Welcome to *Rocky Mountain Reflections*’ eighth issue. Since 2010, our print and online versions of Colorado Mountain College’s Arts and Literary Journal have showcased the best poetry, short fiction, and visual arts by CMC staff, faculty, and chiefly students.

This Spring 2016 volume represents expressions of writers’ individual journeys as well as statements of the social, economic, and political forces present in our lives. Imaginative visions of American History intersect with themes that emerge in academic disciplines across the college, most notably issues of sustainability.

The variety of arts media includes oils, acrylics, watercolors, and photography in works that record and comment upon the richness of the world around us. New with this issue are three-dimensional arts forms, like ceramics and sculpture.

Taking our cue from the changing world of multi-media literary and art forms, *Rocky Mountain Reflections* is in the process of evolving into a more inclusive online format. New media invite new modes of expression, so in the future we will be able to publish audio and visual productions, sculpture and ceramic, photojournalism, and interactive installations.

Enjoy this volume of the *Reflections*, and take note of the contest winners. Congratulations to all contributors to the journal, and thanks to all who make the journal possible.

Sincerely,

Joyce Devlin Mosher, PhD
The page includes the editorial board members, contents section, and art listings. The editorial board consists of faculty members in literary and visual arts. The contents list various articles, paintings, and photography. The visual arts section lists artists with their works, such as "Little Pots," "Copper Blue Green Cup and Urn," and "Looking for Strays Hay Park."
### Poetry

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Empty Tent After Everest Base Avalanche
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/ Carol Matthews /  
Apres Ski Too
Cruiser Bike

3D ART
First Place: 3D Art

Katherine Clark

Little Pots
Wyatt B. Murphy

Copper Blue Green Cup and Urn

Sgraffito Yarn Bowl
Photography
Rocky Mountain Reflections

/ Daria Standish /

Cattle Roundup

/ Raymond H. Van Der Veer III /

The Old Ways
Sam McCleneghan IV / Butterfly

Keela McCleneghan / Roswater
/ Elle ONeel /  
Smoking Snowboarder

/ Mia Migliero /  
The Art Of Living
Cholla Nicoll / Cedar Sunrise

Robin Bruce / Storm on Pikes Peak
/ Dawn Hayes /

Lion - Sketch
We lay, wooden match sticks on the bed.  
He taught me how to be perfectly naked,  
while down below the street cleaner  
sweeps the grit of dirty lives.

While the saxophone spilled melodies  
onto the battered asphalt, notes  
scraped, broke, rolled, scattered  
through the darkness and into our bed.

Meanwhile, a tiny candle-flame  
flickers shadows on the wall beside us,  
as we untangle our limbs, bruised from  
the debris of music careening in dark,  
a few notes still clinging to our bodies.
On the outside, shiny yellow paint. 
Imperfections and dents still shining through. 
Remember that bike ride down “Death Hill” 
Pretty sure the pebble is still imbedded in my knee. 
The scars will always show, regardless of the color I paint myself. 
Every swipe of the wipers on my windshield shows a new view, 
Clean and fresh, I even see a rainbow in the distance, barely visible on the horizon. 
Engine is still strong, but misfires from time to time. 
The heart is pumping, but stutters at times due to mistreatment. 
Still, every morning it purrs, or growls to a start, faithfully. 
Some mornings require more starter fluid then others. 
I’ve heard if you treat her right, she’ll run forever. 
‘67 is 20 years older than I am, however, days I feel older than that. 
Open the door, the inside seat is torn and tattered, 
Obvious to the shit I’ve dealt with, and out for all to see. 
But the bench seat is comfortable and can fit a family, 5 kids and a man-child. 
Cheerios, coffee and markers in a rainbow of colors stain the seat and floorboard. 
Cigarette burns from habits long past and empty Fireball 5th’s litter the floor. 
I keep emptying the trash, but it always comes back. 
We throw our gear in the back to haul on an adventure. 
I can take it all, move it across the states as needed. 
We throw our life in the back, 
I’ve got this.

I learned a new word 
As my mother stood at the top of the stairs 
I thought she’d kill him 
But they killed me 

As my mother stood at the top of the stairs 
I wanted to hide 
But they killed me 
When they stopped loving each other 

I wanted to hide 
He smiled at her 
When they stopped loving each other 
I hoped they loved me 

He smiled at her 
The angriest smile 
I hoped they loved me 
More than they hated each other 

The angriest smile 
It didn’t make sense 
More than they hated each other 
They loved that word 

I learned a new word 
It didn’t make sense 
As my mother stood at the top of the stairs 
They loved that word
Lying on the crisp grass, cold seeps through my Jacket. Elegant gray clouds take their time passing through the sky, a breath of wind makes the naked branches shiver. There is electricity in the air as the world waits in anticipation. I can feel it in the bumps on my skin and in my smile.

A gentle silence settles like an audience when theater lights dim. All is calm for an instant even time seems to stop so that it may watch me. The first delicate flakes begin their dance down from the heavens twisting and twirling with finesse moving to the flow of its own music, I follow the drift all the way down to the tip of my nose.

A phoenix of winter beauty dying only to be renewed in the sky once more.

What Would Mother Think and What Would Dad Say? And the Hell What Do I Think?

First time shooting fine arts
Here comes my lady parts

Socks off now I’m really nude
My mom would say this is so lewd

I hope my parents never find out
They’ll tell me to take another rout

I keep thinking of my dad
That sounds really fucking bad

My boobs aren’t the same size
Maybe this decision wasn’t wise

There’s cellulite on my thighs
The flash is hurting my eyes

One nipple is much colder
My butt is getting older

My blood pressure is elevating
My razor burn is irritating

I see my reflection in the glass
Is that a pimple on my ass?
Rattatat of gun shots echoed in his ears as he entered the house. Fresh smell of nicotine. A mirror reflected corpses, ribs like mountains, and someone he didn't recognize.

Consumed by fire, he shattered the glass.

Sweating, mouth dry as paper.

He gave up and laid down. Amongst the corpses.

PTSD

Breasts Are for...

