

SAGE MAGAZINE

expanding environmentalism

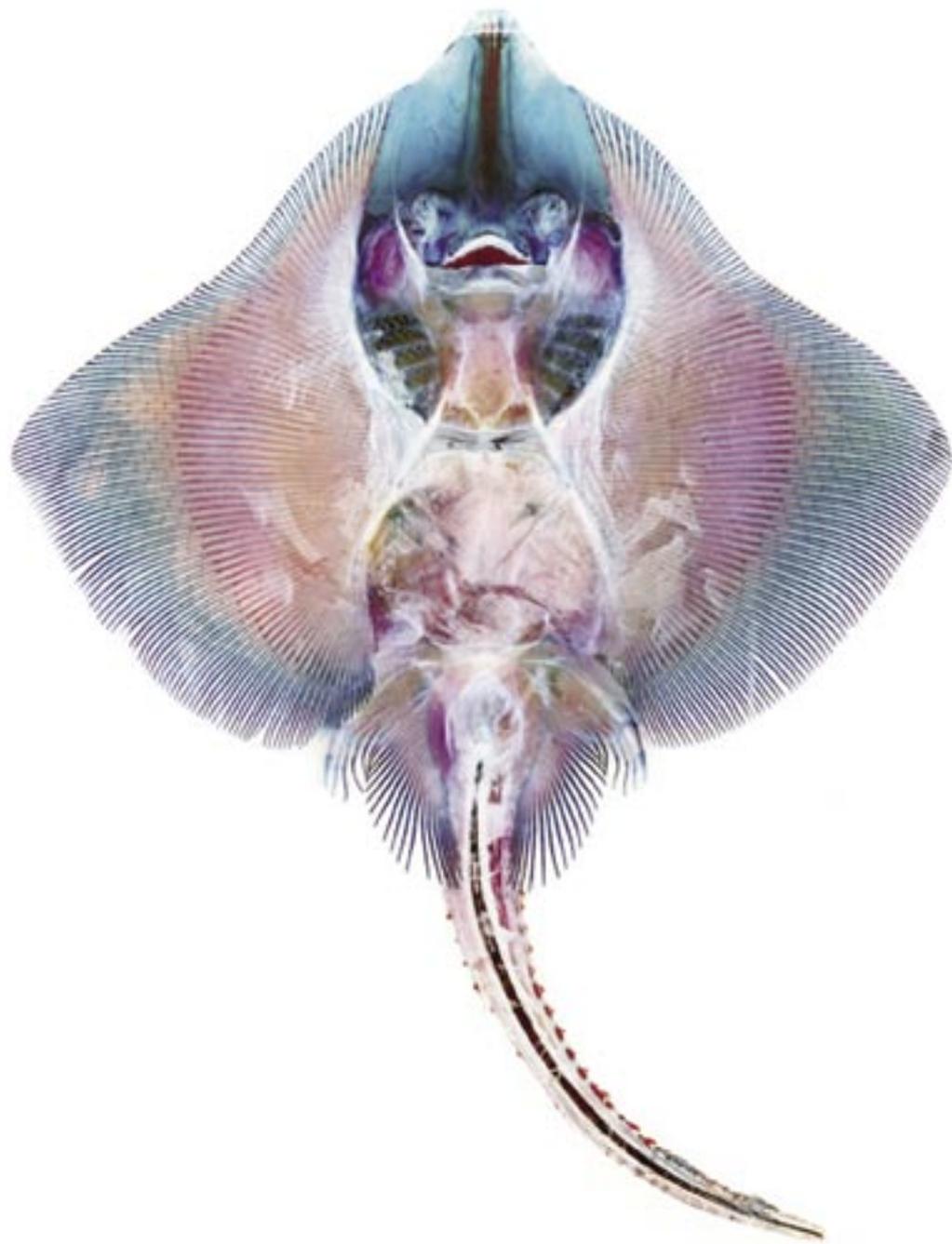
volume 1, issue 1



BORDERLAND: WHY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS MATTER

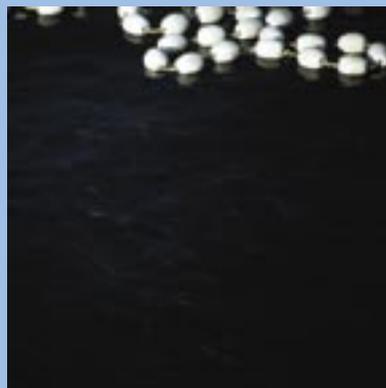
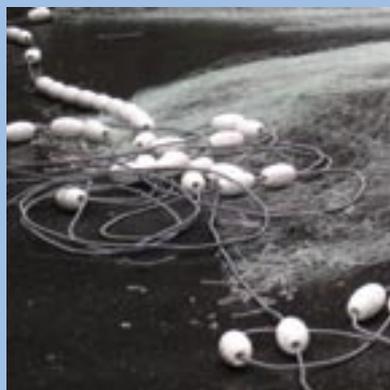
THE MYTH OF CLEAN COAL

WAR AND THE ENVIRONMENT



SAGE MAGAZINE

expanding environmentalism



Rosi Kerr

Contents

Departments

- 4 **Letter from the Editors** Wanted: Readers
- 6 **Out and Around** Montreal Climate Talks, Oil Addicts
- 10 **Materials** A Short History of Plastic
- 11 **Innovations** Toilet Technology
- 12 **Reality Check** Hybrid Incentives
- 13 **Quiz** Are you an Environmentalist?
- 24 **Food For Thought** Organic Goes Corporate
- 36 **The Cabbage** Fake News
- 38 **The Critics' Pages** Reviews and Opinions
- 41 **Listed**
- 42 **Last Page** The View From Above

Features

- 14 **Borderland: The Education of an Environmentalist** In the public schools on the border of Texas and Mexico, an environmentalist is challenged and redefined
Stephanie Paige Ogburn
- 21 **The Modern Coal Town** Images from Appalachia
Ross Geredien
- 26 **Accelerated Destruction** War is impacting Kashmir's fragile alpine environment, but not in the way one might think
Jeni Krencicki
- 30 **Brooklyn, N.Y. 2.14.05** Fiction
Christopher O'Brien

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All correspondence may be addressed to:

Editors, SAGE Magazine • 205 Prospect Street • New Haven, CT 06511
magazine@yale.edu

FROM THE EDITORS

WANTED

Personals

ENERGETIC PARTNER

Fit and funny SWF seeks manly man for playmate, soulmate and possible life mate. I'm a smart, nice looking, laid back woman of 32 years. I want someone who can bring spontaneity into my life and a hand to hold at the movies on Saturday nights. In fact, I'd be happy with anything on a Saturday night. Maybe I should just get another dog.

KINKY & KIND

Strong, muscular, over 40 teddy bear SBM seeks friendly but freaky woman to play with and love. I like going to the gym together, making smoothies, and dripping melted chocolate on your hot body. I can bench press 230 lbs so I can easily carry you anywhere you want to go...in the bedroom.

MISSED CONNECTION

I saw you at Amoeba Records, Upper Haight last Saturday. You, tight dark blue jeans, Of Montreal teeshirt, black hoodie, red dyed hair, lingering in Songs: Ohia section. Me, at the listening station checking out the new Belle & Sebastian album. I was wearing tight dark blue jeans, orange hoodie, fauxhawk. Continually shoe-gazing I had a hard time checking you out. Want to go see if we can track down David Berman? I hear he's in the area.

WHEAT GRASS SHOT

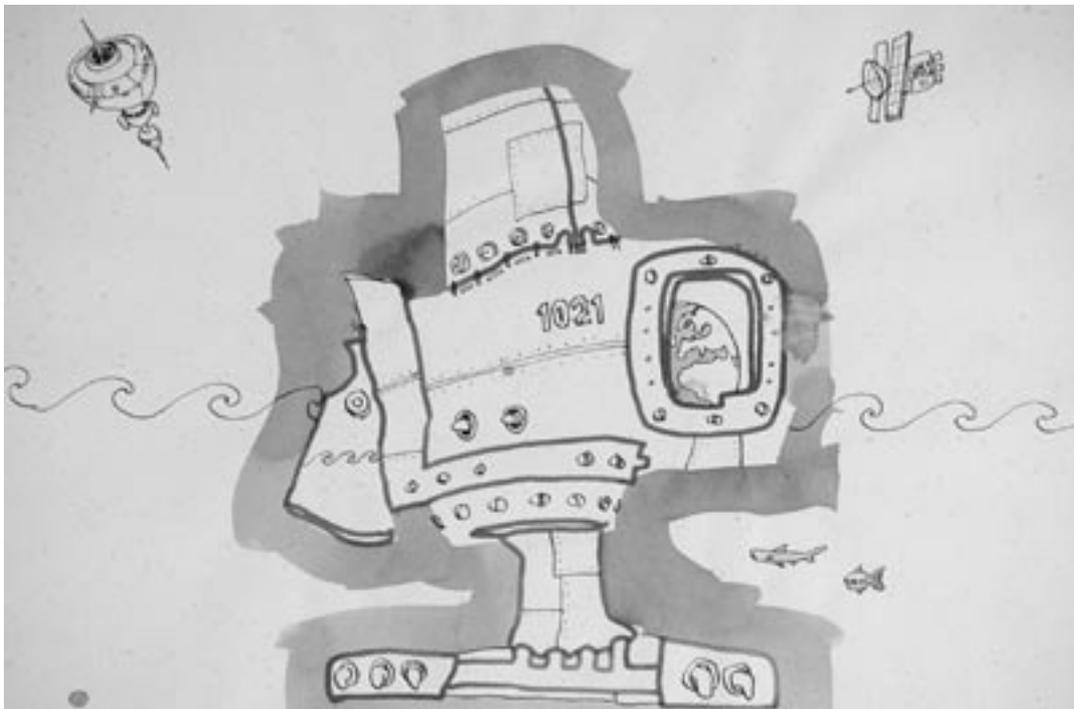
SAM seeks SWM for healthy lifestyle comradery. I enjoy roller-blading, avocados, sprouts, spirulina, and Absolutely No Carbs. Ideal match: business exec and/or RNC member with lots of money and new, fancy sports car. Thinking of stopping in on a Log Cabin meeting.

I WANT YOU TO WANT ME

New environmental magazine seeking for readers, any age/shape/color. **Must have a sense of humor and be able to read... or just look at pictures. Employment, religious beliefs, political leaning, previous environmental knowledge unimportant. About me: I am 10 inches by 10 inches, height/weight proportionate, full color photos, art and cartoons, recycled paper content, new to the area, minimal baggage. Influences and inspirations: Rolling Stone, Orion, The New Yorker, The Daily Show, the Onion, grist.org, Woody Allen, Arrested Development, the Sierra Nevada foothills, the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Cotton: Fabric of Our Lives advertising campaign, chocolate and drinkable yogurt. I enjoy a well-told joke, rush hour subway rides, being read on the can, long walks on the beach (to pick up trash/save baby seals), and submissions from people outside the U.S. I make great reading material for the gym or on the train and fit easily in your purse or cargo-pants pocket. Looking for someone to read my first issue, no strings attached. You don't even have to take me out to dinner. Dog-, cat-, kid-friendly. Open to long-term relationship, long distance okay.**

MISSED CONNECTION

You, Hasidic Jew on the J train to Brooklyn last Thursday night, rush hour. You had curly hair, big black top hat, standing near the door looking anxious. Me, white 20 something sitting, reading new Tom Wolfe book. I'd like to see you without your hat on. Meet sometime for some challah or maybe a bagel?



SUBMERGED • MIKE GODWIN

CONTRIBUTORS

& CREDITS

FOUNDING EDITORS

Erin Barnes
Laura Jensen
Stephanie Paige Ogburn

MANAGING EDITOR

Laura Jensen

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Erin Barnes
Stephanie Paige Ogburn

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Catherine Byun
Michael Gold
T. Colleen Morgan
Amanda Sahl
Rebecca Watters
Dahvi Wilson

COPY EDITORS

Catherine Benson
Rosi Kerr
Vanitha Sivarajan
Nadav Tanners
Rachel Wilson
Johanna Zetterberg

PHOTO EDITOR

Evelyn Silva

ADVISORS

Jane Coppock
Fred Strebeigh

SPECIAL THANKS

Amity Doolittle
Julie Newman
Gus Speth



JENI KRENCICKI

Jeni Krencicki is currently pursuing a master's degree at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. She would like to thank the Jubitz Family Foundation for funding the research that led to the article published in SAGE magazine.

STEPHANIE OGBURN

Stephanie Ogburn is not a hippie, but she does like the environment and was once a vegan. She enjoys organic gardening, reading and drinking coffee out of an old Prego jar. She studies at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies.

CHRISTOPHER O'BRIEN

Christopher O'Brien, the fiction-writing dynamo, lives in Alexandria, VA. He has been told he has very nice eyes. He plays guitar in a rock band called the Tigers and has no troubles.

MADELEINE MEEK

Madeleine Meek is a graduate student at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. She is the co-chair of the Coalition on Agriculture, Food and the Environment, which inspires Yalies to eat wholesome local and organic food.

ROSI KERR

Rosi Kerr spent last summer in Alaska thanks to a grant from the Jubitz Family Foundation, where she worked for a Native American environmental non-profit, guided river rafting trips on the Copper River and tried photography.

ROSS GEREDIEN

Ross Geredien has been doing conservation and stock photography for eight years. A professional ecologist and naturalist, Ross also works in land conservation. Visit his website at www.goodmigrationsphoto.com.

ALEX SPINNEY

Alex is a freelance painter in Brooklyn, New York

ELIZABETH PICKETT

Elizabeth Pickett's artwork is inspired by the patterns and rhythms of the Hawaiian Islands. Her paintings were created in a rainforest cabin on the eastern coast of the Big Island.

MIKE GODWIN

Mike Godwin is a graduate student in the Department of Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara. An amateur naturalist, archaeologist and interplanetary geophysics buff, Mike works primarily in two-dimensional media: drawing, painting, and programming.

ALLISON MEIERDING

Allison Meierding is a graphic designer/illustrator working in New York City. She primarily designs book interiors and covers with Laurie Dolphin Design.

AMANDA MOSS COWAN

Amanda Cowan, MBA, Master of Environmental Management candidate at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, believes climate change is the biggest threat humans face today. Her goal is to help businesses reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

COLLEEN MORGAN

Colleen is a student at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, focusing on Industrial Ecology. She hopes to study the energy sector and the agriculture industry to understand how their practices can be improved to reduce environmental impacts and create cost savings.

BRANDON BALLANGEE

Eco-Artist, Social Sculptor, and Civil Discontent
www.greenmuseum.org/ballengee
www.wavehill.org/arts/brandon_ballengee.html
www.scicult.com/artists/brandonballengee/
www.disk-o.com/malamp/

Climate Crisis

AMANDA COWAN

This past December, Inuit elders from northern Canada slowly made their way to a raised platform at the front of the Ottawa River Room at Montreal's Palais des Congrès. They took their positions, one by one. The old leaders' words painted a picture of how life in the North had changed over the last few years, and interpreters struggled to find translations in English that would adequately capture their descriptions.

Less ice meant traveling farther distances to hunt. It also meant having to buy tents, because there was no longer enough snow pack to build the igloos that would normally house the hunters during their expeditions. Some desirable species had disappeared entirely. On the other hand, warmer temperatures in summer led to more mosquitoes, increasing the risk of disease — as well as levels of human irritation.

Two days earlier, chief U.S. climate negotiator Harlan Watson had loomed over the same podium, smirking as he answered questions from the standing-room-only audience. Mr. Watson's inquisitors seemed barely able to contain their anger — they waited quietly enough for the microphone, but their carefully worded questions were delivered in low, tight voices that reflected deep resentment toward the U.S. stance on global efforts to rein in climate change. Environmental groups had criticized the appointment of Harlan Watson to his post when evidence surfaced that ExxonMobil had suggested him for the job (at the time, Watson was on the U.S. House Committee on Science). However, at this, the 11th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1st Meeting of

the Parties to the recently ratified Kyoto Protocol, Mr. Watson was just following orders, toeing the Administration line by insisting that the U.S. was doing plenty on the climate change front and that there was no reason to discuss plans for action after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

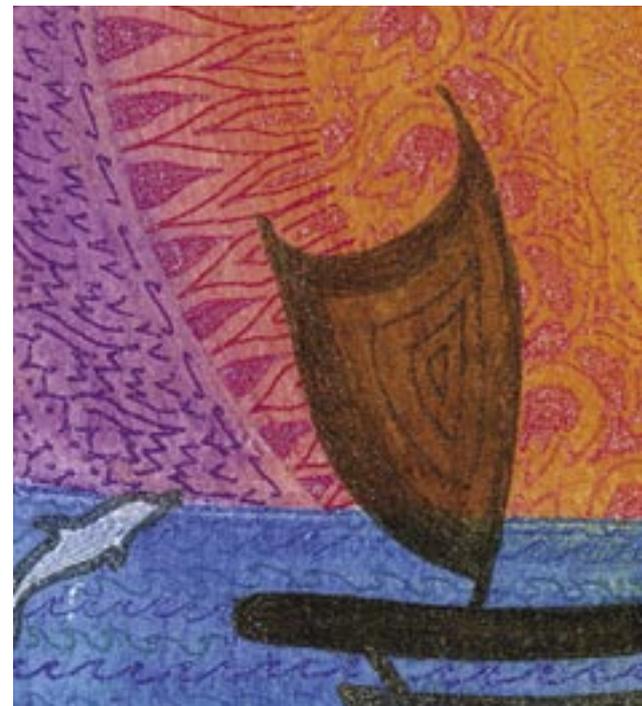
Fifteen years of international negotiations surrounding the Kyoto Protocol have resulted in an accord that is considered too little, too late by some, too much, too soon by others. The Kyoto Protocol excludes most of the world's population from greenhouse gas reduction efforts by failing to negotiate agreements for emission reductions with developing countries, including India and China. Its targeted emission reductions (7 percent below 1990 levels) are inadequate to bring the problem under control — by a factor of ten. The world's biggest per capita emitter — the U.S. — has rejected the agreement, and after years of White House claims that implementing Kyoto would devastate our economy, the climate change community has become resigned to U.S. inaction, at least until 2008. A momentary panic ensued last year, though, when a few complaints about the perceived economic hardship of Kyoto compliance escaped the lips of the UK's Tony Blair, usually a staunch supporter of the agreement.

