

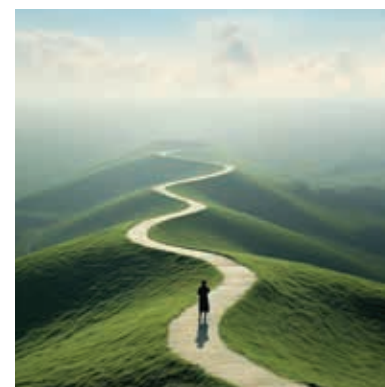
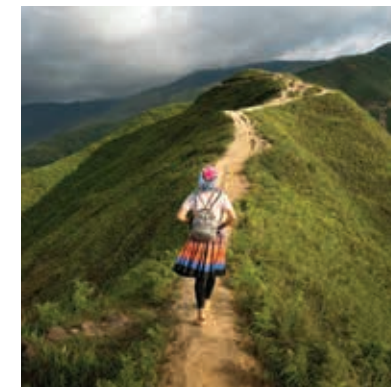
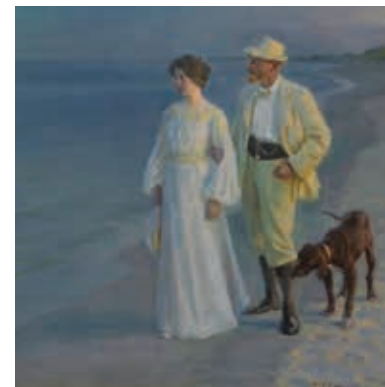
Still Point *Arts Quarterly*

NATURE ART SPIRIT

FALL 2024 • ISSUE NO. 55

nature inspires art • art reveals spirit • spirit changes the world

WALKING





Fall 2024 • Issue No. 55

Christine Brooks Cote, Editor

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image info

Walking

CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE



I’ve walked the beaches of southern California—in summer and winter; under a bright-blue sky, skirting crowds of people, the sand hot under my feet; under a starry sky, feeling the rhythm of the crashing waves, appreciating the solitude, smelling the smoke from campfires on the beach.

I’ve walked the beaches to inhale the salty ocean air and allow the advancing waves to wet my feet just moments before they quickly recede, enjoying the back and forth motion of the water.

I’ve walked the beaches while wrapped in a blanket of fog so thick that I couldn’t find my way back.

I’ve walked the beaches with joy in my heart, and I’ve walked with tears streaming down my face. I’ve walked the beaches to find myself in the magic and mystery.

CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE founded Shanti Arts in 2011 to revel in nature, art, and spirit. She has called Maine her home for the last thirty years.

image info



I’ve roamed city streets—San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Denver—finding local landmarks, neighborhoods famous for their history and culture, beautiful buildings and bridges. I’ve roamed city streets and parks, taking a seat and watching people pass by. I’ve roamed city streets for the best of local foods, the finest bakery shop in the city, and the coffee shop with exceptional lattes.

I’ve roamed city streets for the excitement of it—encounters with street musicians, artists, poets, parades; people who don’t look or speak like anyone in my town; the sounds of traffic, buses, police cars; the smells from food carts, vehicle exhaust, rain on the pavement.

I’ve roamed city streets to enjoy the cacophony, to feel stretched and invigorated by the enormity and brilliance of it all.

I've climbed the granite mountains of Maine and New Hampshire—easy, gradual ascents as well as steep climbs that took everything I had to give; on easy-to-follow trails worn by the thousands of feet that came before mine; over and around massive boulders that at times had me crawling along on all fours; past the tree line to discover the beauty of the alpine meadows, home to tiny grasses and sedges, and lichen that not long ago supported herds of caribou.

I've climbed the granite mountains to be rewarded by breathtaking views at the top . . . but found that the real reward was the effort, making slow progress, putting one foot in front of another over and over again; the real reward was the moose and bear and hawks and toads encountered along the way; the real reward was the pleasure of sitting on a rocky ledge for a few minutes to eat crackers and peanut butter and drink some water; the real reward was the combination of tiredness and exaltation that filled my body and spirit.



I've tramped through the forests of northern Maine—through softwoods . . . white pine, spruce, hemlock; through hardwoods . . . maple, ash, birch, beech, aspen. I've tramped through the forests on my way to a pond or lake, dragging my kayak behind me. I've tramped to watch my beautiful red dogs run through the woods as they enjoy the sights and smells. I've tramped to find a log to sit on just to watch and listen to what is around me . . . animals, blooming wildflowers, falling acorns or dead tree branches, the wind in the trees. I've tramped just to see where the trail ends.

I've tramped through the forests, smelling the heavenly scent of spruce trees, crunching dry leaves underfoot in the fall, moving silently on fallen evergreen needles in the summer, and squeaking on a thick base of snow in winter.

I've tramped through the forests to deepen my love for them.



I've walked to be in the moment, to let go of whatever difficulties and confusions occupied my mind, to feel the physicality of the experience, to absorb the natural world, to seek and find pure pleasure.

image info

SHANTI ARTS PUBLISHING

MOST RECENT RELEASES



Break the Spell
Stacie Smith
poetry



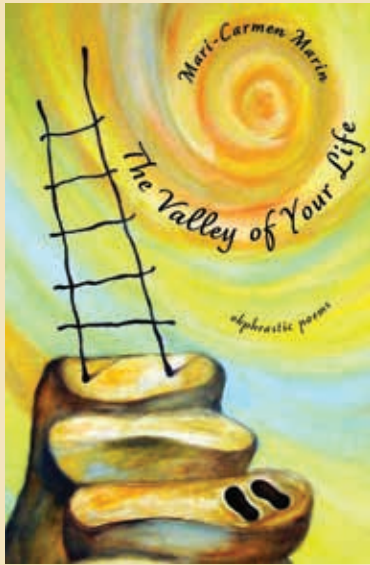
Wind and Hills
Marguerite Costigan
poetry



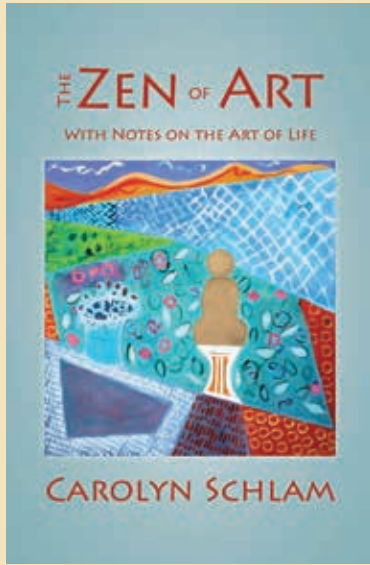
Dreams of Passing Fire
Katherine January
Rebecca Ring
poetry



Prairie Roots
James Lowell Hall
poetry



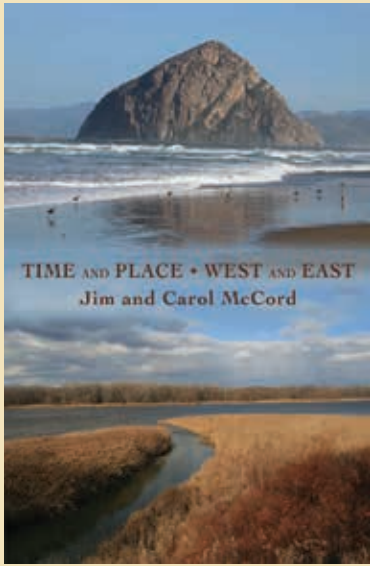
The Valley of Your Life
Mari-Carmen Marin
ekphrastic poetry



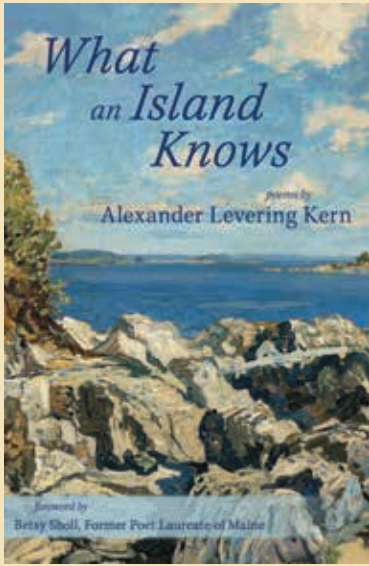
The Zen of Art
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art practice



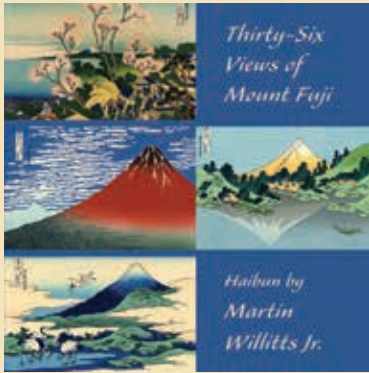
On Radical Noticing
David Breeden
poetry



**Time and Place •
West and East**
Jim and Carol McCord
poetry & photography



What an Island Knows
Alexander Levering Kern
poetry



**Thirty-Six Views
of Mount Fuji**
Martin Willitts Jr.
poetry



GOD
J. R. Solonche
poetry



**Songs for the Great
Horned**
Ken Weisner
poetry

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AND ARTISTS

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(19) **NANCY BUONACCORSI** lives in Lafayette, California, and retirement from her career in special education gives her more time to hike. She writes essays mostly about travel, her experiences in nature, and her love for animals.

(32) **KIT CARLSON** is an Episcopal priest and a lifelong writer. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and for Best of Short Fictions. She lives in East Lansing, Michigan. • kitcarlson.org

(130) **SUSAN CURRIE** is a West Palm Beach-based photographer and writer. Her words and images have been on exhibit throughout the country and featured in many publications. She is the author of [Superflow: Light Up the Artist in You](#) (Nine Rivers, 2021).

(62) **SUZANNE DOERGE** is an adult educator who has worked with organizations at the local, national, and international level to support the voices of marginalized communities. She lives in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on the unceded land of the Algonquin people.

(82) **BRIAN DUNCAN** lives in New Jersey, having retired from working in a virology laboratory at Princeton University for many years. He enjoys devoting his time to poetry, reading, gardening, and hiking.

(81) **PAUL HILDING** is a retired lawyer in Idaho. He spends a fair amount of time walking his dogs when not working on his climate fiction (cli-fi) novel, which may or may not be published before events overtake the dystopian future he has projected in the story.

(103) **ERIN JAMIESON** (she/her) holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University. Her poetry chapbook *Fairytales* was published by Bottlecap Press and *Remnants*, came out in 2024. Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams*) came out November 2023.

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(47) **ANDREA LANI** is a writer and book coach. She is the author of *Uphill Both Ways: Hiking toward Happiness on the Colorado Trail* and essays and short stories that have appeared in numerous publications. She lives in Maine and is a Maine Master Naturalist. • www.andrealani.com

(105) **DAVID MACAULEY** is Academy Professor and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Environmental Studies at Penn State University, Brandywine. He has authored and edited several books, notably *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas*.

(127) **MOLLY MURFEE** was the 2023 Local Writer-in-Residence for the Mountain Words Literary Festival; a 2022 finalist for the Annie Dillard Award for Creative Nonfiction; and a 2022 contributor to the Bread Loaf Environmental Writer’s Conference. Molly teaches nature writing at Western Colorado University. • www.mollymurfee.com

(76) **REBECCA RING** resides in Utah, where she is a full-time writer. Along with degrees in film and education and careers in both fields in Canada and the US, she has an MFA in writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. [Dreams of Passing Fire](#) is her first poetry collection.

(89) **JANE SALISBURY** writes and lives in Portland, Oregon. She worked as a librarian for many years and spends her time walking, volunteering, gardening, and grandparenting.

(64) **BARBARA SAPIENZA** is a retired clinical psychologist and has authored three novels. She lives in Sausalito, California, and enjoys painting, dancing, volunteering, and tai chi.

(17) Nominated for the National Book Award, the Eric Hoffer Book Award, and nominated three times for the Pulitzer Prize, **J. R. SOLONCHE** is the author of 36 books of poetry and coauthor of another. He lives in the Hudson Valley.

(40) **DANIEL THOMAS**’s second poetry book, *Leaving the Base Camp at Dawn*, was published in 2022. His first collection, *Deep Pockets*, won a 2018 Catholic Press Award. • danielthomaspoetry.com

(115) **AD WEST** resides in Washington State. She’s had a lifelong love affair with literature, earning a BA in English and an MA in Women’s Studies. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, playing with her fur babies, and watching all the best stories film has to offer with her partner.

IMAGE CREDITS

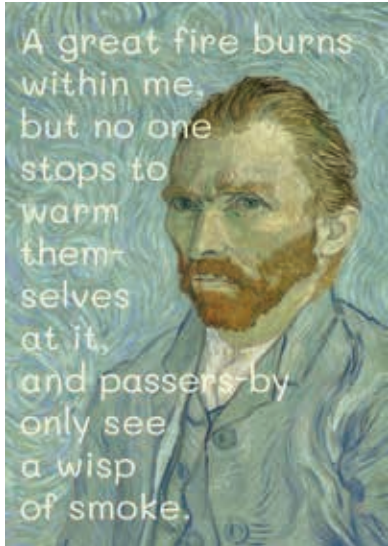
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(85) Black Lives Matter Protest in Washington, D.C., May 31, 2020. koshu-kunii / [unsplash.com](#)
(86) View of the Crowd, Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs. Photograph by Warren K. Leffler. [WC PD](#)
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(91) [l] Roger Rössing and Renate Rössing, In Front of a Farmhouse, 1952. Deutsche Fotothek Dresden, Germany. [WC CC](#); [r] Dragiša Modrinjak, Schoolchildren in Slovenia, 6 October 1961. [WC PD](#)

(92) [l] Ken Bell, Two women walking a great dane in High Park in Toronto, 15 October 1958. Library and Archives Canada. [WC PD](#); [r] Harry Pot / Anefo, 8 August 1963. Dutch National Archives. [WC CC](#)
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WINTER 2024 ISSUE



Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait*, 1889

The Self-Portrait

In its grandest sense, a self-portrait may be presented as a painting, a collage, a poem, an essay, a story . . . Who is the you that you know? How do you express it?

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Winter 2024 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: October 1, 2024

SPRING 2025 ISSUE



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My Favorite Things

These are a few of my favorite things . . .

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Spring 2025 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 1, 2025

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE



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Summer

“Then followed that beautiful season . . . summer . . . Filled was the air with a dreamy and magical light, and the landscape lay as if new-created in all the freshness of childhood.”

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Summer 2025 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: April 1, 2025

FALL 2025 ISSUE



Izuddin Helmi Adnan on unsplash.com

On the Road

“Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me, as is ever so on the road.”

—Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*

Selected artists and writers will have their work featured in the Fall 2025 issue of Still Point Arts Quarterly

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: July 1, 2025

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a dirt path in a forest. The path is lined with trees and greenery, leading towards a bright, hazy light at the end. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants, and a backpack is visible.

KEVIN BROWNE

Creating the Path as We Go, or Wayfinding through the Feet

IT IS LATE SPRING AND I AM walking in one of our local nature preserves when I encounter a painted turtle slowly working her way uphill from the nearby pond and across the mowed path. It is nesting season, and I think she must be looking for a suitable spot to lay her eggs, a ritual developed through millions of years of reptile evolution and wayfinding and still with its degree of mystery to our scientific inquiry.

Two seasons later, in late autumn along the same trail, I come across a fuzzy caterpillar moving even more slowly across the path on her enigmatic journey to unknown ends. I pause and watch as she crosses one blade of grass at a time, a pace almost unimaginably slow to my mind yet also very beautiful in its complex rhythms. I wonder how long it takes her to cross this six-foot path, how she knows where to go, and at her remarkable sense of purpose. I think about what it would be like for humans to have a similar instinctual

sense of moving through the world, albeit somewhat faster.

Wayfinding in the contemporary built environment is an information systems-driven project relying heavily on visual cues, mirroring the privileging of that sense over our others in our modern world. I have been noticing how much I also rely on vision to find my way through both urban and natural environments. In response to this overreliance on vision, as part of my regular walks, I have been trying to more consciously engage my other senses. On one of my favorite paths in a local county park, I have noticed that at a certain point along the creek, I regularly disturb a small group of ducks who naturally sense I am coming long before I see them and noisily fly off. It alerts me that I am about halfway along the path. There are numerous large oaks and willows marking the way, more than a few of which have fallen into the creek, creating swirling eddies that add a gentle rapids and good structure

for fish but also catchments for the ubiquitous plastic trash that finds its way into the creek. I also am more attuned to the sound of the wind and the birdsong, the frozen crunch or soft muddiness of the path under my feet, and other sensory cues. The more I walk the path the more familiar it becomes to me and the more I am attuned to some of its mysteries and changing rhythms through the seasons. I become more aware of the path's textures, of a relational experience. I feel like I create my own path, an experiential as well as a psychogeographical one, as I traverse the physical landscape.

The anthropologist [Tim Ingold](#) calls this form of embodied practice “walking as a way of knowing”—the idea being that we create our way and our stories as we move through the paths of the world, generating knowledge through our movements, gestures, and perceptions. We develop an experiential understanding of the world and create approved routes

and no-go zones in an ongoing and fluid dialogue with the physical and psychological environment. Walking is a multisensorial experience, particularly engaging the haptic sense. As [Michel de Certeau](#) suggests, walking becomes a long poem (*The Practice of Everyday Life*).

This concept of knowledge and the poetics of movement also fits with the practice of walking meditation. Though I cognitively know the general contours of these local paths, each time I travel them I experience something new, the bend of a tree root, a particular eddy in the creek, an unexpected birdsong, a deer path into a willow thicket, the smell of a prairie flower, an insect making its way, or the sound of my footsteps in different seasons. I attempt to be in the present and allow the way to unfold how it will. In this way the paths remain fresh, and I attempt to attune myself to the rhythms of the land, each of us humans and non-humans finding our way through the world. ✕



EVENING WALK IN LATE NOVEMBER

It is cold, I have not brought
gloves, and I can put only one

hand at a time in my pockets.
Is it true that the light of a flashlight,

even one as feeble as this,
goes on forever into space,

which also goes on forever?
I have heard it is true.

I envy the lake, which forgets it is
water as it becomes the sky.

I have heard that photons, like
fireflies, find one another in the dark.

I don't know which is the greater mystery,
the stars I cannot touch or the trees I can.

—J. R. Solonche



Footsteps

NANCY BUONACCORSI

THE BLAST OF THUNDER ricochets off the ridge and rattles the windows of our mountain cabin. It's early morning and I woke to hailstones pelting our metal roof. I watched those dark-bellied clouds, heavy with this summer storm, lumber over the nearby ridge last evening and settle above our valley. I feel the morning chill in our cabin, and a fire in the stone hearth would be nice right now—Kuma, my border collie, would love to curl up in front of it—but

that cozy fire will wait. I'm impatient, been waiting this storm out, eager to get outside to walk the dampened trail and hear the hush of the softened needles under my feet. The hail has stopped. I think the storm is moving on.

I look through the rain-streaked windows and catch a hint of bluish light, the blink of a flash, then hear a faint echoing clash of thunder, looking, sounding further to the west. This energy dance of the earth and sky will soon grace another part of the valley.

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Time to bundle up, get out there, feel the sizzle of energy left behind.

Boots, coat, and hat, a pocketful of tasty dog treats, water bottle, snack bar for me, and I follow my feet out the door. My dog feels something, too, nudges my hand with his nose and follows right behind.

We find ourselves, once again, at the edge of our forest. Trees have been thinned near our cabin to reduce fuel, to help mitigate the potential of drought-driven forest fires. But up ahead the stand is thicker, darker green. Clouds have followed their storm center toward the mountains to the west, leaving room for the sun to filter through the trees. Stepping stones of light beckon us deeper into the stand. How far will we walk today? Just the mile to Cold Creek? Or further, the two hours up to the meadow?

The mountain air is starting to warm. We head into the trees. I hear my footsteps, my dog's paws padding, soft on the cushiony ground. The sun begins to pull the sweet scent from the pines' bark. I walk right up to a Jeffrey pine, bury my nose in its trunk, and smell its familiar hint of vanilla that will get more lush and sweet with the warming sun. We enter the territory of the crows and jays, cawing and screaming at our intrusion. Douglas squirrels bark and chirp at us, asking our business. Good question.