TITS breasts
MODELS mothers
BOOBS ARE FOR SEX bottles nurture
SHOW THEM SELL THEM disgusting, conceal them
LAND OF THE FREE home of the easily offended
THE BABY IS CRYING Let it starve
We pull another day from nothing,
take sun and palm it in a bottle
Soundlessly, I sing.
My songs shudder with reserve--
*Play that one more time*
Repeat my universe,
make the minutes loop,
saunter to sleep with Polaris in mind.
I remake my ashes,
cultivate kindness,
so the garden may feed
fractals of green through the tattered screen.
Rainbows glimmer a samba behind us.
We converse about eternity
only to find
we've been here all along.

Chipeta slowed her horse,
and looked over her shoulder one last time at the shining mountains.
The seasons of her childhood came back to her.
She remembered throwing herself on the ground to taste the first green shoots after a winter of dried meat and hard pinon nuts.
She could feel the wind as she raced her horse over the low hills in summer, her hair flying behind,
then falling exhausted onto her buffalo robe bed,
and staring through the hole in the top of the teepee at the brilliant sky.
She smelled the bloody deer hides, tanned with the animal's brains,
and she heard the whispers of yellow aspens.
She recalled the smoky warmth of campfires in winter, the time for stories.
She closed her eyes and felt herself swaying forward and back, forward and back in the Bear Dance when spring came again.
She could make baskets and coat them with boiled tree sap until they could hold water.
She was a good hunter.
She could decorate a doeskin shirt with beads of bone and elk teeth.
Would her skills have any value in this new life, in a cabin in dry, brown Utah?
She took one long, last look at the mountains of her past, and wondered,
With my husband dead and no children of my own,
will I have any value?

Author's note--On August 27, 1881, Chipeta (the widow of Chief Ouray) and 1,458 other Utes left Colorado's mountains under U.S. Army guard. They rode in flat boats across the Gunnison River onto a barren reservation in Utah. Chipeta sometimes came back to Glenwood to soak in the hot springs and visit her many friends. She is remembered as a kind and generous peacemaker.
Jazz Man

Vibes got me feeling glee
The way the jazz man plays for me
He riffs the will inside my soul
The power no man ever holds

A place where pride and reverence live
And memories I can’t forgive
The sultry sax swings melody
Rhythm paints pictures of me

Take me to the rolling waves
Out of this corruptive place
Far from comprise and fear
To a state that I hold dear

Take me to where a true love wows
One who doesn’t break me down
Oh mister jazz man please
Play that song of love for me

My Childhood Split by Words

I remember every night.
My memory overwhelms my sleep.
The Bauhinia flower field wallows in the Dawn.
Does the Dragon Fly hide something under their wings?
Low and high, happiness and sadness can’t bother them.
Dropping the Areca nut’s sent all over the hill.
The Dragon Fly brings my dream deeper.
I bury my sadness in river’s red dirt.
The lullaby of my mom appears and disappears.
My childhood flies with kites.
In the night field, the firefly nurtures my dream.
Only I can keep it inside.

Tuổi thơ tôi, đêm nào tôi cũng nhớ.
Kí ức thấp thoáng tràn về trong giấc ngủ.
Cánh đồng hoa ban trải dài trong nắng sớm.
Chuồn chuồn giấu gì trong đôi cánh mỏng.
Bay thấp bay cao mắc kẹt vụn bốn.
Thả ngát hương cau xuống đồi tóc vương.
Giấc mơ tôi thao thức gối đầu.
Tối mộng nỗi buồn chốn xường đầy nầu.
Thả thơi đâu đầy diệu quên cua mẹ.
Tuổi thơ tôi bay lượn theo cánh diều trong gió.
Trên đồng khuya dom dom áp ú giấc mơ thuở nào.
Lọn lên rồi chỉ biết cắt trong tim.

Tuổi thơ tôi, đêm nào tôi cũng nhớ.
Kí ức thấp thoáng tràn về trong giấc ngủ.
Cánh đồng hoa ban trải dài trong nắng sớm.
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Tuổi thơ tôi bay lượn theo cánh diều trong gió.
Trên đồng khuya dom dom áp ú giấc mơ thuở nào.
Lọn lên rồi chỉ biết cắt trong tim.
Really, really hungry.
Stomach feelin' rumbly.
Food's gonna be shitty.
At least my name's not Ricky.

I like rap music.
Mary Jane's cool, too.
My shoe is untied like the waistband of the world.
What's come undone in you?

Stained sleeves
Protruding ribs
Eyes shut
Smoke rings

Spine shivers
Wailing mother
Black coffee
Dry flesh
School bell

Assembly line
Defective me
Red-horned eyes
She's dark
But convincing
A Hundred Times Before

I walked into the garage like I was told
And had done over a hundred times before.
Even the repetition did not make turning the shiny, cold handle any easier.

Mother’s commands were not to be disregarded.

Once the door groaned shut, it was just him and I.

My step-father was drunk.
The stench of stale beer, and the sound of stumbling shuffles.

His eyelids draped like worn out curtains over his menacing glare.
His lack of coordination emphasized by the missing of his mouth
When trying to suck on his burnt down cigar.

The sweet chocolate smell.
It singed my nose.

Rehearsing the line “goodnight” in my head at least a dozen times as I inched closer.

I startled him.

Belligerently his mind raced for a proper act of revenge.

The next few seconds were black.

I must have closed my eyes
But even in the dark the pain was a bright and furious shade of red.
When the world was in focus again, all I saw was a small purple crater on my thigh.

“Goodnight” I said.
As I hurried towards the door.

Jazz Poem

A bass line is key
to a good jazz melody.
Should be sporadic
like a cripple’s walk.

Next comes the beat,
so bring in the drums
dictating the speed,
the sound, the tone.

Often a good pianist
with fingers of an
excited spider.

The soul of the sax
is bold and lively
as if sharing
an ancient story.

Sometimes slow n’ soothing
sometimes swinging,
makin people dance
swaying in a trance.

Keeping listeners
guessing
intrigued by
the mystery.

What will be the
next note?
No one knows.
Not everybody distrusts words.
Some believers occupy their own sounds
As if they were a house,
Iterations as thick as walls.

But words can occupy a cavern
as does a large peppering of bats,
their quiet formations becoming
The bold letters that density writes.
Or scatter, a black mob
Slapping at a surprised intruder.

