his hand in a tight fist, and he hits the windshield. It immediately bursts into a spider web of lines, and the impact causes me to shrink away from him.

“You always say you are trying to help, but really you are just talking down to me like I’m a fucking child!” he screams, his face reddening with each word. I don’t reply but stare straight ahead, letting the familiar hot tears cascade down my face.

I am in the garage watching David work on our car. The windshield is still fractured enough that it impedes visibility, and I think about the expense to replace it. So much bad luck. The engine is blown, but since we don’t have the money for a new car, we are trying to replace the engine ourselves. I have been out here for what seems like a lifetime in case he needs help with something. We have successfully lowered the “new to us” engine that we got from a junkyard into the car. I sit impatiently, waiting for his next command, my foot tapping the bare concrete floor. He hasn’t been himself lately, and I know it is the stress of providing for a family. It isn’t his fault. He has a lot on his shoulders these days. I feel it too, but it wears on him more than it does on me. I need to be a better wife.

“Can I get you something to eat?” I offer to do my best to be a good domestic.
“Yeah, sure,” he says without even looking at me. He is busy tightening something underneath the hood.

I walk inside, relieved that I get a break from the garage. My back aches from sitting in a metal fold-out chair longer than I should, and I arch it trying to create some relief before looking around the kitchen. What should I make him? I could just heat up some leftovers, but I want it to be special. He has been working hard lately, coming home from a twelve-hour shift at the mine just to start working on our car again.

I open up the fridge and rummage through the contents, and then I see it, deli roast beef. I will make him the best sandwich he has ever had. I begin buzzing around the kitchen grabbing tomatoes, lettuce, Swiss cheese, and German mustard from the fridge. I remember I bought a loaf of sourdough from the Amish bakery the other day and look in the bread box, praying that there is enough left. Yes, there is! I don’t know what it is about preparing food for my loving husband, but it fills me with pride. It makes me think that I can do something right. When it is finally all put together, I make a quick grab at the jar of dill pickle spears in the fridge. Pulling one out, I pat it down dry before laying it next to the sandwich. With a Coke under one arm and a plate in my hand, I waddle out to meet my husband. He will be happy when he sees this sandwich.

I walk into the garage and look around to find the place empty. Putting the plate and Coke on the workbench, I walk outside and yell his name, “Daavvviid!” No answer. I walk inside the house thinking that he must have slipped by me and yell again. Nothing. I grab my cell and dial his number hoping he just went next door to borrow a tool. Voicemail.

It is late in the evening, and I sit with my legs in front of me, enjoying the cool breeze as I swing hard through the air. The porch swing was a wedding present from David. He knew that I always dreamed of having one. Headlights approach the driveway, and I stand up to greet whoever it may be. I hope it is David. He has been gone since noon, and I haven’t been able to find him. I told myself I wouldn’t worry anyone until 9 tonight, so I have carried this burden of worry by myself.

Recognition comes, and I realize that the truck approaching belongs to Nate. He parks and runs out of the driver side and opens the passenger side door. I can see the dark form of his body enlarge as he comes back out of the truck. However, his body didn’t grow; he is holding on to my husband. David is staggering around and sputtering half pronounced profanities into the darkness.

“What happened?” I ask Nate.

“He has had quite a bit to drink. He called me probably two hours ago from the bar downtown, but I couldn’t get him to leave until a few minutes ago. He keeps talking about some junkyard that ripped him off,” he says, breathing heavy from the weight of my husband on his body.

I let him in the house and they make their way to living room. He lets David go, and David falls heavily onto the couch without a word.
“Why didn’t you call me? I have been waiting here hours with no idea where he went,” I ask Nate with annoyance in my voice.

“I’m sorry, Mel. David said you knew, and I didn’t want to worry you,” he replies, taking off his baseball cap to wipe the sweat underneath.

I shake my head, feeling sad that he would lie to keep me out.

“Well, hey, I have to go. Mia is waiting for me at home. I left her with all the kids when David called,” he explains.

“Of course. We’ll see you later, Nate. Thanks for all your help. I really appreciate it,” I say, hoping that he leaves feeling that he did the best he could do.