The word "economics" comes to us from ancient Greece, where it meant "management of the house." Per capita income is going up, but can we really say our house is in order? Already warmer waters are increasing the distance between ice floes. Polar bears — normally powerful swimmers — are drowning, and scientists do not expect any to survive past 2060. Land ice, like that covering Greenland and Antarctica, is melting faster than expected. Were Greenland to melt

entirely — according to Stanford Professor of Environmental Biology and Global Change Stephen Schneider, there is a 50 percent chance of it happening — sea levels would rise 23 feet. If Antarctica melted, sea levels would rise more than 200 feet. Jonathan Pershing of the World Resources Institute says, "If you want to see glaciers in Glacier National Park, go now."

In the absence of federal leadership, individual states and cities within the U.S. are taking action to reduce their emissions. And businesses are committing to CO₂ emission reductions while calling for assurances about future regulatory landscapes. They want a level playing field, and they need to incorporate changing requirements into their capital investment decisions sooner rather than later; doing so is more cost effective and ultimately smoothes the emission reduction path.

Yet the world's governments continue to confer in cities like Montreal, and discussion — apparently influenced more by personalities than facts — centers around questions of



who pays. Given the dire consequences of a warming planet, surely it is time, past time, to act. Figuring out who picks up the tab comes later, when we see who's still around and who still has cash in their pockets. In the meantime, we are going to have to buy a lot of tents — or move to higher ground. ♪

Addicted to Oil

T. COLLEEN MORGAN

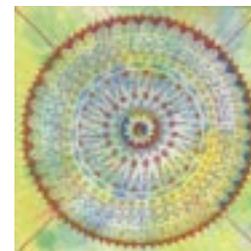
In his State of the Union address January 31, President George W. Bush took a turn to the left when he declared that strengthening the economy requires a nationwide rehab session: we need to conquer our dependence on oil.

"[W]e have a serious problem: America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world," the President said.

Although the majority of the address consisted of rationalizations for continuing the war in Iraq, Bush's rhetoric turned domestic as he spoke of boosting the economy through tax relief, cutting "special interest projects," pushing initiatives to open markets, strengthening the immigration system and reducing health care costs. He even vowed to study Social Security and Medicare, now that the baby boomers are at retirement age.

All of these proclamations were characteristic and unsurprising, as many of them have had Bush's support in the past. Bush's unflinching and dispassionate delivery seemed to soften the surface on which he would drop the big one: the President's derision of the country's oil dependence, some say, was an act of a politically weak leader — the President's approval rating before the speech was 42 percent, eight points lower than the year before — reaching out to new constituencies at the start of the midterm election year. Democrats interviewed after the speech expressed skepticism regarding the President's motives.

His opponents may doubt his sincerity, but the President has declared, for the first time, unquestionable support for alternative energy. His solution to the nation's petroleum addiction is technology, and investment in "cleaner, cheaper and more reliable alternative energy sources." The former Texas oil man announced an Advanced Energy Initiative, a plan that dedicate 22 percent more funding to research in clean-energy alternatives. Two areas were set as priorities: reducing energy consumption by homeowners and businesses and developing new alternatives for energy generation using "zero-emission coal," solar, wind and "safe nuclear."



DAY • ELIZABETH PICKETT

Although this declaration was part of the final third of the President's talk, the initiative turned up on front pages throughout the world, with some calling it the "centerpiece" of the address. The details of the plan supported the President's goal of reducing the oil imported from the Middle East by 75 percent by 2025.

"By applying the talent and technology of America," he said, "this country can dramatically improve our environment, move beyond a petroleum-based economy, and make our dependence on Middle Eastern oil a thing of the past."

As a means of achieving oil independence, Bush pledged additional funding to advance hybrid, electric and hydrogen-powered cars, and encouraged research that would make ethanol "practical and competitive within six years."

To reach this lofty goal, the President proposed an admirable accompaniment: investment in the innovators of the future. The American Competitiveness Initiative is a three-pronged approach to provide funding to advance scientific research, private initiatives and the science and math education of the country's future leaders.

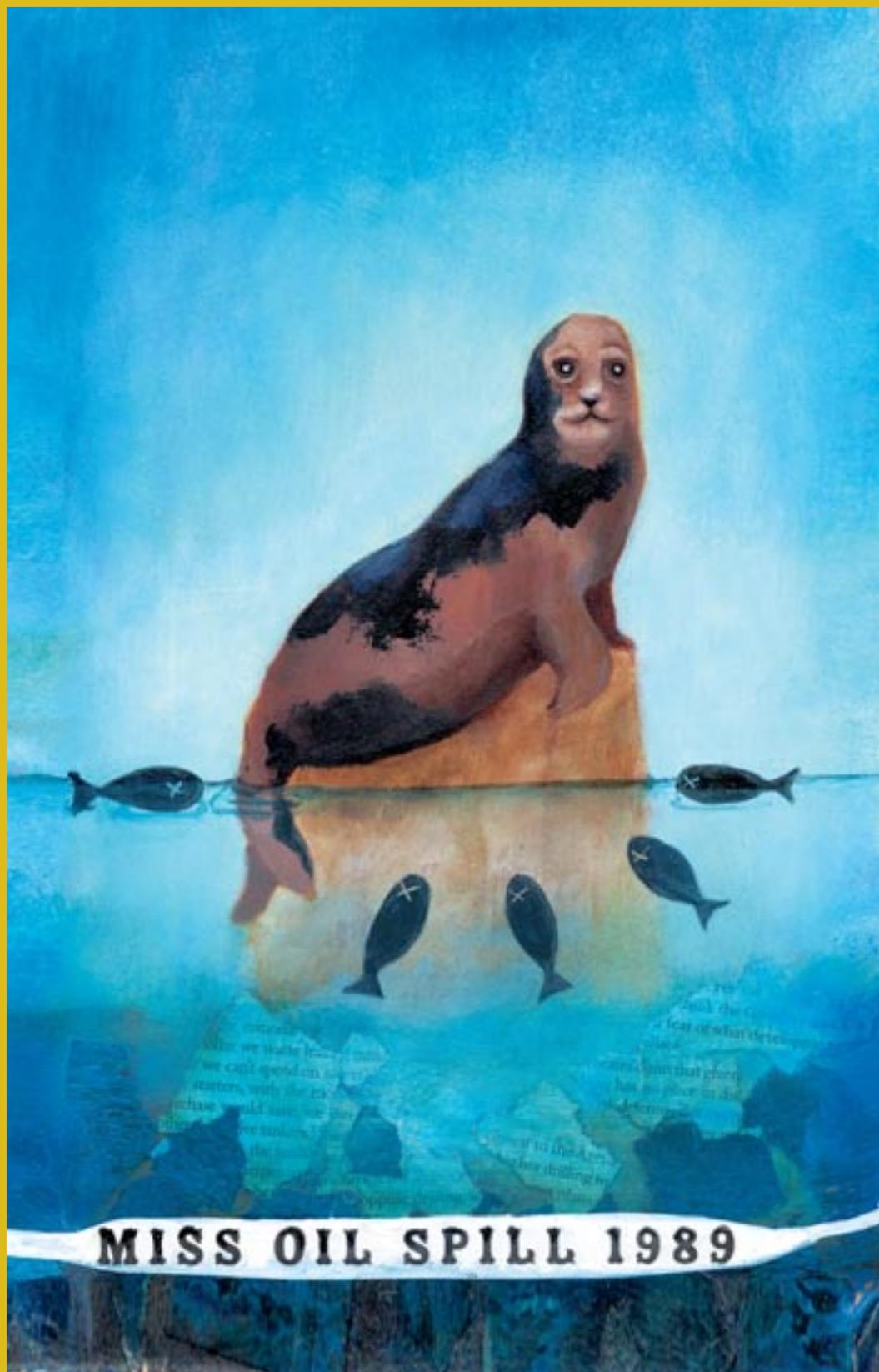
"If we ensure that America's children succeed in life, they will ensure that America succeeds in the world," the President concluded.

This commitment includes a ten year investment in the physical sciences, specifically nanotechnology, alternative energy sources and a "research and development tax credit" to give incentives to private companies for investing in new technologies. Lastly, the plan proposes to

(continued page 8)



WAAALEA LULUABY • ELIZABETH PICKETT



improve math and science programs in the nation's schools by training teachers, bringing professionals into the educational forum and providing more assistance to struggling students.

President Bush's speech could be the outward manifestation of a political turning of the tide, the recognition by their leader that a great majority of Americans believe that climate change is upon us and technology and innovation are the tools for combating the mammoth problem. His speech reacts to a series of recent events that are combining to shape the formation of U.S. Energy Policy: a protracted war to ensure U.S. interests in the Middle East, intense and determined opposition to oil drilling in Alaska, a massive hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico that crippled offshore oil capacity for months and breakthroughs in technologies that made corn stalks and hay potentially viable sources of energy.

"We must continue to lead the world in human talent and creativity," Bush declared. "Our greatest advantage in the world has always been our educated, hardworking, ambitious people — and we're going to keep that edge. ♣

MISS OIL SPILL 1989 • ALLISON MEREDING

First Frost

SHANNON LEAHY

Sun souring in my eyes where arid irises
Ebb under once satin rays of decaying heat.
Faded gold on drooping crescents alludes to a
Burgeoning brilliance now dusted to lackluster
Grown antiquated in the shifting, fertile light.
Amazing is the ravaging of desiccated ground
Hatching dimples from wrinkles
Now dust falling through the cavities of time.

MUTATION EXTRAORDINAIRE • ALLISON MERDING



MATERIALS

PLASTICS

ERIN BARNES

In 1863, the billiard ball industry, facing stiff supply shortages, organized a contest to create an ivory substitute. John W. Hyatt's winning mixture combined camphor and nitro-cellulose to form a good though highly flammable imitation that released a sound like a gunshot when the balls clicked together. A billiard saloon proprietor in Colorado wrote in a letter that during games every man in the room pulled a gun in an instant.

From this explosive beginning, the material known as plastic began its evolution to its current ubiquitous status. In 1909, Dr. Leo Baekeland's plastic patent, Bakelite,[™] became an immediate success as an electrical insulator. Soon plastic was being marketed as "The Material of a Thousand Uses," capable of feats unheard of with other materials.

Across America, manufacturers and designers alike began adapting the versatility of plastic to their fields. Plastic was easily molded into the streamlined forms of Bauhaus art, which integrated form, function and cheap mass production. In his 1930 testimonial to the sweeping appeal and function of this material, American Bauhaus émigré Paul T. Frankl wrote, "These new materials are expressive of our own age. They speak in the vernacular of the 20th century. Theirs is the language of invention, of synthesis. Industrial chemistry today rivals alchemy! Base materials are transmuted into marvels of new beauty." Three years later, folk singer Woody Guthrie touted plastic's virtues from the Columbia River Valley, "...Turnin' out/Everything from fertilizers to sewing machines,/And atomic bedrooms and plastic --/Everything's gonna be plastic."

Tupperware[™], invented by Earl Silas Tupper in 1942, expanded the presence of plastics within the home. Shortly after Tupper's invention, the company

Brownie Wise began hosting Tupperware parties in middle class living rooms across the U.S. And with this, plastics became the new material for the modern woman. Advertisers hyped Tupperware[™] as a blessing of wartime technologies bestowed upon the kitchen, designed to improve the lives of the masses by providing a way to save food and rescue America from wastefulness. The May 1945 issue of Modern Plastics brought plastic into the bedroom in an advertisement for post-formed phenolite, the material out of which Saran Wrap[™] is made, by depicting a nude woman wound up in clear plastic, proclaiming, "Sex: Sara - Sealed, Beautifully Formed."

Mr. McGuire: I just want to say one word to you — just one word.

Ben: Yes sir.

Mr. McGuire: Are you listening?

Ben: Yes I am.

Mr. McGuire: "Plastics."

Ben: Exactly how do you mean?

Mr. McGuire: There's a great future in plastics. Think about it. Will you think about it?

Ben: Yes I will.

Mr. McGuire: Shh! Enough said. That's a deal.

— The Graduate, 1967.

Plastic's uses knew no bounds. In 1957, modern day agribusiness giant Monsanto unveiled a house built entirely of plastic. A year later, the company created the first plastic beverage bottle for Coca-Cola.[™] Before the end of the decade, Mattel marketed the first plastic Barbie[™] doll. Infecting manufacturing processes the world over, plastic production surpassed that of steel in 1979.

Yet despite the wonders of plastic's moldability, malleability and elasticity, many plastics have negative health impacts. Controlled heating of petroleum and other products breaks the materials down into monomers, the building blocks of polymers, which make up plastics. Different monomers have different strengths and molding abilities, and, in turn, varying toxicities. For example, the monomers used to make window frames, pipes, plastic cutlery and CD jewel cases are confirmed carcinogens.

Sturdy polycarbonate plastic bottles, such as the über-popular clear Nalgene[™] bottles that were once thought to be non-degradable and safe, have recently been found to be leaching endocrine disrupters into the liquids they contain after being washed in a dishwasher.

In addition to these toxin concerns, the wave of disposability engendered by the widespread use of plastics has created a massive trash problem. In 2003, plastics comprised 26,668,000 tons of the total domestic municipal solid waste, only 5.2 percent of which was recycled.

Yet the pervasive integration of plastics into our everyday lives is inescapable, from shampoo bottles to carpets, IKEA lamps to poolside recliners. Like a kid seeking a sugar high, we choose to overlook the problematic consequences of our addiction to this sweet material. ☞

THE FUTURE

TOILET TECHNOLOGY IS EXPERIMENTING WITH THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS

CATHERINE BYUN

Efficient toilet technology will only work if people buy it. But how do we change people's most private, personal habit when we can hardly even talk about it without smirking?

Burn Baby Burn

The Incinolet looks like an industrial washing machine but is actually the world's first electric toilet. Using a paper liner in the bowl instead of water, the toilet captures and burns your poop at 1200 degrees Fahrenheit, rendering it into germ-free ash in about an hour. If sitting on a metal, electrified toilet makes you a little uncomfortable, just think about what happens if the power goes out in the middle of a burning cycle: the blower shuts off, and the instructions suggest you "open a window to ventilate as best you can."

A Throne Fit For a King

Toto, Ltd., undisputed heavyweight champ of luxury toilet technology, has recently unveiled two revolutionary toilet designs. The Toto Neorest 600 is smarter and better looking than you. It senses your approach and automatically opens its lid, and as you sit, it gently toasts your buns. For the bashful, the Neorest considerably creates white noise as it purifies the air. A built-in bidet — which comes with three delightful settings — does away with the need for toilet paper. If you don't believe in the power of the bidet, just ask Will Smith. "They're toilet paper-free," he gushed to Access Hollywood.

"You sit on the toilet and there's a spray that's so deadly accurate — wherever you sit on the toilet, somehow it always hits the bull's-eye perfectly." Smith isn't the only celebrity shelling out \$5000 for the space age john; it's only the best for Jennifer Lopez and Brad Pitt's million-dollar backsides.



For water-saving features, the Neorest has sensors in the bowl that analyze your business and adjust water volume according to amount and type of waste. Its wider trapways and sophisticated valve system help it push more with less water. And for mixed gender households, arguments over the seat being up will be forever resolved: the Neorest 600 automatically shuts the lid after each use.

Is SHIT

Bringing Home the Foam

We may be able to give up our toilet paper for the more civilized bidet. A jet of warm water and a blow dry instead of wiping with irritating paper like a barbarian is appealing. But the more important issue at hand for water-conscious enviros — the flush — is harder to approach. Americans like pooping in water. It makes us feel clean. So how do we get over our squeamishness about a dry toilet? The **Clivus Multrum** foam flush toilet may be one step. An aquarium-style pump turns biodegradable soap into foam that cleans and flushes the bowl. Using only 3 oz. of water per flush, the foam toilet is water-efficient and compost-friendly. The toilet looks like a conventional one, but it might work better psychologically to have some foam in the bowl to begin with. Either way, you may still have to hold a training workshop every time you have a party. ♪

HYBRIDIZING

MICHAEL GOLD

AMERICA'S HIGHWAYS

Millions of Americans will hit the roads this summer, setting off the annual driving glut that invariably finds environmentalists in a cold sweat. This year, however, greenies everywhere can rest easier, as incentives in numerous states have made clean driving more worthwhile than ever. Thanks to www.hybridcars.com for the information compiled in this chart. ♪

-  = INCENTIVE NOT OFFERED
-  = PENDING LEGISLATION OR RESTRICTIONS APPLY
-  = INCENTIVE OFFERED

DIFFERING HYBRID INCENTIVES BY STATE			
STATE	TAX CREDIT	PARKING	CARPOOL LANES
Arizona			
California (Bay Area and Los Angeles)			
Colorado			
Connecticut			
District of Columbia			
Florida			
Georgia			
Illinois			
Louisiana			
Maine			
Maryland (Baltimore)			
Massachusetts			
New Mexico			
New York			
Oregon			
Pennsylvania			
Utah			
Virginia			
West Virginia			

Q U I Z

Are you a wacko, fringe, extremist tree-hugger?

1. I think it's important to conserve water; therefore, I:

- Wash my car on the lawn.
- Use a hose instead of a sprinkler to water my garden.
- Pee in my potted plants — it's all water, right?
- Don't shower. Ever.
- Have purchased water-conserving washing machines and toilets.

2. When I buy a new pair of shoes, I check to be sure that:

- They were not in People Magazine's "What Were They Thinking" category.
- They are marked down at least 30 percent.
- They weren't made by child slave laborers in Third World sweatshops.
- They contain no animal products and will biodegrade if placed in my backyard compost pile.

3. The last time I ate a hamburger I was:

- Hanging out with the guys, watching the game.
- Hanging out with the guys, watching the stock market.
- Two years old, before I converted to vegetarianism.
- Last Christmas when I visited my family on their ranch in Texas. It would have been rude not to eat what they offered me.

4. I think nuclear energy is:

- The cleanest technology available for meeting our energy needs.
- Fine, as long as the waste doesn't get dumped in my backyard.
- Terrifying...Weren't you alive during Three Mile Island?
- The only explanation for the mental mutation of President Dubya.