Truth is, the careless tree line ahead
Scribes itself against the blue,
A seamless drift of cloud, or
The precise script of an incoming storm.

No shelter here from the pelts of rain like gunshots.
No words to put off
this inevitable death.
I need to let you go
down to the streets
cuz rhythm's got hold of my feet,
I'm following this beat,
and that pair of brown eyes
that drive me so wild.
The sun sat high, directly over Cranston's head, when his horse spooked at the sight of the skeleton. The sorrel gelding was only eight, and still figuring the ins and outs of riding the trail. Cranston bought him from a woman in town, a middle-aged, recent divorcee with a diving neckline laying bare more than necessary, and who did not take Cranston's hints that he wanted only the horse before bringing him a large glass of wine which Cranston poured onto the ground as the woman laughed at one of her own tasteless jokes. The woman knew little about horses and less about men, and Cranston felt satisfied with the cost of the horse and the relatively quick exit from the temptress.

The horse spun on Cranston, but he called and pulled on the reins. As soon as the horse's former owner's street vanished from Cranston's rearview mirror, he had rechristened the horse Downtown, and the animal took a liking to it.

The skeleton was half buried in the dirt, beneath the shade of a low juniper. There was no denying the distinctly human nature of the bones. Cranston stared hard. He rode this trail every other weekend, and the bones never showed themselves until today. The mudslides must have unearthed them, he decided. He turned Downtown and rode back to the cabin.

It wasn't really a cabin anymore, but a concrete foundation that once supported a cabin. Rotting wood scattered about the ridge, desecrated odes to a miner who once claimed it. An abandoned mining camp sat over the ridge, a fast 15-minute ride, depending on one's willingness to cut cross country on a horse while going down a mountainside. The camp still held a bunkhouse, dining house, assorted smaller buildings in various states of disrepair, and several mine openings enclosed with wire. The mine shut in the mid-eighties, and now used by teenagers seeking an out-of-town space for illicit behaviors. It also doubled as one of the few landmarks where cell phone service was reliable. He called the BLM office from here, being as it was on government land and that Cranston disliked the sheriff, a distant cousin of his who didn't know a peacock from a hawk. Dispatch told him to stay put until the BLM agent arrived.
Cranston dismounted, tied Downtown to a tree, and limped over to poke at the dead embers of his fire from last night. The heavens had cleared after sundown and he had spent the night staring at stars and light unpolluted by the debris of humanity. Now the pine ridge took clear form in the early afternoon sky.

At length he heard the hum of a motor coming from the switchbacks below him. Cranston sighed as a young man rode into view on a four-wheeler, wearing a dusty suit. It was Reginald Gregory Thompson the Second, the name by which the puissant always introduced himself. Cranston felt his fifty-five years, and Downtown felt anxious. The horse neighed and circled. An appropriate reaction to a 20-something who for all his fancy degrees was put in charge of the local BLM office over men and women Cranston had known for years, people who knew the land and the world that was. Not some fresh out of college jackass who thought nothing of wearing a pin-striped three-piece suit on the trail.

“Mr. Cranston,” Thompson sniffled. He did not offer his hand or shut off the engine, but instead sat stiffly in the seat, his portly frame an uncomfortable fit. His eyes remained glued to his cell phone as he spoke.

“Reggie,” said Cranston. He focused on the ashes.

“Mr. Thompson is acceptable,” said Thompson. He would carry his diplomas around in his pocket if they weren't nailed to his office wall.

Cranston spat on the ground. “Of course. My mistake, Reggie.” A silence ensued as Thompson thought about how to deal with this unpleasant business.

“Pretty day,” Thompson blurted.

Cranston frowned. “I don’t care too much for your thoughts on the weather. Just want to show the bones and get.”

“The scene of the crime. Lead on.”

Cranston sighed and shook his head. “What damn crime? You should avoid reaching those premature conclusions you like to jump to all the time.”

Reggie’s chubby cheeks turned crimson. “Of course. Lead on.”

Cranston spit again, and climbed on Downtown. He led the horse forward and down the trail at a steady trot. Behind him, Thompson grunted as the four-wheeler hit a bump, disrupting the comfort of Thompson’s sizable rump. Cranston smiled, and slowed to a walk. Reggie thought himself a man in hurry, going places in every sense of the word, and taking no time for the slower life. Sometimes a man needed an easing off the gas pedal to nowhere.

At the site of the bones, Cranston waited for Reggie to turn off the four-wheeler. The beer belly dismounted first, followed by the rest that squinted at the bones before squatting to examine them. He held his phone and took photographs of the side, standing and stooping, bending and adjusting. From the saddle Cranston glimpsed a sizable plumber’s crack.

“That’s a real pretty machine you’ve got for yourself there, Reggie. When you going to get yourself a horse?”

“I’d take this any day over some four-legged creature,” Reggie huffed. “You don’t have to deal with attitude.”

“Of course, you do have to deal with running out of gas.”

“That’s why I carry an extra tank.”

“Which doesn’t do much good when rocks puncture it.” Cranston gestured back at the tank, which leaked a steady stream of fuel onto the ground. Thompson cursed, the words echoed back at him from the nearby mountainsides, and his kicks and stomps sent dust and rock into flight.

After a few minutes of this, Cranston interrupted him. “As much as I enjoy the show, Reggie, mountains look prettier without your words of wisdom.”

Thompson glared at Cranston. “You think you’re smart. In two years, this won’t look like the same place, and then you can visit me in my office and tell me how pretty you think these damn hills are.”

“Slow down, Reggie, us old timers can only take in so many words at once. What’s this about 2 years?”

“Not that you’ll live to see it, but a developer wants to buy this, and if I get my way, I’ll sell it. It’ll turn this trail into a paved two-lane road and develop the hell out of this country. Get some jobs, some houses, some stores in here. That’s prettier than any mountainside you and that animal that stinks of shit will ever understand.”

“I suppose.” Downtown turned a few circles around Thompson. “Sorry. Ignorance makes him anxious.”

Thompson glared at Cranston, and then looked at the bones. “Of course, these could go a long way toward delaying – who wants to live on a crime scene, or Indian burial ground, or whatever the hell this is?”

“You and those fancy conclusions again.”