The next morning, I wake up in our bed alone and remember the night before. Even though I tried, I could not get him to budge off the couch. I then realize what woke me and quiet my brain so I can take in the sounds of crashing metal and glass coming from the side of the house. I work hard to roll myself out of bed, something that is a little more difficult every day. I find my slippers under the kitchen table and slip them on before heading out the door.

The cold morning air causes goose bumps to appear suddenly on my arms, and I shiver slightly before making it into the detached garage. I can hear the sounds of glass breaking when I pull open the door, and I step back trying to avoid the flying shards. It takes a moment for my eyes to adjust to the dark of the garage in contrast to the bright outside. There I see David standing in the middle of the garage. There is broken glass everywhere, and when I look down, I see the sandwich I made yesterday scattered along the floor. David’s chest rises and falls violently, and I am hesitant to go any closer. I am afraid of him. My pulse quickens, and I struggle to figure out what I should do next. My physiological reaction to him feels strange and familiar all at once.

“What’s wrong David?” I question, my voice barely audible, but he hears me.

“What’s wrong!? What is wrong!? You have no clue, do you?” he yells back at me.

At that moment, I am no longer afraid, I am angry. He can’t just act like this every time something goes wrong. Lots of things are going to go wrong, and I can’t help him if he is going to freak out and scream at me.

I verbalize my thoughts, “David, you can’t act like this anymore. It isn’t solving anything. It is just making everything worse.”

Then I see him move. He grabs one of the chains we used to hoist the engine into the car with and swings it hard through the air. Before I have time to move away, the chain makes contact with my legs. Pain erupts in my thighs, and I crumple to the floor pulling my legs into me to pacify the violent sting. My mind is spinning with anger, sadness, confusion, and his voice. He is yelling at me.

“This is your fault, Melissa. If you just stayed inside the house and gave me my space this would never have happened.”
Then he is gone, and I am alone on the floor, crying amidst the strewn sandwich, which mocks me and my stupidity. Animal-like noises come from my mouth as I mourn what I feel is the end of my marriage. The end of the family I wanted for my daughter. The end. Just as my tears start to slow, and I begin to regulate the rhythm of my breathing, I feel vibrations in my back pocket. When I look at the screen of my phone, I see it is my mother and, without thinking, I answer her call.

“Hi Mom,” I say, my voice barely audible from the tears and screams.

“Honey, what is wrong? Have you been crying?” she asks.

“It’s David. We got in a fight, Mom. I just think I can’t stay with him. He just gets too mad,” I confess, tears welling up in my eyes again.

“Sweetie, I know it is hard, but nothing worth having is going to be easy,” she assures me.

Before I can stop myself I blurt out, “You don’t understand! He hit me!”

“When?” my mother asks.

“Just a little bit ago,” I respond.

“And that is why you want to leave him?” she questions.

“Yeah,” I say, gasping for breath.

“Look, I am going to tell you something and I don’t want you to interrupt. Just hear me out. If you still feel like you need to leave, then leave. I raised you your entire life without a father and it was not easy. I either missed work because I needed to care for you, or I missed enjoying you because I had to work. I don’t want that for you and my grandbaby,” she explains.

I interrupt, “But I don’t know what else to do!”

“Hold on a sec. You need to try real hard to forgive and be a good wife. It is your duty. I’m not saying it is okay for him to hit you, but you need to try and forgive and move on. You got to know that you have it made right now. You get to raise that baby instead of paying someone else to do it. I’m sure David will feel sorry for what he did and will treat you like gold from now on. You’ll get through this. I know you will,” she says.

“Okay,” I respond. Maybe I am making this into a bigger deal than it is.

“Now, let’s talk about the reason I called you in the first place,” she says.

It is late at night when I hear the bedroom door open. I can hear him undressing, but I pretend to be asleep. From the hurried and uncoordinated sounds of his movements and the stench of liquor in the air, I can already tell that he has been drinking again. He crawls into bed behind me and puts his arm around my waist, pulling my entire body into his. I work hard to control my muscles which have tensed up with the embrace. He plants heavy wet kisses on my shoulders and whispers into my ear.

“I am so sorry, Mel. I promise I will never hurt you again. I am so sorry. Please forgive me,” he begs.