5. When I shop for groceries:

- I always buy organic or locally grown food.
- I always buy things on sale.

- I stay away from all processed foods.
- I grow all my own food.
- I don't shop for groceries...I eat out every meal.

6. To get to work/school, I:

- Turn on my hybrid with its nifty push-button start ignition.
- Walk or ride my bike.
- Take public transportation.
- Drive my beat-up Ford Taurus.
- Tear down the roads in my Hummer.

7. I spend the most time outside when I am:

- Going for a hike.
- Reading.
- Shopping.
- Hunting or fishing.
- Stepping out for a smoke since the Fascists outlawed smoking in bars.

8. My favorite storybook to read to a child is:

- Bambi.
- Everyone Farts.
- A Brief History of Time.
- The Giving Tree.
- The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kindergartners

9. The best date I can imagine is:

- Going to see an action movie, then making out in the back seat of my 1956 Chevy Convertible.
- Getting a good bottle of organic wine and enjoying a picnic dinner at midnight on a golf course.
- Dinner at the fanciest restaurant in town, followed by a night at the Omni Hotel.
- Baking cookies together...to bring to bed.
- A full day of service at Habitat for Humanity and then a night at the soup kitchen.

Answer Key on page 35



TIRE • MIKE GODWIN

The Rio Grande Valley is a valley, perhaps. I will not quarrel with the geologists, but from the perspective of an inhabitant, there is nothing valley-like about this sprawling and dry spread of land. The word "valley" brings to mind a verdant depression bisected by a river. One imagines riparian vegetation and surrounding hills, settlements concentrated near the life-supplying river, distant mountains. I came here with this commonly-accepted definition in mind. But this valley — "The Valley" as residents of Texas call it — is different. This valley is sustained by a river that is all but gone; agribusiness and industry now claim most of the land on either side of the Rio Grande and the remaining open space of this great floodplain is

an intense birdwatcher, but I am a naturalist and an environmentalist. I was looking for a teaching job in a high-need area but not an inner city. My research into the nature of the Rio Grande Valley turned up web pages listing nine World Birding Center sites and the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge as naturalists' meccas, replete with brown pelicans, green jays and plain chachalacas. Texas Region One Educational Center's teacher recruitment literature painted a picture of a rural working-class Mexican-American community that was in need of dedicated teachers-to-be. I envisioned taking my students on field trips to the wildlife refuge and teaching a unit on migrating monarch butterflies, which pass through the region en route to Mexico. The Valley

the address, 2510 South Cesar Chavez Road, along with the words: "Welcome New Students." The square lines and fresh bricks of Dr. Thomas Esparza Elementary, constructed earlier in the summer, appeared eerily urban, situated between dirt and weeds and crops and an irrigation canal. Adding to the peculiarity was its next-door neighbor: Esparza Elementary sits adjacent to another elementary school, Betts Elementary. Some of my students went there last year. So many children live in this area that the Edinburg School District built two contiguous schools. During recess my students wandered over to the fence and chattered with their friends from last year.

At 5:30 that Thursday afternoon, after the first day of school, I drove home, weary already. I had given a student survey as my "first day of school" activity. Its main purpose, other than getting to know my students, was to act as an informal diagnostic tool; by reading it I had not only learned about the students, but

BORDER

steadily shrinking, as immigrants move in and sprawl takes over.

The Rio Grande Valley stretches along the Texas-Mexico border, running about 100 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, expanding out from the river for approximately 25 miles on either side of the border. It exists as a land in-between, a transition zone, a frontier. I passed a year living in this land of in-between, teaching fourth grade at a public elementary school in Edinburg, Texas. Living here, I found myself caught in the Valley haze: a blurring of definitions, an expansive state-of-being that mixes cultures, nations, and identities.

When I first investigated teaching in the Valley, it caught my eye for two reasons. It had an at-risk student population with a need for teachers, and it was the crossroads of the two major North American bird migration patterns. Birds flying south for the winter from both the eastern and western United States cross paths at this tiny point on the Texas-Mexico border, then go on to feast in the tropical Yucatán, readying themselves for spring migration and reproduction. I'm not

THE EDUCATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTALIST

LAND

STEPHANIE PAIGE OGBURN

seemed like a great place to combine my desire to teach with my love of the natural world.

I arrived in the Valley on a feverish day in early August. The air smelled of burning rubber. On my way in I drove past groves of orange trees. Those gave way to fields of strip malls — the Valley was blessed with Lowe's, the Gap, Staples, a sprinkling of Wal-Marts and a Target. I didn't see any parks. There wasn't a bird in sight.

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On August 14, 2003, my life as a teacher began. Fog enveloped my drive to work that morning. The school marquee displayed

I also had ascertained where they stood in their abilities to write complete sentences and understand the written word. The sobering results of this first diagnostic indicated that learning about migrating butterflies and bird species might be luxuries out of the reach of my students, who may forever be playing catch-up. Half of my nine-year-old students could not spell their favorite color and confused the letters "th" with "d."

By Columbus Day teaching consumed me; I felt as though I had lost my identity as an environmentalist. Instead of planning field

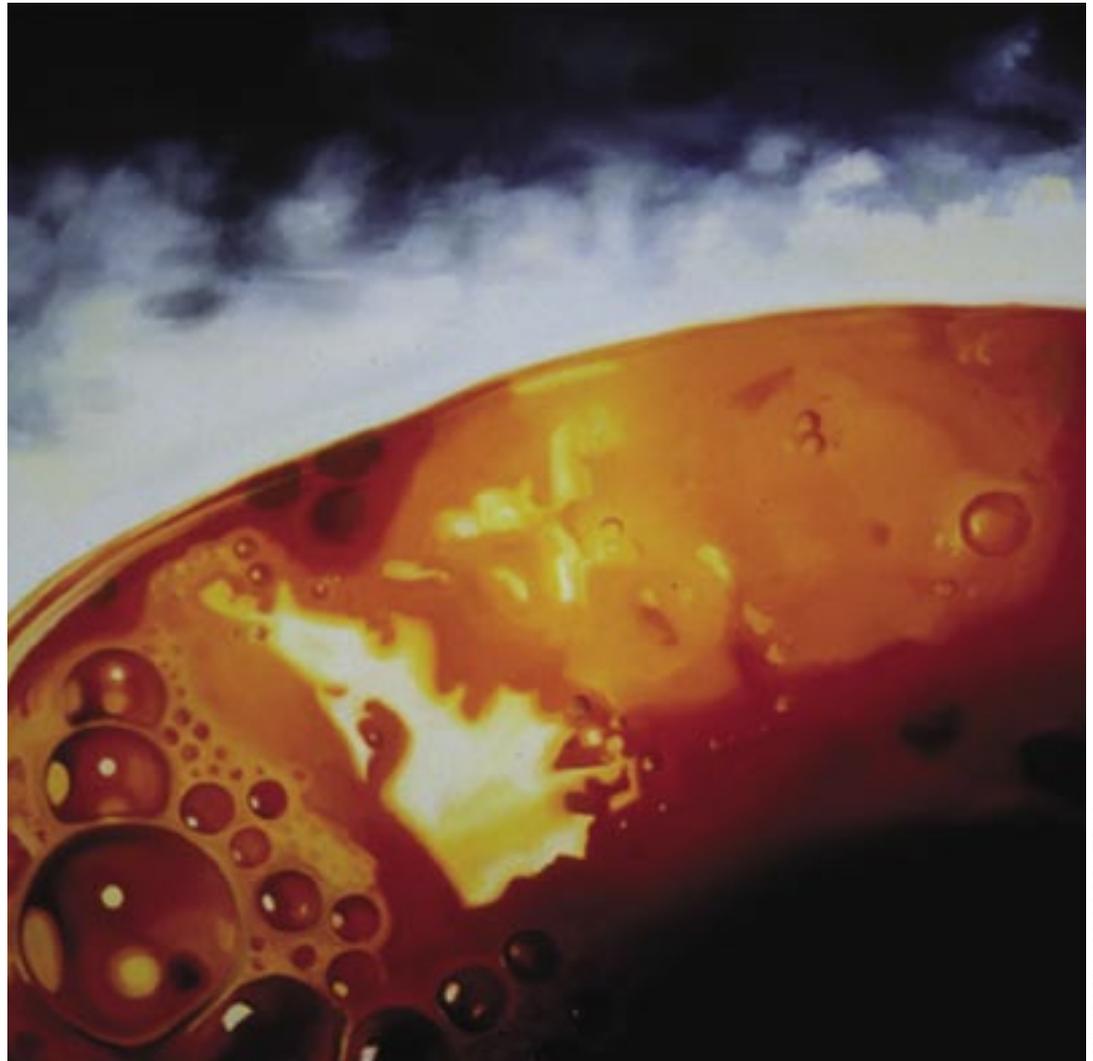
trips or taking students bird-watching, I spent sunny days locked inside the local library, trying to find picture books to use for read-out-loud mini-lessons. I looked up seven different ways to teach the mathematical concept of place value. I regularly drove my car to Wal-Mart, where I purchased landfill-sized quantities of construction paper and writing supplies. When a new issue of Sierra magazine arrived, instead of reading the articles I would immediately cut it up and use the pictures to make vocabulary flash cards. I had not gone hiking in months.

I migrated to the Valley in much the same way people migrate from Mexico: hopeful, planning, searching for a better life and a better world. But, like them, I was subsumed. It was birds that drew me to the Valley, but when I arrived there were no birds. When I arrived there were orange groves, and Best Buys, and Room 46: a classroom full of the brown faces of twenty fourth-graders. The majority of them were significantly below grade level in either reading or math. Teaching them only the basics seemed contrary to my idea of environmental education, but like my definition of "valley," my definition of "environmentalist" was also being challenged. I could not think about wildlife refuges and energy policy when all my energy was devoted to reaching absent-minded Yasmine, to encouraging empty-eyed Jaime, to teaching tiny Marisa. My students may be future environmentalists, but not the kind who preserve biodiversity in the Amazon or buy expensive Toyota hybrids. My students, once they learn to read, write and understand long division, may become college graduates who will get jobs as teachers or nurses and one day find the time to work on the environmental justice issues that impact their community: issues like the pesticide drift from the farms that surround them and the untreated wastewater that floods their neighborhoods.

Marisa is the smallest student in my class. She's also one of the furthest below grade level in reading. To get to fourth grade, she had to take her state-mandated reading test

the maximum three times, barely passing on her third try. Marisa is labeled "migrant" because at some point in her life she shuttled between the California and Texas public school systems, her father following work, his children following him. I now urge her to stay in one place, to remain at school even longer

& Noble and purchase four Horrible Harry books. That's second grade level. She reads out loud for half an hour, and then we do some exercises and I tell her to take the books home, to keep the books, to sleep with the books. I give her extra homework: read thirty minutes every night. We write interactive



OMLETTE SUNRISE • ALEX SPINNER

than what is required: an hour extra Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Every extra hour with me is an extra hour of English; they only speak Spanish in her home and in her colonia. After school the two of us read together. We start with short stories photocopied from Spider magazine. I drive to the McAllen Barnes

journal entries back and forth in which she tells me her thoughts about what she's been reading. I respond, trying to probe, to inspire, to create a reader. I create a class-wide reading competition with her in mind; the competition is for reading the most books. The prize is a trip for the top three students

to the bookstore where I will buy them each the book of their choosing. In another life, I might have made the prize a frog-catching trip to a nearby pond. But there are only reservoirs here, and even if there were ponds, the Valley has changed my priorities. I have decided that reading is more important than anything else — that if I can get my students to love books then the love of the natural world may someday follow, because in America if you can't read you are more likely to become the victim of an environmental disaster than a future environmental leader.

Some days I wonder how many trees one has to kill before being condemned to hell, as I consume the paper products of entire Chilean temperate rainforests photocopying short story after short story for each of the students in my Reading Workshop small-group lessons. My school provided its teachers with reading textbooks and a handful of books, nothing else. I used to spend my weekends backpacking in the southern Appalachians. Now I spend twelve-hour Saturdays surrounded by white linoleum, plastering a wall in Room 46 with words we will use in classroom games and exercises. This word wall displays problem words for English language learners. Because colors help in memorization, I write the words on synthetic dye-saturated paper strips of hot-pink, neon-green, electric-blue, and highlighter-yellow. Their, there, they're. Clothes, close. Leaf, leave. Because. Tomorrow. School.

One Sunday, however, I choose to rest. I drive to Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, the place highlighted through my early research as the center of Valley nature. To get to it I drive along a highway enclosed by fields of sorghum and lettuce. I am up early on Sunday morning, and when I arrive I see the farm workers next to the refuge, shimmering figures in the morning haze, harvesting the cabbage. The refuge opens through an archway connected to a visitors center. I enter. I must cross an irrigation canal to get to the hiking trails. I run into the wildness. I lose myself in a forest of Spanish moss-draped oaks for three minutes. Then I come to the edge. I gaze out on another tired field: plowed,

## In America if you can't read you are more likely to become the victim of an environmental disaster than a future environmental leader.

planted, full of the linear rationality emblematic of agrarian civilization. I turn around. I run south for eight minutes, overtaking a wetland bordered by sunflowers and snowy egrets. The trail dead-ends at a small arroyo. I creep down to the border; a green kingfisher swoops over slow-moving water. I see rusted fencing near the bank, and understand I have arrived at the southern edge of the refuge. This dust-colored creek is the Rio Grande. I suffocate for a few minutes in the Valley heat and the knowledge that this is the extent of the preserve. I walk the twenty minutes back to the visitors center entrance of the wildlife refuge. Ringed on all sides by either farmland or Mexico, I feel as though the word "wild" should not be connected with this 3.25 square mile island of land. There are lots of birds; there's just not lots of wildness. The Santa Ana National Wildlife refuge may be a birding mecca, but in reality, the nine birding sites of the fabulously-named World Birding Center are a threatened and isolated archipelago of Rio Grande ecology in a surrounding ocean of pesticide-coated fields and poverty-stricken farm workers.

I try to pick out the environmental issues of the Valley. I take as my unit of measure Hidalgo County, the political unit that encompasses Edinburg. My first attempt follows the Environmental Protection Agency's categorization of environmental problems, breaking the Valley's issues into physical elements: waste, air and water. In Hidalgo County, waste is illegally disposed of on a regular basis. Sewage spills. Hazy air carries pollution from car emissions and industrial burning. Water is scarce, and often poor in quality. Stolen from the river, it disappears into cement-lined canals and is divided among acres of oranges and lettuces and sorghum. On its way it picks up agricultural chemicals and salts as it passes through the

soil. Then it runs back into the Rio Grande, carrying these dissolved salts and chemicals, depositing them into the river. Wastewater does not have enough places to go; the Valley's treatment plants cannot keep up with its growing population. Ancient pipes leak and quantities of sewage return untreated into the Rio Grande. The once-great river now flows contaminated with waste or chemical residues from pesticides. Sometimes it floods, spreading its toxic contents across the land.

These divisions of waste, air and water seem artificial and technical to me, something that a scientific outsider might turn to as a means of understanding the Valley. I feel as though I am ignoring the social and economic contexts in using this method of separation. I have lived in Edinburg. While there I breathed the polluted air and drank the contaminated water and walked beside the chemically-treated fields and foul-smelling canals. My neighborhood flooded; I ran outside and splashed with the neighborhood kids in two feet of possibly toxic stormwater runoff. I know that there are issues of air, of water and of waste, but these categories cannot be isolated as if part of a chemical analysis; science cannot neatly separate out the Valley's environmental problems.

Looking for something that unites air and water and waste, I then turn to economics — to industry. The smoke-spewing border factories known as maquiladoras (or maquilas) and the sprawling machine of Valley agriculture leap to mind. In 1999, the Annual Review of Energy and the Environment published an article on border environmental issues that identified maquiladoras as a source for dangerous sulfur dioxide emissions and hazardous waste. This same report listed toxic pesticide exposure and poor water quality as major environmental problems in the Rio Grande Valley Region.

Many of the maquila-related border issues stem from the advent of the Border Industrialization Program of 1965, a precursor of the North American Free Trade Agreement that lowered tariffs and trade barriers to companies that set up shop in Mexico within 12 miles of the border. The passage of NAFTA in 1993 solidified the free exchange of both trade and its associated environmental problems, with the number of border maquiladoras growing from 1,789 in 1990 to 3,703 in 2000. And while agriculture has steadily decreased the number of laborers it employs, it has increased its environmental impact by using more and more pesticides.

I am faced with the giant of Valley agriculture every day on my commute, when I leave school and drive north along South Cesar Chavez. The road continues for another mile and a half before dead-ending into a field of salad greens. I note the changes in the fields. The cocoa-brown dirt rows appear in August while I am teaching double-digit multiplication. A cloak of green emerges after Labor Day, during the week that we read *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. I identify what looks like broccoli while we are conducting a revising and editing writing workshop. Driving home one day, the complexities of long division crowding my mind, I see the remains of a harvest — or, to my eyes, what looks like the looting of the field, with green rubble dispersed haphazardly in the graying soil. This is a sad time of year. Around the same time the sugar cane burns. The smell hangs all over the Valley. The ash particles float, spin, drift, fall. Valley snow, some call it, even though it is only October.

At this point in the school year I begin to teach open-ended essay writing. The first long writing assignment I gave my class was to write about a time something made them sad. Starting in September we were supposed to give students general topics like this to write about, as preparation for the No Child Left Behind mandated writing test they would take in March. It is known for asking questions such as: "write about the best day you've ever had," or "write about a challenge you overcame," or

"write about a time you learned something important." I chose the topic of sadness because I felt that all fourth graders have ups and downs, and I wanted to let them express those feelings. The responses I received left me sitting speechless in my classroom. The burdens

her for being stupid and fat, and how this made her sad. Marisa wrote about the first time she went to a movie theater, last year with her third grade field trip, and she was scared because the ceiling was so high and the movie theater so dark she thought it was going to fall on top



NEVERGRADES OVER EASY • ALEX SPINNEY

carried by my students are greater than I could have imagined, and this only cemented my desire to help them succeed in school. One of my students, an obese diabetic girl named Yasmine, wrote about how her mother yelled at

of her. Lesly, one of my brightest students, wrote about her dad, a teamster who is never home because he is always driving, trying to make more money. Jaime wrote four unrelated nonsensical sentences in an hour-long period.