“Well, no conclusions needed. I don’t see any bones here. You must have trouble seeing the difference between a rotten deer skeleton and human bones. It’s not worth the trouble you’ll go through trying to convince anyone else you saw something here that wasn’t.”

Cranston sat still. “And if I don’t see it that way?”
I Rodeo to Rescue

Stepping out of my truck, I drop my gear bag and approach the rickety old fence. Within the pen an aged bronc struggles against the halter as my brother, Jack, leads him over to where I am standing. His eyes are wide with panic and he stomps his feet, kicking up dust as he unsuccessfully tries to back pedal. Jack ties the lead rope off to the fence post and tentatively reaches out towards the frightened creature's nose, speaking in a soft, calm voice. His hand edges closer, stopping for a moment each time the animal pulls away, only to continue inching forward until he makes contact with the horse's skin.

"His name is Dusty Road," Jack explains once the horse has calmed down some.

I reach out slowly while Dusty watches me warily until I make contact, gently rubbing the soft reddish-brown hairs on his nose.

"How'd we get this one?" I inquire, feeling the animal relax as we shift our focus away from him and towards each other.

"The Sheriff rescued him from a small ranch that was ignoring him. Apparently rough stock wasn't as profitable as they thought and he paid the price. You know as well as I do that the larger rodeos really crack down on animal welfare these days," Jack states.

"How many does that make now? Ten?" I ask.

"Twelve," Jack answers and I raise my eyebrow inquisitively and he continues.

"Older couple a few counties over relinquished two older mares they could no longer care for. Animal Control asked if we wanted them so I said yes."

I nod thoughtfully while watching Dusty Road. His body is covered in a concerning patchwork of scars, scabs, and patches of lost hair. The remaining reddish hair he had left still had patches of mud where the skin most likely had been too sensitive to brush out properly and his mane was matted and would probably need to be cut back to get it cleaned up. Despite the neglect he had calmed quickly to being near us and was now nosing at my hand that had gone limp, dangling over the railing my forearm was resting on. He probably hadn't been much of a bucker to start with and that had only made him less profitable at the rodeos, but then again it is hard to judge an animal by the way he acts in a pen versus a chute.
Dear Diary,

Nature has an amazing way of controlling itself and maintaining a balance all on its own. In 2017 Mount Massive Colorado Wilderness needed to introduce wolves back into the wild. Deer and elk in the area were becoming overpopulated, and you could not drive outside of Leadville without hitting one. Not enough hunters to keep them under control, and let’s face it, no one wants a banged up or totaled car. Giving back nature the ability to take care of itself, Lake County reached out to the wolves for help. I imagine that the pack will allow itself to grow. The alpha female will let other wolves breed because when food is plentiful, they don’t worry about the extra mouths to feed. Quickly, the wildlife population will reach a balance, and since wolves are supposed to be intelligent creatures, they instinctively will note this change and maintain the pack. I can only hope this is what will happen because I own livestock and wolves could make a tasty meal of my animals.

In my research, worrying about this wolf introduction, I found a 2011 Natural Agricultural Statistics Service data report which reflected only 2% of cows are killed by wolves. Poor wolves. They sure do get a bad name, and I can remember being interested by a book I read on the possibility of wolves coexisting with ranching. I believe that ranching and wildlife sharing the land is absolutely practical as long as both sides can accept reasonable loss. Bryce Andrews’ book intrigued me, and I connected passionately with the book because I had helped work with cows at a Rocky Mountain ranch. “Badluck Way” remains one of my favorite books. My visit to the Colorado Wolf and Wildlife Center in 2015 took place because the Badluck story so inspired me. The author was pretty cute too, but I would never tell my boyfriend. -Slightly smitten Jeneé

On this beautiful crisp morning, I am admiring the Sawatch Mountain Range. Winter is almost here, I realize during my drive to Ass Ranch (true name). The cold air crystallizes over Mt. Elbert and creates a hue that slowly fades from pink to purple then blue, and the skyline appears like high definition television. Upon arriving I shudder and shiver as I step out of the car. I think “Is it really that cold outside?” The quiet, eerie calm...
of the pastures makes me tremble. Every morning I travel to the ranch to feed my horse, Reign, yet this morning feels particularly different.

Reign is glory, spirit, beauty, trust, curiosity and peace all wrapped into one. The feeling I have for this magnificent creature are untouchable; she is the love of my life. When she looks at me—with eyebrows slightly raised—she is ready for whatever adventure we are about to embark upon. I know this is a time when animal and human bond. When I am not around, Reign’s companion Chic adopts a leadership role. Chic possesses strong brute force at times, but she shows spicy spirit; so beware of this wild black mare.

As I approach these two horses, I am not greeted with their usual bucking and snorting. Reign does not move with the passion and life she normally has during feeding time. My heart races in anticipation of the problem. I approach faster now, and my adrenaline accelerates. I see blood pooling at Reign’s feet. She has gashes by her tail, and I can see what were her beautiful muscles exposed in frightening crimson. Panic washes over me; I am blinded by rage knowing the Mt. Massive wolf pack had ripped my world apart. I glance over to see Chic partially consumed, her life slowly seeping into the earth, and my heart weeps knowing the loyalty Reign has; she could not leave Chic in her struggle for survival.

Suddenly, I wake up in sweat-soaked sheets from this horrendous nightmare. I feel relief as I realize this is only a dream, and the chances are slim my dream could become a reality if and when the wolf population increases in Colorado.

June 16, 2015
Dear Diary,

This year I could not believe how long it took the Leadville snow to melt. At times in May I did not think winter would ever cease in Leadville. Today I went on my first cattle drive. It was amazing! My friends continually teased me and called me a “City Slicker.” I have not seen this movie; I am putting it on my Netflix list, so I can understand the joke. Cows—such funny animals—sometimes just stop on the trail and start belting moos out for no particular reason. I even named one Oreo because of his coloring. He was so cute I could just eat him up, no pun intended, even though I did laugh at my own offbeat humor.