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What is it that draws me to walk the untamed trails, to walk off the trails, to follow the deer paths, to step within the trees? Why am I drawn to clamber up a granite-bound mountain, the steeper the better? What do I extract through the soles of my boots from the dirt, the decomposed material, the alluvial layer, the creek crossing into the heart of my heart—or sinew or bone? I feel a settling when I walk, climb, hike. My legs may ache, I wipe sweat from my face, will need to catch my breath, but my feet on the ground centers me, satisfies me, answers the question.

At times, it's the impact. When driven, anxious, wanting to walk out of my skin, my feet remind me that I need to focus on them to navigate the unpaved trail, step around rocks, tread over branches. I attend to and feel only the contact, my steps, my heartbeat, the exertion, not the welling angst, the yearning, or rising unrest. My focus levels me, pulls me toward my center.

I'm not out for a stroll, rather a full-body hike! Maybe it's the endorphins.

And then there's the walk when relaxed—a meander, a wander, a stroll. A walk inspired by the joy of feeling immersed in nature. A trudge one day, boots in mud; a saunter another, my feet talking to the ground.

I wish to sink these feet as deep as the earth will allow, steps planted fully. I imagine roots sprouting from my toes,

pushing through the soles of my shoes, wriggling into the soil. My roots might absorb an electrical charge from within our earth, rout it to my fingertips, and galvanize my senses. Last night's lightning bolts ripped through the air with their negative charge to balance our earth's positive. Energized, maybe balanced, my walk becomes a communion with trees, rocks, clouds, creatures, with self.



Today, my walk feels like a bit of seeking. The storm rattled the windows and rattled my calm. I want the soothing I feel amidst these trees, the forest refreshed from its cloud bath. Kuma and I stop near a cluster of purple lupine. He settles down to crunch a dried twig between his paws.

I watch a small pollinator insect hover and dip and remember [David Attenborough's](#) talk about plants and bees communicating through their electrical charges; their electrical fields balance each other out. Plants, standing on their roots latched to the ground, have a negative electrical charge. He shares a device that measures that tiny electrical field. It hums. Bees have a positive charge, and with this they communicate: flower says nectar source is depleted, come back later; or flower says I have nectar again, come on in, so the bees indulge, and pollen actually leaps over to the positive-charged bee! So

this electrical energy coming through my toes sounds like a real thing! A bit of earthing—a new term I found perusing the internet. Much more to discover, understand, feel. I stop and consider removing my boots, remove all insulation! No, not yet; the needles are pokey, even if still damp.

Kuma and I start up again. I hear a woodpecker at work, my footsteps, and the comfortable sound of paws padding. I pay attention: I raise my knee, feel

my foot in the air, the start of forward movement; step down.

At times, it's just knowing that I can make progress. I may have no destination, know only an inkling of direction. I may not see a path. There may be no path, my way obscured by doubt, grief, or fear, or by logs, slash, and forest duff. But I will sense movement, and that can sustain me for the time being. I can walk from here to there.



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I did cover ground, here to there, for days when my son and I walked through the Andes in Peru, climbing and descending mountain passes in our leather boots, sleeping in tents outside small villages. We met women along the trail, walking in sandals, wearing bright colors that stood out against the brown of the foothills, and leading llamas that wore their own colored headpieces. That first day, I learned how to inhale and exhale in the thin air, how to check my feet for sore spots. We were led by Jose, our knowledgeable and enthusiastic Peruvian guide, our food was prepared by a cook, and our necessities carried by horses. My feet hold the treasured memory.

My husband and I went on a wee walk, fifty-five miles, through the Scottish Highlands, staying in old country inns—my introduction to nutty single malts. We traipsed past farms, by flocks of sheep and ancient standing stones. We walked over springy moss, climbed stone walls, and waded through mud. We got off track—crossed the wrong bridge, walked along the wrong fork of the river, were caught in a downpour—memorable steps on unintentional new ground.

Sometimes I crave the exertion, a push, and my walking has led me to scale heights. My daughter and I trekked up Mount Kilimanjaro in

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2018—she to the top, me to 17,450 feet. This became a hike of exhaustion, debilitating elevation, freezing temperatures, otherworldly sights, wonderful people, and awe. Climbing Mount Whitney with my husband at age forty-nine was rewarding and tough—a physical challenge of altitude sickness, plodding, one foot in front of the other, gorgeous sights, the bluest of skies. Hiking to the cables on Half Dome and climbing to its peak twice—the goal, the blisters, the hours, the way granite holds my feet in place, being above and within so much beauty. And the numerous hikes to the Yosemite High Sierra Camps and to Sierra backpacking camps of our own making—wildflowers, high meadows, fording rivers, the sore back, sore legs, the push up the mountain to get somewhere before dark.

I seek the exertion. Sometimes the effort is the reward.



I sense, at times, that my walking, traipsing, and plodding—my drive—may be connected to more than the ground and granite beneath my feet. I catch a glimpse of ancestral connection through time, feel reverberations of movement a century old. My Italian relatives, my father's heritage, traversed their vineyards, olive orchards, and narrow cobblestone streets in their hilltop village of Castelvechio in Tuscany.

I walked those village streets when I was twenty-one and again when I was fifty-six—through alleys, under stone arches, to the overgrown family graveyard. I imagine my grandparents and great-grandparents as they walked to church, strolled to their neighbors to share a meal, and made their way to the low rock wall that overlooks the green fields below. I can see their purposeful walk to the same graveyard to pay respects and leave flowers. Their footsteps leave invisible imprints on stone, soil, and on me.

My other Italian ancestors lived further north in the foothills of the Apuan Alps, in the small commune of Pontremoli. They walked over the medieval stone bridge that crosses the Magra River, atop the path of pilgrims that traveled the Via Francigena, the Camino to Rome, from Canterbury, England, through France and Switzerland, crossing Italy to Rome. Thunderclouds climb toward the Alps and can hurl lightning bolts and release rain along their way. The rains fall and swell the Magra, and villagers hurry to huddle under awnings and archways. My ancestor was the cobbler in Pontremoli in a line of cobblers. He made the shoes that crossed the bridge, plodded the muddy paths hugging the river, sloshed through puddles, and hurried to find shelter from the rain.

Maybe I walk like them. Connected with stone, soil, and history.

Further to the east, Armenia feels exotic. Many footsteps crossed this ancient land, residing in the Caucasus Mountains. Traders walked the Silk Road through Armenia, carrying spices, silks, and ideas on the route linking China to Rome. And pilgrims walked miles along mountain paths to the Tatev Monastery, seeking spiritual renewal. My grandmother Abisag would walk with her mother, my great-grandmother, from their village to town, through worn hillsides in worn leather shoes. Our story is that in 1906, Abisag, at age twelve, betrothed to a man in her village, traveled with her new family by horseback, camel, and foot from Armenia to Marseille, France. They eventually boarded a ship to carry them to Ellis Island. I hear, through story, their footsteps that paced the weathered wooden deck of the ship that delivered them to America, feet that felt the current of the sea through their boots. A lightning strike flashed in the distance and illuminated the shore as they approached land. This story has filtered through two generations; their story continued when their feet touched their new home.

My grandmother traveled over two thousand miles from her village in Armenia to France in 1906, some of which, maybe most of which, was by foot. She'd left her home, seeking a new life. Eight years later in 1914, Armenians were forced to march

through the desert, away from their homeland, many to their death. A cultural, ethnic atrocity. What energy did their feet gather from the parched ground? I avoid the documented scenes and stories of those who walked, vacant eyes on hopeless faces. I cannot avoid hearing and feeling an innate memory of doomed footsteps.

Maybe I walk for them. For those who did not choose to walk, who walked until their feet stopped, could no longer lift, and ceased.

I hear and repeat their stories, distant and distinct, etched in memory. It may be that the echo of their steps as they walked on cobblestones, through desert, under archways, and through mud reverberate when I walk—like a conduit, leading my feet to connect with a charged current through ground and through time—fueling me, pulling me, carrying me.

Today, this brightening summer morning, I am walking through the trees of a forest that feels like home. I chose to lace up the boots that carry me down familiar paths or across untrodden places. I feel my motion, I feel the warming sun, my feet on damp ground. We reach Cold Creek. Its ripples sound like a welcome. Calming. My dog wades in up to his chest. I take off my boots, pull off my socks, and soak my feet in the chilled water. We'll stay awhile. Then head off further, to the meadow, or somewhere—not ready to stop walking. ✧

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“Life itself is as much a long walk as it is a long conversation, and the ways along which we walk are those along which we live.”

—Tim Ingold



Friedrich Schwinge, *The Painter and the Children*, 1899.

Schwinge
Fr. Schwinge 1899

A photograph of a person sitting in the center of a large, circular stone labyrinth in a forest. The labyrinth is made of many concentric rings of stones, and the person is sitting on the innermost ring. The forest is lush with green trees and moss-covered rocks.

Solvitur ambulando. (It is solved by walking.)
—attributed to St. Augustine

You always walk a labyrinth the same way. Begin at the opening, the portal into a one-way maze that winds through loops and turns to a scalloped center point. Set an intention, a question, a focus for your prayer.

Step in. Bear your intention, your question, your prayer to the center, step by step, turn by turn. As slowly or as quickly as you desire or need, allow the rhythm of your steps to work, beat by

beat, on your rattling thoughts. Stand in the center. As long as you like. Until some resolution, some illumination, some decision emerges.

Then turn and trace the way out again, looping inward and outward, back and forth, now circling the center, now tracing the outer edge. Eventually you come to the portal that sent you inward. Step off the labyrinth. Turn and face the pathway. Offer thanksgiving, then go.

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Pathway

KIT CARLSON

You never walk a labyrinth the same way. Each journey brings a different question, each center a new illumination, each exit a different sort of promise. **Question. Walk. Pause. Resolve. Return.** This is the pattern to the pathway. It is the purpose of this particular spiritual practice.

Without attention to the pattern, the purpose can be lost. A friend who regularly walks labyrinths says that sometimes her mind races so fast

that her walk becomes only a hurried beeline in and out, steps moving as quickly as her thoughts. “Then I have to go do it again,” she says. “Because I got nothing out of it.” Better to spend an hour, slowly stepping, pausing, turning, pondering.



From age twelve to seventeen, I lived in Florida, on the Gulf of Mexico. Our family owned a ten-unit motel, and we lived in a small house next door. And while I was growing up, this pattern, this way of walking—pausing—resolving—returning is how I managed the tumults of adolescence in a family that could put the “nuke” in nuclear.

When it became too much, all of it, I hurtled out of the house, slamming the door. “I’m going for a walk on the beach,” I would yell. The three white wooden steps down to Longboat Key’s squeaky white sand became the portal. The pathway was a stretch of sand—brown and hard where the waves washed in and out, white and soft above the waterline. And I would tromp, sulking, down the beach.

The center point, the stopping point, was usually Villa am Meer. Next to the looming towers of a condominium, this bedraggled, Spanish-style mansion sat empty, crumbling day by day under a blanket of salt spray and tropic winds. Clay tiles had split and toppled from the

You always walk a labyrinth the same way.

roof, littering the patchy lawn. In the courtyard that faced the sea, a big blue fountain was dry and desiccated. The whole place was deserted, decaying. It asked nothing of me. As I perched on rough coquina rocks piled



in Roman mosaics, on rocky seashores in Scandinavia, on Hopi baskets. For many of these artifacts, it is not obvious why a labyrinthine design was used, but there they are, over and over again—patterns that outline a winding path

to a center point.

This single path is what distinguishes a labyrinth from a maze. It is unicursal, a closed trail that follows only one way into the center. Those who enter a labyrinth cannot get lost if they stay on this path—inward to the center, then outward again, winding the same way back and forth, until they re-emerge.

In Greek mythology, the labyrinth was a maze, the maze of the Minotaur, a dark, subterranean cavern with dead ends and deceptive turns. A cave where the Minotaur, a bull-like monster, lurked at the center to devour heroes sent by King Minos to conquer the labyrinth and its beast. But a true labyrinth has no dead ends, no deceptive turns. It is less like the Minotaur's maze and more like the thread of Princess Ariadne. She gave a ball of golden thread to

in front of the seawall, hard and scratchy as my mood, the house's silence gave me cover to come back to myself. The rhythm of waves—rush, hush, rush, hush—brought me peace.

Then home again, slower now, watching the gulls play games with the wind, flapping forward for a few hundred feet, hanging there motionless in the air, then tipping, peeling off, soaring back the way they had come. Then turning, flapping, doing it again.

This motion—work forward, pause, return to start—even the seagulls were doing it. Their pathway was the air, their wings the agents of motion, but the pattern was the same. Go forward. Pause. Return to start.



Labyrinths are ancient. These varied, twisting motifs appear on Cretan coins,

You never walk a labyrinth the same way.

Theseus when he was about to make his hero's journey to the labyrinth's center where the Minotaur lurked. Theseus tied the thread at the opening of the cave and unwound it as he made his way inward so he could follow the thread back out again in safety, through all the twists and turns.



door, onto the sidewalk, around the block, around the corner, down to the park, seethe, sit, regroup, then back again.

"It feels like you're abandoning me," he said.

"I'm saving myself—and us," I retorted.



A labyrinth is like that single line to lead you inward, then out again. It is like Ariadne's promise: you will emerge from the labyrinth victorious.

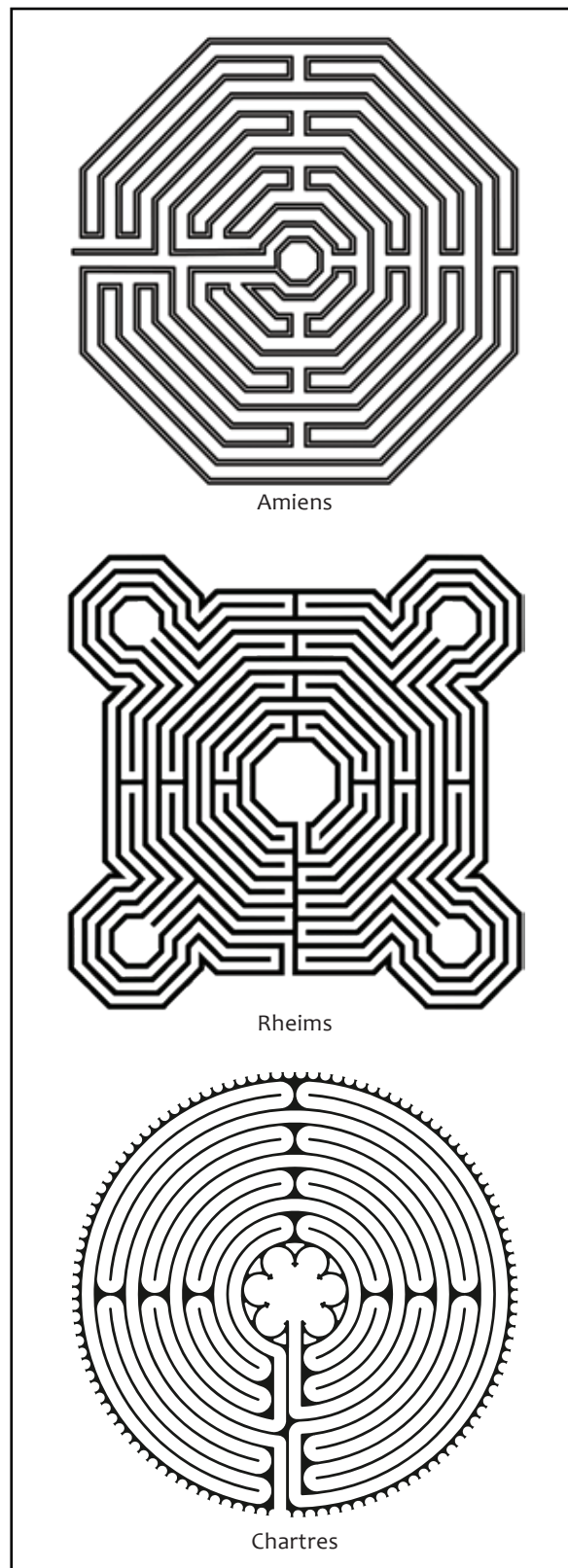


Question. Walk. Pause. Resolve. Return. Even as I left home and the beach, went to college, then entered adulthood, I still soothed my anger this way, answered my questions this way. Sometimes it looked like I was walking out. But I always returned, restored.

Early in our marriage, my husband didn't understand my need for this rhythm, this pattern, this way to find my center point again. When our conflicts grew intense, when I was ready to explode into a thousand flares of fireworks, I left. I walked. Out the

As Gothic cathedrals rose, stone by stone, during the high Middle Ages, labyrinths were laid in the floors of several French cathedrals: Rheims, Amiens, Chartres. The [Rheims labyrinth](#), built in 1240 of blue stones inlaid in the cathedral floor, was destroyed in 1779. In [Amiens](#), the black and white square labyrinth, built in 1288, was destroyed in 1825. A replica was reinstalled in Amiens some sixty years later.

Only the [Chartres labyrinth](#) survives, original and intact. It is enormous, stretching the width of the nave, mirroring exactly in size and shape the great stained-glass rose window that rises above it. It is disguised, most of the time, by wooden cathedral chairs and exposed for walking only on Fridays. But the Chartres labyrinth



is also ubiquitous; its eleven-circuit pattern with a distinctive rose petal center point has become the model for most modern labyrinths.

No one really knows why these patterns were laid in cathedral floors or what their purpose was. Some say they were for imaginative pilgrimages; if people could not go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, they could make a spiritual journey by walking the labyrinth. But despite all the books that have been written on these medieval installations, no one can say for certain if people actually did this—this movement—the way we walk a labyrinth today. **Question. Walk. Pause. Resolve. Return. Complete.**



The first time I walked a labyrinth, everything made sense. An enormous, full-size, Chartres-style labyrinth painted on canvas was laid out on the floor of the lunch room in the National Cathedral School. Lauren Artress, founder of [Veriditas](#)—a movement to retrieve the labyrinth for spiritual growth—had brought the labyrinth to Washington, D.C.

I did not know what it meant to walk it, but I came to make the attempt.

The wide, high room was flooded with sunlight washing through the wall of windows on the north side. It hummed with the presence of at least fifty people—moving, resting, pausing, walking. But not speaking.



The only sounds were the whispers of stocking-clad feet smoothing the canvas. Some people sat or lay on benches around the edges of the room, eyes closed or heads bowed or chins lifted upward to the ceiling. Others were making the journey—some slowly, incrementally stepping, and some purposefully heading inward.

Women wore scarves draped over their heads or sarongs wrapped around their shoulders like prayer shawls. Teenagers in baggy jeans and hoodies suppressed giggles, trying not to make eye contact with one another. A few men and women, and even a child or two, stood in the scalloped petals of the center, waiting to receive whatever gift the labyrinth was about

to give them. And then there were those on their way outward. Stepping out of the center and easing back along the pathway's coils, leaving by the same way they had come, some looked as though nothing of note had happened. But some were weeping. Some even danced down the path.

I stepped onto the canvas, paused at the portal, and wondered—wondered what this practice was meant for, what it already meant to those on the pathway, wondered what it might mean to me. I took my first step, slowly, unsure. I stepped again, eyes focused downward on the white ribbon of pathway between two blue borders. Step by step, forward, inward. Turning, returning, inward, then outward again.

As I walked farther in, the looping turns of the path became my only guide. I could not see how far I had come, how far I still had to go. Without a sense of direction, there was no sense of time. Was I there yet, was I not there yet? It no longer seemed to matter. I took each step as it came, slid silently around those coming toward me on the path. Each turn was an invitation to pause, reorient, breathe.

The energy of the labyrinth walk felt different from my anxious, fiery flights down the beach, or out the door, or down the street. Curiously, the slower my steps became, the stronger they felt, as if each foot was making its own statement as it stepped, claiming the pathway, claiming the moment, grounding me in this walk. Yet it was also the same as every troubled walk I had ever taken. Step by step, as I headed inward toward the center, my day fell away from me, and the pressures of my life faded in the beams of sunlight. I found again what I had sought on all those countless walks. Peace and presence, I began saying silently to myself. Peace and presence.

I was not fleeing. I was finding. And when I arrived in the center, I knew. Like coming home, I discovered that this was the practice that had always grounded me, whether the pathway was coiled in a labyrinth or unwound like the lines of a city sidewalk. This pattern, this process, this path. Walking. Pausing. Resolving. Returning.

Restored. ✖



Two Horses

Most days, we walk together,
passing the field where wildflowers
mingle in the breeze. Some swell
with new buds, others face
the sun in full bloom, or turn
heavy heads downward and wilt
into seed. We veer through
the oak grove by the museum,
and the last stretch before home
takes us by a tiny ranch,

holdover from the rural past,
with a riding pen just big enough
for two horses to circle. Beside it,
a brown horse and a white horse
stand quietly in their pens.
Hand in hand, we watch: the dusty
hooves, the downturned eyes,
settled in being—
in sun, grass, breeze, silence.