Every day Jaime is the first of my students to arrive off the buses. Every day he enters the classroom, ducking his head and avoiding my morning greeting. When we sit in small groups for reading, he stares past me. His eyes are so deep it is as if his soul was left in another world. I never know if he understands me because he sits there dumbly, looking beyond my presence, beyond the walls of the classroom, beyond the fields that encircle the outside of the school. Jaime passed his third grade reading tests, although on the second try. But he fails almost every assignment I give and I have placed him at a Kindergarten level in reading ability based on our one-on-one reading sessions.

After grading yet another one of Jaime's failed reading exercises, I tell him to tell his mother that we need to have a conference. With the help of a bilingual teacher, I explain to Jaime's mother, a cleaning woman who only speaks Spanish, that she needs to get him to school a half-hour early three days a week. Her eyes, mirror images of her son's, connect with me through the language barrier. She says that she and her husband will work something out, and Jaime begins to arrive early for tutoring sessions. I find that he likes computer games; his ever-dark eyes light up at the opportunity to play a math game called Number Munchers on my classroom computer. I let him play these games on some of the mornings; I feel badly for making him stay longer in a place where he is constantly judged a failure. Other mornings we read together — Nate the Great is our favorite detective. Jaime will be able to read one day; it is just going to take him longer than most.

Jaime, Marisa and many of my other students live in neighborhoods called colonias. Colonias are defined by the United States Department of Housing and Human Development as "rural communities located within 150 miles of the US-Mexican Border. They often lack the basic necessities most Americans take for granted — running water, electricity and paved roads... Without safe, sanitary and affordable housing, drinkable water, sewer and drainage systems, colonias struggle with issues often associated with 'Third World' countries."

Originally founded as agricultural or industrial worker settlements located outside of the realm of city rules and regulations, colonias are now home to communities of poor Mexican-American families. Their children, my students, are faced with overcoming "Third World" style health and safety hazards as well as low reading, writing and math scores. Hidalgo County, where I taught, is known for having the greatest number of colonias in all of Texas.

This explanation of the risks associated with the colonia lifestyle says little about motivation — about why Marisa lives on a colonia on the border. A report on the Texas border issued by the Texas Comptroller's office provides a glimpse into this rationale: "From Zacatecas, 350 miles south of Nuevo Laredo, the northern Mexico Border region is often viewed as an area of high income and expanding employment opportunities...in Dallas, 350 miles north of Laredo, the Texas Border region is frequently seen as poor and fraught with such social problems as drug trafficking, pollution and climbing high school dropout and teen pregnancy rates."

Looking southward from the trim Dallas suburbs the view seems "poor and fraught," but what if you were to drive south, to Zacatecas, and from there turn your gaze toward the north? As you make the 700 - mile southern journey, the land flattens, heats up, dries out. Nearing the border the oak trees shrink and transform to creosote bushes. Some of these wave crackling white or blue flags — not signs of Texan patriotism but escaped plastic bags from Wal-Marts and grocery stores. Arrive at the Rio Grande and wait in a line of cars for three hours, breathing thick exhaust fumes. Cross into Reynosa, Mexico, and the stray dogs begin to follow the car as the streets cobble and narrow to a VW-size width. Keep driving southwest, into a great arid plain, around Monterrey's frightening metropolis, and finally arrive 350 miles south of the border. The land looks dusty and tired. The creeks clog with garbage. Unemployed men lounge in doorways and cantinas. Perhaps you hear whispered schemes to find a good job doing construction

with a cousin or uncle who has already made the journey. From here, turn your body 180 degrees to face Los Estados Unidos, and the view becomes one of prosperity and promise. Colonias, a symbol of environmental injustice and degradation, exist because of the promise of economic prosperity.

Is this promise coming true? I can only use my classroom as an example, for it is all I know. Marisa lives in a colonia. She is one of many children. Her large family is indicative of Valley demographics: the 2000 census counted 35.3 percent of the population as children age eighteen or below. Marisa lives south of Esparza Elementary, in an area where the farmland breaks and small clusters of trailers appear. Pavement disintegrates here, the opposite of the paving-over that happens further west in the city limits. Dust scatters and half-feral dogs wander through the colonia neighborhood. Children ride bikes and throw stones at each other. Power lines swoop and loop a maze of cable from trailer to trailer. The drainage ditches on either side of the road gleam red and fresh, and at the end of the road they disappear. This is a neighborhood-in-progress.

And Marisa is part of a family-in-progress. Her parents migrated here for an opportunity that did not exist for them in Mexico. Marisa is a migrant, and she is an English Language Learner, and she is Mexican-American, and she is two grade levels behind in reading and math, and she is also a United States citizen and a student at Dr. Thomas Esparza Elementary School. She stays after school not only because she is so far behind but because her parents are willing to come pick her up an hour and a half late, three days a week. I cannot understand their Spanish, but I can understand their intense faith in education, in America, in me. As a teacher I represent a pathway to a better life, if not for them then for her.

Marisa and Jaime are just two of twenty students — each with his own story or learning disability or special skills — each of whom deserves to grow up and have a better life than the life he is now living. The object of education is to allow individuals

to know about the world around them, to become cognizant about the system within which they are living, to allow them to make informed choices that will hopefully make their lives better. I became an environmentalist because education allowed me to choose to become interested in environmental issues. I arrived in the Valley dreaming that I could teach my students about the wonders of birds and butterflies, but I realized that they faced much more pressing environmental issues than that. And to reach the point where they can address those complex issues, they first need to become competent in the basic skills that their parents lack. All I can hope is that, by teaching reading, I offered these children the opportunity to choose what they want to believe in and what they wish to fight for. The Valley's environmental issues are far beyond the sphere of their knowledge, but if more teachers take extra time with students like Yasmine or Jaime or Marisa, then maybe one day this will not be the case.

Two years later, Marisa and I still exchange letters. I am attending graduate school for Environmental Science, yet my letters to her speak only of children's books. Marisa writes to me about what she is reading; she knows that literature is our special topic of correspondence. My letters give her reading recommendations; they tell her about the *Spiderwick Chronicles*, a new series I think she might like. From her writing and the books she tells me about, I estimate she is probably reading at a high 5th grade level now, nearly four grade levels ahead of where she was when she entered my classroom, and almost on grade level for her age. I suppose I could tell her about what I'm learning: offer syntheses of environmental issues and try to get her interested. Instead I write of the wonders of British fantasy. I wonder to myself if she can read *Lemony Snicket* yet. I do not mention these great books because I don't want to frustrate her by recommending something too difficult. That's rule number one in the realm of teaching reading: don't force students to read books at a level that is frustrating for them; that will turn them off of reading forever. The

joy of reading can so easily be squashed; I tried to cultivate it in each of my students. They already faced barriers of poor schools, poor homes and poor language skills. I believed that maybe if they loved books that some of these barriers would be a little easier to overcome.

If Marisa can read, then she can graduate from high school. If she can graduate from high

for proper zoning for colonia neighborhoods; they form nonprofits and run health clinics to address the amazingly complex health and environmental problems associated with living in a borderland. Marisa has six years left before graduation. I will write her faithfully for these six years. Maybe the topics of global warming or sustainable agriculture will one day enter



HAM HEAVEN • ALEX SPINNEY

school, she can go to college. If she can go to college, she can do almost anything. This is why her parents came to the United States. No one who has a college degree lives in a colonia. People in the Valley who have degrees become teachers or social workers; they fight

into our correspondence. Right now I am happy to write to her of how much I love the new *Olivia* book and ask her if she's read the latest *Harry Potter*, because every book she reads brings her a step closer to becoming one of the

50.5 percent of Valley-dwellers who attain a high school education.

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I can list the Valley's environmental problems now. When I was living in Edinburg, however, my major environmental concern consisted of how to best arrange the 28 desks in my classroom to serve as workstations for a well-run Reading Workshop. Issues like forest protection or stopping sprawl existed only as memories from college classes and Home Depot protests and summer work as a wilderness guide. There are no forests in the Valley.

Birders and naturalists from all over the United States journey to the Valley — nationally recognized as a premier destination of North American avian diversity. But anyone who trades in binoculars for a straightforward look at the Valley is forced to face a stunning reality of environmental degradation and social inequity. I was thrust into that world of competing realities when I became a teacher. Despite what the birder bulletins say, to a Valley resident working seven days a week and living in a colonia there is little in the way of environmental escape. The environmental reality of the Valley is a reality influenced by highly productive farmland and low-skill industry — economies that are highly productive only thanks to highly specific inputs. Agriculture on this scale demands inputs of fertilizer. Industry demands a constant supply of cheap labor. These farms and factories demand water captured from the river. They demand low-quality schools to supply uneducated workers. They demand illegal immigrants who will work for just a few dollars an hour. They demand that education remain an issue separate from environmentalism. They demand that environmentalism remain just another special interest. They prefer the many environmentalists who fight to protect wildlife sanctuaries along the Rio Grande to the few environmentalists who question why the Valley schoolchildren live in Third World conditions and are not learning how to read.

Environmentalism has so long been equated with protection: the protection of water, the protection of species, the protection of wildness, the protection of communities, the protection of health. But what if a place has nothing left to protect? Then environmentalism is forced to expand beyond these issues; to acknowledge that an ability to read on grade level may lead to a student like Marisa becoming educated enough to move beyond working in a maquiladora and living in a colonia. Marisa may not become a World Wildlife Fund volunteer, but maybe she will become a citizen who fights against this dehumanizing and ecologically devastating system of large-scale agriculture — perhaps through her work, perhaps through her vote. In the Rio Grande Valley, a place where everyone is related to everyone else and everything is connected to everything else, teaching a student to love books may be just as environmentally important as protecting migrating bird habitat.

As environmentalists, we can lobby for a ban on poisonous pesticides, but there will still be poor families living in colonias that overflow with rivers of sewage every time it rains. We can fight for a protected wilderness corridor along the Rio Grande, but Mexicans will still trample precious bird habitat as they traverse the border in search of higher paying jobs.

As environmentalists, we also can educate, so that the children of these families will be able to read and understand the false lease the colonia slumlord offers them. We can advocate, so that the Mexican economic situation becomes less desperate. We can acknowledge the complex interconnectivity of environmental and social problems, and the role of education in giving individuals the tools to solve those problems. We can recognize that one way to be an environmentalist in a borderland is to be a teacher. ♪

THE



MODERN

THE DESTRUCTION OF APPALACHIA

PHOTO ESSAY • ROSS GEREDIEN



COAL TOWN





Hidden among the ridges of the Cumberland Plateau, mountaintop removal is devastating parts of West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee. Mountaintop removal is a form of strip mining that extracts layers of coal, called seams, by blasting away all of the overlying timber, topsoil and bedrock. The timber, valued at \$5,000 per acre, is deposited in the valleys along with the bedrock in huge structures called "valley fills." This process (Kayford Blasting in November, page 21, top right) makes it possible for a handful of equipment operators to extract in a matter of days what once took hundreds of underground miners weeks or months to extract. Mountaintop removal rates have soared since 2000, destroying over 500,000 acres of lush Appalachian forests in West Virginia alone.

With hundreds of thousands of additional acres of forest slated for future destruction, the situation in Appalachia has become desperate. Many mountaintop removal practices violate Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, but executive orders by the Bush administration provide loopholes that allow

the coal industry to continue unchecked. A West Virginia District Court judge has ruled in favor of grassroots environmental groups who have sued coal companies, only to be overturned by the 4th Circuit Court in Richmond, Virginia. To stop the destruction, national legal action and aggressive energy policies and infrastructure developments that reduce U.S. coal consumption are needed. Otherwise, only isolated patches of

forest like Kayford Mountain (pictured top rightz page 21) will remain in Appalachia.

Larry Gibson (left) looks out at what used to be Kayford Mountain, the place his kin have called home for over 220 years. Multiple coal mines surround Larry's home on three sides. For the last 20 years, Larry has devoted his life to stopping mountaintop removal, traveling the country and educating the



public about the coal industry's devastating impacts on Appalachian communities. "People ask me if I have any photos of what the mountain looked like before," Larry reflects. "Why would you want to take a picture of a mountain? After all, it's going to be there forever. At least that's what I thought."

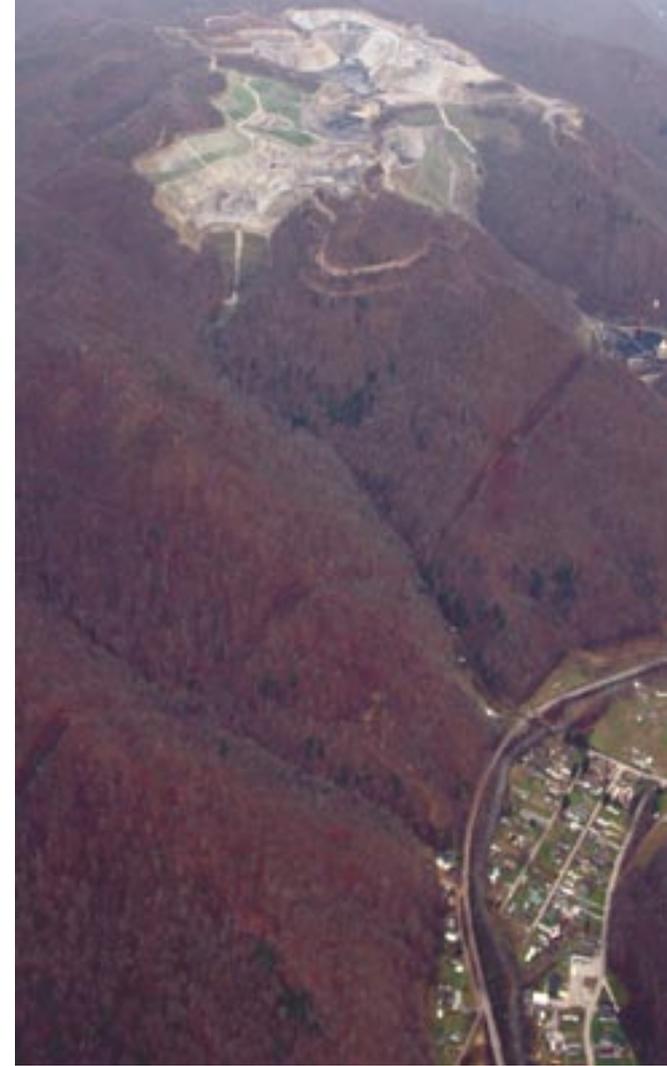
Massive cliffs dwarf heavy drilling and mine equipment at a mountaintop removal mine site.



The blasting process requires several thousand pounds of ammonium nitrate to dislodge massive amounts of Appalachian geology. Each blast sends "fly-rock," boulders and debris the size of compact cars, up to half a mile from the site. Many local residents have suffered property damage and injury as a result. In 2003, fly-rock killed a three-year-old boy in his bed.

The Marsh Fork Elementary School (center picture, white building, bottom right) has become a heated battleground within the mountaintop removal debate. Many residents feel the school is a symbol of the coal companies' blatant disregard for human safety. The school lies just 400 yards below a massive slurry impoundment and only 150 yards from a Massey Energy coal processing facility. In recent years, dozens of children have gone home with severe asthma due to coal dust that drifted from the adjacent silo, coating the playground. Slurry impoundments, which store the by-products of coal processing, also pose grave health hazards. Such impoundments have failed nine times over the last 35 years: in 2000, 250 million gallons of toxic sludge containing heavy metals, arsenic and other carcinogens poured into Martin County, Kentucky, polluting an entire watershed.

Maria Gunnoe's home (top right) rests at the mouth of a hollow just a mile below an Arch Coal mining operation. Since the mining began in 1999, flash floods have inundated her property seven times, nearly killing her and her two children in 2003. Without the timber that once absorbed the runoff from rainfall, the water now has nowhere to go but to rush downstream, sometimes in a torrent. "My daughter will go to bed with all of her clothes on, including her boots, even if it's just threatening rain," Maria says. "I fear for my children. I don't want them to live in constant terror." •



For more information on mountaintop removal, go to www.ohvec.org.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shades of Organic

MADELEINE MEEK

What does organic mean to you, and what motivates you to buy organic food? Is it because you fear the pesticides, the antibiotics, the hormones and the genetically-modified aspects of conventionally-produced food? Is it because of ethical concerns regarding humane animal treatment? Do you dislike the taste of processed foods? Do you prefer supporting small businesses rather than multi-national corporations? Is it because you feel that organic food is more nutritious? Do you have a love for and a desire to support the farming community?

There are ongoing debates about the meaning of organic, and the biggest question recently has been: does organic mean crops grown without pesticides, food free from genetic engineering or animals raised without the use of antibiotics or hormones? Some might say that it does, including perhaps the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), whose organic certification

standards have been debated for over a decade. But when organic farming became popular in the 1970s, it encompassed much more than just the input-based production requirements which the NOSB regulates for organic food; it instead (in most cases) included an entire ethic of production, consumption and community values.

Now organic has become something entirely different, in part because several top corporations have decided to "go organic" either by introducing their own brands or through buying organic food companies. Michael Pollan, author of the bestseller *The Botany of Desire*, wrote that "The word 'organic' around 1970 connoted a great deal more than a technique for growing vegetables. The movement's pioneers set out to create not just an alternative mode of production (the farms) but of distribution (the co-ops and health-food stores) and even consumption... much more than just lunch, organic food was 'an edible dynamic' that promised to raise consciousness about the economic order, draw critical lines of connection between the personal and the political."

Phil Howard, postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at University of California Santa Cruz, has also written extensively about the corporate ownership of organic companies and what this means for the organic movement. The accompanying chart, created by him, traces these links, showing how most of the organic companies you know have been acquired and are now owned by corporate giants. The benefits of these consolidations are real; organic food is now cheaper and more available to a greater number of people. But if organic companies begin to compromise their environmental, socially conscious and ethical standards, then the so-called efficiency of dealing with larger farms and centralized supply chains crushes many of the small organic farmers who can no longer be economically competitive. As Pollan wrote, "Many of the small farmers present at the creation of organic agriculture today find themselves struggling to compete against the larger players, as the familiar, dismal history of American agriculture begins to repeat itself in the organic sector."