I bite my lip hard to keep myself from crying. In just a few minutes, I can
hear his quiet snores in my ear, and I allow my body to relax. I am angry with
him. How could he do this to me and think it is okay? But he did say sorry.
He hasn't ever apologized before. Maybe he means it. We are all human. I
know I am just as capable of making mistakes. I remember what my mom
said and decide to try harder. The exhaustion of the day finally hits me, and I
fall into a deep sleep inside David’s arms.

Mia and I sit in the hospital room chatting casually, and I watch her with
pride as she admires my daughter, Madison.

“We were having brunch with his parents, and I got up to get some more
orange juice. When I walked into the kitchen, I swore I had peed my pants!”
I say laughing at myself. “I was super embarrassed, so I snuck out to the car
to see if I had any dry clothes. The next thing I know, the pain is so bad that I
can't stand up straight," I tell her.

“So when did you finally go to the hospital?” she asks.

“Well, I was going to wait a little bit and see if I got anymore, but David's
mom came out and saw me crouched next to the car with wet pants, and the
next thing I knew, I was on my way to the hospital,” I say, remembering the
car ride.

I had felt major panic in the car. Not because I was giving birth, but
because they would see the bruise on my back from where David had hit me
when I walked away from him in the middle of an argument days before.
However, I was able to make up a convincing lie, and they didn't question me
again.

David comes back into the room after giving us girls a few minutes to
chat without him.

“Well, I got to go pick up the kids from school,” Mia tells me, getting up
to hand Madison back. David walks to her and carefully transitions our baby
into the crook of his elbow.

Disappointed that she has to leave already, I say, “Okay. Thanks for
coming and seeing me. I should be released in the morning, and I would love
some company when I get home.”

“I'll call you tomorrow,” Mia says as she walks out the door.

David looks at me and with a twisted expression says, “I think she just
pooped.”

Laughing, I start to get out of bed to change her, but David stops me.

“No, stay in bed. Let me change this one. I better get used to it,” he says.

I watch as David carefully changes his first diaper. I can't help but laugh at
the way his face contorts as he wipes the black sticky poo from her bottom.
He laughs too.

“How did we make something so perfect?” he asks as he wraps her tightly
in a blanket.

“We just got lucky,” I say.
David responds by looking down at the bundle in his arms and in a high-pitched voice that sounds odd coming from his lips says, “No, it is because you have such a beautiful and amazing mommy. Huh?”

I am certain in this moment that staying was the right decision. I sit back in my bed, and my heart is filled with happiness. I have everything I have ever dreamed of right here with me.

Since Madison’s birth, David has been so much better. I think about how his regular outbursts have completely perished since we came home with her that happy day. Madison will be six months old today, and even though it is cheesy, I am making her half of a round cake to celebrate. David should be home in about five hours, and the festivities will be a welcome surprise after spending a day underground. The phone rings, bringing me out my daydream, and I rush to answer it before the sound wakes the baby. In a hushed tone, I say, “Hello?”

“Melissa, this is John, David’s boss. He never made it into work today. Is everything okay?” he says.

In a panic, I lie, “Oh no! I forgot to call you. We had a family emergency. A close relative of David’s died last night and he has been with family all day. I told him I would call you, and I must have forgotten. David is going to be so upset with me!”

“Don’t worry. I totally understand. Death has a funny way of changing our priorities. Tell David my prayers are with his family, and I will see him tomorrow,” John reassures me. I can feel the empathy pouring through the speaker, and I feel immediate guilt.

“Thanks, John. I’ll make sure to call you if anything ever happens again,” I say, trying to sound genuine.

The moment I hang up the phone, I panic. Holy shit! Why did I just lie? What if David was in an accident on his way to the mine and nobody has found him yet? What is wrong with me? Of course, he wouldn’t play hooky. My first phone call is to Nate, but I don’t get an answer, so I leave a voicemail trying to sound nonchalant about not knowing where David is. Then I call his parents. They answer and have the same concerns I do. I would drive to look for him, but he took the truck this morning. Anita, his mother, says she will drive to the mine and see if she can find our truck.

An hour later I receive a call. It is Anita. She found his vehicle parked on the side of the road. She used the spare key they had since the truck actually belongs to them, and it started up just fine. Unsure of what it all means, I ask, “Do you think he is okay?”