My friends Rocky Mountain ranch lease is on beautiful National Forest land. I would never have imagined after climbing that rocky, thick forested mountain face, that at the top it opened up to beaver meadows with aspen all around, and a little cabin sits off to the side. I love the smell of aspen in the forest. Many camping trips are planned this summer. I will stay at that cabin and check on the cows, of course.
cattle. He believes the solution required trading cattle ranching for buffalo ranching. Buffalo, as a larger food supply, present fewer hazards to the environment and naturally were the species originally here in North America.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service will reimburse ranchers if they can prove their cow was eaten by wolves. The government is trying to right the wrong done by wolves and proposes a solution for disgruntled ranchers. Really ridiculous! This is not the balance I imagine humans and animals to have. I am appalled by the sense of entitlement presented by some people. We do not own public lands which truly belong to the wildlife. I believe that further educating myself about wolves and ranching, then passing on what I have learned to others provides the best possible way to help the community be aware that we can share and coexist with nature.

-Mysteriously motivated Jeneé

Winter, 1979. Anishinabe Student Center, Duluth, MN:

Winter, with its darkness, snow, and cold, is the time for telling stories, the time to learn. Iron Legs, an Elder, is telling us about how Ma’iingen, the wolf, and man were once brothers who had to go their separate ways.

Northern Wisconsin, January, 1980:

A long day. Tired. Classes until afternoon, then work until 11. Driving the 40 miles home. No cars for the past 20 miles. Road snow packed and slick. Full Moon. Slow for a corner and there are two huge husky-looking dogs. I stop, thinking these dogs are lost, no homes for miles. They leap an old fence. One is wearing a radio collar.

In one traditional story, a wolf is the best friend and helper of Nanabozho who figures in many Anishinabe teachings and creation stories (think Jesus with a sense of humor). Wolf shows him the correct path, how to track game, keeps him from getting lost.

February, 1985. Northern Wisconsin:

I am stranded at my cabin after a snowstorm, shoveling the driveway. A Department of Natural Resources truck with a tracking antenna struggles down the drifted road. The driver stops, surprised to see someone outside. They are tracking radio collared wolves. I tell them of my sighting years ago and they get excited. What I’d seen was the alpha pair marking one corner of the territory of the Empire Pack. These wolves had migrated from northern Minnesota, the first established pack in Wisconsin.

The Wolf Clan is the friendship clan of the Bear Clan, the protectors of the People. When a Bear clansman is born, the Wolf people give them a name from their own clan. They are, after the Bear Clan, “minor soldiers.” When people cross the water, the Wolf Clan may be asked to still the wind.

-Mysteriously motivated Jeneé

Winter, 1979. Anishinabe Student Center, Duluth, MN:

Winter, with its darkness, snow, and cold, is the time for telling stories, the time to learn. Iron Legs, an Elder, is telling us about how Ma’iingen, the wolf, and man were once brothers who had to go their separate ways.
A man was walking alone met a coyote. Coyote spoke to the man and said, “How would you like to smoke my pipe?”

The man thanked the coyote and said “Sure!”

When the man was finished, the coyote said, “You have smoked my pipe so now you are my friend and I will not harm you, but will take you to meet my people. I want my people to know that you have smoked my pipe. They will be glad to see you and will give you great powers.” They walked on a way and after a while they met many coyotes and wolves.

When the coyotes and the wolves saw the coyote with the man one wolf called to the other wolves and said, “Everyone be seated. Let us hear what these people who are coming have to say.”

When they were seated the coyote stood up and said, “This man is my brother. He smoked my pipe. He came with me to pay you a visit. Let us take pity on him and make him a wonderful man.”

The man was frightened, for the wolves came very close to him. Then the man was told that he must not be afraid to look. So he did and saw many coyotes, old and young.

The coyotes began to roll in the dust then they came to the man and gave him plant roots and told him that the roots were good for healing the sick. Then one of the coyotes arose and said, “We will give you this root and if any many is bitten by a mad dog give him this medicine. He will then get well and not go mad. The other medicinal roots are good for other ailments and pains.” Next a wolf stood up and rolled in the dust. Then he arose and gave the man a whistle and said, “I give you the whistle. When anybody is sick, use this whistle and the person will be made well.”

Then another wolf arose and gave the man a piece of bone with the skull of a wolf on it and said, “Take this piece of bone. If anyone attempts to poison or bewitch you, lay the bone on your forehead and you will be able to overcome them. My power is the bone.”

Finally the man spoke and said, “This is enough. I thank you wolves and coyotes, I am glad I came here.”

Then coyote took the man back to the village. “When you get home,” the coyote said, “take this whistle. Blow it before you get home. Blow hard and we will hear it; all the coyotes and wolves will hear it.”

The man did as he was told and heard the coyotes and wolves howl in the distance.

After several days he heard of a man who was very ill. He went to him and doctored him. With the new healing powers he had learned from the wolves and the coyotes, he was able to cure the sick man.

Thus began the journeys of the first healers.

Granite Canyon. 2007. First Spring in Colorado:

I am running on the Old Stage road; something is moving in the wind. It is a coyote hanging upside down from an old telegraph pole. I am aghast, sickened. The person with me, a “local”, is nonplussed and says: “this is what we in do in the West with anything that eats deer and elk”. It stayed on my mind all night, the carcass twisting in the wind. I returned the next day, alone. It was cold, the coyote semi frozen but the stench still incredible. It had been there long enough that the skin was sloughing off but there was enough left to tell she was female and had been nursing. I cut her down, cover her with rocks, lay down tobacco in the four directions, and apologize to her and her now starved pups for the idiocy and violence of my species. I wonder: “What people do this?” There were no ranches, no pets, nor livestock anywhere near. She was no threat to anyone. “What had I gotten into by moving here”?

The Wolf Clan represents the path finders. Their responsibility is to guide the people in living their lives in the way the Creator intended.

Keweenaw Peninsula, Thanksgiving Day, 2013:

I fly home to see my father: I was worried as he’d collapsed a month before. This turned out to be the last time I’d see him conscious and upright. It was a weird, climate-change day; too warm for late November. Dad wished to rest so I went to my
home, 30 miles west. It was deer hunting season so I was careful in the woods. I came upon dog tracks, going in a determined direction with no human tracks beside them. The tracks were as long as my hand and sunk deep into the soil. I find scat with bone fragments. This is no dog. Occasional hunters in pickup trucks drive by and glower as I am scaring away “their” deer. I follow the tracks, erasing them with a branch as I walk.