Phil Howard's Ways to Support Local and Small-Scale Organic Companies

- ★ Seek Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), roadside stands and farmers' markets that connect consumers directly with local farms.
- ★ Support farmer marketing cooperatives with retail brands (such as Organic Valley) or other companies that have not been bought by multinationals such as Alvarado Street Bakery, Nature's Path, Amy's, Eden, Golden Temple/Yogi Tea and a host of smaller organic companies.
- ★ Howard says, "Look for addresses on the label that are near where you live, which are likely to be smaller companies."
- ★ Buy food with eco-labels that display ecological and social criteria that go beyond organic, such as:
 - Fair trade, which guarantees a fair price to the farmer and a fair wage to farm workers;
 - Humane, which assures consumers that livestock have been treated humanely;
 - Region-specific labels; and
 - Shade Grown Coffee, which additionally preserves species habitat.

Recommended Reading

New York Times

Survey Ranks 'Organic-ness' at Dairies
published 03.22.06

Behind the Organic Industrial Complex
published 05.13.01

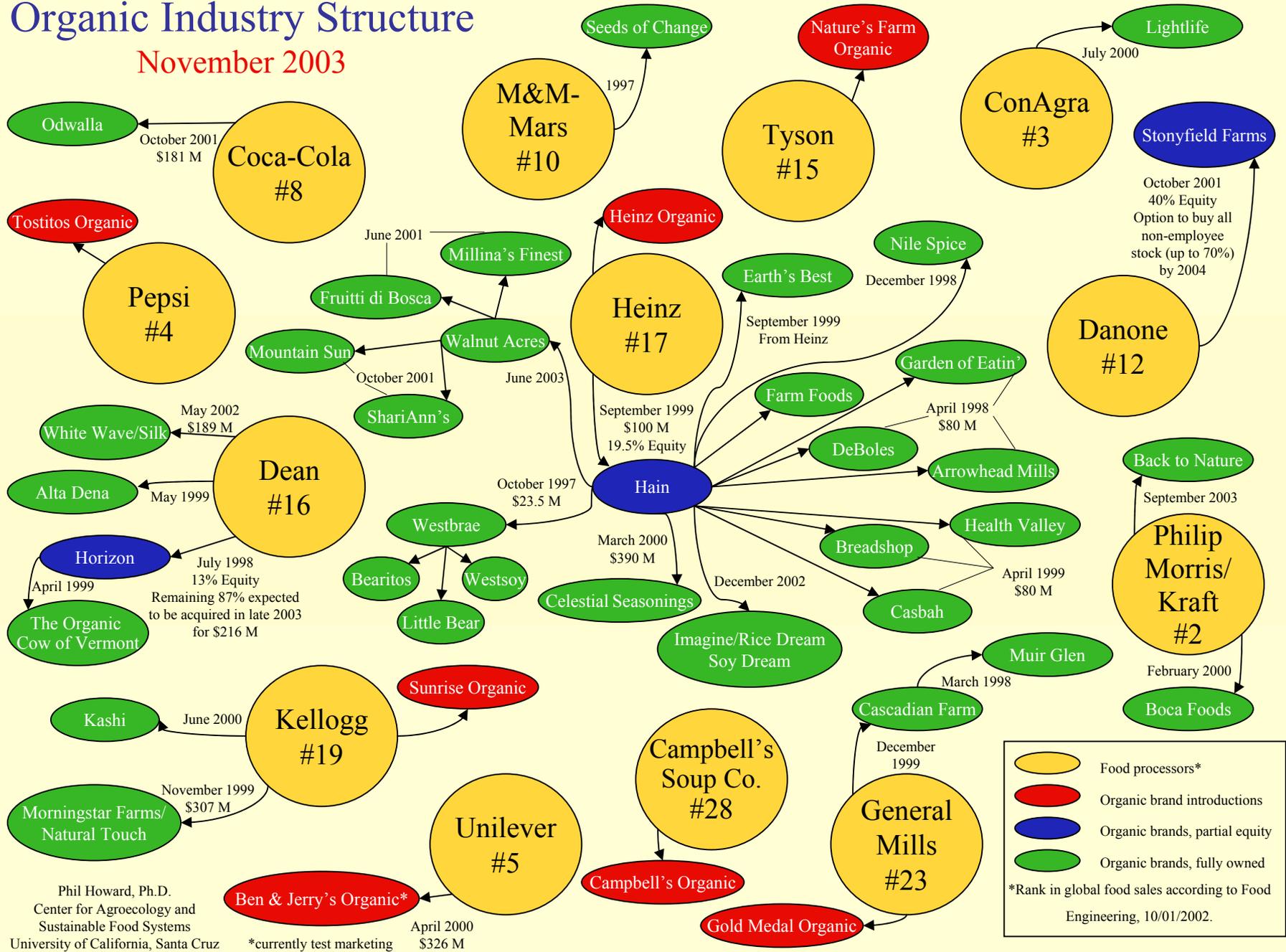
Websites

The Agribusiness Accountability Initiative
www.agribusinessaccountability.org

The Organic Consumers Association
www.organicconsumers.org

Organic Industry Structure

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Phil Howard, Ph.D.
Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems
University of California, Santa Cruz

*currently test marketing

There is an old African proverb about war that says, when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers in the end. The proverb neglects to mention that, while the grass suffers a great deal, its destruction goes largely unnoticed. I see the trampled grass as being akin, in wartime, to the trampled environment. While there are literally hundreds of organizations dedicated to promoting peace and human rights during times of conflict, there is not a single international group focused on monitoring war's impact on the

nigricollos, commonly as the "alpine crane," and in Ladakh as the "Tung Tung." Currently, it is estimated that only 15 breeding pairs remain in the region. To me, their disappearance was symbolic of the destructive impacts of the military's presence in Ladakh.

Early on in my research, I was fortunate to hear about a young, prize-winning journalist named "Rigzin" who had spent months investigating the military's effects on the local community and was reportedly a local expert on the topic of the endangered cranes. After several days

of misguided attempts to locate the correct "Rigzin" (everyone in Leh seemed to have a "cousin" named Rigzin), I finally found him working in his partially-constructed cinder-block office down a dusty road on the outskirts of town, past the region's only modern gas station and two army checkpoints. Rigzin seemed almost like a caricature of a journalist — adorned in Clark Kent glasses and khaki pants, cheeks red from the summer heat. He was generous with his time and, at the end of our interview, suggested that I take a three-day expedition into the salt marsh region along the Tibetan Plateau to see for myself how the permanent paramilitary presence along the region's famed Tso Moriri lake was destroying the crane breeding grounds. The army was also, Rigzin suggested in our meeting, having

ACCELERATED

WHAT WAR REALLY BRINGS TO THE PEOPLE OF KASHMIR

environment. Determined to challenge this trend, I set out for one of the world's most dangerous places — the remote and dramatic landscape of Indian Kashmir. It was this image of trampled grass that inspired me to spend the better part of last summer interviewing local villagers and officials, trying to observe and record what I could not read about in academic journals or find reference to in the popular press. What impact was this half-century long armed standoff, now creating nuclear tension between India and Pakistan, having on the delicate natural environment of the Himalayas? I went in search of the answers to the questions that nobody else seemed willing to ask.

The metaphor of the trampled grass soon took on new meaning for me as I began to dig around the bustling Himalayan town of Leh, fending off charismatic Kashmiri merchants hawking their handicrafts as I searched for journalists, military officials and seasoned nonprofit staff who might take an hour to sit down with me and answer my questions. The image of trampled grass quickly transformed to one of endangered, beautiful-winged birds as I was told over and over again about the disappearance of the region's legendary black-necked cranes — known scientifically as *Grus*

DESTRUCTION

JENI KRENCICKI





substantial impacts on the traditional nomadic way of life along the plateau. Equipped with a digital camera, a small butane stove and a fierce curiosity, I set out for the salt marshes.

The drive out to Tso Moriri provided me with an introduction to the geography of Ladakhi Kashmir — a substantial swath of land (approximately the size of England), territorially situated within the Eastern region of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The people of Ladakh are predominantly Buddhist and the region is closer, culturally and geographically, to Tibet than New Delhi. Of the 130,000 local residents, most are family farmers working moderate-sized rice and vegetable plots of only three to four acres. It is a community where 90 percent of families retain ownership of their ancestral land. The trip took me past many of these family farms, as well as a number of hilltop monasteries, a summer home for the Dalai Lama, endless communal pasture and several large army barracks encased in barbed wire and housing some of the estimated 80,000 soldiers and affiliated support staff that occupy Ladakh. Interestingly, Ladakh is an odd mixture of Old World agrarian culture and

New World nuclear politics. With the disputed borders of China to the East and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir to the North, Ladakh has become an important strategic command post for the Indian Army. This fact was continually reinforced as my jeep was stopped close to a dozen times at military checkpoints on the road from Leh to Tso Moriri.

It was late afternoon when we arrived at the lake. In Ladakhi, "Tso" means "lake." Tashi, my driver, had promised that we would be at camp by lunchtime, but the rough roads had been hard on the jeep and we had slowed to a 15 mile per hour crawl sometime after breakfast. The dusty plains were picturesque and had distracted me from my mission of getting to camp by midday. Often their beauty had beckoned me to momentarily halt the drive and stare out at the dramatic scenery of snow dusted hillsides and salt ponds in the desert. We had also stopped for some time at a nomadic camp ten miles or so out from the lake to observe an old woman and her family shearing the skin of a dead pashmina goat. The local children, though living in one of the most remote places in the world, had come

rushing towards our vehicle squealing the only English they appeared to know, "One pen! One pen!" This is the same request that I've heard from begging children all over the developing world, but here the request seemed particularly out of place. The lives of these children are unequivocally devoted to becoming shepherds — to learning the timeless family trade of gathering the soft underbelly fur of their goats to sell to the traveling Kashmiri merchants. Their harsh livelihoods, I uncomfortably mused, marked the origins of the soft lilac-colored cashmere sweater that I purchased last winter at the mall.

Tso Moriri sits at an elevation of over 14,000 feet and comprises an area of about 29,652 acres. My research had revealed that the lake is home to some of Ladakh's diverse bird population of 315 endemic and migratory species, such as the horned lark, the white-breasted dipper and the brahaminy duck, in addition to the threatened cranes. What I couldn't have known from perusing reading materials put out by environmental groups was that it would also be the most quietly dramatic place I have ever visited. Only in America had I seen lakes his

large, and human beings with jet skis and street lamps had invaded them. Expecting to find the bustle of a significant paramilitary presence along the lake, I was stunned to encounter only three small crudely designed and half-heartedly camouflaged barracks and two lanky Indian soldiers who seemed to act more like park rangers than warmongers, scrutinizing our passports and suggesting better campsite locations. Within hours of arrival, I began to doubt that these men had anything to do with the loss of the cranes.

The sun was close to setting as we made our way around the lake looking for a good place to set up camp. We paused momentarily at the sight of three bar-headed geese entering the water from the shore — embarrassingly mistaking them, from our distance, for the famed black-necked cranes. I felt dizzy from the bumpy drive, and the contrasting images of butterscotch-hued land between ice-blue lake and cerulean sky were almost hypnotic as I stepped out of the jeep and into the icy thin air. We decided to pitch our tents on a small island situated between two hilltops in the middle of one of the streambeds that fed into the lake about two hundred yards downstream from where we stood — a safe distance from the crane habitat along the water's edge. Above us, somehow strung between the hills, was a tattered string of Tibetan prayer flags. Famished from the journey, Tashi and I pressure-cooked basmati rice and fried tomatoes and eggplant with cumin on an open flame. After dinner, with my headlamp in my pocket, entranced by the landscape, I excitedly made my way down to the water's edge.

As I got close to the water, I saw that the perimeter of Tso Moriri was speckled with temporary tent communities for, I later learned, hundreds of tourists. Large, white tents were set up in clusters along the streambeds that feed into the great blue lake. The scene looked less like a war zone and more like the setting of some great outdoor festival like Woodstock, only before the crowds arrive. The small village of Korzok, perched at 14,081 feet on a hilltop along the Southern edge of the lake, and home

to less than 100 local people, was visible from where I stood at the water's edge. I later learned that Korzok had built its first permanent guest house structure this year, so now even those tourists with an aversion to tent camping will find comfortable accommodations at Tso Moriri. While I encountered fewer than a dozen tourists at the lake during my stay, their numbers were still double or triple the size of the resident paramilitary community. I was told by both the

War is what has pushed an additional 80,000 people into a beautiful yet desolate, inhospitable place, taxing the resources of both the natural world and the traditional culture.

local villagers and my guide Tashi that loud white jeeps often breeze in from the West, where the tourist towns of Leh and Manali are situated, and off-road along the edge of the lake — often churning across the parcels of land known to be nesting grounds for the birds. Rather than resist the loss of the black-necked cranes and the significant disturbance to their pasturelands, the locals explained that they gladly welcome both the tourists and the troops into their community. The outsiders bring money, medicine and other western fare, from paved roads to schools to pop music.

The more I learned about Kashmir and its ecology, the more confused I became. I had expected to find evidence that the large military presence had substantially impacted the local people and their access to basic environmental goods such as clean air, clean water and access to grazing and farmland. Upon arrival, I assumed that the declining crane population in the salt marshes of Ladakh would sharply display the military's impact. All of my observations at Tso Moriri pointed out that, while the army played a role in the initial construction of roads into the marsh region, it was the bustling "ecotourism" business in Leh that has been, and continues to be,

precipitating the demise of the cranes. Every year, thousands of foreign bird aficionados take a break from expensive Buddhist holidays in Himalayan retreat centers to pile into ubiquitous white jeeps that weave up and down the bumpy roads between Leh and the Tibetan marshes, hoping to catch a glimpse or snap a photo of something beautiful and rare. Instead, they perpetuate community disturbance and environmental destruction.

The war's impact on Ladakh is much more complicated than I had assumed, yet just as destructive. War is what has pushed an additional 80,000 people into a beautiful yet desolate, inhospitable place, taxing the resources of both the natural world and the traditional culture. War has most obviously led to road construction, literally paving the way for jeeps and symbolically paving the way for modernization. People in Ladakh commented over and over about the link between the military presence and increased demand for local vegetables and other goods. Ironically, by building roads and promoting a cash economy within the local community, the military's role in Ladakh has worked to create an infrastructure for tourism, a tourism marketed as environmentally friendly to the young and hip in town on Zen retreats. Excited by the possibility of seeing the breathtaking cranes at Tso Moriri and her sister lakes and marshes, the unknowing tourists pay local tour operators a substantial amount of money to inadvertently drive right over crane nesting grounds, to sleep in tents on fragile crane breeding grounds and then to leave behind, along with their remnants of waste, the impression that the locals would do well to emulate these damaging lifestyles.

War brings in soldiers and roads and hospitals and tourists and medicine and radios and packaged foods and books and pens...and considerable amounts of money. These are tangible, concrete goods and services. What war takes away is much subtler: several pair of endangered cranes, say, or satisfaction with one's culture and way of life. These qualities are perhaps more important, yet they are much, much harder to quantify than the immediate economic benefits that the Ladakhis crave.

The majority of locals I encountered believed that the short-term benefits of the military presence — such as better roads, health care and access to the outside world — outweighed the long-term social and environmental costs, as exemplified by the disappearance of the cranes. In the Kashmir Valley, where frequent terrorist attacks and a high incidence of fighting with Pakistani insurgents continues to plague the local communities, I found very little reflection on environmental impacts or human rights issues in general. People were, instead, focused on basic survival. More soldiers and more tourists bring in more money to a starving local economy even if they kill the birds. The sad truth is that the tourists will probably leave once the cranes are gone. Then the local people will have neither the money nor the birds, but their way of life will have been fundamentally altered in the process. This is a difficult issue to raise with people whose children are hungry today. It is challenging to address environmentally devastating behavior that brings in immediate solutions to poor people while exacerbating long-term problems in their communities and to the environment. Maybe what people in this region need, rather than tourism revenue, is a voice that will try to speak for the major victims of the war: the cranes of today and the Ladakhi culture of tomorrow. Over the course of my research, I continued to ask myself, "How did I ever get so involved with such a complicated and tormenting issue?"

My interest in the environmental impacts of war began during a summer trip to Asia three years ago. On a trek around the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal, I had encountered Maoist

guerrillas and fled from them down the trail. The most unusual sight, a group of army soldiers with a bulldozer, saved me from the Maoists. With the country in the midst of a civil war and most of the land in the region protected by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), Nepal had disregarded its environmental protections and begun construction of this road as part of a military project. The sight of the bulldozer on protected land in the Himalayas induced a deep curiosity to learn more about the connections between war and the environment — about how environmental protections are eroded or ignored in times of battle, about the close linkage between environmental public health and international human rights law and about how resource scarcity is often a primary cause of violent conflict.

My experiences in Kashmir have now caused me to question the assumptions that led me to the region in the first place. In the course of my research, I did not encounter another student studying the conflict, nor did I encounter a single member of the Western press. There were no other people researching or reporting anything at all about the conflict. While I went into Kashmir to observe the environmental and human rights effects of the India-Pakistan standoff, I realized early on that the brunt of the military's environmental impact was being felt in the small communities overrun by army camps — not necessarily in the bullet-ridden hot spots along the Line of Control, the contentious border between the two nations. The conflict has affected many aspects of daily life in the communities I visited, from the types of birds that one might observe on a clear day in the desert skies to the changing hopes and dreams of the youth coming of age in a region that has not known peace in their lifetimes. The presence of the army and its associated paramilitary force in Kashmir has provided substantial short-term gains to the communities in which it resides: roads are built, modern medicine is available for barter or purchase and an emerging market has developed for locally grown vegetables and cottage-industry produced goods.

At the same time, the communities in the region are suffering substantial long-term harms for these short-term benefits. The black-necked crane is disappearing due to the increased tourism infrastructure that has been developed as a result of the roads built by the army. Leaving Kashmir, I began to question the importance of saving the cranes in light of the fact that their destruction has brought tourism money into poor communities. Maybe, I thought, there has to be a choice between cranes and people. Then I remembered the proverb about the trampled grass. The cranes are not the ones fighting this seemingly irrational nuclear standoff. They are innocent in all respects and they cannot defend themselves. The local children are equally innocent. What if protecting the cranes and the local children, in this case, would require the same solution? Maybe the role of witness, the work of sharing this story, is the first step...