“I’m sure he is fine. Just hold tight for a couple of hours, and I am sure he will be home soon,” she says, trying to comfort a worried wife.

I decide to distract myself and continue working on decorating the house and preparing the cake for Madison. She is up now, and I make faces at her in her high chair as I whip and pour batter. Just as I finish adding a pink half to the top of the cake, I hear the door open. It is David.
“Where were you? I was so worried. You didn’t make it to work today. What happened?” I say all in one breath.

He looks at me, his exhaustion all over his face, “The truck broke down, and I dropped my cell phone climbing out of the truck. I just walked all the way here.”

Immediately I know he is lying to me. “Your mom said that the truck started right up when she went looking for you. It is parked out back.”

“You called my mother?” he questions angrily.

“I was worried when your boss called me wondering where you were. By the way, I had to lie to him because I had absolutely no idea,” I say, and I can hear the blame in my voice.

“What did he say?” David asks calming down.

“He said he would see you tomorrow,” I reply.

“Of course he did,” David says before removing his shoes and heading to the bedroom.

I look around, wondering how this day went so wrong. I decide to leave the festivities for the next day when David is in a better mood and not exhausted from walking nearly 10 miles back to the house. I know he is lying, but I can’t quite figure out his reasoning.

The next morning, I wake up, and David is still in bed. I look at the alarm clock and realize that he is over an hour late for work. “Wake up, David! You’re late!” I say shaking his entire body.

He looks up at me for just a moment and then grunts that he is not going to work today and rolls over.

“Did you call John? I told him you would be in today,” I say.

“No, fuck him. He can have his job,” says David.

“That is not funny, David. We need this job!” I cry.

He turns around to look at me and in a calm and menacing voice says, “No, you need this job.”

I leave the room, afraid that I may start a fight if I stay any longer. I don’t want to ruin the last several months without any outbursts.

I sit at the kitchen table, sipping my coffee and waiting for Madison to wake up. I feel like I need to talk to someone about David’s behavior, but dismiss the idea. We can work this out on our own. I decide that we will have cake for breakfast since we didn’t get to eat it last night. Maybe I can sweeten David up and get to the bottom of what is going on. Maybe there is something happening at work, and he hasn’t told me about it. If it really is that bad, I would never make him stay. I just wish he would talk to me about it.

A little after noon, David finally makes his way into the kitchen, scowling when he puts his lips to the coffee he just poured and realizes it is cold.

“Would it be too much to ask for some hot coffee when I wake up?” he asks.
“Would it be too much to ask for an explanation about why you are not at work?” I retort.

He glares at me and without saying anything begins to cut into the cake on the counter.

“You haven’t even asked why I made a cake and decorated the house!” I yell, finally fed up. “Your daughter turned six months old yesterday, and I thought we should celebrate, but you were too busy pretending that the truck broke down!”

He looks at me with shock. I can hear Madison in the other room beginning to fuss at the noise.

“Celebrate her six-month birthday? That is what you are pissed about? That’s the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard! Maybe if you spent less time doing useless shit, you could actually finish the laundry every day,” he screams.

“You try taking care of a baby and keeping the house in order. It isn’t like you ever offer to help,” I yell. Madison’s cries become louder with every word we shout.

“Oh yeah, because sitting on your ass all day is hard work. You don’t even care that I risk my life every day to put a roof over your head. You are just here for the fucking paycheck!” he bellows.

I can’t take it anymore. Madison is now screaming, and I can’t argue with him. I turn around to leave the kitchen, and I feel his hands on my arm. He is pulling me back.

“Let me go, David! I need to go get Madison!” I scream.

“We are not done. She can wait,” he snarls.

I look at him, and I can see the large kitchen knife in his hand that he was using for the cake.

I cry, tears filling my throat, “Please, just let me go. I just want to take care of our baby.”

“This is what you always do, Melissa! You can’t even have an honest conversation without running and hiding! You are such a bitch.”