*Humility (Dhaadendiziwin) is represented by the wolf. For the wolf, life is lived for his pack and the ultimate shame is to be outcast. Humility is to know that you are a sacred part of creation. Live life selflessly and not selfishly. Respect your place and carry your pride with your people and praise the accomplishments of all. Do not become arrogant and self-important. Find balance within yourself and all living things.*

**Un-named Mountain Pass Colorado, Fall, 2014:**

I am riding with a “local” in his truck. We stop near the summit; he gravitates toward some mine ruins. I turn the other way, sick of all things mining, and see a wolf. Unmistakable and huge. We stare at one other. It’s a lanky teenager, a male. The wolf is in a bowl, totally in the open. My companion looks up from his mine waste and sees him. I throw a rock, scaring the wolf away while the local goes for his gun. I tell him, “Don’t shoot, it’s someone’s dog”. I tell the wolf; “Welcome home”.

“When the West was settled, it was won, I am not talking about from the Native Americans, French, British, or any other foreigner, but from ourselves; the West was won from the industry and development.”

Thomas spoke this with passion and magnanimity as he stood along the creek. He often spoke to nature: the water, the trees, the sun or whatever, but never did he speak with such force. It was as if he, now, had the answers he was searching for in life, but could only manifest such thoughts to nature. To speak these thoughts in public would feel like treason for he knows where compassion lies. Many would denounce him as a traitor and exile him. He knew he must cross the threshold of society ever so delicately.

“The East was settled with the dream of independent private property, but as nature has demonstrated, personally owned land is not just personally tended. It is not distinct from the surrounding land and property of others, but rather dependent upon ecological functions of the whole, dependent upon the surrounding land for the most elementary of functions; it is dependent private property! What is done upstream comes downstream, what is done upwind blows downwind and what is done in the East affects the West.”

His thoughts were running wild that day and he felt as if he had something important to say, but did not know who would really listen to his rant. And so he spoke to nature, the one who always listens, and forcefully he spoke.

As he spoke he could hear the water flowing, splish-splash, the birds singing, tweet-tweet, even the wind howling, wssshhhh. He could hear all the music of nature but above all he could hear himself. Even so, his voice did not silence or dominate nature, but rather put words to the natural acoustics.

He walked up the creek to a small waterfall. There were many rocks and his voice echoed clearly. Moss grew out of every saturated crevasse and ferns were sprawling everywhere. He stood there watching the water crash down. Every bit of water seemed different, some were lonely drops in their own shape and others were large masses moving in harmony like synchronized divers at the Olympics. Thomas stared at the majestic actions.
He heard a voice from the darkness across the water asking "Was the West was really won, or have we been duped again?"

Thomas did not know anybody was around, but he was not concerned. He thought about the problem of public land after the Westward expansion. One thing that came to mind was the history of overgrazing public land, how ranchers used to fence off public land for private use due to overcrowding. He thought about how this led to regulations on grazing that helped but still are not followed over one-hundred years later.

Next he thought about the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and how they make an annual profit of almost 4 billion dollars after expenses. How they are supposed to protect the land yet they lease it for private profitable destruction. His mind was in distress.

"It was the lawyer who said conservation needs to be profitable to stay alive, and thus sustainability was born," the voice said.

"Exactly, and business will come down to the bottom line, money, and that is where sustainability can conquer."

"But will 'sustainability' be true to the environment or will it simply sustain our destructive culture?"

The voice asked.

Thomas thought in agony about what he just heard as he splashed his left foot in the flowing water. He did not know what to say, so he just listened

"See Thomas," said the voice, "this depresses me, but depression can be satisfying and addictive if you let it; I, myself, only live in depression. When you are spiraling out of control with the defeat that has brought about your affliction, it can be exhilarating in many ways, like when you know there is nothing that can be done so you simply enjoy it. It is at that point when you view life in a distinct way, in a way that you have never seen before. It is metaphysically pleasing in a way, watching yourself and your life being degraded away, like our epistemology degrades our metaphysical experiences, when our theories of knowledge undermine our knowledgeable experiences. Depression is warranted in our society, to bring us back down to reality and earth, for so many of our activities and daily routines are disconnected from nature in the most wretched of ways."

There was a short pause in conversation. Then the voice continued.

"The sadness and vices of our society bring forth personal depression. How can one live in our society without being depressed? But it is what comes out of the depression that in practical. It is the dreaded social change that is what comes about and brings one out of such depths, despair with a goal if you will, the thing we all sit around and fearfully wait for in anticipation, for once one realizes how to bring about such change they cannot wallow in their misery. They rejoice this misery as a chance to change it."

The voice continued speaking,

"All this talk of emotions and talk of change has brought me to ethics. With the creation of every human virtue is the creation of a vice, or vice-versa; you cannot have a left without a right. Thus we know many vices and vicious acts exist today, especially that we exhibit upon the environment, but where is the virtue to combat it?"

This resonated in in Thomas' ears. It was like he always knew it, but never heard it in such a way. A look of determination came upon his face and he said,

"I shall elicit virtue with every movement and protect the rangeland from overgrazing, the forest from clear-cutting, the desert from mineral gouging, the soil from depletion, the animals from extinction; I shall rally the people for protecting the environment! We will allow nature to ascend unto the dominate throne, recognizing the environment as the basis of human productivity and we will dismantle our shallow destructive view allowing the environment to flourish without our guidance; we shall return to allowing nature to guide us. We shall honor the West and protect the land from over-consumption and industrial depredation."

Then he thought about what he said and the implications that must follow; how he must continue to protect the treasures of the West he has sworn allegiance to. With such an allegiance it should be considered treason to know such things and not speak them in public.

"Then you must get out there and protect such beauty with greatness. You must protect and promote the growing old of redwoods rather than just short term growth of redwoods, you must protect the lone wolf in order to preserve the pack, you must protect the grass to preserve the herds and you must protect the soil in order to preserve the ecosystem. It shall be your duty as is mine, to protect what we have sworn allegiance to. With such an allegiance it should be considered treason to know such things and not speak them in public."

The voice said:

"Then you must get out there and protect such beauty with greatness. You must protect and promote the growing old of redwoods rather than just short term growth of redwoods, you must protect the lone wolf in order to preserve the pack, you must protect the grass to preserve the herds and you must protect the soil in order to preserve the ecosystem. It shall be your duty as is mine, to protect what we have from over-zealous destruction and development, for development of the natural world must stop one day, and this day must come soon to preserve our beauty as we recognize it."