Not long ago, I happened across Peter Benenson's obituary in the newspaper. I read that he founded Amnesty International with inspiration from the Chinese proverb "better light a candle than curse the darkness." I carried this scrap of paper with me on my trip to Kashmir, rereading it daily as constant reminder that transformation can be sparked by the simple act of shining a light on those darkest of places, and then asking people to pay attention. ☞ PHOTOS BY AUTHOR

Winter Poem

JIM ROSENBLUTH

In the windowed alcove
A shadow passes
Across the sunlit wall —
The seagull's flight.

The young woman struggled with the bags as she ascended the stairway to the apartment, the apartment that they had been so happy to find. The staircase was wide and dirty. If she'd been asked she would have guessed that the building was from the fifties. She actually had no real reason for thinking this, except that it seemed old and

thick and textured with numerous layers of inconsistently applied coats of paint.

The floor between the stairs looked as if it consisted of hundreds of different colored small stones placed together, something similar to a cobblestone road but on a smaller scale. It had a tan base peppered with differing shades

of dark greens, browns, dark reds, black slate, and quartz. This actually reminded her more of the seventies, perhaps because it seemed consistent with different school buildings she'd had to visit in high school for standardized tests or away soccer games. School buildings that had tan brick facades, this pebble flooring, and ubiquitous rectangular U-shaped layouts. She had always had the impression that these were buildings from the seventies, but she could have easily been wrong about that as well.

This may have been an impression caused by information she had heard being discussed by her parents or their friends when she was a small child, or it may have been something she had just decided the way we decide things when we're eleven and then keep on believing them to be rooted in fact the rest of our lives.

Either way the building was not new and it had these weird floors that were also dirty and

BROOKLYN, N.Y.

out-dated, and that seemed like fifties to her. The building had wide black stone stairs that were worn down in the center, presumably from over fifty years of footsteps. The hallways were painted a dull red and the walls were

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CHRISTOPHER O'BRIEN



neglected. This she assumed was probably a common condition of common areas, areas for which people aren't prepared to accept responsibility, despite these places' proximity to the places we understand to be our own. When she was younger and in Virginia, it had always seemed unjust to her that her father be compelled by the city to trim the hedge when it infringed upon the sidewalk. The hedge belonged to them and she didn't feel that they should have to cut it if they didn't want to, especially since this responsibility was often delegated to her by her father. Similarly she felt that it should have been the city's responsibility to manage the grass in front of the sidewalk, yes it was in front of their house but it was outside the perimeter of their yard beyond the sidewalk, in the realm of three hour parking signs and telephone poles. But now she was in New York and there was no yard or grass or centralized authority that compelled the people of this building to clean the areas around their doors; in newer buildings she imagined it was different.

Somewhere between the first and second floors the little girl from across the hall came flying down the stairs and collided into the woman's body somewhere in the region south of the packages in her arms. The boxes up around her chest slid off to the right and fell down to the landing, but she managed to hold on to the grocery bags and her oversized purse.

"Whoa, watch out, sweetie," she said crouching down, releasing the grocery bags and her purse. The little girl stared up at her with her big brown eyes, expressionless, motionless.

"You should be more careful, honey," said the young woman stepping down to the landing to retrieve her packages. The little girl, feeling as though she'd been dismissed, continued her run past the young woman down the remaining flights.

When the young woman reached the fourth floor she found the little girl's two older brothers in the hallway. They had pulled a television out into the hall and had connected it to their X-Box. Her presence was not acknowledged. The two boys looked out from under their identical black bangs into the blue glow of the television. She stepped behind the television that had been set upon an old plastic crate in the middle of the hall

taking care not to trip on the extension cords that ran from out of the children's apartment, 4E. The door to 4E remained ajar because of the cords but was not open wide enough to glimpse inside. The young woman could not recall ever seeing the parents, only these three children in the hall. She often heard the mother through the wall in her living room, which evidently was shared with a bedroom from 4E, but she couldn't be certain that she had ever seen the woman. Maybe they'd crossed paths in the bodega on the corner or on the way to the train or something, but she wasn't aware of it if they had.

Smoke and rich aromas escaped through the crack in the door. This was common, the smell of complex spice combinations emanating from 4E. She positioned one of the grocery bags onto the doorknob of their own apartment and held the boxes in place with her chin, using the hand she had just freed to search through the large purse that had slipped from her shoulder and hung in the crook of her opposite arm's elbow. Muffled music sounded from within their apartment, and she could also hear laughing, a woman's laugh, high and choked.

She managed to find the keys amongst the objects within her bag, but not without some difficulty. She sifted past sunglasses, regular glasses, contact solution, two wallets (one for money, her check card and her two credit cards, the other filled with pictures of her nieces and one of her Dad, business cards, and scraps of paper with various numbers and contact information scribbled upon them), a change purse, two tubes of paint she had bought over a month ago for a mural in the bathroom that she had yet to begin, a copy of Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word* of which she had read the first thirty pages at least seven times without ever making it further, a folded up New Yorker, a folded up In Touch, three postcards she had gotten for free at some bar and had thought she had liked at the time, a make up bag, at least three hair rubber bands, two tampons, her cell phone, Parliament Lights, three packs of matches, a lighter that worked, a lighter that didn't work, as well as various crumpled receipts and pieces of cellophane wrapping to locate her keys, which should have been easy as they themselves were a massive collection of souvenir key chains and superfluous keys. She unlocked the door and

used her weight to push it open nearly losing a box from off the top of her pile. She kicked the door closed behind her and steadied herself for her walk down the hallway.

She walked down the long bare hallway that led to the kitchen. The apartment was constructed in a P-shape with this unnecessary tail of a hallway not wide enough for a coat rack and without a working light. At the end of the tail was the kitchen off to the right, followed by the bathroom and then the living room. She stopped into the kitchen and began to unburden herself. The kitchen was small, not large enough for a real dining table, when they had first moved in she had always mentally referred to the kitchen as the nook, but she never said this out loud. They had placed a small black table in the kitchen that was just big enough for two people to sit and drink coffee. This table had been found a few blocks over in the trash; it was a small card table.

~ Ten months prior ~

They walked along the sidewalk that was still wet from rain, but not in any glistening kind of way, just darkened concrete. He walked along the curb occasionally stepping down into the street with his right foot. She walked on his left holding his arm like an escort at a debutante ball, his arm bent slightly, hers interlocking.

"I don't know I just got the feeling she really liked me," she said. "And I was like totally worried when she walked in because I was hoping for a guy, but I guess it didn't matter. She was totally cool too. She was all laid back wearing like jeans and a hoodie. I really hope I get it. Everybody seemed really nice there, and plus I would get health insurance."

"Yeah I know this is like the fourth time you've told me about it," he said.

"I'm sorry I keep talking about it I just really, really want it."

"It's cool, I hope you get it too, then we can stop asking your dad for money."

"When have you ever asked my dad for anything?"

"You know what I mean, I'm just saying then you can pay your share of the rent. And not have to eat all my granola bars."

"If we added up all the money I've ever spent on you it wouldn't even compare to anything you've spent this one fucking month."

"Yeah but that was all your dad's money."

"So what? It wasn't yours. I never heard you complain about his money when you wanted to drink every night in college."

"Look, it's not a big deal, it's just different now, I'm just saying it will be good for us to both be independent, I mean he won't be able to give you shit about everything if you don't have to ask him for money."

"No he probably still will, but I don't really understand why it bothers you, if it doesn't bother me."

"It does bother you, that's why I don't like it. You get upset for like three days every time he yells at you."

"No I don't, and he doesn't yell at me." She released her arm from his.

"Look, whatever, you're so argumentative when you're drunk."

"I'm not drunk, I only had like three beers."

"You had four beers, I know because I paid for them, and even if it had been three that would have been enough to make you drunk."

"When the fuck did you start caring about money so much? I didn't even want to go out. You said you wanted to take me out to celebrate my fucking interview, if you are so worried about it then don't..." She turned

realizing he was no longer walking beside her. He was stopped about fifteen paces back next to a mountain of black trash bags. "What are you doing?" she yelled. He held his index finger to his lips and then waved her over. She sighed and walked back towards the trash.

"Check this out," he whispered.

"What?" she said also in a whisper.

"This table, it would be good in the kitchen."

"Why are we whispering?"

"Because some people work around here, it's three thirty."

"No it isn't," she said at a loud volume.

"Just help me grab this," he said. She looked at the small black table. It had rusty steel legs that folded underneath it.

"It's ugly," she said.

~

On either side of the table were orange chairs with plastic backs and steel legs, the kind you sit on at assemblies in grade school. She let the boxes slide off the grocery bags on to the table and she dropped her purse on an orange chair before setting the groceries on the floor. She paused for a moment listening to the sounds from the living room.

One of his Springsteen albums was playing loudly. She could make out the tone of his story voice, but she couldn't tell what he was saying. She could have easily guessed though. It was probably the one where he and his friends accidentally lit the couch on fire in the woods and had to roll it into the creek or else the story about his apartment in college with the zip line that his roommates had tied from their balcony to a light post in the parking lot. She heard the choked female laughter, and she tried to remember the first times she had heard those stories wondering if she'd laughed like that. She began putting the groceries away.

She then picked up her purse and the two boxes before heading toward the living room. In the living room she found Travis sitting on another one of the orange grade school chairs, which he had pulled away from its normal location in the corner. He sat at the edge of the coffee table situated directly across from a woman seated on the couch. She was dark and pretty, probably late twenties. She had long straight black hair with bangs across her forehead like Joan Jett, deep-set brown eyes and olive skin. She was wearing cowboy boots and a brown skirt that probably ended somewhere just below her knees, although it

was difficult to tell based on the way she was sitting: legs crossed tightly, leaning forward on the edge of the sofa. On top she wore a jean jacket over a black tank top. Both she and Travis were drinking red wine, she out of a wine glass and he from a small juice glass. As the young woman entered the room they both looked up startled.

"Oh hey, I didn't hear you come in," said Travis.

The young woman smiled slightly and shrugged her shoulders glancing toward the dark woman on the couch. "Yeah, uh this is Viviana. Viviana, Sarah, Sarah, Viviana," he said standing slightly and gesturing to each woman. Sarah balanced her packages with one hand and walked over to shake Viviana's hand, which she had extended from her perch on the couch. The woman smiled. Sarah smiled.

"Are you drinking wine, Travis? I didn't know your body accepted alcohol in non-Budweiser form," said Sarah.

"Oh my body is capable of some pretty amazing things," said Travis. Sarah glanced over to the coffee table. There stood two empty bottles of wine and a third half full.

"Don't you have to work early tomorrow?" asked Sarah.

"Hey it's Valentines Day!" said Travis shrugging his shoulders and splashing some wine out on to the floor. He and the woman on the couch began to laugh at this exceptionally hard as if it was some kind of inside jocular excuse that they had been repeating all night.

"Yeah," said Viviana, "grab a glass — it's the holidays." Viviana spoke with a slight accent of indeterminate origin. Again they laughed excessively.

"What's in the boxes?" Travis asked still giggling.

"Oh," said Sarah glancing down at the packages she was holding tightly to her chest. "Just some dresses I got from that place on North 11th, for that thing I'm doing for Cathy."

"Sarah makes dresses," said Travis. Viviana tilted her head slightly and raised her eyebrows looking toward Sarah.

"Yup I make dresses," said Sarah.

"No she's good," said Travis. "She makes pretty nice stuff out of like total crap."



"So do you sell your stuff, or...?" asked Viviana her voice trailing.

"Uh, yeah I have a website for some T-shirts and a few dresses, but that's just like silk screening, not really any seamstress creations or anything."

"I'd love to see some of your stuff sometime," said Viviana.

"Yeah we'll have to do that," said Sarah. The Springsteen album ended.

"So you can support yourself on this website?" asked Viviana.

"No, no, I also work as a personal assistant for a designer."

"Oh that sounds interesting."

"Yeah, it's not." Sarah looked over at Travis. Travis had gotten up and gone to the stereo that sat on the bookshelf in the corner. Sarah placed the boxes on the table and began rifling through her over-sized purse. She located the box of Parliaments and placed one into her mouth before returning her attention to her bag. Travis put on a Coltrane album, either "Blue Train" or "Love Supreme." Sarah always got those two confused.

"Here use this," said Viviana holding up a little green lighter.

"Oh thanks," said Sarah. She took the lighter and used it to light her cigarette before placing it down on the table near the ashtray. "So what do you do?" asked Sarah. "Oh I am a translator," said Viviana picking up the lighter and putting it into her bag, which was lying next to her on the couch. Her bag was black with a wooden handle. It was either an old medical bag or had been made to look like it was an old medical bag. Travis sat back down. Sarah looked at Travis and took a drag of her cigarette. Travis picked up the bottle of wine and refilled his juice glass.

"What does that mean?" asked Sarah.

"Nothing much really, I have to translate things back and forth for contracts and things."

"What languages do you translate?"

"Just Italian and English," said Viviana.

"Hey can I have a Parliament?" asked Travis. Sarah went back into her bag and produced the pack.

"So how do you guys know each other? I



don't think I've ever heard Travis mention any translator friends."

"Oh we just met tonight," said Viviana.

~ Three hours prior ~

After the First Avenue stop the train cleared out slightly and the young man was able to find a seat. He hesitated to see if the woman with the stroller was going to sit, but she seemed content to stand so he sat down. He settled into his seat placing his bag tightly between his legs and began scrolling through his iPod for a different album. He chose Elvis Costello's first album as the soundtrack for the final leg of his subway journey, and watched the others on the train move to his music. He leaned back and glanced from left to right imagining himself to be an actor in the opening of a film. He surveyed those sitting across the aisle, picturing various scenarios that might ensue. He entertained foiling purse snatchings or performing the Heimlich on a small child. Of course the music would have to fade or perhaps end abruptly once the action began. He was envisioning himself kicking out the windows after a terrorist bombing and carrying a screaming toddler to safety when he saw her leaning against the doors. She had beautiful dark eyes and long black hair that was cut straight across her forehead. She wore a long coat that hung down below her knees leaving

only a small area of exposed skin above her cowboy boots. She glanced in his direction and they made eye contact for a brief moment.

She would obviously be the romantic interest in his film. The train began to slow as it pulled into the Bedford station and his leading lady turned around to face the doors. The young man arose and got into position for his exit. Unfortunately there were multiple bodies between him and his lady and she developed quite a head start. He watched her as she exited the train and ascended the stairs toward the street. He was able to keep her in view despite the crowds that separated them as she went through the turnstile, but once she turned and headed up the final flight of stairs he lost sight of her. The young man tried to push through the crowds but got stuck behind a couple carrying a stroller up the stairs. He briefly contemplated changing the music on his iPod to something more fitting a chase, but decided it would take too much time. When he made it out to the street he had lost sight of her. The young man took his hat out of his coat pocket and pulled it on; it always seemed colder on this side of the river. He put his hands in his pockets and began walking down Bedford past all the tables filled with books, dodging people and staring only at the pavement in front of him.

Around N. 5th he happened to glance up into the window of a women's boutique, and there she was holding up a shiny gold purse, talking

with a sales lady. He stood and watched her. She seemed to smile a great deal. She began to turn in his direction and he quickly turned and continued walking down the sidewalk. He stopped on the corner and turned into a bodega. He stood in the doorway and looked back down the street to see if she would exit. He glanced over his shoulder at the counter. There was a large Dominican with a mustache watching him. He returned to his vigil but he could feel the Dominican's gaze on his back. After a few tense minutes when she still had not emerged from the boutique he turned toward the counter.

"Let me get a box of Camel Lights," he said. The Dominican hesitated for a moment looking him up and down, and then turned to pull down the cigarettes without ever completely looking away from the young man. "No, Lights, no, to the left, yeah those." The Dominican took his money. His brow was stern and he continued to look directly at the young man. The young man took his change and headed out the door. He opened the pack and lit a cigarette walking back in the direction of the boutique. As he was heading up the block the door to the boutique opened and she emerged. She began walking in his direction. She passed by him without noticing him, and he continued in the opposite direction for a moment before turning and following her back down the street. He followed her for three blocks maintaining a safe distance without giving significant thought to his next move. Around 5.1st she stopped and entered a dimly lit bar on the left. He felt his chest grow tight. He looked at his cigarette, which had burned down to the filter; he flicked it on the sidewalk and followed into the bar.

Sarah reached back into her bag and threw the Parliaments in Travis' direction. The box bounced off his shoulder and skidded across the floor.

"Well I'm probably going to turn in," said Sarah picking her boxes back up from the coffee table and heading across the room to the bedroom. Travis was leaning way over in his chair attempting to reach the cigarette pack without getting up.

"It was nice to meet you," said Viviana.

"Oh yeah definitely," said Sarah wrestling with

her packages and the bedroom doorknob. She walked into the room kicking the door closed behind her and threw all her packages down on the bed. She stood by the door looking into the full-length mirror and listening to the muffled sax emanating from the living room. Viviana was talking, but she couldn't make out what she was saying. No, no it's not like that, she heard Travis saying loudly. Sarah took off her coat letting it fall to the ground and stared intently at the mirror on the back of the door. She looked skinny. She had lost ten pounds in the last month. It's not like that, she thought. She decided her breasts definitely looked smaller. Viviana's laugh rang out from the other room.