My free arm comes up and smacks him upside the head. The moment he realizes what happened, his whole face twists in anger and he pushes me against the kitchen wall. I throw my body back toward him and hit him again in the face. I am no longer afraid. He will not get the best of me, I think as I swing my arms wildly. He struggles to grab my arms, and then he gives up and punches me in the face. The impact causes me to fall back and land on the floor. I look up, and he is on top of me, holding me down. I can feel strings of saliva hit my face as he screams at me. I work to get out from underneath him, but he is too strong. Then I feel his hands on my neck, and I can’t breathe. I panic and reach my arms out to find something to hit him with. Then my fingers grasp it - the knife he was holding earlier. I thrust it up and cut the side of his face. He realizes what happened, and makes a grab for the knife. I am not quick or strong enough and he wins. I struggle harder trying to overcome his strength.

“Just hold still, Melissa! Stop fighting me.”
I can’t. Right now my instinct is fight or flight. Then I feel it. Warm blood floods the front of my torso. I feel the impact of the knife in my stomach over and over again. David screams, “Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”

The feeling is so surreal, and I am not sure if it is even happening. I look at David surprised, and he returns my gaze. He begins to panic and tries to slow the bleeding with his hands. I can hear him murmuring, “I didn’t mean to, I didn’t mean to.” I hear him call dispatch and yell that we need an ambulance. Then I feel nothing but a state of oblivion.

I sit in the back of the church watching the funeral proceedings. It is the same church I was married in just about one year previously. The same people are there, but instead of smiles, they wear tears on their faces. People get up and talk about what a loving mother, sister, daughter, and friend I was. They cry and hold one another. They say that they will be reunited with me soon enough and that I am in a better place. I watch my mother gently rock Madison, who is unobservant of my mother’s silent tears of grief and guilt. I want to reach out to her and tell her it isn’t her fault. I want to tell her I love her. Madison is happy to be in the arms of her grandma, and that makes me smile. Madison won’t remember what happened to me. She will only know that I loved her because people will tell her so. That is a blessing all on its own. I can see now this is how things were supposed to be. Madison will grow up in a home without violent outbursts, without fear. David will go to prison, and I pray he finds help. She will only know her mother by what other people tell her, but that is okay, because she will be safe. I know that I would have never left her father. I was too forgiving. I was too young to understand the dangers of living with such a man. I wanted what I considered a whole family too badly. The writing was on the wall, but I couldn’t read it.

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**Ending Remarks**

“Writing on the Wall” was a tough story to write. As someone who has been the victim of domestic violence, and did not understand that I was a victim until years after my marriage ended, I wanted to give the protagonist, Melissa, a happy ending. However, I found that to expose the intricacies of emotions that a domestic violence victim experiences, I couldn’t allow the story to end well for Melissa. “Writing on the Wall” reveals the reason that leaving is not so easy and the loss of self that occurs in such a relationship.

Melissa loves her husband dearly, and although it is a shotgun wedding, she is elated to spend the rest of her life with David. However, shortly after they are married, Melissa learns that David is not able to appropriately cope with negative emotions. It is easy to say, “Just leave him!” but leaving a domestic violence relationship is not that simple. Many factors determine whether a woman stays or goes. A variety of social and cultural values such as religious beliefs, the need for a traditional American family, and a lack of the concept of self, all create conditions that make the latter more difficult. Lynch explains
that women in a domestic violence relationship will focus their energy on predicting the needs and wants of their abuser to prevent violence (220). He also revealed in his research that women of violent relationships described themselves as being silenced, isolated, and self-sacrificing (Lynch 227). During a series of interviews with Jones, one woman reported her efforts to prevent further abuse: “I always used to be on edge or sort of half alert thinking, oh god, you know what’s he is going to say, what’s going to happen, you know, am I doing anything wrong or right?” (82). The constant fear of abuse and the tactics used to prevent abuse create a loss of identity for these women. The loss of self then perpetuates their inability to leave because they are no longer able to care for their wants and needs.

Women who do manage to leave an abusive relationship report that support from family, friends, or other entities was essential to their success. In “Writing on the Wall,” Melissa does find the courage to reach out to a support member, but the abuse is dismissed. Although the idea of a friend or family member dismissing abuse may seem unlikely, many people do not adequately understand the severity of the violence. We will see that Melissa has other people in her circle, but she doesn’t reveal to them what happens at home. All of the women interviewed in Jones’ study showed that they hid the violence from family and friends because they feared their reactions (79). Once again, these women conditioned themselves to act in the best interest of their abuser and not for themselves. Bringing awareness to the loss of identity in victims of domestic violence and how it impacts their decision making is imperative to stopping and preventing such abuse.