—Daniel Thomas



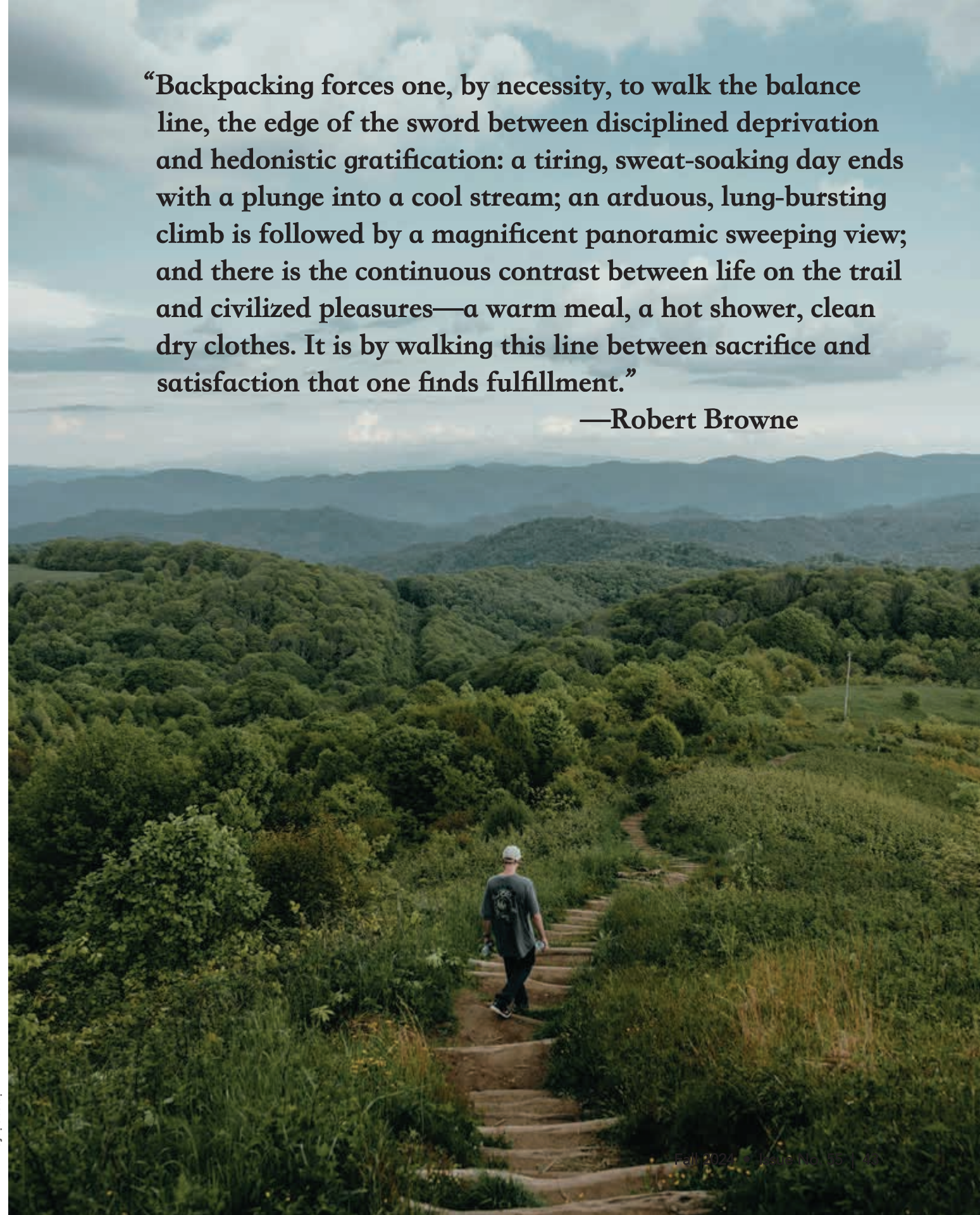


The Appalachian Trail, known as the A.T., is a hiking trail of almost 2,200 miles that extends from Springer Mountain in Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. It is thought to be the world's longest continuous hiking trail. More than three million people hike segments of it each year. "Thru-hikers" walk the entire trail in a single season. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy estimates that there are over 3,000 attempts to traverse the entire trail each year, about 25 percent of which succeed.



"Backpacking forces one, by necessity, to walk the balance line, the edge of the sword between disciplined deprivation and hedonistic gratification: a tiring, sweat-soaking day ends with a plunge into a cool stream; an arduous, lung-bursting climb is followed by a magnificent panoramic sweeping view; and there is the continuous contrast between life on the trail and civilized pleasures—a warm meal, a hot shower, clean dry clothes. It is by walking this line between sacrifice and satisfaction that one finds fulfillment."

—Robert Browne





“Most of the time you don’t think. No point. Instead, you exist in a kind of mobile Zen mode, your brain like a balloon tethered with a string, accompanying but not actually part of the body below. Walking for hours and miles becomes as automatic, as unremarkable, as breathing.”

—Bill Bryson



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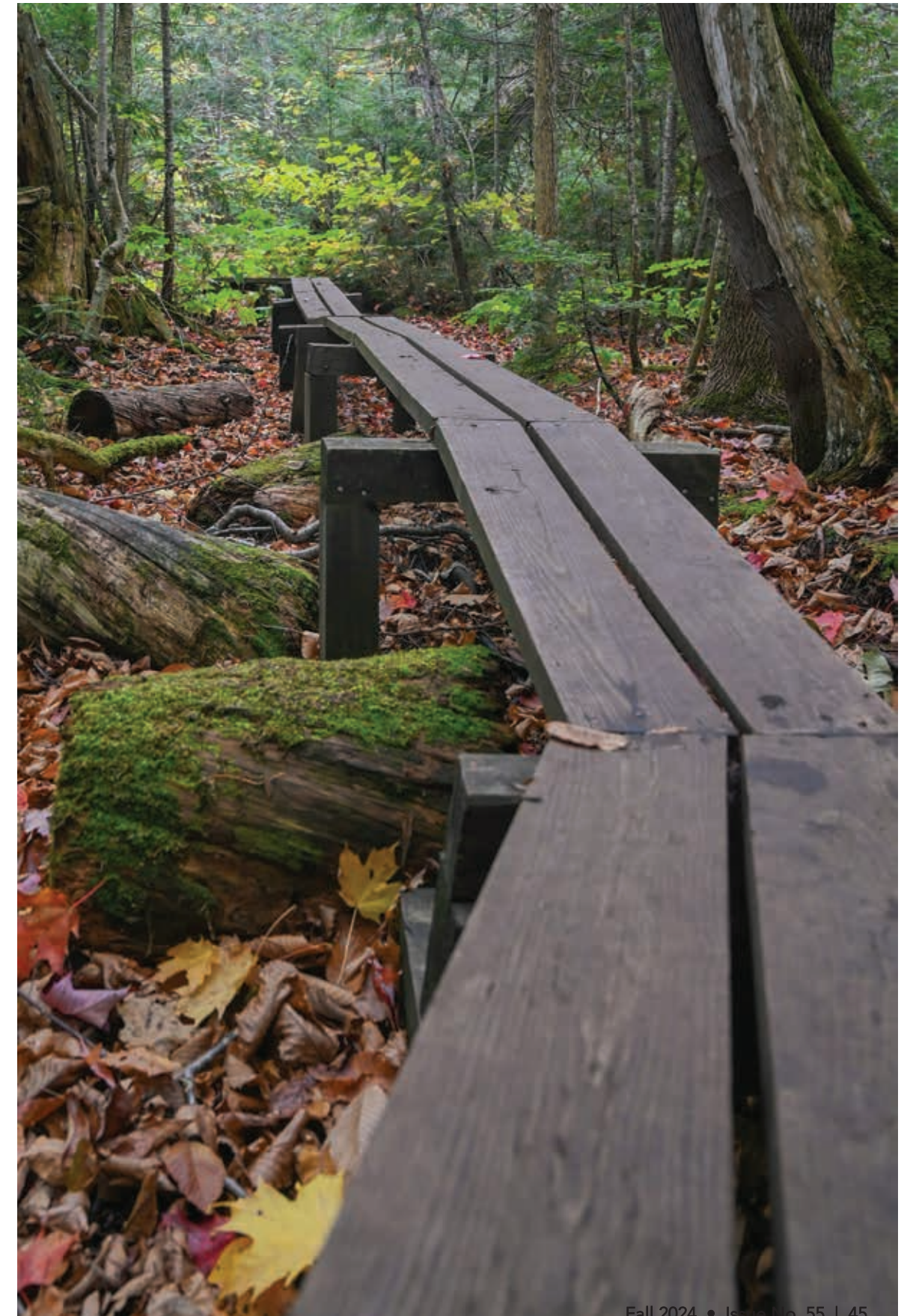




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Walking in Place

ANDREA LANI



*HENRY DAVID THOREAU'S QUOTATIONS
ARE FROM HIS ESSAY "WALKING."*

THE EASTERN RIVER

A hot Sunday afternoon in mid-August, my husband and three children out of the house. Giddy at being home alone, I can't settle down to any of the things I'd like to do in the rare quiet left behind in their absence. So I go for a walk.

I step out the door and into the woods, following a long hump of glacier-deposited gravel on whose toe-like southern terminus we built our house thirteen years ago. Over the

years, we've cut back the more aggressive brush and sawed away—or worked around—downed trees, but otherwise our trail is little more than a wildlife path through the woods, and we can tell by the tracks they leave behind that the wild creatures still travel this route we adopted from them.

I pause, hearing only the distant crow of a rooster. Not an insect, a bird, a breath of wind in the trees, not a car on the road breaks the stillness. The trail ambles to the

northern boundary of our property, makes a sharp left U-turn, and travels downhill through a grove of young balsam fir from which we cull our Christmas trees. At the bottom of the hill, I walk along ruts left behind by a skidder that cleared the land years before it became ours, cross a seep of deep glistening mud on a wobbly log, and continue to the river.

Our river isn't much of a river, by Maine standards. Barely wider than my kitchen, it diminishes to a shin-deep trickle this time of year. But it is an official river: the West Branch of the Eastern River. A few miles downstream from us it joins the East Branch and from there it broadens and becomes tidal as it flows south and joins the much more mighty Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers in Merrymeeting Bay. It's been a dry summer, and the water in our stretch is even lower than normal. Grass grows in the streambed and rocky bars stretch in from both sides. Where the steep bank dips down to meet the river, I step in.

The water is the color of an old penny, the bottom a jumble of blocky stones. Blobs of gelatinous green algae cling to underwater grass. A pair of blue damselflies settles on the water, the male clutching the female's neck with the tip of his abdomen. She sinks below the surface to lay her eggs on a blade of grass. Thumb-sized fish occupy every pool deeper

than a few inches. Frogs leap or swim away at my every step. Crimson cardinal flowers line the far bank. If I were with my family, we would wade upstream to where the river crosses under the road through a large culvert, but today I take a few pictures of the flowers, study the damselflies, then return to the trail. When I reach the fork I hesitate. If I were to go back the way I came, I'd avoid the field overgrown with vegetation that will tear at my bare legs, but something pulls me in the other direction, through waist-high goldenrod and meadowsweet and clouds of deer flies—a sense of ritual, the full-circle satisfaction of walking a loop.

WALDEN

Last summer I visited Walden Pond on my way to see a friend in Massachusetts. I had driven by the sign on the highway that points to the road that leads to the cabin in the woods many times, but I had never before made the detour.

After a drive through Concord that befuddled my GPS, I found Thoreau's Eden right on the side of the road—pond to the left, parking area and reconstructed cabin to the right. I had no plan for what to do when I got there, so I walked, away from the bath house and beach where swimmers shrieked in the May-cold water and around Walden Pond, an

orb of clear blue water circled by a narrow band of sand and steep slopes forested with tall, straight white pines. A side trail led me to the heap of stones that marked the spot where Thoreau's cabin had stood. From there, I climbed Emerson's Cliff, a ridge of gray granite encrusted with rock tripe lichens the size of elephants'

long essay "Walking" makes me want to throw my copy, bound in a tiny book, across the room: "I think that I cannot preserve my heart and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all

"I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements."

—Henry David Thoreau

ears. There, far from the noise and bustle of swimmers and joggers, I felt a moment of the peace Thoreau might have experienced on his daily saunters. Back at the pond, I put my feet in the clear water, completed the loop, and crossed the road to peer into the replica of Thoreau's hut, a just-right-sized cabin furnished with a bed, a chair, and a desk.

Walden, the book, has sat on the lower shelf of my night stand for more than a decade. I pull it out once in a while, but after a few pages of the old hermit's wordy ramblings, I toss it aside in favor of writing more relevant to my life. *Walden* is tiresome, but this line in Thoreau's

worldly engagements." By "worldly engagements," Thoreau means, I assume, responsibilities, of which he had few as a bachelor whose friends helped take care of his material needs. He expresses amazement, almost confusion, possibly sympathy, at the lot of shopkeepers and "womankind" who spend their days sitting indoors, but he fails to note that not everyone has an Emerson on whose land they might squat, nor a Mrs. Emerson to cook them Sunday dinner.

I try to forgive Thoreau his near-sightedness—he was, after all, a product of his time—and read on. After several pages that explore the difference between nature and cul-

“I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering . . . If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again,—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man; then you are ready for a walk.”

—Henry David Thoreau

ture, some mental wandering, descriptions of his own walks, and a longish poem or song, Thoreau explains that when he walks he usually heads in a southwesterly direction: “Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free.” While Thoreau may be speaking literally—east of Concord is Boston, west the wilds of the Berkshires—he is also speaking metaphorically, situated temporally in the midst of the Westward Expansion. I, too, head southwest; although our trail starts out heading north, its ultimate destination, the low spot on the riverbank, is south and west of our house. My heart, too, strains to the southwest, for the mountains and deserts of Colorado, the place where I was born and grew up, a home I have been in exile from for nearly twenty years.

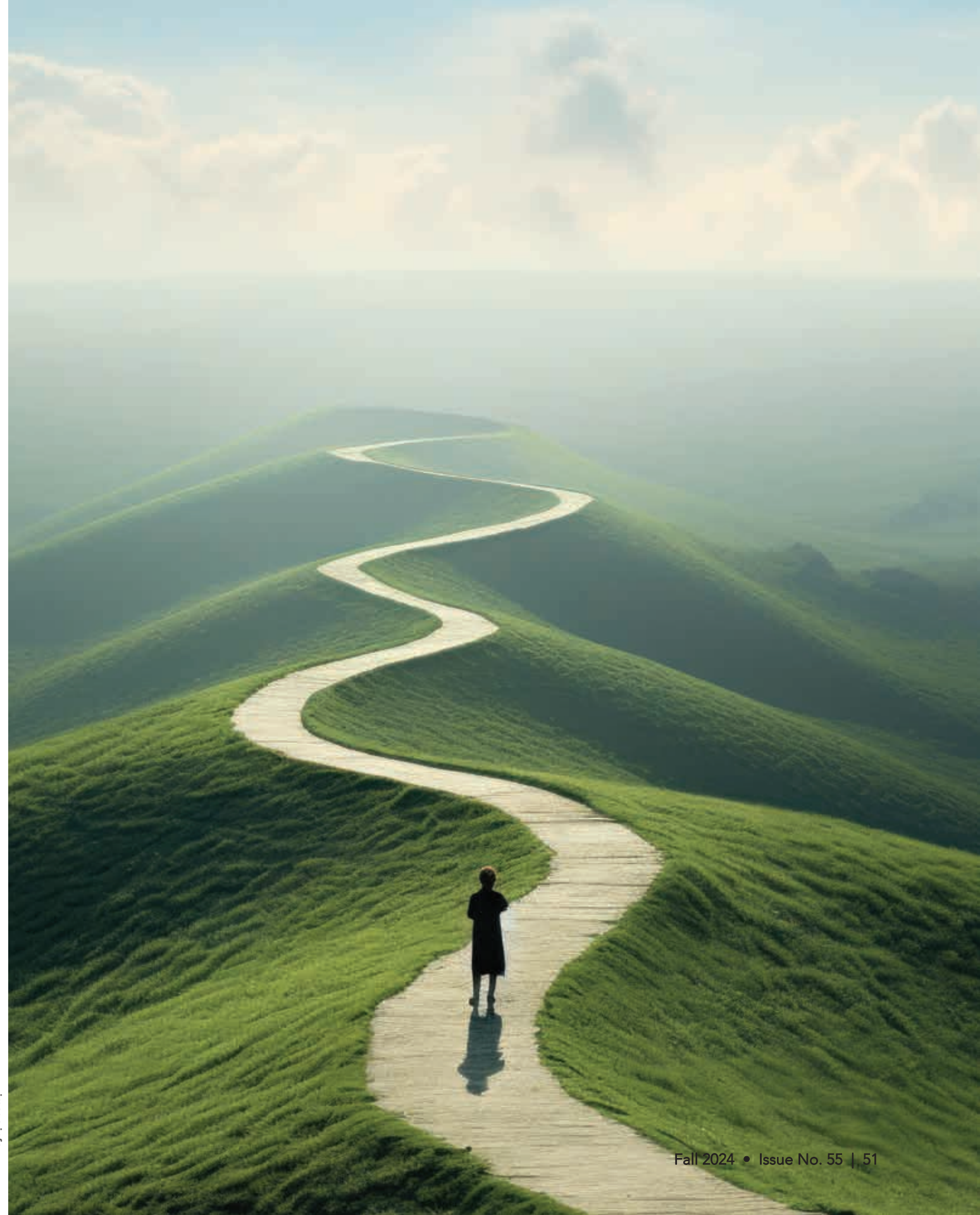
Thoreau goes on to philosophize for several pages about west versus east, waxing romantic about the

West before coming to one the most oft-quoted Thoreauisms: “The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” While I have seen the final seven words of this quote emblazoned on countless posters, tote bags, and coffee mugs, I was not familiar with the first part until I read “Walking.” The West is another name for Wild. I gnaw on this idea. In coming east, Thoreau seems to tell me, I became tame, domesticated. In moving to Maine, I gave up that wild, essential part of myself.

EASTWARD

I did not come east by force, not even in the metaphorical sense in which Thoreau uses the term. Rather, the east coast, Maine specifically, was a kind of West—an unknown, a frontier—

image info



for me. My operating principle at the age of twenty was travel, adventure, escape from the humdrum of the suburban world of my childhood. I picked the tiny college on the coast of Maine in part because of the images of windswept coastline, bare granite hills, and endless blue sea depicted in the admissions catalog.

When I got here, I found I liked Maine. I liked sea kayaking and poking in tide pools. I liked hiking little mountains and climbing granite cliffs. I liked the colors of the autumn leaves and living on the doorstep of a national park. I liked Maine. But I didn't fall in love with Maine the way people who come here from Worcester or Hartford or Baltimore do—city-born people who want nothing more than to grow tomatoes, fix up an old farmhouse, raise chickens, pick apples, simmer maple syrup, watch the seasons change in their back field. Maine feels like coming home to them, but for me it only made me miss the West—wide open expanses of sky, searingly dry air, stark peaks of bare stone, riotous profusions of wildflowers.

I went to Idaho for the summer between my two years of college in Maine, then returned to Colorado as an AmeriCorps volunteer after graduation, followed by a 470-mile hike through the Rockies, a short stint back in my suburban hometown outside Denver, then travel through the western states.

Each new place, each mountain and canyon, desert and meadow, instilled in me a deeper sense of connection, of rapture, of feeling I'd come home to this place called West.

But I had met a boy in college, a boy who grew up in a small town in Maine, a boy who, despite his declarations of a desire to travel, was at heart a homebody. Each time we went west, we would be lured back to Maine by promises from his family of a place to live and a job, by his homesickness for leafy trees, damp air, deep winter. My family could offer us nothing more than a patch of living room floor on which to roll out our sleeping bags. We lived a tug-of-war between the two places for years until we had a baby, built a house, found full-time, permanent work, had two more babies, and realized we were here for good.

At Thoreau's cabin site, a large sign bears this well-known quote from *Walden*: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." The decisions that led me to Maine were made more haphazardly than deliberately, yet they have etched a very deep groove that I don't see a way out of. Will I discover, when I come to die, that I have not lived? Or will I find that my life had carried on despite my dissatisfaction?

