

Editors' Note

At the time of this writing, one of us releases her father's ashes into the Gulf of Mexico, while the other searches for signs of springtime with his young son here in the Arizona highlands. Simultaneously, all people in the world live out their own private dramas, and—realized or not—their stories take place within the context of particular landscapes. In a very real sense, human story and nature story are inseparable. This is equally true from the perspectives of literature and of ecological science. The final arc of human ashes can never be distinct from the swoop of pelicans or the throb of waves on quartz sand. The Arizona walk is unthinkable without the texture of this granite—formed before most recognizable lifeforms existed—or the song of the rock wren that perches upon it. This day would not be *this* day if it weren't the first of the spring full of the song of mockingbirds.

In *Alligator Juniper's* fifth year we invited writers and photographers to probe the varieties of interaction between human consciousness and the more-than-human world in which it is embedded. Our call for submissions went like this:

We interpret "nature writing" expansively and seek any work that offers fresh perspectives on human relationships with the natural world. Thomas Lyon has written that "a distinguishing mark of the nature essay ... is precisely the attempt to harmonize fact knowledge and emotional knowledge." Similarly, Barry Lopez has elucidated the existence of both interior and exterior landscapes, and pointed out that how one learns a landscape is not by knowing the name or identity of its components, but by perceiving the relationships between them. We are interested in fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and photography that ferrets out the shapes of these interactions between exterior and interior landscapes, fact and emotional knowledge, nature and psyche.

Responses were remarkably varied—taking readers from forests to cities, from canyons to prairies. Stories of recoiling from the related tragedies of cancer and mining devastation; of finding solace in the weeds that thrive in a prison yard; of danger that lurks along canoe trails; to fear plainly evident in an urban hospital.

Writing offers a path toward understanding the world around us. It can provide, as Robert Frost said of poetry, "a momentary stay against confusion." But for millennia before "writing," people gathered to listen to and tell stories—stories of human endeavor that would have been unthinkable without the context of landscape, of specific plants and animals, mountaintops and valleys. Stories that provided lessons on powers greater than our own. Whether the greater power is a mastodon or cancer, this tradition of telling stories about the relationship between nature and psyche comprises the oldest form of literature. Its modern

descendent, "nature writing," —a painfully limited label—has often been relegated to literary sidelines. This special issue of Alligator Juniper is devoted to the idea that such stories can continue to teach us—indeed, must teach us—and that "nature writing" is vibrant and deserving of a full place at the literary table. We firmly believe that this sort of storytelling is still relevant, of use, compelling. What follows, then, are the newest examples of the oldest genre of creative response to the big, wild world.
Enjoy.

Melanie Bishop

Thomas Lowe Fleischner