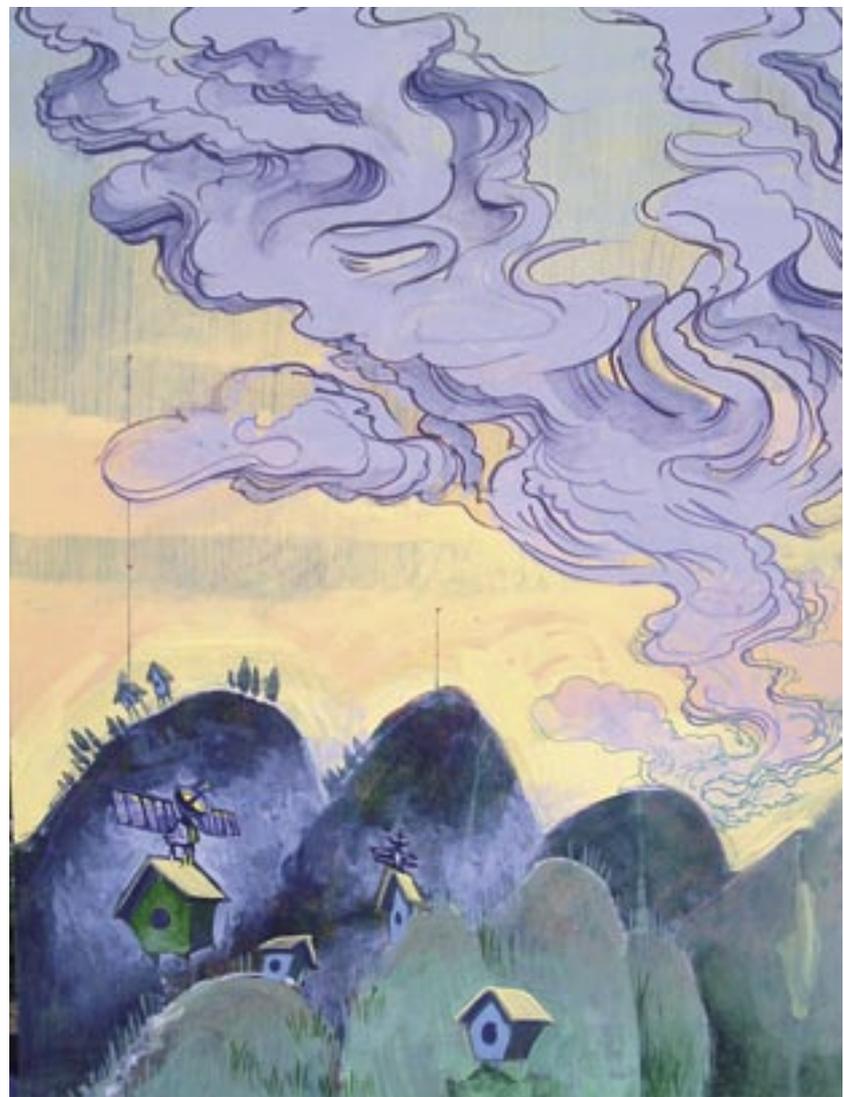
Sarah put her cigarette out in the ashtray on her desk and looked out the bedroom's only window. There was a sliding grate in front of it that prevented people from being able to get in from the fire escape. Her window overlooked an alley across from another old brick building. The lights were on in the apartment directly across the alley, and a towel hung in front of the window as a makeshift curtain.

Sarah laid face down on the bed. She listened to the muted sounds of their speech and Coltrane's sax. She lay still in the same position for about thirty minutes until the album ended, at which point she rolled over onto her back. There was no longer any talking coming from the living room. She listened closely. She definitely hadn't heard them leave. She thought for a second she heard someone setting a glass down, but she couldn't be sure. ☩





TRACTOR • MIKE GODWIN



SATURDAY SKY • MIKE GODWIN

Answer Key to Crunchiness Quiz (page 13)

Scoring

#1: a, 3; b, 1; c, 4; d, 5; e, 2
 #2: a, 1; b, 1; c, 3; d, 4
 #3: a, 2; b, 2; c, 3; d, 2
 #4: a, 1; b, 2; c, 3; d, 4
 #5: a, 4; b, 2; c, 3; d, 5; e, 1

#6: a, 4; b, 5; c, 3; d, 2; e, 1
 #7: a, 5; b, 4; c, 3; d, 2; e, 1
 #8: a, 4; b, 3; c, 2; d, 5; e, 1
 #9: a, 2; b, 5; c, 1; d, 3; e, 4

Rating

39 - 42: Utter Eco-Outcast
 30 - 38: Earthy
 24 - 30: Enviro Joe
 14 - 23: Average Joe
 9 - 13: Daffodil-Stomper

Toxic Releases Take Bay Area by the Balls

SALLY SMOTHERS

The illegal deposition of a toxic chemical into the San Francisco reservoir has had a certain "chilling" effect on the men of the city by the bay.

"You know what your package looks like when you get out of a cold pool?" asked San Francisco resident Juan Aguilero. "I'm like this all the time, man!"

"Whatever this chemical is, it's made me as impotent as a seventy-two year old cancer patient," lamented hale and strapping twenty-eight-year-old exotic dancer Arjun Mugdal. "My balls have become the Paris Hilton of the stripping world — emaciated and totally useless."

"They're after me lucky charms!" ranted afflicted Irish immigrant Terrence O'Reilly. "I'd take a potato famine to this any day."

The chemical, known as NoJ.O.4U, was allegedly dumped into the San Francisco reservoir by the AAA (Artemis-Athena-Aphrodite) Corporation, an industrial-development firm with strong



JAMIE JENSEN

THE CA

P U T T I N G T H E A S S B A C K I N E N

ties to a militant-lesbian-goddess-cult-terrorist syndicate. The AAA Corporation could not be reached for comment, but in a recent publicity gaffe, AAA chairwoman and CEO Jennifer Stein appeared in public with Hillary Clinton and Oprah at the premiere of the long-awaited film version of *The Feminine Mystique*.

"I'm all but totally convinced they're involved somehow," whispered University of California, San Francisco researcher and borderline-psychotic conspiracy theorist Mel Wyman. "Large corporations have been royally shtupping the public for years through large-scale environmental manipulation. In reality, the disco craze was nothing more than involuntary spasms caused by an airborne agent released by the music industry. I can't believe it's finally reached the feminist movement." Wyman's recommendation to all men: stockpile as much bottled water and Russ Meyer movies as possible.

In the meantime, the local female residents have generally responded well to the recent developments. "I've had so much more free time on my hands," gushed young San Francisquette Jeannie Yu. When reminded by her overbearing mother that she has no husband, boyfriend or male prospects of any kind, Jeannie returned to brooding over her carb-laden dinner.

Tests of the San Francisco reservoir have revealed the point source for the chemical deposition to be the minimum-security women's prison on the western bank. Inmate

Shana Kerry told reporters she had been visited numerous times by mysterious women dressed in black distributing vials of a foul-smelling clear liquid, which they asked the inmates to deposit in the reservoir during their daily weight-lifting and back-shaving sessions.

Back in the city, the irate male residents have been calling for a variety of reparative actions, from storming the AAA headquarters to a criminal trial "that'll make the O.J. Simpson case look like 'Bambi,'" said San Francisco hotel manager Paul Davidson.

Davidson said he's prepared to take this case to the government's highest levels and prosecute everyone involved — "the only thing I need is a lawyer."

"You're asking me?" stammered EPA lawyer Jacob Metzger. "We're ... uh, not really prepared, um, if you know what I mean ... We're too busy pandering to the Bush administration." ☹

Leftover Liposuction Fat New Source of Biofuel, Researchers Say

ARIANNA SWIFT

America's obsession with body image may be turning into a boon for the earth. A group of researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles recently announced the results of an experiment using liposuction by-products as a source for the creation of biodiesel.

ABBAGE

V I R O N M E N T A L D E V A S S T A T I O N

"We'd seen that mixtures of pig lard and vegetable oil worked for biodiesel formation, and this is simply another source of fat, so we asked ourselves: why not?" said Chris O'Neill, an environmental engineering Ph.D. student who collaborated on the experiment.

"I actually came up with the idea after my Aunt Elisa had liposuction," added Marisa Lopez, another researcher. "There are tons of plastic surgery clinics in L.A. and I wondered, what do they do with all of that human fat?" Marisa decided to find out, and after calling up a few clinics, she realized that the liposuction leftovers were there for the taking. So she went in and picked some up, in a way not so different from how other resourceful environmentalists have driven up to McDonald's and obtained french fry grease to convert to biodiesel for their own fuel use in alternatively-powered vehicles.

"The companies have to pay to dispose of it anyway, so why not save them money and do a little something for the earth?" queried Dr. James Trainer, who is the principal investigator for the project.

As a result of this research, environmentalists, who often point to Los Angeles as a model of the overtly superficial consumer culture that has threatened the death of our earth in the first place, are being forced to think twice about their notions of what is and is not good for the earth.

"I always thought plastic surgery was totally

lame and symptomatic of our superficial obsessions with quick fixes and appearance over substance, but I guess if you can make biodiesel while helping people feel better about the way they look, it can't be all bad," said Luna Butterfly, a San Francisco activist known for chaining herself to a Hummer to protest America's oil addiction. (Butterfly later became so attached to the Hummer she named it Agape and has converted it to a biodiesel-powered yurtlike structure that she lives and

tours in as she goes about her new job as an inspirational environmental speaker.)

The UCLA group still has some work to do, as they prepare the biodiesel fuel they have created for the broader consumer market.

"The smell you get when burning human-based biodiesel isn't exactly the pleasant french fry odor that McDonald's grease gives off," O'Neill ruefully explained. "We're currently working on an additive to make the odor more pleasant before fat processed in this way can go



NEWS IN BRIEF

Cincinnati, Ohio. Merck & Co., the pharmaceutical mega giant which has successfully developed and marketed such prescriptions drugs as Celebrex,[™] Vioxx,[™] Goodsexasion,[™] Boozehoundnomore,[™] Vivate[™] and Clearagain[™] (all of which have uncontrollable extreme diarrhea as side effects), has released a new drug which ought to please the environmental community. Greenase[™] works with the nerves in the brain to increase the patient's affinity to cute and cuddly animals like panda bears and whales. "Greenase[™] will improve the level of environmental awareness among Americans as it makes the patient unable to focus on anything but the environmental impacts of his or her actions," said Merck & Co. public relations director Maebly I. M. Fullofshit. The product is now available in pill and special dried leaf form, for those who enjoy toking themselves into fuzzy bunny love.

The Everglades, Florida. Republicans are now looking like mobsters as news of a longstanding conspiracy to drain and fill wetlands using less than savory techniques has leapt onto front pages across the nation. The Florida wetlands, once filled, were to be used for the construction of a new mega-church-golf-course-Hummer-factory-gated-community. But Southern Baptist golfers hopeful to move into the new development will have to wait a while longer to swing their irons for Jesus in what was once protected habitat. At 3:30 this past Sabbath morn, Pat Robertson, head of the Christian Coalition (which has the G.O.P. by the balls) and host of The 700 Club (a talk show for crazy people), was caught red-handed with Frederick Chiluba, the President of Zambia, disposing of dead bodies as fill for the Everglades' marshlands. The dead bodies were most likely Hindus and Muslims because Pat Robertson hates Hindus and Muslims (and the President of Venezuela, but he's not dead...yet).

THE CRITICS' PAGES

A FILM

"Thank You" Smokin' Theatres

ADAM RENO

Fox Searchlight's "Thank You for Smoking," based on the sharp, satirical and politically incorrect novel by Christopher Buckley, savagely explores a world where the media has greater influence than the government, the lobbyist wields more power than the Congressman, and parties are more concerned with being popular than being right. Depending on your perspective, this milieu is either completely farcical or unsettlingly familiar.

Debut writer-director Jason Reitman introduces the audience to Nick Naylor (Aaron Eckhart), a lobbyist for Big Tobacco whose moral flexibility and verbal dexterity reign supreme in today's contemporary talking-head culture. An anti-hero to most, Naylor is anything but to his 12-year-old son Joey (Cameron Bright) whose observation and emulation of his father provides the moral framework of Reitman's script.

Despite the concern of his mother, Naylor's ex-wife Jill (Kim Dickens), Joey follows his dad as he defends cigarettes on syndicated talk shows, in congressional hearings and to national reporters. "Smoking" showcases a skewed modern take on fatherly counsel, as Nick teaches Joey: "The beauty of an argument is that if you argue correctly, you're never wrong." One of the most delightful moments in the film comes when Joey unleashes his budding rhetoric on an unsuspecting Jill to convince her that he should accompany his father on a business trip.

To Nick, a well-oiled spin machine, nothing is sacred in the world of Big Tobacco and even bigger money. When Nick is dispatched to California by his boss, "the Captain" (Robert

Duvall), he proves the power of the dollar in sweetening even the most unsavory of offers. First, he delivers a briefcase full of cash to the original Marlboro Man (Sam Elliot) — now an outspoken, lung cancer-stricken opponent of tobacco — in the hopes of silencing the resistance. But more importantly, he meets with Hollywood super-producer Jeff Megall (Rob Lowe) to pitch a multi-million dollar integration of cigarettes into Megall's next blockbuster project.

Lowe's entertaining send-up of the Michael Ovitz-esque power player is only overshadowed by Adam Brody's turn as Megall's doting assistant, whose demeanor switches between cheerful and catty depending on his audience.

Eckhart's quasi-hero faces many obstacles, from the shotgun that Nick points in his face to the liberal terrorists who threaten to kill him. Even more dangerous to Nick may be ambitious reporter Heather Holloway (an uninspired Katie Holmes), whom Nick slept with "in passing."

Nick is at his best when dealing with such hurdles, and Eckhart's glossy veneer lends itself perfectly to this navigation. Fans of Eckhart have been waiting for this performance since his 1997 breakthrough "In the Company of Men," and while "Smoking" certainly won't catapult him into A-list status, it should expose his brilliance to a wider audience.

Reitman leaves some punches unpulled, and "Smoking" would have benefited from being even more savage than it is. The film's best moments are its darkest, and it loses speed when it chooses to be human, but like its central prop or, perhaps more appropriately, topic (since not a single character smokes a cigarette) "Thank You for Smoking" is plenty addictive ... even with the filters. ✂

A WINE

A Lazy Spring Sippin'

DAVID HENDRICK

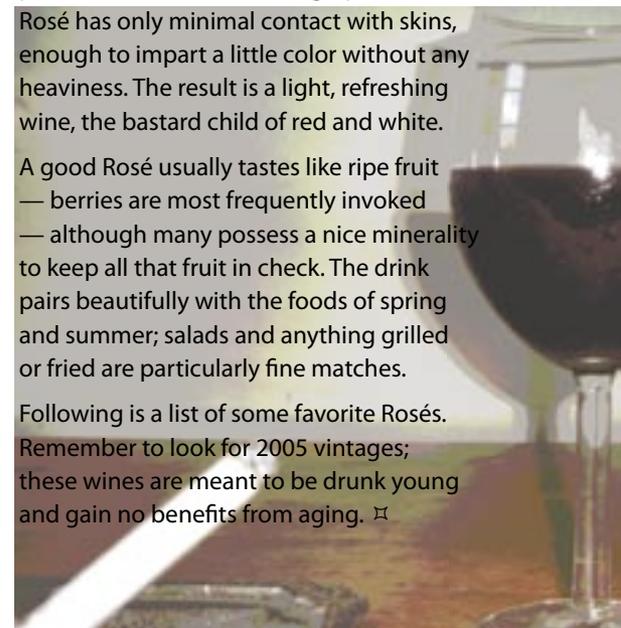
As the days turn longer and warmer, a young wine writer's fancy inevitably turns to Rosé, that most delicious and under-appreciated pink drink.

Frequently confused with its slutty cousin, White Zinfandel, a dry Rosé (rhymes with José) couldn't be more different. Indeed, the two beverages share a common complexion, nothing more. While white Zin is an ungodly sweet mix made up mostly up of unicorn pee and Care Bear vomit, a good Rosé is frequently sourced from high quality vineyards and, most importantly, dry. Dry Rosés are often made from the same grapes that make up your favorite reds — Grenache, Cabernet and Merlot are all popular choices. The difference lies in the production methods.

While red wines get much of their color, tannins and oomph from extended periods of contact with the grape skins, a Rosé has only minimal contact with skins, enough to impart a little color without any heaviness. The result is a light, refreshing wine, the bastard child of red and white.

A good Rosé usually tastes like ripe fruit — berries are most frequently invoked — although many possess a nice minerality to keep all that fruit in check. The drink pairs beautifully with the foods of spring and summer; salads and anything grilled or fried are particularly fine matches.

Following is a list of some favorite Rosés. Remember to look for 2005 vintages; these wines are meant to be drunk young and gain no benefits from aging. ✂



Dave's Rosé Picks

- 10.00 **Grand Cassagne:** From the south of France, this is always among the finest Rosés.
- 7.00 **La Vielle Ferme:** Delicious and oh so cheap, this one's worth buying a case. Bonus points for the button-cute chicken décor.
- 7.00 **Cristalino Brüt:** That's right, a sparkling rosé. Best paired with fried chicken (seriously).
- 9.00 **Bonny Doon Big House Pink:** An exuberant blend of about 1,000 different grapes.

A CITY

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

REBECCA WATTERS

Phnom Penh today remains haunted but not fully defined by its traumatic past. Like icy water running beneath the skin of this tropical city, the legacy of the Khmer Rouge pulses through the streets and the population. In their diverse reaction to the genocide — from a desperate desire to talk about their experiences on the part of some, to reluctance to talk about the Khmer Rouge years on the part of others, to the official government policy of not teaching

about those years in school or admitting to the genocide in general, the people of Phnom Penh are divided — some confront their past while others bluntly refuse to acknowledge this history of loss. The streets acknowledge this history in leading eventually to Tuol Sleng, the high school-turned-torture chamber in which thousands of Khmer Rouge victims were processed before being sent to the Killing Fields. Most tourists who come to Phnom Penh visit Tuol Sleng and the Killing Fields as the second part of the two-tier tour that starts with exploring the temples at Angkor and that purports to encompass everything one needs to understand about Cambodia.

(continued page 40)

A BOOK

Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness

LAURA JENSEN

by Erik Reese Riverhead Books, 2006. \$24.95, 250 pages

I did not open Erik Reese's *Lost Mountain* expecting to be blown away. The book has a copyright date of 2006. Yet when I bought it on February 10 of that same year, it was already marked down 50 percent.

I bought Reese's book after reading his article in Orion magazine ("Moving Mountains: The Battle for Justice Comes to Appalachia," January/February 2006), which was the first thing I ever read about mountaintop mining (or mining of any kind). In the article, Reese describes the way in which coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky has effectively destroyed and continues to threaten the homes, soils, water and, ultimately, the lives of the people in this area. Horrified with the injustice of it all, this piece prompted me to action, spurring me to e-mail everyone I know that lives in or near an Appalachian state (two people — I'm from California) to ask them to please do something about this.