A ME-SHAPED HOLE

Five years ago, I attended a writing conference in Denver. On my way there, I lost my driver's license when I changed planes in Boston. I was too frantic trying to figure out how I would board my return flight to recognize the metaphor of dropping my Maine ID at the border of New England, arriving in Colorado stateless.

The theme of the conference was "Place," with a western flavor. For three days I listened to writers who had moved from New Jersey to Colorado or Texas to Montana talk about how long one must live in the

I had lived in Maine continuously for more than a decade and for large chunks of the decade before that. I had been gone from Colorado for as long as I had lived there. But I hadn't set down roots in my new home. Rather, having landed there through a series of small, inconsequential decisions, I fully expected to pick up and reunite my body with my soul at any moment. But Colorado didn't fit either. Suburban Denver had metastasized into an unrecognizable sprawl of strip malls and car lots and rows upon rows of identical dust-colored houses with huge garages and minuscule green lawns. And, as the implanted writers implied, I had

"No wealth can buy the requisite leisure, freedom, and independence which are the capital in this profession [walking]. It comes only by the grace of God. It requires a direct dispensation from Heaven to become a walker. You must be born into the family of the Walkers."

—Henry David Thoreau

West to be a true "western" writer, how deeply steeped in the landscape you have to be to be owned by it. Over the next three days, as I took notes and wandered the streets of downtown, met family and friends for dinner, listened to poetry readings and keynote speeches, I began to feel increasingly placeless.

been gone too long to truly know the place. The West no longer belonged to me, nor I to it.

In her memoir, *Horizontal World*, about growing up in North Dakota, Debra Marquart writes, "Another reason you can't go home again is that the shape you made upon leaving does not match your shape

upon return. Not even for a weekend is it comfortable to step through the ill-fitting hole that your exit created and take up residence in your old life.” I was finding this discomfort in streets whose names I no longer remembered, the gleaming gold capitol dome whose executive I had never voted for, the seas of people attending the conference, none of whom I knew.

At one panel, the editor of a journal devoted to the idea of place spoke about having recently moved from one region of the country to another and how this change gave him perspective to write about his previous, beloved home. During the question and answer portion of the session, I tried to ask

where we live more than anyplace on earth. I’ve walked it in flip-flops, rain boots, and snow shoes. I’ve walked it with babies in slings, backpacks, strollers, and sleds. I’ve walked with friends and family, with my husband and children, and by myself. I’ve eaten its wild blackberries and strawberries, picked its apples and blueberries, dug its wild sarsaparilla and wild cucumber root. I’ve seen bobcats, white-tailed deer, a moose, two otters, a snapping turtle the size of a trashcan lid, raccoons, porcupines, skunks, mink, weasels, a swarm of honeybees. I’ve lain in bed at night listening to coyotes yip and howl in the river valley. I’ve learned my warblers and thrushes

“I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of taking walks daily,—not [to] exercise the legs or body merely, nor barely to recruit the spirits, but positively to exercise both body and spirit, and to succeed to the highest and worthiest ends by the abandonment of all specific ends,—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering.”

—Henry David Thoreau

him how to cope with physically living in one place when your soul resides in another. Thinking I wanted advice on becoming more closely wedded to the new place, he recommended walking and keeping journals.

I have walked the piece of land

and woodpeckers from these trees and made a list of more than sixty wildflowers growing in its earth. I’ve seen barred and great horned owls, turkey vultures, bald eagles, osprey, Cooper’s hawks, and a goshawk. I’ve watched a family of newly fledged

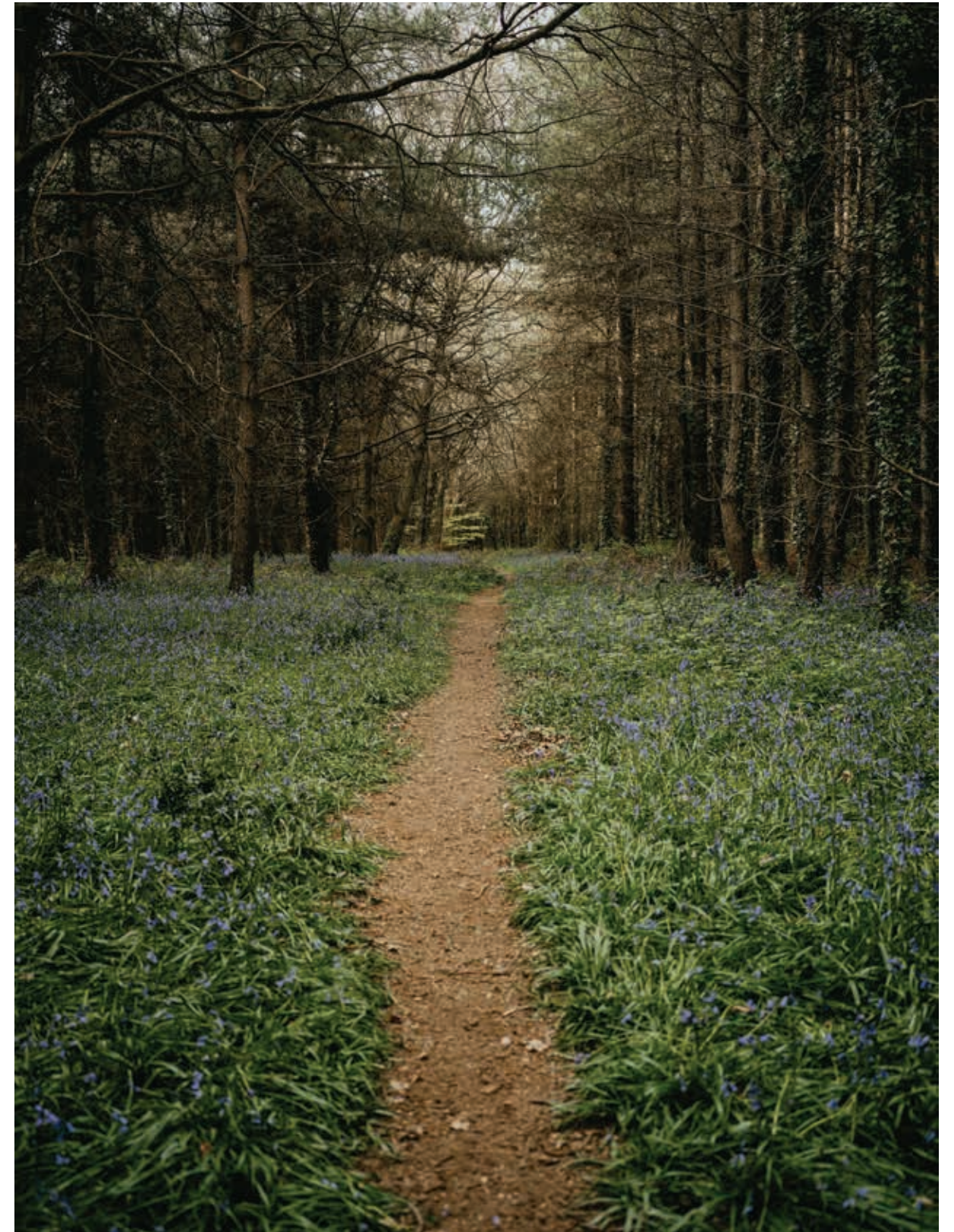


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broad-winged hawks ready for migration every fall but have never found their nest.

My fitness device tells me that our trail is 1,500 steps and our driveway, from the house to the road and back, is 1,000 steps. Sometimes I go weeks not walking the trail, other times I walk it weekly or daily. If, on average, I've walked the trail once a month and the driveway daily for the last thirteen years, I have walked 910,000 steps on this land, more than 400 miles.

I have walked and I have kept journals, a stack ten high in which I've sketched mushrooms, pine trees, glacier-tumbled metamorphic rocks. I've drawn the golden-crowned kinglet that hit the basement window, a garter snake with a leopard frog halfway down its throat, the flowers that brighten our fields, the murky water of the gravel pit pond. I've written lists of trees and flowers and birds, poems about weather, observations of dragonflies and hummingbirds, notes about walks taken with my children. In the pages of those journals, I've noted the change of seasons, year after year, and expressed appreciation for the small and beautiful things of our land.

Yet, despite all those hundreds of miles of walking and the dozens of pages of journals, I have not assimilated to this place. My body lives here, but my soul hovers 1,800 miles away.

WANDERING

Last fall, inspired by Colorado writer Ann Haymond Zwinger's essay ["The Art of Wandering,"](#) I started walking off the beaten path. Where our trail bent south, I turned north, following a ridge above the river, discovering an isolated section of stone wall, a big nest high in a pine tree, a hollow stump I speculated belonged to an American chestnut. I bushwhacked through fir trees to the neighbor's pond, where we skate in winter, and coaxed my family to follow the pathways of all the stone walls on our property. We found an ancient roasting pan and our neighbor's remote-control plane, but the walls didn't lead anywhere, each one petering out in a pile of rocks.

When spring came, I wandered into the woods behind our gravel pit in search of fringed polygala. I didn't find the tiny magenta flower, but I discovered a pink lady's slipper—the first I'd seen on our land. I hunted for more and found a total of seven. One of my sons and I wandered out one evening, hoping to see what occupied that nest on the ridge. We didn't find any hawks, but discovered that beavers had gnawed through three thick ash trees growing along the stone wall high above the river, and we watched a porcupine emerge from its den beneath the roots of a fallen fir tree.

Zwinger defines wandering as "not going anywhere in particular except just to whatever next catches your eye." I was a born wanderer. My mom used to call me Poke-Along Cassidy because of my tendency to dilly-dally whenever we walked to the library, store, or school. I wandered around my backyard, the streets of our neighborhood, behind the ditch that bordered a nearby park. On camping trips, I would wander into

answered, wandering is a lilies-of-the-field pursuit." (Jitney, I learned, is a kind of Uber, a vehicle that transports passengers for a fare. Zwinger's verbified jitney is an accurate description for how parents spend much of their time, although I've never received a fare for my efforts.)

Zwinger found that the practice of wandering does not even require movement. One spring the

"I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit."

—Henry David Thoreau, "Walking"

the forest, aimless but for the glint of sun on a creek, the arc of a tree that resembled a cabin, or a meadow of wildflowers. I didn't go for an actual hike with a destination until I was a teenager. To this day I bring up the rear on a trail, peering into flowers, gazing at treetops, daydreaming my way up mountains.

To learn the art of wandering, Zwinger turns to Thoreau, whose journals document his development as a wanderer. But unlike Thoreau, Zwinger understands what it means to have worldly responsibilities. "Wandering is, on the surface, frittering away one's time," she writes. "When there are children to be jitneyed, laundry to be folded, meals to be planned, dogs to be walked, and letters to be

appearance of a pair of mallards returning to the pond below her house recast what had been a "dour" frame of mind: "With this stationary wandering, I knew, for a moment, the buoyancy of water. Wind flowed under my wing feathers, and the treetops spun away beneath me even as my feet remained on the wooden-plank deck. I came back to this chill world refreshed and cheerful. The ducks were here where they belonged. I was here where I belonged."

It is no coincidence that the place Zwinger belonged to is Colorado. I first discovered her book on alpine tundra the summer after I graduated college, during that AmeriCorps term when I worked on a trail crew on one of the state's 14,000-foot mountains. To this

day, when I read her words about the mountains of Colorado or the deserts of Utah, I sigh. That feeling of belonging is what I am missing, its absence is what squeezes so tight in my chest. I listen for the first squeak of a spring peeper every April, watch (with some dread) for the turning of the maple leaves to crimson every fall. I hear acorns fall on our metal roof, run out to play in the first snow with my children. I scan the edges of the field for emerging wildflowers, search the trees for migrating birds. Each marker of seasonal transition I greet with familiarity, a small measure of joy. But that feeling of rightness, of belonging, eludes me.

HOME

Since my day home alone when I waded into its shallows, I walk to the river one evening a week. All along the trail I greet landmarks—the big white pine where my oldest son and I saw a barred owl on New Year’s Day when he was one, the patch of hay-scented fern that sends up its warm fragrance as I wade through, the place where I discovered the lady’s slippers. It has rained all week and the vegetation along the trail soaks my pants. The Eastern is a river again—dark water flows through the grass and submerges most of the rocks that had been laid bare last week. I pause and listen. My ears take in the gurgle of the water as it flows toward the

sea, a faint wind moving the leaves in the highest branches of the trees, an insect that emits a rough buzz and one that makes a high trill, and a bird that gives off a coarse scraw.

It occurs to me that the editor at that conference so long ago did not misunderstand my question, that what he was saying when he told me to walk and keep journals was *let go. Call your soul home to your body.* To, as countless posters proclaim, *grow where you are planted.* It is, no doubt, sound advice. There is little to guarantee dissatisfaction as much as being unwilling to come to terms with the place where you find yourself on this earth. But as much as the me-shaped hole back home no longer fits, this place doesn’t fit either. It’s like a sweater my mother-in-law, who shops at thrift stores and yard sales, might give me for Christmas—serviceable, but too tight across the shoulders, too long in the sleeves, the fabric scratchy, the color wrong.

When I returned from the writing conference all those years ago, I arrived home in the dark and stood in my yard with stars shining overhead, peepers chorusing in the pond, and tears streaming down my face. I knew that my heart’s home was no longer my home and hadn’t been since I first rode away from it in a Greyhound bus pointed east more than twenty years before. I knew I had to let it go, but I knew that I could not. ✖

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Camino de Santiago

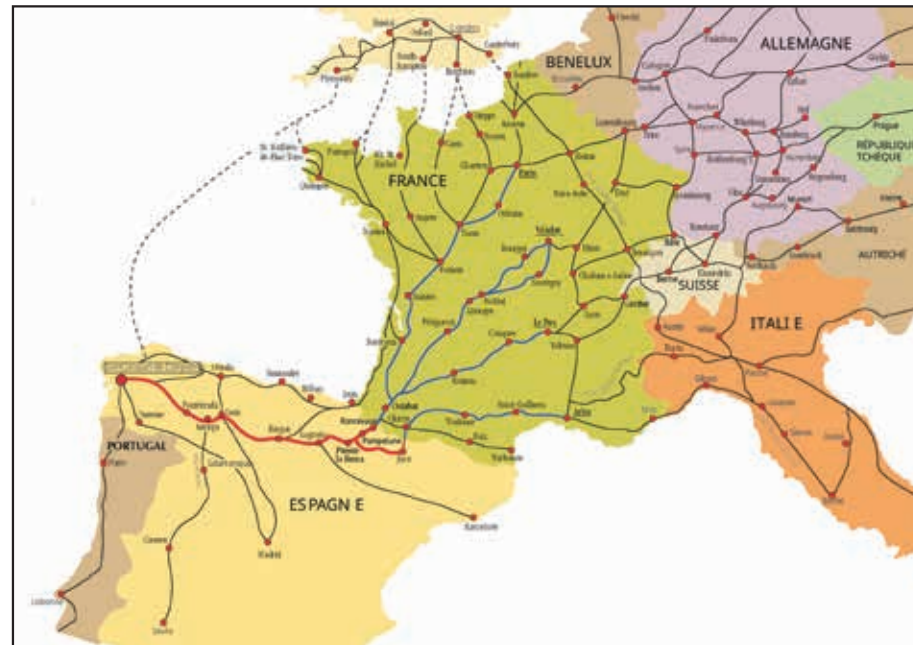
A pilgrimage is a journey along a religiously significant route. Depending on one's mindset and intention, a pilgrimage can lead to personal and spiritual growth or even a profound transformation. There are numerous pilgrimage sites around the globe associated with various religions or sets of beliefs, places to which believers have attached importance due to it being the place of birth or death of praiseworthy individuals, the place of someone's spiritual awakening, or the place where miracles were performed or witnessed.

Camino de Santiago, also known as the Way of St. James, is a well-known pilgrimage site that culminates at the

cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain. The apostle Saint James the Great is said to have been laid to rest in this spot.

There are dozens of routes that can be taken to follow the Camino, depending on where one chooses to start the journey. People have been walking different parts of the Camino since the ninth century.

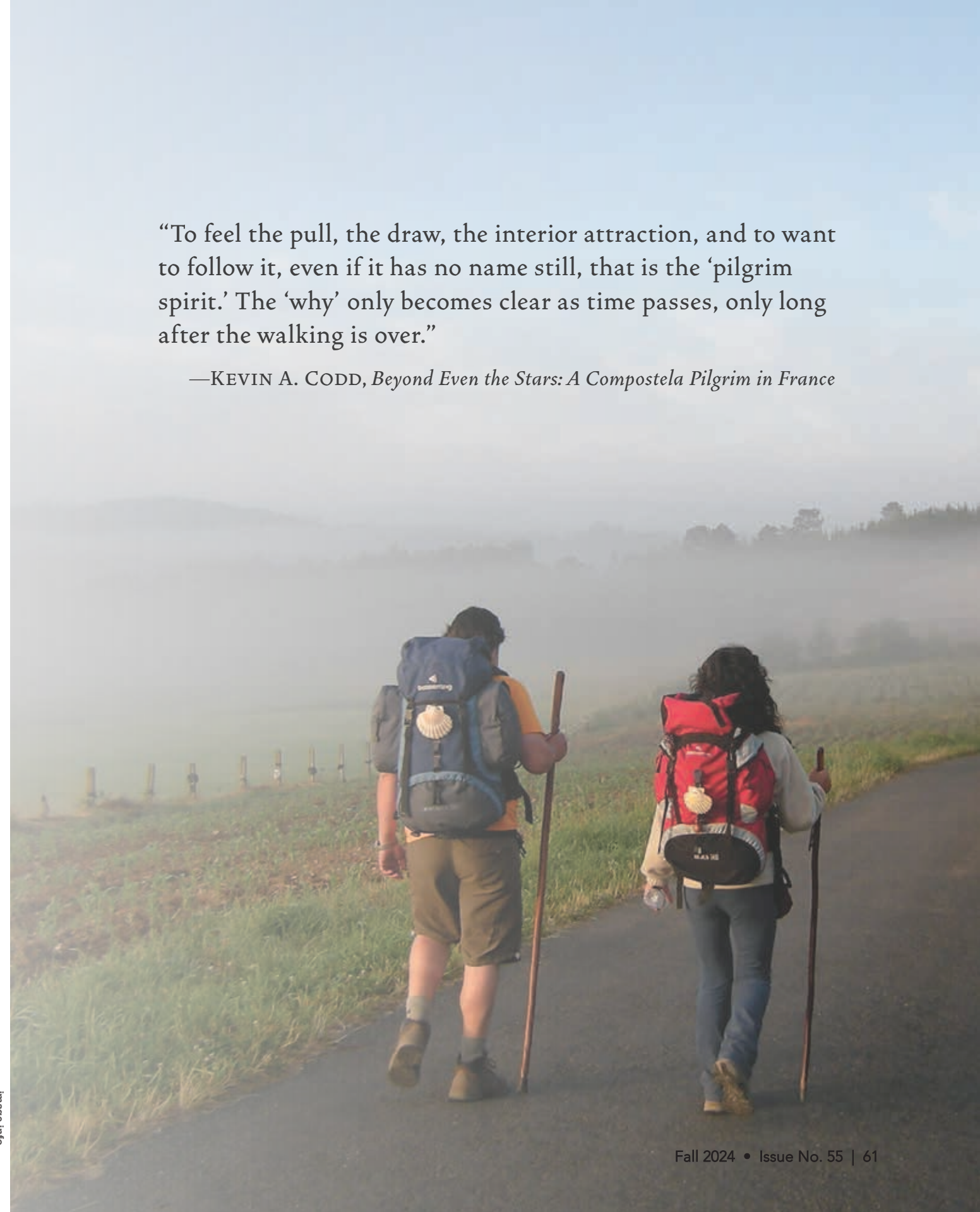
The most popular route is the Camino Frances, which begins at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on the French side of the Pyrenees. From there it is about eight hundred kilometers (roughly five hundred miles) to Santiago de Compostela. Completing this route takes at least four weeks.



“To feel the pull, the draw, the interior attraction, and to want to follow it, even if it has no name still, that is the ‘pilgrim spirit.’ The ‘why’ only becomes clear as time passes, only long after the walking is over.”