References


Muddy Waters
BY JOHN WILLEY

Grand Paw fought a lot in World War Two
Grew up fishing in the Mississippi bayou
When the Nazis rose they shipped him off to war
As the boat neared the beach his chances were poor
When the doors opened up most of the soldiers fell
He was sure he had died and was in his own hell
He thought of the dead men and of their sons and daughters
As he walked by them face down in the muddy waters

The fall of 45 he made it back to his little town
Found a good woman and settled on down
He raised four kids and my mother was one
We'd go see them and it was so much fun
Granny would bake and make that down home food
Corn bread, pies, and all the crawfish she stewed
They had some friends and they made a band
They brought their families and they were grand
We would dance and play and all sing along
Party all night and dance to every song
I'd steal kisses under the stars from their daughters
Listening to Grand Paw sing just like Muddy Waters

Ten years have passed and it seems so long
I remember the way he'd play and sing his song
Bending his harp and stomping his feet
Playing the blues in the Mississippi heat
We laid him to rest next to the river under a tree
With a tombstone that said "Live, laugh, and just be"
Granny is now next to him just like in all their years
And all the great memories bring me to tears
I now hold hands and tell the stories to my daughters
When we visit Granny and Grand Paw down next to the muddy waters
Avalanche
BY VANESSA LIBBEE

I freeze myself,
Life,
    Love,
Family,
As cold as steel in the winter.
I leech all color out of my life,
Happiness,
    Excitement,
Enthusiasm,
All numb and unreachable.
I’m trapped under the weight of
Responsibility,
    Love,
My own body,
Betrays me. But,
Eventually
I reach up and
Grip
The
Hand
Of flame and passion,
And drag myself out of the
Avalanche.

Kindled Sunset
BY LAURA SECULES

Dying embers
burn the horizon
rip open the tattered clouds.
Through the wound
scarlet curtains tear apart and thread across the sky.
The defeated blaze
gives up its throne.
Its majesty welcomes the night.
Contributors’ Notes

**Mickey Allen,** a retired nurse, has lived in Rangely since 1976.

**Caitlin Bagley** is a junior at Moffat County High School. She writes, “I have been drawing and painting since I was four years old. **Butterfly** is an acrylic on canvas painting I made in one of my college art classes last semester.”

**Ken Bailey,** 62, hails from Wisconsin but grew up in Rangely. A hobby cartoonist since early school grades, Ken specializes in creating his own comic books. **Supercat #3** was “published” and distributed to Rangely Middle School students in 1968; current flagship **Mighty EnergyGirl** has 33 books to date, with two set in Rangely. (By day, Ken works for the Kohler Company, a global plumbing-ware manufacturer.)

**Lucas Bergstrom** of Craig photographed **Rocky Perch** on a road trip through Utah. He writes, “This old tree has stood the test of time on its little rock perch overlooking the La Sal Range.” His other photograph, **Evening Silhouette,** “was captured just west of Craig while spending the evening relaxing on the deck.” Bergstrom adds that he has always loved photography but didn’t start to pursue his passion with a purpose until 2015.

**Chakwah Brink** is an 8th-grade student at Barone Middle School in Meeker. He writes, “I have been drawing for most of my life. My favorite artistic expression is pencil drawings. This is a skull pencil drawing. Drawing skulls is a favorite pastime of mine as death changes our bodies and is inevitable.”

**Jeremy Chambers** is finishing a bachelor’s degree. He writes that **Solace** “is a photograph of a juniper tree at Simsberry Draw in Moffat County. This is one of my favorite spots in Colorado.”

**Steve Cochrane** of Rangely photographed **Lone Cone.** He writes, “I try to focus on capturing the briefest of moments; the momentary eye contact with an animal, the light reflecting off a waterfall, and the transient light at dawn and dusk. All these aspects illustrate the beauty of nature and provide an everlasting impression.”