Thomas said:

"I will think of the whole ecosystem instead of simply beautiful aspects, like
Leopold said, I will think like a mountain. I will allow the forest to grow old and naturally regenerate itself rather than inhibiting or chemically inducing such growth. The pack will be allowed to grow deep-rooted and the lone wolves will wander without harassment or targeted assignation. The grass will be allowed to grow at its natural rate, spreading with the wind, keeping itself one step ahead of the herds. The herds will be strong, for the wolves will keep them exercising and from over-grazing specific spots. The soil, the soil, the soil! The soil will harbor plants in a safe way, allowing plants to thrive in guilds, all serving a larger purpose that is not recognized but achieved, achieved in such a way as to promote life from all around. He always knew this, but now felt a deep connection and obligation to it. Thomas saw the shadow appear from the darkness. As he walked closer and into more light, the figure remained dark. He heard the voice say: “I live in the shadows and can never be drawn to the light, for I am the depressed, dreaded, and sad individual who darkens every inch of the earth I move upon. I will be with you so long as this destructive society is upon us, I am your dark side that has been born from constant war with nature. You are not me, but I am you.”

On top of a hill, surrounded by a forest. To get to it, you had to drive up a long dirt and rock road, barely wide enough for a single car. Riding down it on a bike was suicide. The house itself was a white, New England style house with green trim, and a front door that awkwardly hung two feet above the ground, the only entrance was through the mud room, which actually had a porch attached. It was in a small clearing, though, to a young girl, it was enormous. Surrounded by forest on every side, so thick you couldn’t see 10 feet into it. But it was not scary, despite the known presence of moose and bears, the forest was safe. It was comfort. It was a place to hide after a scolding from mom, after a fight with friends, after the house had been invaded by a suffocating amount of family members. The forest was home. There was no fear of getting lost. Every boulder and fallen tree had a name and served as both toy and landmark. The fallen tree, called airplane, was two minutes left (right if you stood facing the house.) and could be a WW 2 bomber, taking down mutated monsters in place of people. Or a passenger plane going to visit the favorite cousin. A boat carrying refugees to safety, a school bus seconds from plummeting off a cliff only to be saved by a heroic 7 year old girl. (the only casualties were the middle school bullies. But everyone agreed it was a necessary sacrifice.) It was a space ship, on route to an unexplored galaxy. A place to read quietly, away from the messy 2 year old brother who liked to eat books and Barbies. The waving rock was on the very edge of the yard, and a place to wave goodbye to leaving guests until they disappeared from view. It was customary to do this with every person who visited, no matter how long they stayed or how often they visited. The one exception being the ambulance that took daddy way, after he cut off part of his finger in the lawn mower. It was also a place to take out aggression by sitting on the large rock and smashing smaller rocks to dust. It was a place little brother wasn’t allowed on, after he fell off of it onto his face several times. The wild flower garden took up the whole back yard, and attracted moose in summer and springe. They were watched safely from the mud room, behind glass doors. Every year, a cow and her two babies came to visit and eat mommy’s plants.
I remember holding my hands out in front of her. Palms up, blood shaking, bandages over most of my knuckles, medical tape wrapped around both palms, securing the scabs that covered the backs of my hands. Under each bandage was a piece of myself I was trying to get rid of. I hated the scabs. I hated the band-aids and the tape. I wanted the wounds to stay open. I imagined that with each drop of blood spilled from them the undesirable, unexplainable pain and guilt went with it. I remember holding out my nauseating pain in front of her and looking up at her with all the desperation I could harness beneath my eyes. Why did I think she could save me? Why did I think she could replace the skin on my hands? Under each bandage was a piece of myself I was trying to get rid of. I hated the scabs. I hated the band-aids and the tape. I wanted the wounds to stay open. I imagined that with each drop of blood split from them the undesirable, unexplainable pain and guilt went with it. I remember holding out my nauseating pain in front of her and looking up at her with all the desperation I could harness beneath my eyes. Why did I think she could save me? Why did I think she could replace the skin on my hands? I remember she stared back at me fearfully and questioning. She both questioned and feared for my sanity. Looking back, she probably feared because there were so many questions. She hasn't been the only one I've given the power of my salvation to. Fast-forward four years. I remember sitting in the back of their car. My forehead rested heavily in my palm; the previous scabs were just scars now. We were on our way to dinner and Enya's "May It Be" was playing through the speakers. This is Maddy's favorite song," Lori said as she turned it up louder. The lyrics filled every space in the car and every place in my body.

"May it be an evening star
Shines down upon you
May it be when darkness falls
Your heart will be true
You walk a lonely road
Oh how far you are from home..."

My eyes were closed and my heart was present, more present than it had ever felt before. Eliza sat in the passenger seat and I could feel her gaze upon me. I didn't have to look up to know where she was looking, where she was feeling. Because where she was feeling was exactly where I was usually feeling. Her tears fell out of my eyes. My breath came out of her lungs. We felt with each other, and that is, to this day, the least lonely feeling I have ever experienced.

In the winter, the garden became a maze of tunnels. Tops of the long plants formed a canopy and it was easy to excavate the paths left by the moose. No one else was allowed, no one else could fit. It could barely fit a small 9 year old girl, doing the army crawl taught her by her favorite uncle.

Opposite the house, on the border of the dirt road and endless forest, was a small stream by black berries and raspberries grew and spring peepers lived and multiplied. The surface of the stream was covered in frog eggs, which would spawn an ungodly amount of pests, who would nosily chirp day and night from the moment they thawed in spring, to when they froze in the fall. There are those who say their chirps sound like sleigh bells. They have never had to live by a spring peeper breeding ground. They are by far, the absolute worst creatures on earth. Second only to biting horse flies and closely followed by mosquitoes.

The house was safe, comfortable, and familiar. But one day it was gone. Maples were traded for aspens. Quiet surrounding forests traded for noisy neighbors. Close friends traded for bullies.
I remember this moment in the car so clearly because it was a moment where I felt whole. The scars were spread wide open on my hands but nothing came out of them. They simply existed. Their pain was present but was wrapped in so much love and safety that the only feeling I had towards them was gratitude for bringing me to this moment. I remember the overwhelming gift of forgiveness I felt towards myself for enabling fear and once upon a time befriending it so tenderly and sacrificially.