—KEVIN A. CODD, *Beyond Even the Stars: A Compostela Pilgrim in France*

image info



PILGRIM ROUTINE

Like walking with Gandhi
on the 24-day Salt March,
or Padre Miguel D'Escoto
on a 14-day Stations of the Cross

for peace in Nicaragua,
or Cree youth on a 1600-kilometer
trek for Indigenous rights
from Whapmagoostui to Ottawa

or like monks in a hermitage
or nuns in a cloister—
each day greets us with discipline
of deepening routine:

rise to the first glint of day,
pull on same clothes,
gather up belongings—
caminar, caminar, caminar

move at meditation's pace:
climb, rest, descend
exert, rest, reflect—
caminar, caminar, caminar

arrive at the abbey, the convent,
an encampment, a benevolent village:
to wash, wring and hang the day's clothes,
rest, coddle feet, eat, drink, sleep

another daybreak, wake
begin, all over again—
caminar, caminar, caminar
our souls imperceptibly altered.

— Suzanne Doerge
from *Footfalls: Poems of the Camino*



Walking the Camino Divino

BARBARA SAPIENZA



OCTOBER 19, 2019, I WRITE ON MY FACEBOOK PAGE: “I ARRIVED IN pelting rain this morning to Santiago de Compostela in time for the noon Mass, blessing pilgrims. I’ve walked a beautiful hundred miles with friends and in silence, through mountains, deserts, towns, welcoming strangers saying *Buen Camino* to cows, pregnant mares, sheep, goats, and tasty tortillas. I’m sore but eager for the Camino of life.”

I don’t say I slipped on the last day in soggy mud near the fence where pilgrims thread holy crosses, that I arrived in Compostela in terrible pain, a fractured tibia. Isn’t falling a part of the sacred way as well?



My desire to walk as Pilgrim, covering one hundred miles on the Way of St. James, walked by millions of people over thousands of years, leads me to a four-day spiritual retreat at Santa Sabina, Dominican College, with Father Fish, a Camaldolese monk and hermit—a veteran pilgrim, *Peregrine*—who has walked several Caminos.

“When we walk the Camino, we walk a spiritual journey on an earthly road. Life is simplified. With silence the Camino begins to speak to us,” he says.

“Hmm!” I say with doubt.

“She chooses us,” he says, calling the Camino “She.”

Do I believe that she chose me?

“Walking is a spiritual and sacramental discipline,” he tells retreatants. “Body is sacrament.”

I nod, remembering the body and blood of Christ, words drummed into me as a child, a mantra in a Catholic family.

“Isn’t walking losing balance, finding balance?” he asks.

“Like walking meditation?” I say, thinking of the moment of lifting one foot, standing midair, before placing it down.

“The Camino invites us out of the known into the unknown,” Father Fish says.

“A great risk,” I say, like the one I took leaving home at twenty-four.

“She only works when we surrender,” he says. “What will you leave behind?”

“Clothes, jewelry, dress shoes, dresses. I’ll take boots, socks, raingear,” I say, thinking of Cheryl Strayed’s *Wild*, her adventure on the Pacific Coast Trail and how she left her boots. OOOEEE!

In my private interview with Father Fish, he asks me what burdens I want to leave with Her. What brokenness, woundedness, stupidity do I want to release?

“Fears of aging and death,” I say. “I’m afraid of moving to the next phase of life.” I don’t say that I hadn’t loved the little girl inside of me all this time; that I want to love her. I don’t tell him that guilt and sadness plague me; that I want to forgive myself.

“With aging we become frightened of unknown territory. It’s like the desert you’re going to walk through. It is scary,” Father says.

“I’m not sure I want to leave.”

“The Camino constantly says leave,” Father says. “She can be a blessing and a bitch too.” Laughing, he reveals some of his own mishaps on the trail, like mistakenly getting off the path, finding himself lost, or adding the dreaded mileage to an already long walk.

“One foot, then the next,” I say. “My tai chi teacher used to say: ‘slowly, slowly.’”

“You’ll have time,” he says.

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On the Camino, discipline begins and is not unlike sitting in the meditation hall, playing the piano, waiting nine months for a child to be born, or waiting in the radiation cathedral at UC with other women every day for six weeks for breast cancer. Like the others, this ritual will be one step at a time.

Certainly, before October 6, 2019, flying to Lisbon-Bilbao, I'd barely heard of St. James, a disciple of Christ who spread Jesus's word in Spain then returned to Jerusalem in 44 CE where he was beheaded by King Herod. With the help of angels, followers carried James's body to Spain to entomb him. Shepherd Pelayo, eight hundred years later, followed a star to his tomb. This

legend brings followers from all over the world to walk The Camino Divino—The Sacred Way.

"Pilgrim" comes from the Latin *perager*: to step beyond one's field. Hadn't I already left my kinfolk at twenty-four when I moved from Boston to San Francisco, pulling a U-Haul with husband and babies, one and three.

At seventy-five I'm itching to step beyond my field again, to wander as a pilgrim through the land. Why? Solitude? Order? Practice? I first heard the word "practice" as a five-year-old when my childhood friend Ray-Ray said, "We practice in this house." He was referring to how he and his sister had a daily practice of piano and song.

So different from my childhood home with my father returning from World War II to meet me, his two-year-old baby, for the first time. My mother distracted, then pregnant with a second unplanned child. I don't recall a practice.

After being diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in 2005 at sixty, I became a seeker. I felt so alone with God. Worse, God had forsaken me. On a cold gray December day after surgery and before radiation, I stood near Kinko's in cold Sausalito, waiting for the Tibetan doctor, a man from an ancient culture, to save me with his herbs. Dr. Lopsang Dhondup took pulses to find the road map that would keep his patients

in good health, that is, to boost my immune system.

And yet, the only thing that consoled me then was sitting quietly or walking slowly, lifting each foot, feeling a moment of suspension before landing. I remember crying inside the downstairs closet in the spare bedroom of our house nights on end, not wanting my husband who had helped me logistically to maneuver through the medical system to hear my crying and despair. When he left for work, I took my tears to the meditation cushion behind the couch in the living room, telling myself, *stay, sit*, as I prepared for a ten-day silent retreat at Spirit Rock. I wanted to handle this in silence. We sat, and walked, and ate.

My motivation to walk the Camino feels like taking up the Zen cushion.

"We practice in this house," Ray had said. "Piano and song, one note then another." Did he know something then?

I tell the meditation teacher at Spirit Rock about my fear of leavings. He says, "If you don't leave, you can't arrive."

Now I've convinced Peter to join me, along with friends Karen, David, and Ned, to leave our comfy homes to walk a hundred twenty miles in rain and mud on difficult terrain. Flying to Lisbon-Bilbao, I ask myself, *What are you seeking?* I don't know the answer. I'm only following a deep knowing that walking will inform me.

From Lisbon we fly to Bilbao to meet a bus to Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees. At Iglesia Santa Maria at 8 p.m., we receive a special blessing for pilgrims of any faith. I receive the Eucharist and the Pilgrim's Passport. The Big Dipper smiles as we begin the morning walk through woodland and pastures. Immediately, raspberry vines entangle me. Thorns wind around my ankles, leaving welts as I admire pregnant mares. Later the first day I slip on slimy rocks while crossing a stream, leaving a wrist sprain. How do I keep going if on this first day I'm already wounded? I think of the poets I love who say the wound is a blessing. I pick myself up, inhale my tears, and pray, telling myself to take the Camino a step at a time. Hadn't Father Fish said She was a bitch too?

While Don Quixote battled windmills, we as pilgrims battle wind. She snaps my hat. The visor stands up or flies off. I spear it with my walking pole like Sir Thighbone (Don Quixote), the knight-errant speared windmills. The walk is hard, dry. Blisters bubble. Battered by wind, I begin singing "You Are My Sunshine" like I used to sing to Isabella and Milla, our granddaughters, when they were babies. They are at home in California about to graduate from high school. Seeing their faces brings tears of love down mine.

*The Camino is working on me,
talking to me of love and tears.*

On a thirteen-kilometer day we leave the monastery near O'Cebreiro. A dark sweetness punctuates secret passageways to Triascastela, one of the last days before reaching Santiago. Walking quietly with other *peregrino*, we listen to the rain. We are ghosts in ponchos. The pelting rain drowns us, soaks us to the bone. I am one with others. We are a parade of souls on the way that thousands of others have walked.

Drinking tea in a teahouse with other pilgrims nursing our blisters, I rest after walking in foggy mist along the beauty of profound green farmland below us. Farms in beautiful rectangular sections of green. A painting I can still see in my tea leaves.

At O'Cebreiro, the view is spectacular with its mystical cloud cover that hovers and floats over and below the hilltops. A beautiful walk through pine forests reminds me of Point Reyes, my home away from home. Fresh enlivening smells of pine needles and red leaves cling to my shoes, slowing things down, providing a spongy carpet for my weary feet. Red and yellow next to green rolling hills call peace to my eyes. I wander through a town, talking to pregnant cows with horns. Do females have horns? I think so.



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One very round cow scratches her head in the vines. Animals and soft clouds give me an ageless feeling. The weather is mild and wet, no longer summer. Every now and then the clouds part to give a glimpse of the sun; curtains part for a moment and then flow, closing the window.

Next day from Sarria we walk through woodlands and farms. Smells, mainly of cows in enclosed spaces getting ready to feed people, stench the air. Pastoral scenes tempered with hectors of green grass shaped in rectangular forms are enclosed by

stone walls. More pilgrims walk here in Galicia, the garden route to Santiago. Today I walk the entire time alone, eighteen kilometers, reflecting on the Camino. Peter is behind me. I realize he's always been behind me, has my back. Tears flow around this awareness. Tears filled with love for him and the gratitude I've never shared.

*The Camino is working on me,
showing me I am loved.*

Walking alone gives me the opportunity to see myself more clearly.

The man in Barbedelo responds to my request for a stamp on my passport by taking my poles from my hands to put rubber caps on the points. I don't want rubber caps on them.

"No," I say as he moves further back into the shop. I follow, realizing he wants to sell me baskets for them.

"No, I don't want to buy anything. Please leave me alone."

I leave. He smiles. I feel as though I've escaped a fox, the dog in Paulo Coelho's book *The Pilgrimage*. I stood up to the fox. I feel proud of myself.

The Camino is working on me, showing me self-protection.

Walking alone for twenty-two kilometers, I see myself on the Camino near animals, villagers, pilgrims from Asia, Italy, Australia, London, people in wheelchairs and using crutches. We are on the garden route of Galicia to beloved Compostela.



October 19, 2019. It's dark leaving Lavacolla, setting out this morning

for the last walk, twelve kilometers on the Camino toward Compostela and St. James's tomb. The rain and the weather match the tears filling my eyes this morning at 7 a.m. on the final stretch. A journey personal and physical, spiritual and emotional awaits me today. I know not what it may bring. I pray to dear James whose memory is kept alive by pilgrims over the centuries.

"Bless me today and all the pilgrims, *Gracias*," I pray.

I walk the last twelve kilometers with pilgrims who like me are walking in pelting rain, drowning in water and mud in soaking wet raingear. Cold to the bone, we enter a chapel near the monument to Pope John Paul and Saint Francis. A little *ermita* (hermitage) four-and-a-half kilometers from the cathedral in Santiago. A woman welcomes us as *peregrino*, stamps our passports Ermita San Marcos de Gozo. She lights a white candle in a red glass. Twinkling with red, like the blood of Christ, I place it at the altar, praying for Frank, my meditation teacher who has had a stroke; Gay, my colleague who is wheelchair-bound and homeless; Mary, a Dominican nun who is dying; and all of us on this road to the field of stars.

I sing, "I walk not into the night. I walk but toward the stars," a song I sang in the Threshold Choir to people dying. I joined the choir after surviving invasive breast cancer. I wonder if

this is the song of my passing. Yes, Compostela, the field of a star, is less than eight kilometers away now.

Outside the rain pours down. I slip in the soggy mud near the fence where pilgrims have threaded holy crosses. My left knee gives way and a new pain deepens the one already there. The pain is exquisite. As the fog deepens, I am less clear. I search the drenched faces of *peregrino* who pass by saying, "*Buen camino*, can I help? Need an arm? A tall branch to use as a crutch?" They melt my heart, and for the moment I find the courage to keep moving toward Santiago de Compostela and St. James.

The Camino tells me of the love of strangers.

My knee aches, my mind jumbles. How will I walk the remaining five kilometers with pain searing through my knee? Peter is ahead now. Have I a sprain, a break, a tear, or a fracture? How can I manage to walk into Santiago, my goal now for two weeks?

"Walk, walk, a step at a time," comes a voice inside.

Why does my wise self not tell me to stop to ask for help or to find a place to get a taxi to ride into the plaza at the Cathedral. Instead, I hear again, "Take one step at a time. Lightly, hold the pain."

The wind and the rain pelt and my poncho is soaked, beaded with little diamonds of water reminding me of the jewel on my finger, a diamond my



image info

maternal grandmother wore on her finger. The ring is old, born of another time when Grandmother received it as a young girl from her lover, my grandfather. The ring passed down to me at her death in 1963, even before I was married. I wear it next to my wedding ring, a plain silver band that cost eleven dollars in 1965. I run my finger along its side, twirling the band as if to awaken it. It does not turn easily around a swollen finger. I hardly notice the pain in my knee as I twirl the band, thinking how Grandmother Josephina made a Camino too. Didn't she cross the Atlantic from Italy to come to America, bringing her new husband, her sister to the new world? Hadn't she suffered in the winds and rains of the sea, traveling day upon day, sunrise upon sunset, always with the raw elements thrashing the boat as she carried the first child in her womb.

Thank you, Grandma, for getting me through this hard patch. The Camino gives me a moment of remembrance.

I need to stop to sit, to give my knee a rest. The rain has lessened, and the stream beside the path twinkles over rocks. Galicia, the Garden of Eden. I don't want to think, only to listen, to feel the moisture from the sky dripping from the trees and down my face. I stretch my head and neck up and open my mouth to sip the tears from the trees. Raindrops commiserate with me, crying cool tears down my face and onto my awaiting tongue. The taste of

the pine-filled drops meld with my tears, refreshing me. Another one soothes the acrid taste that has accumulated. Why? I ask the Camino.

How will I make it? What? When? The questions begin to fall away so that only the cool, vivifying drops of rainwater console me. My mouth, my tongue become the container for the teardrops from the sky. With tongue hanging like a puppy, I sit for time unmeasurable.

Yes, this is like sitting on the cushion fourteen years ago when I held all that seemed so bleak; when I didn't know my prognosis; when I traipsed around in the cold outside of Kinko waiting for the Tibetan healer to read my pulses; when I sat in the radiation cathedral five days a week for six weeks to heal my invasive breast cancer, not knowing that fifteen years later I would be walking the Camino de Santiago. It was like that then. I'd sat and sat and walked in meditation, freeing my mind so that I could take it a step at a time. Was life repeating itself? A new round?

*The Camino is working on me,
telling me to surrender, to allow.*

Here She is again, guiding me to sit and gather the strength I need. I'm alone and not alone. I'm sitting with the women in the radiation cathedral, remembering that we could handle what lay ahead. Yes, then too, we were

immersed in a kind of surrender. A space where answers and questions and rationality simmered on a low horizon. I close my eyes, sure I'm among the others, though I see no one in this forest of Galicia.

I breathe, inhaling the scent of woodland and water, hearing a temple bell like in the monastic retreat where I visited Father Fish. He'd called the Camino "She," said "She" would speak to me. But he didn't tell me I would be surrounded in the garden of Galicia by woodland spirits.

Sitting on the pillow of earth among all those who had walked the Camino for centuries, all those who had sacrificed and prevailed, I knew in my bones that they, too, had surrendered. Some had walked over five hundred miles over many months.

"*Senora, Senora.*" I hear a gentle male voice. Am I in a trance? Then, "*Buen Camino, Senora.*" I look up and standing beside me is a man, a shepherd, with his calf in his arms. "*Buen Camino,*" he says, looking into my eyes, a walking stick in his hand, a ragged shirt on his back. He carries a baby lamb with its front legs draped over his forearm like bracelets.

I wonder if he's one of the herders, returning home with a lamb. I'd seen many such shepherds along the way in the fields. But then perhaps I'm dreaming, trancing again. He reaches out his hand. "The path," he says, looking over his right shoulder. "You

have veered off." He bends down and offers his hand. I take it, roughened by his toil like Pa Tony's. The lamb stretches forward, licking my dried tears. The man says, "Follow me."

I stand up and follow him over a small stream to the path, where some other pilgrims like me walk slowly—some alone, some in pairs, some in groups— all going to Santiago. The shepherd retreats across the stream toward his destination.

Soon I see Pete, who has been behind and/or beside me all the way; he, too, walks slowly with a limp. We smile and walk the last kilometer hand in hand into Santiago, two souls on a path. The Camino has blessed us.

A pilgrim walks beside us, saying, "*Buen Camino.*" I look at him. His eyes are wide and fluid. He looks bedraggled too.

He says, "Less than one kilometer. *Buen camino.*" He pulls ahead.

"Wait!" I call. "Why are you walking?" I ask before he's out of sight.

"To cross over the habitual patterns of life, to shake it up a bit," he says. "And you?"

"The Camino can be a blessing and a bitch," I say.

"Blessings. *Buen Camino,*" the pilgrim says, pulling ahead. "Huh?"

"To accept my fragility," I say. "Only works when we surrender and trust." He nods.

I no longer feel the pain of fracture on my left tibia as I enter Compostela.

I am a pilgrim on the road, praying for my safety and that of others.



image info

I walk the last distance into Santiago in joy.

“Did I meet my intention?” I ask Her.

“You did,” She says. “Vulnerability allows providence.”

“Is that like grace?”

“Hum,” She says. “Remember, you walk not alone.”

“Yes,” I nod. “I walk but toward the star.”

The Camino is working on me, talking to me of fields of love and tears.

The Camino is working on me, telling me we are not separate.

The Camino is working on me, telling me of the sacredness of nature.

“Oh, to be human, needing to be held—and to hold things,” I remember my friend River’s golden line.

“Oh, to be wild and let the river go free,” I say as the doctor places hands on my fractured tibia.

“Oh, to be wild, yet needing to be tamed too,” the doctor replies.

“You’ll feel a slight rush before the calm,” he says.

“I know, it’s always like that,” I say.

In the airplane home, I squeeze my fingers into themselves, feeling the little nubs of aged bones. I close my eyes and inhale deeply, holding

my own fingers within the palm of my hand—a little womb inside me bursting forth. I can hold on a bit longer.

The doctor’s eyes blue and twinkly, like the stars. The bluest stars asking me to take care of myself.

I can hold my hand now, the womb of myself, a small opening into my being. I’m still walking the Camino toward the windmills where Don Quixote smiles. He’s calling me his *Dulcinea*, saying, “Walk toward the spinning wheels in the sky, open your hands and welcome the wind upon your face. Come. You are here with the enchantment of being. One step then another.”

I open my eyes, take a deep breath, feel my feet walking the Camino de Santiago, where pilgrims walked for centuries. A woman walks slowly ahead of me, placing one foot at a time. I catch up with her and walk beside her, smelling the freshness of her robe, the talc she uses. I nestle against the woman’s breast and look into deep brown eyes like mine. We smile at each other. She says, “It’s you, my dear granddaughter. I’m with you.”

I kneel down on the Camino and hug my knees—still knobby caps on fully formed muscular legs—the ones I used to hang on to as a child.

Oh, to be human and need to hold things. ✖

IN OUR VEINS

We woke, in those days, before the sun
to whispers and the slide of bedding
zips and clicks
the cadences of women
stalking the tail of night. Both of us
peering into the dark
that with every footstep grew lighter
until our shadows
loomed across fields of dry
and sentinel September
sunflowers. You,
transfixed
by wizened faces marching
across the dawn expanse.
So many miles ahead of us
and there, in the palm of each hill
a refuge.

It is the refuge of friendship
sheltering us now
the shared memory of weight
on our backs, water in our mouths,
blisters in our socks and still
joy in our step.

Now we carry olive
grove and fig tree, travelers
passed and greeted, the sweet
juice of the *Rioja*
in our veins, almonds
in our pockets, remembrance
of embrace and smile, togetherness
of strangers, of us

light as wind
under the wings of a kite.