Reese's book offers about 245 additional pages on the topic of mountaintop mining. Determined to observe and document the

disappearance of a mountain appropriately named Lost Mountain, Reese made monthly expeditions up the hill for the period of a year — enough time to watch the entire disappearance of the mountaintop. His description of the mining process itself is informative. He explores the way in which the mountaintops are blown off by dropping bags of explosives into holes, how the seams of coal are uncovered and graded and where the mountaintop is put after being thoroughly mined (in the valley along with all the uprooted trees — an avalanche waiting to happen). As you might expect, all sorts of laws are broken in the process.

Reese's writing is at its most engrossing when he humanizes the plight of the mountains of Kentucky, depicting a colorful and multi-dimensional cast of characters whose lives are tucked into the folds of the Appalachian mountains. Through historical research and interviews with community members, Reese uncovers the environmental havoc wreaked upon Appalachian communities due to mountaintop mining: toxic sludge flowing

down the mountains like lava and enveloping homes; whole towns dying from cancer after years of exposure to toxic water supplies; a woman committing suicide because the coal company repeatedly killed the garden her family depended on to survive. Pairing these descriptions with accounts of the blatant intimidation tactics employed by the coal companies, the author effectively demonizes the coal industry and the politicians that permit their continued bad behavior.

Reese conveys an earnest passion for the subject matter, but his message is partially obscured by his subjective interludes. A deeply entrenched environmentalist, Reese's hyper-liberal, biophilic rants come off as more dogmatic than inspiring. The true power of his book lies in its portrayal of the plight of the people in the heartland of Appalachia and in uncovering the complexities of an environmental battle waged by nontraditional environmentalists.

Be sure to check out the photo essay on mountaintop removal on page 21.

Despite a year and a half working in the country, I never visited any of the genocide sites. The closest I came was lunch in a leafy café at a guest house across the street from Tuol Sleng with two friends who worked on the rehabilitation of sex workers rescued from Cambodia's appalling sex industry. We discussed our respective jobs, and the air vibrated with the sense of absence and wrongness emanating from Tuol Sleng. After lunch I returned quickly to my side of town — Tonle Bassac, where the environmental NGOs are located. I never went back. By taking for granted that Tuol Sleng and the Killing Fields summarize the effect of the genocide on the Khmer, or that Angkor and the genocide summarize the Khmer people in general, one misses a much more vibrant, albeit more complex and puzzling reality.

Phnom Penh has its moments and spaces of tranquility. The Royal Palace, the National Museum and the Mekong waterfront offer the opportunity for contemplation.

The city's frenzied markets, its rotting back alleys and madcap rides through the streets via motorbike-taxi are adventures in comprehending the modern Khmer experience. During the dry season, when the daytime temperatures are unbearable, the city comes alive at night with street vendors along the waterfront and karaoke wedding parties in the streets. Beggars are as present and as bold as the vendors. Some tourists and members of the expat community are ostentatiously obnoxious in displaying their privileged situation in comparison to that of the Khmer; an occasional and disgusting spectacle is that of foreigners tossing wads of Cambodian money from the balconies of the Foreign Correspondents' Club, and gleefully watching the chaotic battle amongst the beggars below.

The best way to experience Phnom Penh, when all is said and done, is to learn a few words of Khmer and then find a couple of the women who sell sweets from woven bamboo baskets along the sides of the roads. Buy their sweets, stop and chat for a few

moments. They will tell you how astonished and pleased they are that a foreigner would try steamed coconut squares — a humble food, surely, in comparison to what foreigners must usually eat — and take the time to say hello and ask them how their day is going. ☿

A N O P I N I O N

Everyone's An Expert

THOM RINGER

The Onion recently joked that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should shorten its name to 'The Agency,' in light of the fact that it no longer concerns itself with the environment or its protection.

A silly quip, perhaps, but it raises an interesting question: what does the government really have to do with environmental protection? A knee-jerk response to many environmental challenges is an appeal for more legislation and tighter regulation. However, entrusting responsibility for environmental protection to the government is a sorry alternative to a genuine solution: giving the power to the private citizens most directly affected by local environmental challenges.

It's generally assumed that environmental regulation is warranted because understanding these problems requires some kind of expert knowledge. Only a centralized regulatory body, it is argued, can select, train and coordinate communication between knowledgeable experts. This policy, however, assumes that regulatory bodies have a monopoly on "expertise," and that the local experience of affected residents who have lived in an area for generations counts for very little.

Failure to make residents' concerns a direct part of the "knowledge loop" can lead to poor decision making, as was the case when, in 1978, a government contractor in New Brunswick, Canada, sprayed a toxic pesticide over a wide swath of forest, in spite of the strenuous objections of a local resident whose son was violently allergic to the chemical spray. A property rights approach would have put the concerns of the affected family first,

letting them decide for themselves what could and could not be sprayed on their property. Local residents frequently know the best way to get all the relevant parties to cooperate and coordinate effectively, without coercion. This is what a plucky group of residents on the Spanish River in Ontario, Canada, proved in the late 1940s when they successfully banded together to sue a polluting paper mill, in spite of the total absence of government regulation, using property rights as the legal basis for their suit.

A property rights approach gives people a definite interest in their local environment and some credible tools to defend it. Though it can be challenging to find the appropriate balance of rights, this approach can be less costly, less intrusive and likely more effective in influencing people's attitudes and behaviors over the long term than coercive regulation. Regulation is a second-best alternative because it assumes people can't become better stewards unless coerced. The property rights approach, by contrast, requires that people be given the opportunity and the necessary resources to be good stewards of their own accord. So, then, what does the government really have to do with protecting the environment? Perhaps it all depends on how little — or, as I hope, how much — we think we're capable of doing ourselves. ☿



Top Ten Organic Teas

10. Harney & Sons
9. Peet's
8. Stash
7. Yogi
6. Choice
5. Honest Tea
4. Traditional Medicinals
3. POM (not actually organic, but all natural, kosher, and delicious)
2. Mighty Leaf (not all are organic, but all are lovely)
1. Republic of Tea

Top Ten Jobs created by Rising Sea Levels Due To Climate Crisis

10. House movers
9. Boat Builders
8. Meteorologists
7. Infectious disease experts
6. Amphibious vehicle makers
5. High Rise builders
4. Really big sponge makers
3. Life-vest/floatie manufacturers
2. Gondoliers
1. Underwater archaeologists

Top Ten Indications You're Having a Really Bad Night

10. The smell of your own feet offends you
9. "Galileo" by the Indigo Girls brings you to tears because you don't know how long it will be until your soul gets it right
8. Coors Lite starts looking pretty good
7. You sponsor a starving child in a country far away
6. You talk to your dog about how your day was for over an hour
5. You consider joining a gym then eat a large quantity of cheese
4. You flip through "Chicken Soup for the Soul"
3. You work on your Friendster or your MySpace page
2. 'Everybody Loves Raymond' is on....
1. ...And you're enjoying it

Top Five Best Fake Meats

5. Boca Burger (best with lots of toppings)
4. Morning Star Farms Original Chick'n Patties
3. Dr. Praeger's California Burgers
2. Soyrizo
1. Garden Sausage (better than the real thing!)

Top Five Worst Fake Meats

5. Tofu Pups
4. Smart Dogs
3. Lightlife's Savory Seitan
2. Faken (Bacon)
1. All Tempeh

Top Eleven Hottest Outdoor Sex Spots

11. Yellowstone (WY)
10. Mount Hood (get it? mount?) (OR)
9. Yosemite (CA)
8. Old Rag, Shenandoah National Park (VA)
7. Joshua Tree (CA)
6. Dinosaur National Monument (UT, CO)
5. Rocky Mountain National Park (CO)
4. Berkeley Botanical Gardens (CA)
3. Bryce Canyon (UT)
2. Acadia National Park (ME)
1. Appalachian Trail, Vermont near the intersection with the Long Trail



JOSHUA TREE • J. ZETTERBERG

Flying

ROSI KERR

I fly over Iowa, or maybe South Dakota. The flight path diagrams on the map in my airline magazine are broad and vague, but it is one or the other. I look out the window. Below me squares of tan, brown, gray and black stretch like a vast checkerboard. The regularity, the endlessness, the evenness of the squares is stunning. I press my nose hard against the glass. I crane my neck, looking down below the silver belly of the plane. Neatly hemmed in by a border that must be a road, each group of four squares has a tiny irregularity in one corner: a small patch of buildings, houses and barns. These are farms — American farms — stretching as far as I can see. I squint, straining to find a hint of variation in the hazy distance, but I fail.

I am awed, struck dumb by the scale and sheer magnitude of our human creation. I have studied the numbers: statistics telling us that individual farms are growing in size, that the human population is expanding, that the food we eat is often grown in unsustainable monocultures. But I still imagine the farm as an all-American experience, a wholesome rural place. To see farms forming a landscape so devoid of natural variation it looks like it was stamped out in a factory is not the same as knowing the statistics.

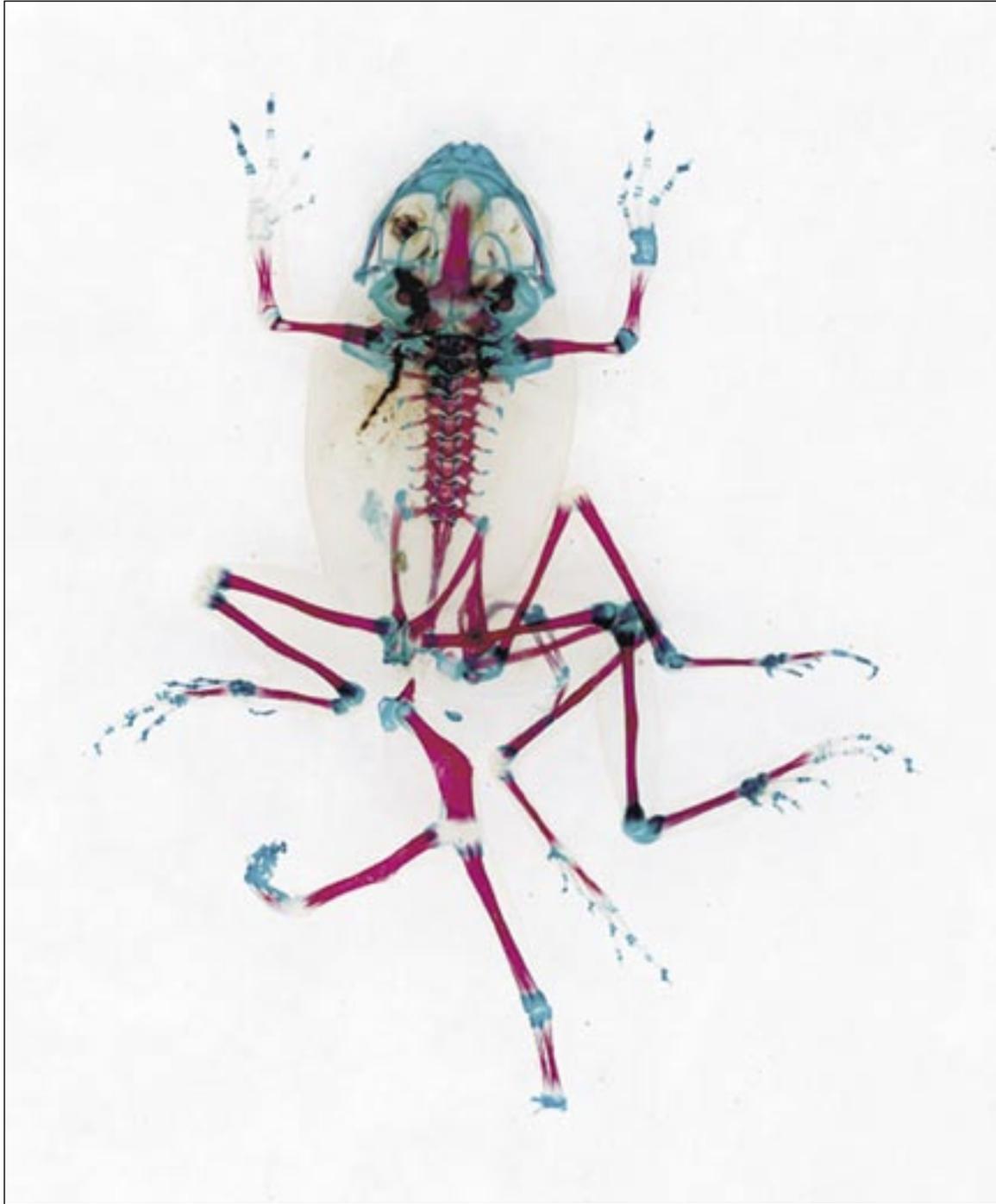
Twenty minutes later the squares still spread outward as far as I can see. Traveling at 460 miles per hour that is 153 miles in a straight line. The squares are just as regular as before but are filled with swirling white patterns, parallel lines highlighted by what must be snow between crop rows or in the hollows of tire tracks. These patterns look like the work of a civilization apprenticed to the ancient cultures that created the great earthworks, the giant spreading eagles and llamas of South America. Unlike the master, the apprentice has no appreciation for contrast, no sense that the unaltered landscape around the form is what sets it apart. Instead he has concentrated on frantically filling every empty space with his creation, leaving nothing wild or arbitrary.

I rock back into my seat, struck by the vision below me and the thought that follows: the wild places that we argue over — the fights we fight for the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, the rainforest, the endangered frogs of California — these are not the statement, the sentence that describes our continent and our people. They are merely the commas that punctuate it. While they are essential for understanding the sentence, they are not its body. Instead

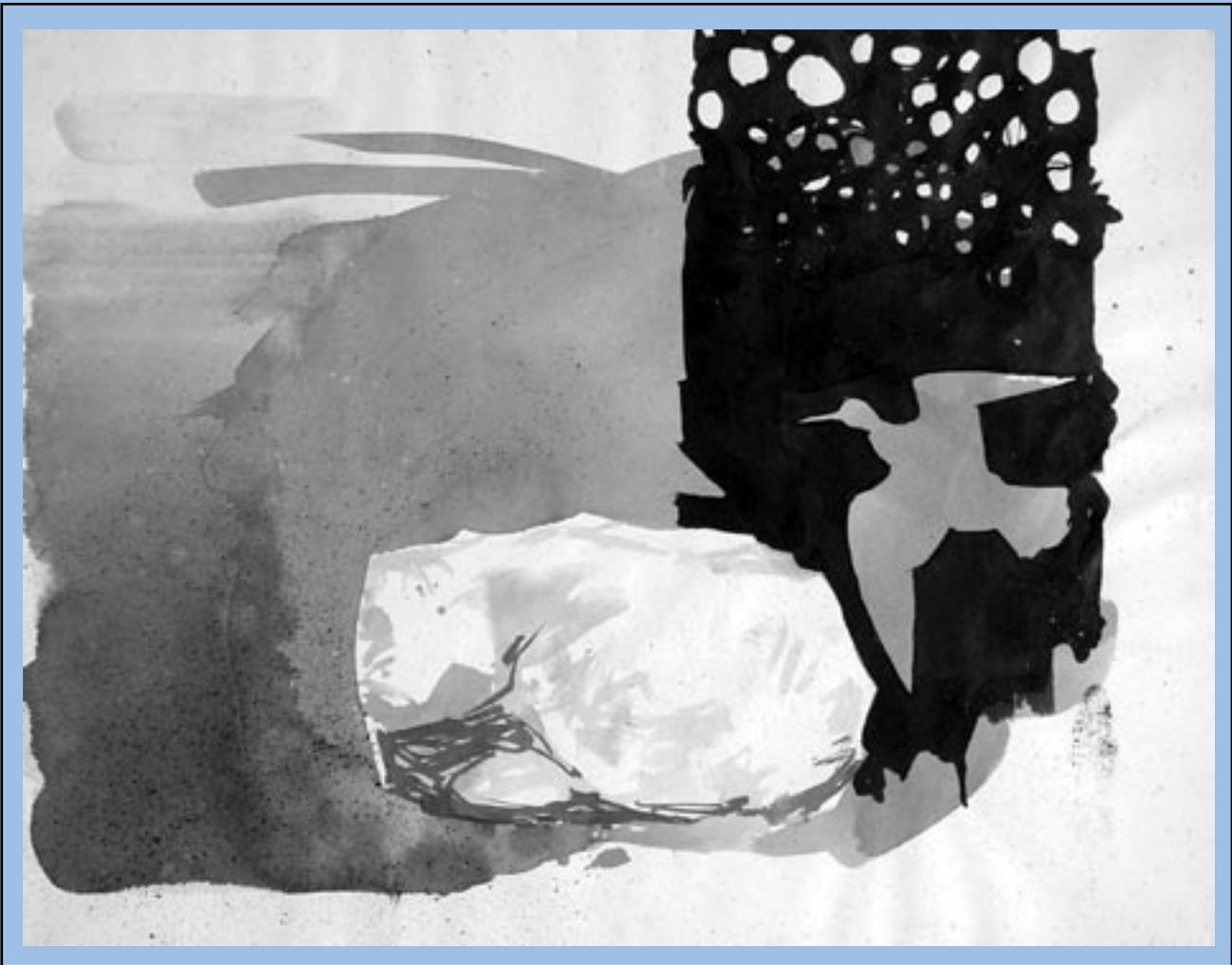
the patchwork of farms, cities, suburbs and controlled places are the verbs and nouns, the meat and meaning of the sentence. It is these places that increasingly occupy much of our country and of the planet.

As we pass over Wyoming, I can see the mountains, the wildness at the edges. I have always thought of it that way, of the wildness "out there" as the place that I loved, the wild edges being worth fighting for. But these places are not unaltered and untouched, nor will they remain as they are. Perhaps I have been thinking about this in the wrong way. I have been arguing for the preservation of the comma, while ignoring the words, the syntax of the whole phrase that describes who we are and defines our landscape, our place.

Maybe the struggle should not be only to leave some wild places as they are, but to allow wild places back into the places where we are. Perhaps I should get out of the plane and onto the ground, not in the wildest places I can reach but in the patchwork below me. Perhaps we need to rewrite not just the punctuation, but the whole sentence. ✎



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