I remember this moment now and wonder if it’s possible for a feeling like that to stay. Is it possible for that kind of freedom within to be obtained and lived with permanently? Or are we as humans only ever able to feel it in flashing moments and forced to remember it when our blood has once again been filled with pain and guilt. And we’re holding out our hands, wishing the pain will drain through the scabs and disappear into a piece of gauze that will absorb it and we can throw it away and never have to think of it again. Perhaps these moments are just flashing memories that keep us going until we’re able to find true freedom and wholeness without someone else. Perhaps until the day we can hold our hands in front of ourselves and depend only on our own inner strength and love to heal the scabs, can we obtain an everlasting feeling of completeness.

I ache for that day, to live forever in the home inside myself. The home built purely out of love and truth, with walls made of eternal light and windows made of forgiveness. Its front door is carved in love and its roof is infinite freedom. In this home I will one day dwell forever, with however many scars it takes for them to become insignificant.

Why did I think Jenny, or Eliza, or Lori could save me? The best answer I’ve encountered is because they are me. We reflect and project until we can truly look at ourselves because we are one.

“May it be the shadow’s call
Will fly away
May it be your journey on
To light the day
When your night is overcome
You may rise to find the sun…
…A promise lives within you now…”
I hear the low hum of the engine and the clanging of the stones against the underbody of my silver Ford Ranger as I drive north up a gravel road that runs next to the beautiful Colorado River with the landscape of the colorful Colorado Rockies. The sun is in force today, blazing down on me and fueling the earth with its light force of energy. Looking out the window, I see the shadow of my truck and the outline of a kayak on the roof. The sky is as blue as the Detroit Lion's Honolulu blue jerseys with the hint of puffy, creamy, white pillows floating in front of that bright ball of energy in the sky. Part of my mind wanders off and thinks about the last time I drove this road and saw a herd of mountain goats grazing on the side of the road. I think about how their horns looked just like the St. Louis Rams logo coiled like a snake but with a hard texture making them look stone-like. I think about how lucky I am to be here in nature witnessing natural beauty and art all around me, and how excited I am to get to my destination where I get to express my freedom and individuality through a sport that uses the earth’s natural energy. I've yet to find a more natural way to connect with the nature. Freestyle kayaking creates an overflow of stimuli in my brain, which puts me on cloud nine.

When I arrive at Gore Canyon Whitewater Park, I take a second to soak in its natural beauty. I look up the river and see the exit of Gore Canyon. Its two massive vertical cliff walls look like the entrance to Mordor, but its different colors and shades of rock left by the years of glaciers ripping through the mountain, the way an barge breaks up ice in the artic, makes it beautiful to look upon. The only remains of the massive glaciers run through the center of the canyon like a dark python, winding it’s way toward me. The snake-like river slithers slowly, searching through prairie-like foothills sending shivers slightly down my sharp slender spine, showering me with significant serenity of natural beauty. The river finally reaches me where I stand next to the wave that I drove here to play in. The moving water bubbles, making sounds like blurp, blip, blurp, bilp, blip, blip, as it roars down the river. The water is so flat and smooth it resembles a pane of glass or a mirror before it falls over a rock shelf and then down onto the river-bed where it recycles itself on top of itself over and over, creating a washing machine like siphon. After spinning and cycling, the water starts to bubble and agitate making that blip, blurp, blip, blip sound. The water begins to take shape of foam like the soap in a car wash all white with popping bubbles. Then the water moves past its foamy state and starts to resemble the mountain landscape in the background.
The peak of the waves catches the light in just the right way making them appear almost transparent. The light dissipates as it falls into the valley in-between the waves making the water look solid and as dark as a starless night. The peaks and valleys start to distance and the waves plane out as the foothills of the majestic Colorado Rockies.

The latex gaskets close around my wrists and neck making the snapping sound of a rubber band as I put on my dry suit. The zipper zooms up my chest sounding like a serrated saw cutting through ply-wood. My life jacket slides over my head onto my shoulders. The plastic fasteners pop when connected and secure onto my body. My spray skirt is pulled up over my legs and secured properly under my life jacket, and my helmet is pulled down over my head. I kind of resemble Randy from A Christmas Story when his mother overdresses him to go out in the cold, or like a samurai warrior ready for battle. My body temperature rises from both the gear and nerves. I can feel beads of sweat running from my arm pits dripping down my body dissipating to a salty track. The anxiousness grows in me like the grass in the spring after the snow melts. I get in my kayak and tuck my knees under their restraints and pull my spray skirt over the cockpit. The bungie snaps tight around the rim of the cockpit sealing out the water.

Then, I slide into the river pushing through the water, causing it to ripple like tiny rolling shinny hills. My paddle blades hit the water opposite of each other propelling me where I want to go. Feelings of serenity and absolute freedom take over my body and soul as my kayak moves into the wave. I can feel the whole force of the natural energy in the river pushing and pulling at my kayak trying to take over. Adjustments of my weight and paddle create a sense of control, and I surf the wave with my kayak turning and gliding on the smooth mirror like water. I feel the water running under me like a treadmill; the natural force of the water falling down the inclined river wants to pull my kayak out of the wave, but the hydraulic formed by the force of the water falling over the rocks keeps me and my kayak surfing the wave. I turn and glide back and forth the way a surfer rides a wave spraying water out of the edges of my kayak the same way snow shoots off the edges of a snowboarder’s board leaving a rooster tail of snow behind him.

With a couple of strong paddle strokes, I push my feet down hard into the glassy smooth front of the wave causing my kayak to upright vertically, and then with precise timing and balance I jump into the air with my arms raised high above my head as if trying to touch the sky, and I flip my body and kayak like a ninja assassin. My kayak completes its full flip in the air; then, it lands and continues to surf and glide in the wave like a surfer in the ocean once again filling my whole being with a sense of what it means to be alive. Harnessing the natural energy of the river to express myself through my passion for the sport of freestyle kayaking is an incomparable feeling of freedom and joy.
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