—Rebecca Ring

A DREAM OF PASSING FIRE

The first night, before we crossed
the Pyrenees on the French side
I dreamed I was passing fire to others
as we crouched in the shadow
of a huge red rock

We were all there, and we were passing
fire. Bowls of fire. In clay pots.
Nothing could be seen but the flicker
of light on rock

This was not a relic of Atapuerca
where fragments of ancient humans
had been found among stones.
This was different

This was the way it feels to be alone—yet not be

This was a small stringed song
in a courtyard at dusk. Chorizo
and fried egg on warm bread.
An open-sided barn, a man and his son
sorting almonds in an old tin tub.
Fresh figs, hidden
until someone showed us
how to look behind the leaves.
Grapes full to bursting
and legions of sunflowers past flowering
heavy brown heads
bowing together
dying together

no gold left in their faces
but when we looked

all we saw was gold

—Katherine January

These two poems are from
Katherine January and Rebecca
Ring's book, *Dreams of Passing Fire*
Companion Poems from the Camino



Peder Severin Krøyer, *Summer Evening at Skagen Beach*, 1899.



Before the Storm

PAUL HILDING

THE DOGS AND I DON'T GO AS far as we used to. Instead of the half-mile jog to the mailboxes at the top of the road or sometimes to the river another half mile beyond, it is all Cabo can do to limp alongside me for a few hundred yards. Loma stays close in the alfalfa field, chasing geese and checking scents left by deer and other late-night visitors. But he's started to slow down as well, his hips stiff with arthritis.

Our unhurried pace allows me to study the weeds along the roadside. As fall becomes winter, I watch the goldenrod fade to cream and then gray. The same cold weather alchemy transforms the grasses and mulleins to muted shades of hazel, rust, and beige. Scattered rows of curly docks have turned entirely brown, as if cast in bronze from stems to leaf tips.

It is easy to succumb to melancholy during this season. Surrounded by so much death, it is natural to think of the short time we have left with our aging dogs. And with each other. But there is also beauty in this stark landscape that draws me out each day into the December chill. And something more—a meaning, perhaps, to be worked out.

Now, as dusk approaches, I pause at a desiccated stand of wild sunflowers. Their straw-colored skeletons remind me of candelabras, dried blossom heads tipped upward toward the slate gray sky. Storm clouds float low in the western sky like silent battleships, crests tinged blood-orange by the last light of the winter sun.

Cabo takes advantage of the break to sit heavily at my feet, seeming to admire the scene as much as I do. After a long moment, he slides to the ground, sighing in a way that seems almost human. The horizon darkens and the battleships sail closer through the evening gloom.

Eventually, Loma sniffs the approaching storm and looks over from the stubble-strewn field. The lifeless stalks shiver in the rising wind. I whistle softly and pull my jacket tight against the cold. For today, it seems, this is the right place to turn around.

The dogs wag their tails as we start the short walk back to the warmth of the cabin. And I feel grateful as well. For these moments before the storm. For all of these moments, every day. Before all of the storms. ✖

image info

Spring Hike

In cool April air and peek-a-boo
sunlight we walk the brown trail,
yellow trail, red trail, looking
under tulip poplars for morels,
and along stream edges for wild ramps.

Too early in the season,
so we settle for anything green
against the winter's refuse.
The spotted leaves and tiny orchid flower
of the trout lily. Burly skunk cabbage,
that bully of the low muddy spots.

The may apple prefers a higher drier place,
with its self-satisfied community
of perfect little cloven-leafed
beach umbrellas. Here and there
a jack-in-the-pulpit stands its ground
among them.

New growth is pushing the sweet gum's
spiky seed balls off the branches.
Overhead, a Carolina wren calls hopefully
for a mate. We listen to that, and to
our aching knees, telling us when
to turn back for home.

— Brian T. Duncan

WALKING WITH A PURPOSE

Protest March



Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. Photograph by Warren K. Leffler.

Black Lives Matter Protest in Washington, D.C., May 31, 2020

image info

View of the Crowd, Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C.,
August 28, 1963. Photograph by Warren K. Leffler.





A History of Walking

JANE SALISBURY

I THINK OF THE MANY WALKS there are in a lifetime, walking to school, walking home, walking through rainstorms and snowstorms, walking in the occasional desert, walking when the bus has left, walking up the aisle and back down it, walking away for the last time. Walking alone and walking together.

In an old photo, I walk together with my grandfather Sol. I am so small that the shirt I wear is made from two bandanas sewn back to back. My hair is black, thick, cut in a Dutch boy. Sol is wearing a short-sleeved cotton shirt with a bolo tie, his white hair swept straight back. Hand in hand, we walk along a road in the Sierra where he and my grandmother Ella lived then, tall old pines behind us. A very early memory, it has nothing in it but my grandfather and me, the fragrant heat of the trees and the walk, and his voice—I remember it still—calm and even, as he told me about the trees and about the round hollows in the limestone made by the [Miwok](#) people, grinding acorns with stones for food.

I was learning that a walk does not need a task, a destination. Walking is just a way of being together, a way to know each other. I would guess, with no data at all, that human beings are the only animals who walk just to walk, with the possible exception of the crows who show off up and down my front walk. The Spanish take the *paseo* to stroll through the streets together and see who is with whom and what they are wearing and what is new. Old couples still walk around the block at twilight as my parents did. We hike down rivers and up mountains, watching ahead for the next bend in the trail. When the pandemic began, this whole city turned out to walk and walk and walk, walking away their fears and their cabin fever.



Nearly thirty years ago, I took my first few steps as a mother, walking a baby girl in my arms away from the infant room of the Changsha First Social Welfare Institute where she had spent most of her first nine months of life.



The woman who handed her to me did so gently, quietly, tears in her eyes, indicating with a little flip of her hand the curls at the nape of her neck, something special she wanted to show me about this baby who was newly mine. This kind woman knew not to scare the baby or make a fuss and so played peekaboo with her as I carried her away, my baby facing her over my shoulder. My little one, soon to be renamed Clare, was oblivious to the import of our short walk to the bus. I was as overwhelmed as I had ever been, but contained myself because I knew, like her caretaker, that a calm voice and a smile were what she needed for the long journey ahead, beginning with that first walk together away from the orphanage and thence from China.

I had learned her name, then

Li Zhuo, only the day before and possessed just one inch-square photo of her serious little face glued to one sheet of scant information: her weight, her length, her “development”—poor—and her birthdate. In the first visit to meet her, the day before I returned to claim her, I clutched the photo in my hand and looked into each small round face in the baby room—simply furnished, two babies to a crib, a little coal stove in the middle of the room. Here was one asleep in the corner of her crib, here another sitting on the floor staring at us giant strangers, one tear rolling down her red cheek, one—was she mine?—rocking her little bamboo walking frame around the room with all the confidence of an empress. Make way, she seemed to mean, at nine months old, make way; I have places to go!

image info

I surveyed the room again, watching the faces of these baby girls once more, one so tiny she must have just arrived, perhaps “brought to the police station” or “found in the railway station,” as nearly all documents of such cases read. I looked at each one so hard that I still remember their faces now, all these years later. I thought she could be this little one asleep. She could be this one on the floor, so fearful and alone. Maybe that robust little girl trying to pry the bars of her crib apart.

But it was none of them. It was the baby girl in the bamboo walker, rocking her determined way toward me in her padded red cotton jacket, knowing before I did, that I was hers and she was mine. Li Zhuo was Clare Zhuo was Li Zhuo.



Some people know how to hold a baby instinctively; others look as though they have just been handed a live weasel when a baby is placed in their arms. I thought I was pretty good at it. I had always loved my dolls and my friends’ babies and my little niece and nephews. But it had not crossed my mind that most babies start out approximately the weight of a leg of lamb. My Li Zhuo weighed eighteen pounds, the size of a roast turkey for fifteen. Even though she was the kind of spider monkey baby who is springy and hangs on, she was not the starter baby with which most mothers begin. And I was the only one carrying her; she had no father then, and her grandparents were not nearby to hold her while I made dinner or took a bath or even sat down.



So I had to learn how to walk with her, how to switch arms and shift weight and bend my knees to pick her up and put her down. Tendonitis and back spasms came with carrying her, but I could not resist picking her up and walking around with her. I was besotted, I suppose. I carried her everywhere, like a child with a beloved toy. I carried her in my arms for too many years for my own good, loving too much her arms wound around my neck.

After the carrying years wound down, we walked, and I learned to match my pace to hers. When Clare first learned to walk at fourteen months, we meandered along together, on the beach for that first mouthful of sand, up the block and back, stopping for leaves and cracks in the sidewalk, and around

and around my parents' brick patio under their huge old elm tree. I got used to her running full tilt at me from daycare and then from school, bracing for the impact of her little and then not so little body and the coming home of it every day. I got used to her withdrawal from such demonstrations when she stopped at nine or ten. And then used to it again when she was grown and came home to me from far away, hurling herself at me in airports. By then, Isaac stood at my side, now her devoted father whom I had married when Clare was eleven.



In the middle of my life, Clare left home, as children do, and my mother and father died. My parents had been my always, my friends, our champions

when it was just Clare and me. It never failed to surprise me that my parents had grown old, but I learned to slow to their steps as they aged, walking my mother ten steps from her reading chair to the kitchen table, taking my father's arm when I picked him up for Mass every Sunday. After they died in their mideighties, I missed the need to offer my hand or my arm walking with them. I grieved for them. I sank. I felt that I could not live when my father died three years after my mother.

I cannot remember how I learned that I could walk away from the black dog of depression and endless mourning. But I started to walk, fast, every morning, to pound it out on the pavement at dawn, to walk my body and walk my mind, letting the sentences and faces and songs wander around in my brain until something was ironed

out or soothed or lit on fire. I thought about my cheerful father, who alone among the twenty or so lawyers in our small town, had ridden his bike to his office almost every fair day, downhill to work and back up for dinner, in his summer suit. I thought about my cerebral and loving mother, who only let go of living when she could no longer read or concentrate on our faces. I met coyotes and wanderers and raccoons. I watched the gardens and the river and the silver windows downtown when the sun hit them. I told myself my own story as I walked and walked and walked, wondering at how my life had written itself.



Little Isaac, my big baby grandson, his grandfather's namesake, struts into the world with the importance of



a new walker, belly sticking straight out, an object in each hand for ballast (two empty seltzer cans favored above all others), and his eye on something ahead—the dog, a rock, a rose petal on the sidewalk—that he must first pick up, an exercise in concentration, and then examine closely. At the Lake of the Woods, I carry him down to the shore to see it for his first look, the water blue and flat in the sun, a mile across, the mountain at the far end, our longtime friend, some spring snow left on its peak. He is stunned and stares and stares. We sit on the bench for a while, taking it in.

Starting back up to the cabin, I put him down to see if he will walk with me. Usually a two-minute walk for me alone takes fifteen minutes for the two of us. He holds my hand as we climb over roots and scuff

our sandals in the summer dust. He stops to reach the fir needles on a low branch, just one finger touching one needle. He picks up a rock and hands it to me. And then, so solemn, he hands me a very small pine cone. A woolly bear caterpillar comes across our path, and he stops as if a gate has been slammed down, waiting as it inches its bright and prickly body to the other side of the two-foot-wide trail. I feel that I could walk beside him, my serious little one, all the afternoons left to me, as we examine the world, two by two.



Now I am getting old. I just have myself to carry in the mornings, the early e-bikers and running men whizzing by me in the semidark. I like my own pace. I am still happiest in my

body when I am walking very early in the morning, on one of several routes that takes me out into open skies, out to the bluff over the Willamette. But I am daunted every morning, and I am afraid. I think, “I won’t walk, I cannot walk, not this morning.” Daily, I doubt that I can walk my three miles because my lungs are troublesome and breathing does not come easily. As I make tea and look out the window into the shadowy street, I write a drama in my mind: if I cannot find enough air, I’ll founder out there in the half light and fall down on the sidewalk, and no one will see me because it is much too early even in this big city, and Isaac will find me gasping and blue, or maybe already dead, when he takes his walk later.

But while I am spinning this terrible story and worrying about my poor lungs,

I am assessing the weather—raincoat, yes or no, sweatshirt, yes or no, regular cap or waterproof one? I am tying my shoelaces tightly, finding my phone and earbuds, and thinking about what to listen to—a book or music or some gripping podcast. Or maybe I will just listen to my own thoughts, reviewing history, thinking of the walks in the Sierra, through the streets of Changsha, on the trail to the lake, and the sober and dear face of little Isaac and our slow walks to the corner and back, he stopping at a breeze, a cat, a nasturtium.

I ready myself for my hour, my miles. I zip the phone and my inhaler into my pocket, set the timer, step out the door, press play, choose north or south, and go out to meet my certain death as happy as the baby crows in the neighbor’s tree, squawking at the thrill of being newly alive. ※



Ludwig Richter, *Bridal Procession in a Spring Landscape*, 1847.



Circle of Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Wedding Procession in a Landscape* (detail).



Silvestro Lega, *The Newlyweds*, 1866.



Carl Moser, *Breton Wedding*, 1906.

Image info

Funeral Processions

For all of recorded history, processions have been part of festivities, observances, and rituals. Processions feature the orderly movement of people from one place to another, often elevating and celebrating the transition from one place to another or one stage of life to another. A procession is a participatory event, which differentiates it from a parade.



Joseph Bayer, *Holy Blood Procession*, 1849.



Martin van Meytens, *Entry of the Bride*, 1763.



Antoon Sallaert, *The Ommegang of Brussels on 31 May 1615*, early 17th century.



Auguste Roquemont, *Procession*, 1832-39.

Funeral Processions



Frank Bramley, *For of Such Is the Kingdom of Heaven*, 1891.



Ivan Ivanovich Reimers, *Funeral in Italy*, 1861.



Henri-Édouard Truchot, *Funeral Procession of Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of Charles VI of France*. c. 1822.



Gustaaf Sorel, *The Poor Man's Cart*.



SUNFLOWERS

the sunflowers have died
flattened by the cool chill
of misty gray November
this is a field of ephemeral
beauty—those fleeting hours
we once walked hand in hand
chasing after sunlight after
shadows invaded

I walk alone—lonely breaths
in bitter wind, wind-burnt
cheeks and a heaviness I cannot
shake: a walk that never ends

— Erin Jamieson



“We don’t think enough about staircases. Nothing is more beautiful in old houses than the staircases. Nothing is uglier, colder, more hostile, meaner in today’s apartment buildings. We should learn to live more on staircases. But how?”

—Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*

Stairs and Steps: Walking above the Earth

DAVID MACAULEY

Most forms of movement on foot occur across horizontal surfaces. We stroll, amble, promenade, or saunter on beaches, along sidewalks, down city streets, in parks, and through forests. Stairs are noteworthy in that they depart from this terrestrial axis and plane of relative stability. They move upwards or downwards rather than along the earth’s proliferating contours. In so doing, they offer walkers accompanying rewards, challenges, and risks.

In leaving the sure-footed realm of the familiar, stairs engage both our bodies and minds. They contest our presumed and usually reliable sense of physical balance, threatening to send us tumbling suddenly to the bottom of a stairwell. They disrupt our walking rhythm and pace but also teach us about stamina, leg

strength, and willpower. They generate anticipation of—or longing for—arrival and rest. We might await a panoramic view at the top of a long set of steps or appreciate the chance to relax on a bench after a protracted journey upwards. I experienced this elation recently after walking up the steps on Corcovado Mountain in Rio de Janeiro to reach the Art Deco statue [Cristo Redentor](#) and to survey the beautiful city and its curvilinear beaches.

Like mountain climbing, walking up a “flight” of stairs can become about psychological ascension or spiritual aspiration, even transcendence. Walking up as waking up. At times, it may encourage a minor kind of personal heroism defined by grit and persistence—akin to social climbing—perhaps through an imagined enterprise of

overcoming weightedness, of temporarily slaying gravity's pull.

Ambulation assumes many forms, from dog walks to mall walks, from aesthetic flânerie and circuit walks in a garden or museum to meditative [kinhin](#) and pilgrimages. Stairs also come in many guises and styles. Sometimes a staircase seems almost to be suspended magically in the air. Beautiful staircases often suggest theatricality, even grandeur in their audacity to defy boundedness to the earth. They might even become an evolving stage or a form of interactive sculpture. Spiral staircases may resemble the double helix of DNA strands. Erecting an impressive set of stairs depends upon tethering together geometry, design skills, and artistry.

Stairs become places, too, including spots to rest, sites to stack books, or settings for a group photo. The steps outside an apartment building are gathering grounds for conversations, opportunities to smoke a cigarette, sip a beverage, or enjoy a slice of watermelon—respite from work to watch the world walk leisurely by. In this regard, steps and stairs serve as affordances for pedestrians and other wayfarers, stationary objects that satisfy a variety of changing human needs as well as an invitation to nonhuman beings (dogs, birds, squirrels) to put them equally to use. Stairs that lead up to or down from a domicile also create a conduit and

bridge between the anonymity of the street and the intimacy of the home.

Although this point is frequently overlooked, a great amount of walking occurs within buildings or community infrastructure, including bridges, tunnels, parking lots, airports, and stadiums. In such instances, we are often quite literally inside of artifacts and technology. In these and other spaces, we pass people on the stairs as we do when we saunter on the sidewalk. When I lived in Astoria, Queens, I had to regularly pass a married couple who lived directly below my apartment and with whom I once had a serious disagreement. During the altercation, one of them threw a punch at my head from behind a barely open door. Walking past the pair and their two dogs on the stairs subsequently grew to be an extremely uncomfortable process, a tense tango of sidestepping another confrontation.

Walking the stairs has entered our cultural language. The expression, *l'esprit de l'escalier*—literally “spirit of the staircase” or “staircase wit”—describes a situation in which one thinks of an insightful or witty remark that one could have shared at a party or an event, though only after departing the social occasion—while descending the steps, for example. French philosopher Denis Diderot coined the apt phrase in *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*. Characterizing an incident when he was insulted, Diderot

observed: “A sensitive man, such as myself, overwhelmed by the argument leveled against him, becomes confused and doesn't come to himself again until at the bottom of the stairs.”

Literature and social history contain many other interesting references to staircases. One often approaches religious shrines through a pilgrimage and long series of stairs. [Mount Girnar](#), a sacred site for Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain devotees in the Indian state of Gujarat, for example, is accessed on foot by walking up nearly 10,000 steps in rugged terrain. Cinderella loses her glass slipper hurrying down the staircase. Julius Caesar was assassinated on steps. Films such as *Rocky*, *The Exorcist*, and *The Joker* feature memorable stair scenes. And, of course, Led Zeppelin's “Stairway to Heaven” is played widely around the world. In such cases, we come to see both the precarity and danger of stairs as well as their beauty and allure.

A rich vocabulary of terms can apply to well-crafted and ornate staircases. With handrails, there are finials, volutes, goosenecks, newels, balusters, rosettes, and turnouts. Elsewhere on the steps, we might find spandrels, landings, platforms, aprons, and balconies. The names for helical or “spiral” stairs alone are legion: circular, winding, elliptical, oval, turret, turnpike, corkscrew, belfry, and cochlea among them.

Stairs have become more direct objects of aesthetic enjoyment and recreation as well. There are cascading steps with serpentine turns like the meandering bends in a river. Stairs can nearly metamorphose visually into mazes or labyrinths. In some cities, they have been creatively transformed into a black and white piano keyboard that can be sounded by one's descending or ascending feet prior to entering a subway station or trolley terminal. Children in particular love to play upon them, drumming out sounds the way they might strike a xylophone and improvising melodies as they walk up and down.

M. C. Escher's lithographs play with images of stairs, too, offering a logic-bending perspective on bodily movement that undermines our entrenched perceptions. “[Ascending and Descending](#)” depicts a never-ending staircase upon which walk two rows of identically dressed men. “[Relativity](#)” shows seven sets of stairs where the normal rules of gravity fail to function, and “[House of Stairs](#)” is populated with imaginary creatures who move up and down a tall structure filled with interwoven staircases.

Marcel Duchamp's cubist and futurist painting “[Nude Descending a Staircase](#)” presents a figure composed of cylindrical and conical shapes walking rhythmically down a set of stairs, revealing a hybridized organic and mechanical body in motion through

a succession of superimposed images. Generating a scandal for the art world in 1912—"an explosion in a shingle factory," as one critic put it—the picture invites comparison with Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotography, especially "[Woman Walking Downstairs](#)" (1887). X. J. Kennedy's ekphrastic poem of the same name as Duchamp's painting comments delightfully upon this image. It describes a "One-woman waterfall" who descends the stairs in "snowing flesh," stopping momentarily on the final step to gather "her motions into shape."

Staircases, of course, have existed for many centuries and the earliest ones were solely functional in orientation. Steps cut from tree trunks helped travelers navigate uneven terrain. The Egyptians and Mayans built stairs to ascend pyramids, and in the Middle Ages they were used for military purposes, with spiral staircases constructed in castles. While prototypes have been found dating back to 6,000 BCE, the Roman architect Vitruvius devised the initial set of influential rules for their design.