**Kim Ekstrom** lists home as Meeker, CO.

**Morgan Fisher** is a CNCC Rangely student from Grand Junction, CO.

**Deborah Miles Freitag** says of “**Dux and Lux,**” “Several oily ducks followed the two in the story. Those two were our only successful rescues; the rest smothered to death in oil. The hen’s sudden death while winging in freedom over the river seems a much more noble way to go. **Paz y todo bien, Rangely**.”

**Jeff Grubbs,** CNCC’s Associate VP of Instruction, photographed **Running on Salt Lake** in 2017.

**Tamara Grubbs** of Craig describes “**Love and Tequila**” as “a work of flash fiction.”

**Andrew Gulliford** is an historian and an award-winning author and editor who divides his time between the mountains of Durango, CO and the canyons of Bluff, UT. Dr. Gulliford recently edited **The Last Stand of the Pack: A Critical Edition,** which details the trapping, poisoning, shooting, and killing of wolves in Colorado and why we should bring them back. Reach him at andy@agulliford.com.

**Rene Harden** of Rangely photographed **Hiding** in Wills Point, Texas, in the summer of 2017. She writes, “This dragonfly seemed to be trying to hide behind a reed at Snapping Turtle Pond. Such beautiful wings gave it away.”
JANELE HUSBAND of Craig describes her photograph: “Decades of Ford automobiles gather in their senior years near Medart, Florida, to ... Rust in Peace.”

JOSEPH LANSING, a long-time Rangely resident, is currently “a Colorado boy in exile in Oklahoma with an eye for the beauty in the old and discarded.” Joseph writes that Blue Door is “a small store in the once busy railroad town of Shawnee, Wyoming.” His other watercolor is “a view from the north side of Thompson Springs, Utah, in winter.”

VANESSA LIBBEE of Craig writes, “I am a high school senior who will graduate with my associate’s degree. I write poems and short stories for enjoyment.”

SAMANTHA LIGHTSHADE writes, “Poetry has been a wonderful outlet for me to overcome struggles in my past. This poem speaks about the real things I overcame to become who I want to be.”

JENNY MEYER of Craig writes of Sheep Camp, “As a photographer, I sometimes get bored with the straight image and want to take my vision a step further. Since observing many a sheep camp during my travels in Northwest Colorado, I decided to combine the major parts of several photographs: the dog, the horse, the sheep, and the fall wagons into a digital painting that tells a story as I see it.” About Ice Bracelet she writes, “This is a photograph of a Sandhill Crane after he took off from a cold, partially frozen pond. When night comes, they roost in a pond for protection against predators.”

DESIREE MOORE of Craig wrote “Writing on the Wall” and is CNCC’s Director of Community Education. Desiree enjoys writing about the complexities of being a woman in today’s society and often draws on her personal experiences or experiences of the many women who have influenced her throughout her lifetime.

DAVID MORRIS taught language arts for 35 years. He has published three books of poetry and has an unpublished novel. He tries his hand at a variety of art forms, and loves to let those creative juices flow.

NIJOLE RASMUSSEN of Denver writes that Whisper of the Horse shows “a horse resting after a long lesson he gave to a young rider. I embraced the ambiance of this quiet moment, this dialogue between the horse and me.”

JANINE RINKER is from Craig.

SUE SAMANIEGO, CNCC Foundation Director, has two poems in this year’s Waving Hands as well as the artwork on the front cover. She notes that Western Sandpiper is mixed media, watercolor, and acrylic on paper.

LAURA SECULES lives in Craig.

KATHY SIMPSON recently retired from teaching biology and math at CNCC Craig. Kathy has a gift for photographing the wild beauty of Northwest Colorado.

JOYCE WILSON writes that “Ashes of Husbands” appeared originally in her collection Poetry For People Who Don’t Like It, October 2017. Joyce writes that publishing her previous poems in Waving Hands Review encouraged her to self-publish her book. Please visit oldladynewpoet@gmail.com to learn more about her poetry.

JOHN WILLEY is a chef by trade. He is originally from West Virginia, and after college he moved out West. Captivated by the ruggedness and beauty of western Colorado, he took up photography. Photography has motivated him to travel and see new sights. “It makes you see the world differently,” he says.

ANITA WITHEY is an itinerant poet who writes only when inspiration slaps her upside the head. She claims Dinosaur, Colorado, as her stomping grounds.
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