The etymology of the word "stair" connects us in European languages to "path" (German), "walk" (Welsh), and "scaffold" (Dutch). As the pre-Socratic thinker Heraclitus points out, "The way up and the way down are one and the same," and when we apply this ancient insight to the staircase, we can grasp the circularity at work in

walking rising and falling steps. The philosopher Gaston Bachelard also perceived a related form of repetition when he noted how the first stairway we encounter in youth typically inscribes within us—through our bodily habits over time—a deep and recurring sense of the home, which is divided spatially and psychically by the vertical poles of cellar (darkness and anxiety) and attic (light and reason).

My own Victorian home in Philadelphia has multiple sets of stairs that rise respectively from the basement to the fourth floor, from the sidewalk to the front porch, and from the garden to the back deck. Each flight has a distinct texture and feel, and it seems to voice sounds that speak to the deeper history of the inhabited structure. As I walk through the house, the wooden steps beneath me tend to sink ever-so-slightly and often to creak or groan plaintively, as does my body increasingly as it ages.

When I stroll the streets of other cities, I keep an eye and ear out for interesting or unusual staircases. I once stayed in an Amsterdam apartment that possessed stairs that rose almost straight up from the door at street level. Ascending them was like mounting and climbing a tall ladder to reach the top floor. Older houses in the city were apparently constructed very narrowly and quite high to avoid taxes that were levied according to architectural width rather than height.

For the elderly and people with physical vulnerabilities, stairs can present impediments to safe walking. "All things can be deadly to us, even the things made to serve us . . . and stairs can kill us, if we do not walk circumspectly," notes Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées*. Laurel and Hardy's iconic film *The Music Box* makes this point in a slightly different way, as it depicts the two men trying to move a piano up a lengthy set of stairs, only to witness it rolling dangerously back down numerous times.

A *New Yorker* cartoon provides a contemporary humorous twist to this kind of situation in showing several people in gym clothes entering an elevator upon which hangs a sign that reads TO THE STAIRMASTER. In this regard, exercise and the potential romance of walking the stairs are both lost to us when technological alternatives such as escalators, moving walkways, ramps, and lifts are selected or foisted upon us.

In a world where walking is progressively displaced by automobiles and other mechanical or motorized choices, we should arguably appreciate the opportunities to keep our feet securely to the ground, even when we have the chance to discover forms of flight on the stairs. In this way, we might gain a valuable view from above about the necessity—as Nietzsche beseeches us—of remaining "faithful to the earth." ✱

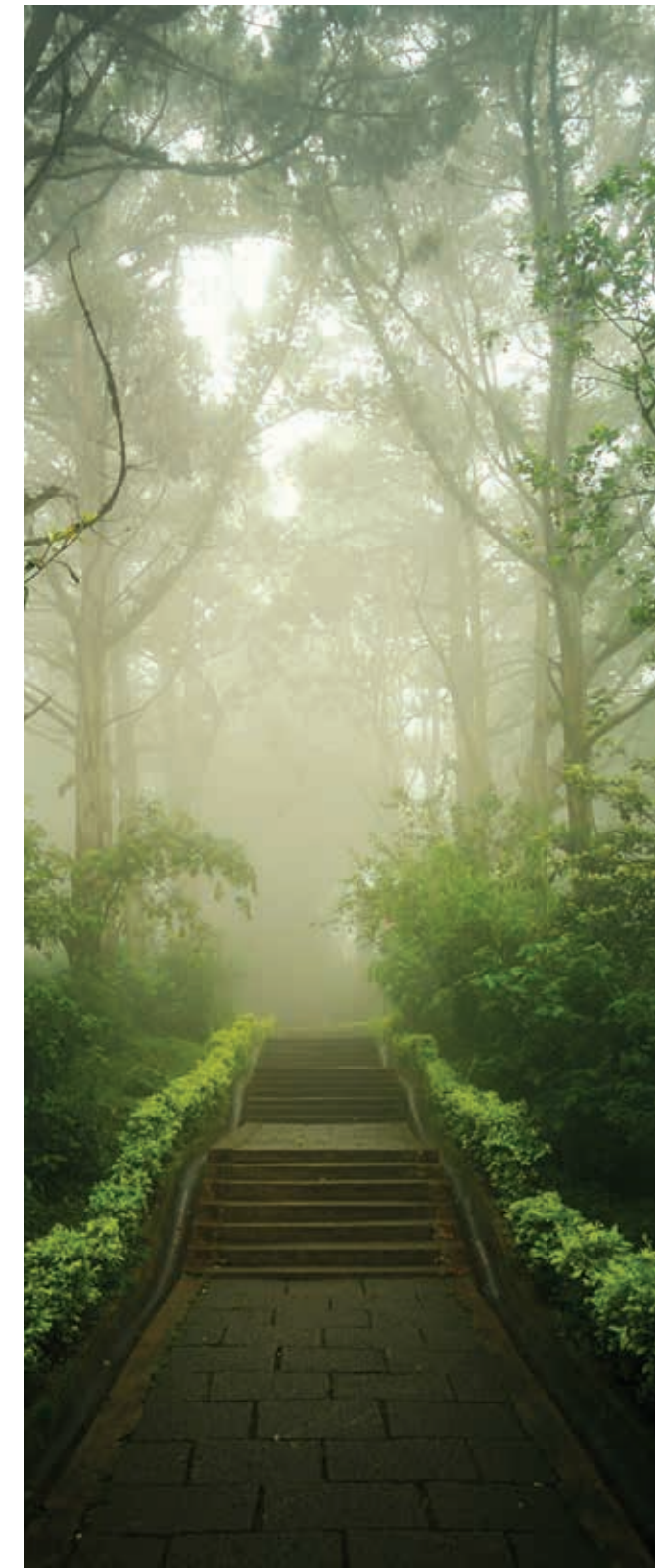


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No Flashlight

AMY BOYD

WHEN YOU GO OUT INTO THE woods, don't take a flashlight. Walk down the trail immersed in darkness, letting it wrap around you like a softly woven shawl. Turning on a light separates you from the universe of nocturnal dwelling. Resist the urge to stay with the familiar. You need no passport; walk on without knowing the language of this world that is not yours. Trust that foreign does not mean hostile; trust that your body knows more than you understand and can guide you.

Let your feet lead the way, allowing your toes to navigate, teaching the soles of your feet to feel twig and rock, root and acorn even through the bottoms of your shoes. What is the difference in the way your foot slides over sycamore leaf and limestone, oak duff and clay? Notice the brush of vine along your ankles; you move too fast for its tendrils to grab you, but its cells still know you have been there and respond by curling long after you have passed. Each time you approach the trail's edge, branches nudge you and you stay the course.

Walk more slowly if you need to. Take the time needed to move in confidence and respect. Give your body the chance to absorb what is around you, the time for your senses to reach out and back in, to take on a life of their own. Become meditative but alert to the external, not internal. This walk will take all your attention;

let go of the day's events and bright colors.

As your pupils open wide to receive all the subtle light, let your eyesight reach out into the treespace around you, learning the difference between branch and air, between gray and gray and gray and gray. If the trail is wide, look up and see the wobbly line of sky above your path, stars sending their vectors of light through space to you. They are the same stars wherever you are in the hemisphere, signs of familiarity even in this unknown place.

Let your ears notice the spaces between quiet and silent, between foot on trail and foot straying into underbrush. What is the difference between the shuffle of sand and the scuttle of pine needle? The forest listens to you too. A snake feels the vibrations of your boots on the dirt and stays low

and still. A mouse hears the crack of twig and ducks under a slab of bark.

You are not alone; katydids remind you that they have you surrounded, and you can claim them as your companions. You may hear animals rustling in the leaves, but you don't know the language to distinguish skink from grasshopper, vole from newt. Trust that though unfamiliar, these creatures are not hostile; they are your community, respect given, honor received. Their noises remind you that you share the planet and are a visitor in their world.

That musky smell there along the trail—pause and consider. Coyote or skunk, weasel or rutting buck? If this were your world, you would know the difference as certainly as your nose distinguishes cinnamon from coffee. Instead, nod in acknowledgment to the unknown and breathe it in,

letting your cells wake up to its presence. As you approach the low places near creek or pond, your nose goes on alert, smelling the transition from moist to moister, wet to wetter. The scents of fish and duckweed, decay and fecundity creep up to your place of slight elevation.

You reach a place where so little light is coming through that you can see nothing useful for navigation. Close your eyes, then, and trust the rest of your body to guide you. Let ears and skin, toes and nose become even more awake. They will respond by expanding gratefully, stretching their underused superpowers like the wings of a butterfly emerging from chrysalis, slowly filling and taking on their potential.

Sometimes you will stumble. Years of evolution as a diurnal organism have not thoroughly prepared you

for life in darkness. You lack the whiskers that expand the sensory edges of nocturnal mammals and the retinas of owls that scoop up even the least photons of light. Let yourself stumble sometimes or wander off the trail slightly before retracing your steps. Perhaps your heart will race, ancient fear of the hunted and lost taking hold. Don't let the fear own you; accept the humility of the foreigner in a strange land. Pick yourself up, listen to the assurance of the katydids, wrap yourself in the dark moist air and continue on.

Take a child with you next time. Show her that flashlights don't belong on night walks in the woods. Open her world to the nighttime; guide her into a way without fear or mistrust. Teach her that trusting her body will give her strength and agility beyond her imagination. ✖



image info

Walking Sweet Dee

AD WEST

LIKE MOST SUBURBANITES, I live in close proximity to many other white people. But I don't know them. Partly because I'm ashamed of where I live, ashamed to be part of a history of white flight into suburbia. Mostly though, I don't know anyone because I'm a terrible neighbor. I've spent most of my time inside with the curtains tightly closed, jumping behind them (literally) to hide when the doorbell rings. I did this long before the CDC suggested sheltering in place might be the safest choice. I'm a trendsetter.

My therapist doesn't seem to understand this. She keeps mispronouncing "trendsetter," saying something that sounds more like "mild agoraphobia" when I tell her how I become overwhelmed in grocery stores by the lights, sounds, and people until I want to run out crying. The panic attacks started in 2020. My therapist

and I have discussed the many reasons I may be avoiding the outside world—other than a worldwide global pandemic threatening to kill us all, as if that isn't enough. I was fat-shamed as a kid, and my mom used to force me to go on painfully long bike rides during which people would shout at us from their car windows. Plus multiple sclerosis messes with my senses, making noisy settings and fluorescent lights difficult to handle for long. Whatever the cause, I stopped going out unless it's absolutely necessary.

I don't like that some small seed of fear found its way into my belly and planted itself, shot its poisonous roots into my spinal cord where it merged with the nerves that branch out throughout my body, immobilizing me, keeping me from being the person I want to be. There are many things I want to change about the way I'm using this life and this frail body: how much I exercise,

what foods I eat, the number of words I write daily, the amount of attention I give my partner. But I haven't been sure if change is possible. Can adults really change? Significantly? Certainly not our personalities, which seem to be cemented early in life. But what about our behavior? I've been trying my whole life to be more consistent, less prone to procrastination, more comfortable in my body, more content with where I am. I set New Year's resolutions and I'm excellent at keeping them—for an average of three weeks.

During the shelter-in-place times, I tried watching Ted Talks and reading books about motivation, learning how adults successfully change ingrained behavior. I had some successes but just as many relapses. I needed help. So, like most other middle-class Americans, I sought therapy. After being on multiple waiting lists for months, I finally met someone who wanted to help me help myself, which is how, in an attempt to overcome my trend-setting agoraphobia, I committed to taking my Great Pyrenees, Sweet Dee, on a short walk any day it isn't pouring rain.



I live north of Seattle. Our city is known for how much it rains. Most major cities have an environmental personality. It's always windy in Chicago, foggy in San Francisco, smoggy in Los Angeles, humid in Atlanta, and polluted in New

York. These are carefully perpetuated stereotypes designed to discourage more people from moving into these already overcrowded areas. And there are far too many people here on the land the [Coast Salish](#) people once democratically inhabited. I've lived in other cities where the land to people ratio was significantly higher than it is here. To the gods we must look like ants, crawling out of the hills on either side of Lake Washington, fanning out across the earth.

My therapist suggested that I start by walking in my suburban neighborhood for ten minutes a day. If that went well, add a few more minutes, maybe even walk all the way around the block. I agreed to this "reasonable" plan, thinking I might be able to go weeks without having to leave the house. Sanctioned. Without guilt. Canceled due to rain. After all, it rains constantly in Seattle.

Nope.

January, February, March—gray skies often, full day of rain intermittent to rare.

That's how I find myself, on the penultimate day of March at 4:00 p.m., looking out the front picture window of my three-bedroom bungalow, taking note of the pale blue sky, the cotton-ball clouds, the deepening green of a lawn springing back to life, and the full bloom of our trembling Newport plum. It's time. I hear Sweet Dee start to whine behind me.

We adopted Sweet Dee when she couldn't cut it as a rancher in Texas. At least, that's what I assume happened, although the Great Pyrenees Rescue Society didn't say so specifically. She was six months old and fifty scraggly pounds when her original people sent her away. Maybe it was because she was born with a hearing disorder, undiagnosed by our veterinarian, but when I call her in from the yard, sometimes she can't hear me; sometimes she just continues to go about her business, chatting with strangers passing by on the sidewalk or smelling each blade of grass individually. Maybe we got Dee because her original people realized the love of this world can't be trained out of her; there's too much fun to be had breathing fresh air and chasing birds to worry about keeping track of livestock. Six months old and already fired from her first job, yet somehow, it didn't crush her spirit like a COVID-related job loss seems to have crushed my partner's.

There have been moments in the past three months when I was tempted to give up on our walks. Once, early on—I'd say about three weeks in—when we still only walked a few blocks, I saw a couple coming toward us. Like it always does when I see other people, my heart started thundering and my limbs went numb. I accidentally dropped Dee's leash and she kept walking. I panicked

further, my mind screamed at me: "She might jump! Grab her!" I knew I had to catch Sweet Dee before she reached the woman walking toward us who was carrying a newborn infant against her chest in one of those cotton kangaroo-type pouches. I gave chase, trying to step on the end of the leash where it dragged behind her. Never a good idea. My foot hit the edge of the sidewalk. I lurched forward. Twisted my ankle. Scraped my hands. Screamed, "stupid fucking bitch!" which I'm sure the couple thought was directed at poor Sweet Dee though in reality it was self-recrimination. (I may have to ask my therapist if she thinks I have a mild case of Tourette Syndrome as well.) Thankfully, Dee halted at hearing my distress, and I was able to grab the end of her leash and pull myself up with the grace of a round beetle that landed on its back. If humans still had tails, mine would have been tucked between my legs as I turned and went straight home, managing to make it safely inside before I burst into tears.

I'm not sure why I kept going after all that. In 2019, I would have given up for sure. But now, having lived through a global pandemic, political turmoil, social upheaval, and a midlife crisis, I needed to keep going. I needed to believe change is possible, even if it's small and not nearly consequential enough. Plus,



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now I have a therapist to disappoint, and I didn't want to tell her I couldn't do something as simple as taking a short walk. I considered lying but reasoned that that might undermine the personal growth process just a little. So the walks continued and got longer each day.



Now Sweet Dee expects, even demands, our time together outside. She stands behind me while I check the weather. As a pandemic pup, she knows the signs. If I put on pants, I'm almost certainly leaving the house. But is she invited? I put on socks and she's hopeful. When the tennis shoes get picked up, she starts to whimper, softly at first, but increasing in volume like my cell phone when it rings—impossible to ignore once it reaches top volume. Her fluffy tail thumps against a tan carpet thick with her furry castoffs.

Sometimes I take her older brother, Walter White, first. Just a short walk around the block for the brindled thirteen-year-old beagle / Boston terrier mix. (I tried walking them together a few times but decided I like having arms that are connected to my body.) It's almost more trouble than it's worth to take Walter first because Dee sits in the front window, channeling her wolf ancestors,

howling like she lost her firstborn pup. I've been assured by my partner—who does not walk with us (is agoraphobia contagious?)—that this continues for ten to twenty minutes, until either I get back or he takes her into the backyard for a distraction romp. I worry what happens when we both leave. But then again, that rarely happens these days.

When my socks, sneakers, and headphones have been donned, I finally reach for Dee's pink harness. She dances a jig, making it difficult for me to snap the clasps. I tell her to sit still and laugh as she drops her haunches for half a second then stands right back up. Incurrable! I relish the feel of her soft fur on my cheek as I reach under her now ninety-pound body, searching for the straps. Click! Click! She flaps with delight and lunges toward the front door. I make her wait while I turn on my audio book and attach her leash.

Finally, we're out the door and she's off. She runs ahead, pulling the leash to the full fifteen feet of its length while I holler, "Slow down Fluffmonster Fuller!" She knows the route and feels no need to wait for her slowpoke human. First, she turns left and sniffs the dandelions growing along the six-foot-tall cedar fence that separates our stolen [Tulalip](#) land from that of our neighbors. Dee

pulls me around the corner and barks hello to our neighbor's black lab, Bear; the dogs are still talking through a tall barrier, but this time it's from a different angle, which makes it much more fun. Sometimes all you need is a new angle.

Now we're on the asphalt path that runs through the open field behind our neighborhood. Dee speeds to a full gallop before she halts suddenly in front of a pine limb blown onto the path during a recent storm. Within reason, I like to let Sweet Dee experience her walks the way I wish I faced life—fearless, head on, throwing her face into every tall bunch of sweetgrass just to see what she might find, stopping to inhale the scent of every daffodil, a perma-smile on her lips, grateful for every breath of spring air. Unlike Dee, usually I cower. I procrastinate. I make excuses: I have MS, my partner is depressed, I'm tired, I have a headache. Maybe I'm just exhausted from the effort it takes to be my own worst enemy.

On our walk, Dee feels an obligation to sniff all the fallen pine branches to make sure they smell just as good as yesterday. Her tail wags in confirmation but then gets caught in the bramble of wild blackberry vines— Washington State's most frustrating weed—and she pulls hard to escape their grasp. The vines crawl from this open field and into the yard of every house on 24th Street, where some of us wage war and

others have conceded defeat, letting them grow so tall that six-foot-high wooden fences are devoured in their campaign to conquer the whole earth. They're colonialist vines. Later in the spring, the county will come and mow them all down out here in the field. But they'll be back. They're as tenacious as Sweet Dee.

Dee pulls me from the trail and into the small neighborhood across the field. The houses are newer here but far more cheaply made than the ones on the street where I live. It's one of those hit-and-miss neighborhoods where we pass a split-level house with rotting porch steps and overgrown myrtle bushes hanging over the sidewalk next door to a tidy rancher with a perfectly manicured garden filled with sunny daisies, perfectly trimmed dogwood and holly bushes, and thoughtfully pruned rhododendron trees that line the edge of the yard. I wonder how many countless hours the owners spend pulling and digging, pruning and screeching when a finger gets jabbed by a thorn from the detested barberry bush. Why is this something people even care about when it can't possibly last? Aren't there better things to do with our time? asks the middle-aged, mentally ill, video game addict.

I pull Dee past a mud puddle that wallows in an empty corner between someone's cement driveway and a row of evergreen arborvitae; not only are

those trees ugly as a star-nosed mole, but, like so many other things in the suburbs, they make no sense. We have them, too, blocking our driveway from the neighbors, and I've always wondered why we need a dozen ten-foot-tall evergreen bushes planted a few feet apart forming an impenetrable hedge at the edge of our driveway. I'd rather the monstrosities have been planted where they might be useful—along a freeway to block sound, in a park to provide shade, or in my backyard where, despite the six-foot-high fence flanking its edges, there is no privacy whatsoever. I brush my hair and put on a bra every time I go out to water my vegetable garden because the neighbors on two sides have tall decks that effectively turn our backyard into a fish tank, and I'm the exotic puffer fish. My partner thinks it's weird that I'm bothered by such an insignificant thing like neighbors gawping at my greasy blonde mop in the morning, but he grew up in a neighborhood just like this, whereas I grew up on a farm surrounded by acres of wheat fields, and beyond those were forests of lodgepole pine and aspen. If anyone was looking into our backyard, it was either a deer or a person who'd find themselves at the end of my daddy's shotgun-shaped No Trespassing sign.

Sweet Dee is much more neighborly than I am. On our walk, we find no shortage of potential friends as she tugs me along. I duck my head and mumble-

echo any greeting I hear as I try to walk faster. Often, we cross the street or give others a wide berth when crossing isn't possible. I'm sure Sweet Dee wonders why I never let her stop and say hello. Today, I shorten her leash and pull her past the half-dozen munchkins playing on damp yellow-brown-barely-green lawns or riding bikes and skateboards along the street.

One of the things I look forward to most days is passing the Alpacas that live behind the big house on the corner. Dee stops and we all stare at each other from across the street. I ask her if she wants to go say hello, and she trots across the road where we stand outside the barbed wire while the pack animals gallop toward us. The tall white one is usually the boldest. She comes within a few feet of us, turns her head to the side and looks regal. The smaller black one is timid, so she stays at a distance, but I can tell she's interested. I wish I was brave enough to knock on their owner's door and ask to pet them. I also wish I knew what was in Sweet Dee's mind while she looks at them so fixedly. It seems she knows she was meant to do something with creatures that look like this, and she longs to be the dog she was meant to be. I wave goodbye to the alpacas and pat Dee's back, telling her, "It's okay." Not everyone gets to be what they think they were born to be, only the really lucky ones do, and there just

aren't that many of those. I wanted to get my Ph.D., write a bestselling novel, travel the world. All but one of those dreams requires leaving the house and, you know, having a working body.

On the corner we pass the house with the iron flower boxes I like so much; they're industrial and rusted, the exact opposite of a suburban aesthetic, and I appreciate the owner of the house for her artist's eyes. I also like her Black Lives Matter sign—one of two I pass on this road daily. I shorten Dee's leash as we near the crosswalk on the busiest road. "All clear! Let's go." We cross the street at a noticeably quicker pace then slow down as we pass the house on the other corner where two Chihuahuas screech at us through thick glass windows. I watch them quiver and bounce from their perch on top of a sofa. Sometimes I wonder if Walter has a little Chihuahua in him because he has the same way of vibrating when he wants something—usually a pet or a cuddle, but also food. Dogs, Chihuahuas especially, know what's most important: human contact, long naps, a brisk walk, and a full belly after dinner. I should be more like a Chihuahua.

Now we're in the newest development in our area. The houses are spacious, the lawns perfectly green and edged along the sidewalk, flowerbeds sparse and freshly mulched. I don't stop Dee from

walking through them and kicking the mulch around with her giant paws. This group of a dozen homes has its own private park with a sign that states: No Trespassing. For Residents Only. The vast grassy expanse is large enough to host soccer games and baseball practices, maybe even a small festival, but they won't share with outsiders. The wealthy can't be forced to mingle with common folk. The private park, with its verdant carpeting is Dee's favorite place to stop and empty herself. I'm pretty sure she's a socialist like me.

Once we're past the bougie block, we find ourselves on a street a lot like our own, with older homes built in the seventies and eighties. Dee starts to pull harder as we get closer to the house with her favorite pals—the middle-aged Lab and the Bohemian shepherd puppy. The puppy wants badly to play with Sweet Dee. From the way she nearly pulls my shoulder out of joint as we approach, I understand the feeling is mutual. Every day I have to hold tight as she gets excited and starts to lunge toward the chain-link fence that keeps her friends at bay. The puppy doesn't seem to realize that it's her job to protect her house from strangers, but the older, wiser Labrador does, and when we first met three months ago, he made that message clear. He didn't scare me. I'm never afraid of the animals we pass—only the people. I tell the Lab what a good buddy he is as

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we walk by, and after months of this routine, he doesn't even get up from his sunny patch of earth to so much as growl at us.

Just over a mile into the walk and after the excitement of seeing her favorite pals, Sweet Dee exhibits her first signs of fatigue. She walks slower, almost next to me, instead of pulling ahead. Pyrs aren't known for their high energy levels—she's definitely the right dog for me. Dee doesn't notice the Catholic Church we pass. She has about as much use for it as I do these days. Like the Virgin Mary, the grounds are immaculate, the building is clean brick and colorful stained glass. The parking lot is interspersed with planters that hold cherry trees, now in full bloom; the snowy pink petals litter the ground like confetti. Just a couple of blocks ahead, on the other side of the street is the Lutheran Church. In contrast to the Catholic, the grounds appear shabby, the mulch sun-bleached, the dogwood bushes untrimmed and crawling onto the blacktop-paved parking lot. Even the building has a look of disrepair. It's as if every Lutheran takes a vow of poverty, not just their ministers.

Dee is thirsty and dragging her paws by the time we reach the end of the longest street we walk. She stops and I let her drink from the plastic pipe that has been cut off and now sits in the ground like a bowl, collecting rainwater just so Dee can wet her

parched throat. We're paused in front of the house with the Trans Pride flag. I've never seen the people who live here, never glimpsed so much as a coming or going, though we pass by here nearly every day. I wonder if the neighbors are kind to them and if they feel welcome here, on this church-heavy block, in this conservative town, or if they hide away like I did for many years. It's not easy to trust that other people will treat you with kindness when you're different.

Down a hill and around another corner, Dee and I are finally back on our own street, only half a mile from home. Sweet Dee meanders up this loneliest stretch of road. The only friends we pass here are squirrels, and she knows she's not allowed to play with them. One time she took off after one as though propelled by a jet-powered engine and almost pulled me off my feet. We had a long, stern talk that day, and with her "I'm sorry" kisses she promised never to do it again. Unlike some humans, Sweet Dee keeps her promises.

She stops and sits on her soft haunches at the top of the road that leads down to the lake. Right now, I think it must look like one large water bowl to her, but in the summer, it becomes a bathtub too. "It's too cold," I tell her, tugging at her leash and using the command we taught her when she was a puppy—"Let's go." She obeys when she feels like it,

though today is not one of those days. I repeat the command and she lets out a low groan, but she stands. She gives the lake one last glance before we walk away.

Moments later, I see a woman jogging toward us, and I pull Sweet Dee to the side because the shoulder is narrow here. The woman smiles as she runs past, and I don't look down. I feel my lips turn up at the corners, too, and I nod my head. My heart doesn't race. My breath is calm and even.

We're almost home. The end of the walk is a steep hill. Sweet Dee and I are both panting by the time we reach the cool, mossy blanket of our lawn. Dee flops down and rolls onto her back, paws in the air as she wriggles around, thankful, as am I, for the one hour of joy we find on our walks. I think that's the miracle of it all—after only three months, I love this time as much as she does. And I've been at it, consistently, for way longer than my usual three weeks.



For an hour a day, Sweet Dee teaches me to live, to breath (sometimes quite heavily), and to appreciate beauty. When we're walking, I try not to think about all the lives lost in recent years or how lonely my grandmother is in her retirement home because no one visits. For an hour, I try to forget how my partner's burgeoning case

of fatalism was cemented when he lost the best job he ever had. I don't worry about how Dad has cancer, and I had to send him actuarial tables in an attempt to convince him he should consider a bone marrow transplant. I don't think about how Walter, my cuddliest four-legged pal, who stayed by my side and comforted me every time I cried the year after I was diagnosed with MS, may not be with me much longer. I try not to dwell on the environmental crisis happening on Earth or wonder about the future of our species. No, for an hour, I attempt to live like Sweet Dee. Unafraid. Intrigued by everything I find outside. I breathe deeply, enjoying the musky scent of wild grasses, the touch of velvety buds on the low hanging branches of the Magnolia trees, the sounds of children laughing and dogs barking hello to passersby. Walking Sweet Dee in early spring confirms that life, in all its forms and facets, finds a way to carry on, to renew itself, to burst forth in the most unlikely places. Life fights to exist. To grow. To change. And so, I suppose, do I.

"Come on, my sweet canine polar bear. Let's go get a drink," I say as I pull at Dee's leash. She lifts her head, rolls over, and ambles to her feet. We're going inside for now, but we'll probably be back out here tomorrow even though the weather channel says there's a chance of rain. ※



image info

The Slow Art of the Saunter

MOLLY MURFEE

Previously published in *Crested Butte News*, June 18, 2018

WE ARE ALWAYS GOING somewhere. The top of the peak, the end of the ride. The next meeting, the next assignment. We are constantly doing, achieving, striving. Always with some goal in mind—even if it is recreational.

We forget . . . to just . . . be.

There's a lot we miss in not just being.

I've formed a habit that contributes vastly to the tiny tendrils of sanity I cling to. Every morning I make my tea, don whatever gear the early temperatures demand, and go on a saunter. Most days it is exactly the same saunter, on a trail popular for walking dogs, chatting with friends, going on a jog, or that quick pre-work mountain bike ride.

I walk extremely slowly and admit to an amount of self-consciousness in doing so. I don't have a dog to blame it on or a child tottering after me, and so when hearing footsteps or tire treads approach, I nonchalantly pull off the trail and pretend to look at something—a yellow warbler flitting in the willows, the newly unfurled

banners of the cheer-drenched mule's ear sunflower.

It is amazing to notice what exists in the world when you're not moving so fast, not doing several things at once in the interest of efficiency and lack of time.

So often we whiz by—pedaling like the boogeyman is chasing us—and it is hard to notice the tiny bird's nest in the one pine tree in the otherwise aspen-drenched forest, or the tiny olive-colored bird with the red crest like a mohawk that frequents it, or that the nest somehow disappeared the following year.

It's hard to hear the heralds of spring—the red-winged blackbirds on first arrival, the buzzy trill of the first hummingbird, that heart-throbbing first robin's call—when on a cell phone making a string of appointments for later that day.

It's hard to catch the green glint of that first blade of grass when engrossed in a conversation inducing visions of the people you're mad at.

When we hurry so much we put our bodies in a constant state of stress. Evolutionarily, this stress charged our

adrenaline so we could run from the saber-toothed tiger and other threats. But then we outwitted the tiger and the chase was over. Tigers didn't chase us every waking hour. We rested afterwards.

In our modern world, we subject our bodies to the equivalent of constantly running from that saber-toothed tiger due to a barrage of irrelevant stresses and inconsequential worries that aren't life threatening, but our brain stem tells us they are because it has not evolved quickly enough to distinguish a tiger from a demanding text that really could be put on hold for another thirty minutes until we are done with our saunter. Our heart rate surges the same. As does our adrenaline and its companion, cortisol. And we're feeding the very thing we came to get away from. The physiology and chemistry of what's supposed to be a life-saving reaction has, in fact, become a source of our emotional and physical demise on a variety of levels.

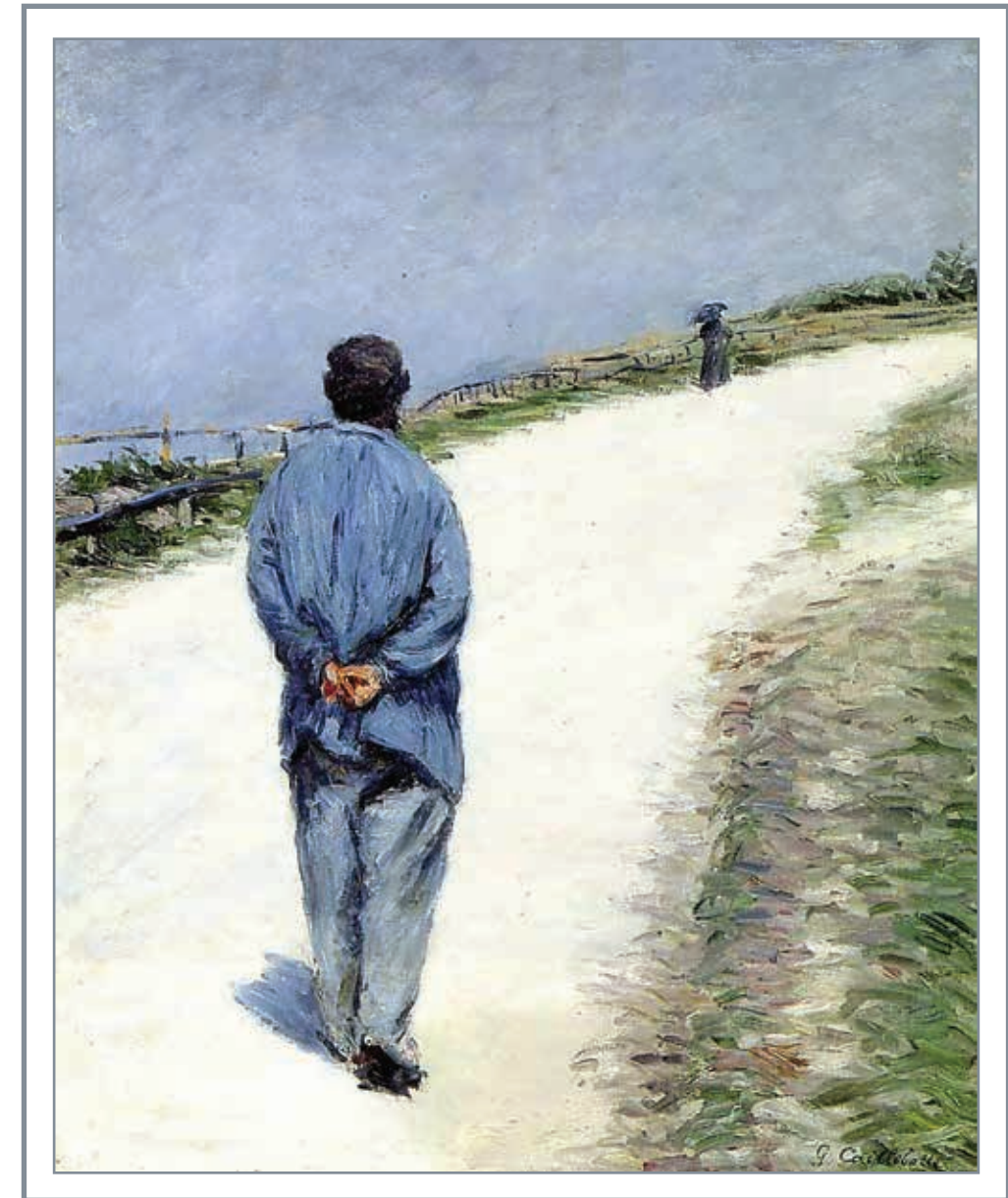
In the scenario at hand, the one of being on a walk in the woods when we are constantly on our cell phones, constantly talking, constantly trying to get the ride or the run or the walk over with so we can move on to the next thing, we are missing the point of being out there in the first place. We are missing the golden opportunity to be in the present—that present with the air sweetly perfumed with the newly bloomed wild peas, that present with the way the sun glowingly filters

through the aspen leaves creating intricate patterns of shadow and light, that present with the great blue heron on her morning ritual fly to that high alpine lake abundant with fish.

I am one who believes that nature serves as a great tonic for our busy, overworked lives, but only if we intentionally create the time and space to listen and notice, to let the effervescent green of a new aspen leaf sink into our pores, to evaporate the hardened surface of our own skin until it dissipates into sunlight. To become one with where we are.

When we put everything else down and engage in just the simple act of noticing, we gain the perspective of what's actually important. We orient toward something larger than ourselves. The microbes in the soil, the electromagnetic pulses of the earth, and the vitamin D of the sunshine contribute to our health, making us calmer, happier. We stop the constant shots of cortisol into our overtaxed bloodstream and allow our bodies to reset. In this state we are better to the people around us—friends, children, spouse, ourselves, even the person taking too much time in the grocery store line.

We find, through the joy of discovering the squawks of the great blue heron babies as they receive newly caught fish from their parents, that it really doesn't take so much to make us happy. Why all this running and fretting and worrying? We gain self-



awareness, realizing we had hunched our shoulders up around our earlobes in response to the constant stimulus. We notice how utterly manic and ridiculous we have become, so addicted we are to our gadgets and screens and the never-ending search to get somewhere else.

There is a magic and a beauty that comes from the “just being” of a slow saunter. All that we have to do, all those angers and frustrations and stresses fall away until all we are left with is the absolute absorption into simply what is. ✱

away, from

away from the jangle
i step
out the back door
to see, to see
what the ocean
has to say

my bicycle could breeze me to its banks
but, the truth is
just as much the fix is that self reliant prelude
forward progress through open space
my quiet cadence begins the humbling,
the curtain pulling back

and then,
then the big, huge blue
always so excited to see me!
surf swelling and fading
2 steps up, 1 step back
dissolving its issues, while creating some new

and up and up and up
the clouds, their sift
the boundless wonder above
and, i in between

who could ask for a better greeting?
no task except to yield
yield and accept this gospel sung in two parts
nothing to do but extend it some moments
to find
its own way in

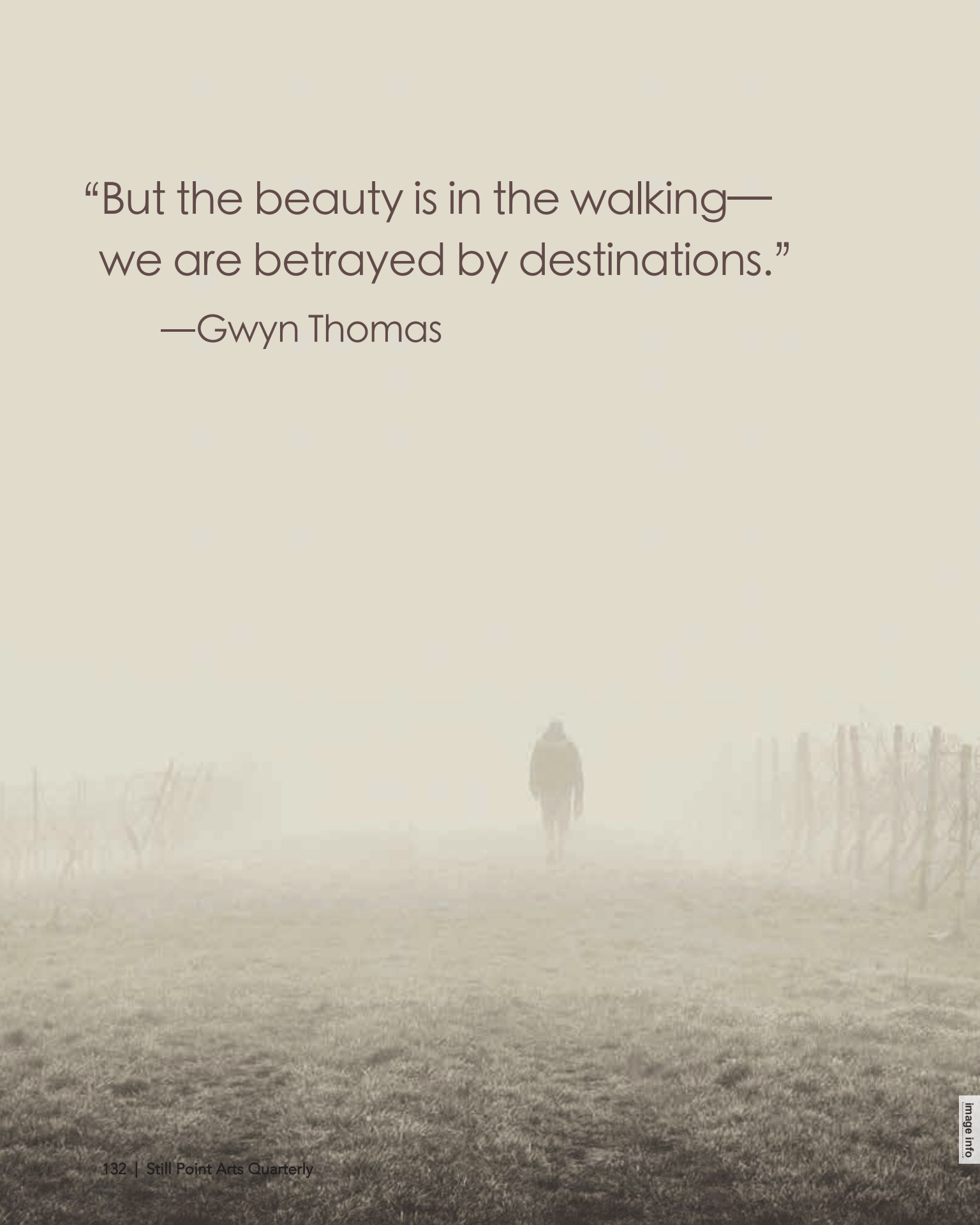
away from my quandaries i have wandered
and clutching my reset
i step
through the front door
the fix in
for today

—susan currie

image by susan currie

“But the beauty is in the walking—
we are betrayed by destinations.”

—Gwyn Thomas



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